



## Commission publishes guidance on coronavirus-related humanitarian aid to Syria despite sanctions

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The European Commission has published detailed guidance on how coronavirus-related humanitarian aid can be sent to countries and areas around the world that are subject to EU sanctions.

This guidance note on **Syria** is the first in a series of comprehensive Q&As, which aims to give practical guidance on how to comply with EU sanctions when providing humanitarian aid, in particular medical assistance, to fight the coronavirus pandemic. By clarifying the responsibilities and processes for the provision of this aid, this note should facilitate the task of humanitarian operators in Syria. It should speed up the channelling of equipment and assistance to fight the coronavirus pandemic in Syria. It is addressed to all actors involved in the supply of humanitarian aid, such as the competent authorities of EU Member States, which manage the implementation of EU sanctions, and public and private operators (donors, NGOs, banks and other actors involved in humanitarian activities), which must comply with EU sanctions when providing assistance.

Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People, said: *"The coronavirus pandemic knows no borders. Only together can we protect the most vulnerable people from this virus and the human suffering that it brings. The European Commission is committed to doing everything in its power to respond to questions from humanitarian operators regarding their activities in sanctioned countries or areas. Humanitarian assistance can reach those in need, even with sanctions in place. The two things are not incompatible."*

Josep **Borrell**, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President for a Stronger Europe in the World, said: *"Sanctions should not stand in the way nor impede the delivery of essential equipment and supplies necessary in the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic. The EU's sanctions therefore provide for humanitarian exemptions and are fully in line with all obligations under international law. We need to ensure timely assistance and avoid negative consequences for the populations of conflict affected areas, who already are bearing a heavy burden."*

Janez **Lenarčič**, Commissioner for Crisis Management, said: *"Sanctions should not impede the delivery of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance, in line with International Humanitarian Law. Providing clarity is a step forward to addressing the many challenges humanitarian actors face to deliver assistance on the ground, in contexts like Syria."*

The fight against the coronavirus pandemic is an unprecedented challenge that requires global unity, cooperation, solidarity and compassion. While no country is spared, complex political or economic situations and ongoing conflicts in certain areas of the world can only add to the devastating effects that the pandemic has on the population in those countries.

### For more information

EU sanctions are a foreign policy tool and seek to uphold universal values such as preserving peace, strengthening international security, consolidating and supporting democracy, international law and human rights. They are targeted at those whose actions endanger these values, while avoiding negative consequences on the civilian population. The EU has about 40 different sanctions regimes currently in place.

As part of the Commission's role as Guardian of the Treaties, Executive Vice-President **Dombrovskis** is responsible for monitoring the enforcement of EU financial and economic sanctions across the Union. He is also responsible for developing proposals to enhance the EU's resilience to extraterritorial sanctions by third countries, in close cooperation with the High Representative/Vice-President **Borrell**, also ensuring that sanctions are applied in a way that takes into account the needs of humanitarian operators.

Compliance by the EU with relevant international obligations and its policy of targeted measures underpin a system of exceptions. These can include the provision of humanitarian assistance and humanitarian activities, including medical assistance. Depending on the transactions they envisage

and the restrictions existing in each case, humanitarian operators may need to request a prior authorisation in order to export certain goods to sanctioned countries. Such authorisations are delivered by the competent authorities in each Member State.

The Guidance Note is a tool which helps address a number of questions received by the Commission from donors, NGOs, banks and other actors involved in humanitarian activities, and from national authorities. Questions refer to exports of, and payments for, protective gear, medicines, medical equipment, or the provision of medical assistance to the population in need in areas subject to EU sanctions.

In so doing, the Commission aims at facilitating the task of humanitarian operators fighting against the coronavirus pandemic in Syria. The Commission intends to update this guidance with further information regarding other countries subject to EU sanctions, such as Yemen, Somalia, North Korea and others.

The Commission is also working closely with Member States to ensure that in the current context, national procedures are transparent and easily accessible for humanitarian operators from the whole EU.

## **Guidance Note**

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### Press contacts:

[Daniel FERRIE](#) (+32 2 298 65 00)

[Peter STANO](#) (+32 2 295 45 53)

[Aikaterini APOSTOLA](#) (+32 2 298 76 24)

[Lauranne DEVILLE](#) (+32 2 298 08 33)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)