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**COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION**

**of 29.11.2024**

**on EU Host Nation Support Guidelines**

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## on EU Host Nation Support Guidelines

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular Article 292 thereof,

Whereas:

- (1) Under Article 196(1)(b) TFEU, the Union is to promote swift, effective operational cooperation within the Union between national civil protection services.
- (2) The Union Civil Protection Mechanism ('Union Mechanism'), established by Decision No 1313/2013/EU<sup>1</sup>, aims to strengthen cooperation between the Union and the Member States and facilitate coordination in the field of civil protection in order to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing, preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters.
- (3) In accordance with Article 8(1)(i) of Decision No 1313/2013/EU, the Commission should take, within its sphere of competence, the necessary actions to facilitate host nation support, including developing and updating, together with Member States, guidelines on host nation support, on the basis of operational experience as an action enhancing preparedness at Member State and Union level to respond to disasters.
- (4) Host nation support ('HNS') is defined under Article 4(9) of Decision No 1313/2013/EU as any action undertaken in the preparedness and response phases by the country receiving or sending assistance, or by the Commission, to remove foreseeable obstacles to international assistance offered through the Union Mechanism. It includes support from Member States to facilitate the transiting of this assistance through their territory.
- (5) In 2012 the Commission published the EU Host Nation Support Guidelines ('Guidelines') for the provision of HNS to Member States and Participating States delivering assistance during a major emergency<sup>2</sup>. These guidelines offer support to ensuring that the deployed response capacities operating in the territory of a requesting country ('Host Nation') or transiting through the territory of another country ('Transit Nation'), may reach and operate in the affected country.
- (6) On 9 June 2023, the Commission and experts of the Commission Expert Group on Capacities discussed the need to review the existing version of the Guidelines. The Commission asked Member States and Participating States to appoint HNS experts to discuss the revision of the Guidelines at a workshop that took place on 26 and 27 September 2023. The workshop's conclusions provided the basis for this revised

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<sup>1</sup> Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924.

<sup>2</sup> SWD(2012) 169 final of 1 June 2012 "Commission Staff Work Document - EU Host Nation Support Guidelines".

version of the Guidelines, which was agreed among HNS experts during a dedicated meeting on 16 May 2024.

- (7) Against this background, a Recommendation should be adopted to update the Guidelines and support Member States' and Participating States' Emergency Management Authorities in establishing HNS plans. HNS plans should be developed as part of preparedness activities, and should define structures, activities and procedures to be followed in mutual agreement by different Host Nation actors involved in the management and support of international assistance transiting through a country or being received by the Host Nation during an emergency.
- (8) The objective of effective HNS plans should be to remove as much as possible any foreseeable obstacles to the intervention of International Response Capacities so as to ensure that disaster response operations proceed in a smooth manner. For the sake of its effectiveness, it should be recommended that a country's HNS plan be endorsed by all Host Nation stakeholders and have a legal validity.
- (9) The Guidelines should be generic, since the level of HNS required varies depending on the scale and severity of the crisis for which the deployment of capacities is being performed and should take into account the self-sufficiency requirements for modules, as set out under Article 12 of Commission Implementing Decision 2014/762/EU of 16 October 2014 laying down rules for the implementation of Decision No 1313/2013/EU<sup>3</sup>. Actual level of support provided by the Host Nation as part of HNS should be agreed between the Host Nation and the Sending Nation.
- (10) The EU HNS Guidelines should provide recommendations for the preparedness phase ahead of crises, the emergency management phase including coordination on-site during a crisis, as well as recommendations on logistics, the financial aspects, the legal aspects, and liability attached to HNS.
- (11) The Emergency Response Coordination Centre ('ERCC') of the Union Mechanism and the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS) should play a role in supporting the clarification of the level of support provided by the Host Nation as part of HNS for specific deployments.
- (12) The content of EU HNS Guideline Recommendation should be digitised and made available online in the EU HNS Toolbox on the DG ECHO website to allow easier access to all stakeholders, as the EU HNS Toolbox already contains updated Host Nation country-specific documentation, such as Country Profiles and handbooks.
- (13) The EU HNS Guidelines should be complementary to existing international documents related to relief operations and disaster management.

HAS ADOPTED THIS RECOMMENDATION

### **SUBJECT MATTER AND SCOPE**

1. In line with Article 8(1)(i) of Decision No 1313/2013/EU, this Recommendation establishes EU Host Nation Support Guidelines ('EU HNS Guidelines'), and provides support to Member States' Emergency Management Authorities to setup host nation support ('HNS') plans.

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<sup>3</sup> OJ L 320, 6.11.2014, p. 1.

