

# Unmasking Sanctions "Shadow on Health"

Report of the Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights  
Alena F. Douhan

## Unveiling the Shadow

- Providing a comprehensive assessment of the impact of unilateral sanctions, means of their enforcement and over-compliance on various aspects of the right to health, including access to healthcare, vaccination, prevention of diseases, access to tests, medicine, medical equipment.
- Addressing the issue of the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the SDG 3, including maintenance and development of the healthcare system, and impact on the most vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, those suffering from rare and severe diseases, children, women, older persons.
- Considering the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the availability of medical assistance in emergency situations, as well as the efficacy of humanitarian exemptions.

## Lifelines Disrupted: Direct impact on the right to health

- **Access to medicine and medical equipment:** Unilateral sanctions cause severe shortages in essential medicines, medical equipment, software etc especially for chronic and life-threatening conditions. Unavailability of vaccination result in outbreaks of preventable diseases like measles, polio, tuberculosis etc. Restrictions have drastically reduced the availability of necessary supplies, resulted in the growing mortality rates and human suffering among Epidermolysis Bullosa and Thalassemia patients due to insufficient medical provisions.
- **Availability of healthcare:** Unilateral sanctions damage healthcare systems, affecting medicine procurement and delivery, and increasing mortality rates. They hinder the development of healthcare systems, including healthcare facilities, emergency transportation, qualified doctors. It also undermines possible emergency and pandemic response.



## Invisible Barriers: Indirect impact on the right to health

- **Poverty and nutrition:** Unilateral sanctions have led to economic crises and soaring poverty, severely impacting healthcare and nutrition in affected countries, causing widespread food insecurity and undernourishment, particularly harming women and children, making people to sell even provided subsidized medicine at the black market to buy food.
- **Clean water, sanitation, access to energy, environment:** Unilateral sanctions lead to electricity and fuel shortages, causing water and sanitation systems to collapse and increasing the risk of waterborne diseases. They also deprioritize environmental projects, worsening pollution and occupational health challenges.
- **Transportation:** Poverty, unavailability of transportation system, diesel, roads and vehicles prevent people from getting to hospitals preventing them from getting necessary health care.

## Protection of vulnerable groups

- **People with disabilities and those with severe diseases:** Unilateral sanctions disproportionately harm people of these groups, leading to multiplied mortality rates and reduced life expectancy.
- **Women and children:** Unilateral sanctions lead to increased maternal and infant mortality due to shortages in medical assistance, essential medicines, and nutritional care. These sanctions exacerbate malnutrition and health risks among children, while women face heightened vulnerabilities, including increased risks of human trafficking and economic exploitation.
- **Other populations** like refugees, older persons.

## Impact in emergency situations and humanitarian aid

- Unilateral sanctions significantly hinder emergency healthcare and humanitarian aid delivery. Complex and unclear sanctions regulations, ineffective humanitarian exemptions, and over-compliance issues impede timely and efficient emergency responses, often shifting humanitarian efforts from needs to risk assessment. This complexity is exemplified in the response to the 2023 earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, where sanctions-related challenges obstructed critical relief efforts.

## Recommendations

- **Review and Lift Unnecessary Sanctions:** Sanctioning states and organizations should reassess and lift measures not authorized by the UN Security Council, considering humanitarian concerns in both imposition and application.
- **Exempt Critical Infrastructure from Sanctions:** Unilateral sanctions should not impact essential services like healthcare, food, water supply, and sanitation, ensuring the survival and well-being of populations.
- **Minimize Over-Compliance and Protect Human Rights:** States are obliged to implement all necessary measures to prevent over-compliance and ensure that private businesses within their jurisdiction do not infringe upon the right to health or other human rights abroad. Businesses shall avoid zero-risk policies and over-compliance, particularly concerning essential goods for health services and critical infrastructure support.
- **Facilitate Access to Essential Goods and Services:** Licensing procedures should not hinder the provision of medicine, vaccines, and essentials for health and sanitation. Pharmaceutical, medical equipment and other companies, donors, humanitarian organizations shall not be subjected to penalties to deliver essential goods.
- **Engage in International Cooperation and Monitoring:** Encourage states under unilateral sanctions to provide detailed information on all types of sanctions induced challenges to UN entities and mechanisms, and urge WHO and other entities to monitor and study the impacts of unilateral sanctions on health, especially for vulnerable groups.

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