2. The EU HNS Guidelines are non-binding, and aim to provide principles and indications to ensure that structures and procedures are established in support of International Response Capacities operating in the territory of a requesting country ('Host Nation'), or transiting through the territory of another country ('the Transit Nation'), to reach the affected country.
3. This Recommendation replaces the 2012 Commission EU Host Nation Support Guidelines<sup>4</sup>.
4. International Response Capacities should be understood to include rescEU capacities, experts under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism ('Union Mechanism'), teams, modules – including their personnel and capacities, as well as other response capacities sent by Member States and Participating States to a Host Nation.
5. Safety and security does not fall under the scope of this Recommendation. The Host Nation should be responsible for, and take appropriate measures, to address the safety and security of personnel of the incoming International Response Capacities and of the locations, facilities, means of transport, equipment and goods used in connection with the international assistance provided.
6. In particular, the Host Nation should take appropriate measures and provide security services in case of need. Incoming teams and modules should develop safety and security plans in cooperation with the Host Nation, taking account of HNS provided for safety and security.
7. The main responsibility for the safety of International Response Capacities' personnel operating equipment lies with the International Response Capacities themselves. For this reason, the International Response Capacities' designated safety and security personnel is responsible to conduct the safety and security assessment prior to and throughout the deployment.
8. Media and public communication relations do not fall under the scope of this Recommendation. Member States and Participating States should develop a plan on how to deal with media and public communication relations during emergencies where international assistance is requested, as a part of their respective countries' strategy on HNS.
9. Relations with third parties, such as NGOs and volunteers, do not fall under the scope of this Recommendation, even if Member States and Participating States may develop a plan on how to deal with all third parties during emergencies, should such parties offer assistance, as a part of their respective countries' strategy on HNS.

#### **GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPAREDNESS PHASE**

10. Because advance planning with a focus on incoming assistance arrangements is a vital aspect of effective emergency response cooperation, Member States and Participating States should set up or integrate arrangements to enable international emergency support within their territory in order to ensure effective HNS in case of a major disaster.

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<sup>4</sup> SWD(2012) 169 final of 1 June 2012 "Commission Staff Work Document - EU Host Nation Support Guidelines".

11. To assist in advance planning, Member States and Participating States should produce an analysis of the country's risks and any perceived possible capacity gaps of the country's resources in advance of any disaster occurring. This analysis should help Member States and Participating States in defining the moment when a country may need to request international assistance via the Union Mechanism, and to assist in identifying which capacities may be required in different scenarios in order to formulate a precise and timely request for assistance.
12. The National Emergency Management Authority, or the main actor responsible for coordinating HNS within the country's administration in case it is not the National Emergency Management Authority, as well as all participating public and private actors involved in the process of HNS should be identified together with their various responsibilities and obligations in the different phases of HNS.
13. Relevant emergency management authorities and actors should have knowledge of the Union Mechanism and relevant international guidelines and standards. It is also important to ensure the establishment of the appropriate instrument necessary to ensure HNS activity, such as national laws, regulations, directives, procedures or memoranda of understanding, as appropriate.
14. National HNS plans should detail aspects of the legislation applicable on the Host Nation's territory that assisting countries and organisations should consider, either before or during the provision of international assistance, and prepare appropriate instruments and procedures to ensure that the assisting country can comply promptly with requirements of legislation applicable on the country's territory in order to enter and operate effectively on the territory of the Host Nation.
15. The planning phase should also identify and highlight potential barriers to the effective delivery of international assistance, such as logistics issues, medical authorisation for material and personnel, flight authorisations, telecommunication permits and authorisations, safety and security risks, as well as list possible actions that the country's authorities could undertake to address the potential barriers identified.
16. Commission Implementing Decision 2014/762/EU provides in its Article 39(3) that a Member State requesting assistance shall facilitate board and accommodation for the assisting teams and replenish supplies, and provisions free of charge, as part of HNS. For this reason, national HNS plans should also define procedure on how to ensure financial support necessary for HNS activity.
17. During the emergency planning phase, the Member States and Participating States should, inter alia, focus on:
  - (a) The preparation of Country Profiles for incoming teams. The Country Profiles should be kept up-to-date by respective Member States and Participating States and would be available to other Member States and Participating States via the HNS Toolbox and CECIS;
  - (b) The set up and training of a HNS Cell. Annex 7 contains the Terms of References of the HNS Cell and defines its three functions. In case a Member State or a Participating State takes the decision to not set up a HNS Cell, that Member State or Participating State should ensure that the HNS Cell functions are covered by at least one HNS Liaison Contact Point, which will cover the functions of the HNS Cell in accordance with its Terms of Reference. As part of the HNS Cell, Member States and Participating States should appoint and

train HNS Liaison Officers for the purpose of receiving and liaising with incoming International Response Capacities to facilitate efficient HNS. Terms of Reference of HNS Liaison Officers can be found in Annex 9 of this document;

- (c) The systematic review and updates of the existing HNS plans when necessary.
18. The Host Nation and incoming International Response Capacities should take all necessary measures to ensure interoperability in operations, logistics, communication, and other aspects of HNS.
  19. In order to request international assistance timely and effectively through the Union Mechanism, it is recommended that during the preparation of the HNS plan the capacity needs of identified potential scenarios linked to National Risk Assessments that may require international assistance based on existing availability of the country's capacities are matched with the range of available International Response Capacities.
  20. Member States and Participating States should clarify procedures to prepare, authorise and disseminate any request for international assistance from the national focal point and update and maintain national forms.
  21. Member States and Participating States should prepare requesting procedures for types of incident as per scenarios detailed in the National Risks Assessments as well as for different types of assistance, taking into account that different actors may be involved in the preparation and validation of the request for assistance depending on the type of disaster.
  22. Member States and Participating States should involve, train and exercise all actors involved in the request for international assistance phase by having detailed and tested procedures, communication channels, including CECIS and Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre ('vOSOCC'), and templates for requesting and offering international assistance in the country's emergency planning, courses, trainings and exercises.
  23. To prepare for hosting international assistance and in order to establish an effective HNS organization, Member States and Participating States should evaluate the impact that incoming International Response Capacities deployed in specific scenarios will have on a Host Nation.
  24. It is recommended to establish a HNS Cell within the competent country's authority/authorities in charge of coordinating HNS to International Response Capacities during emergencies. This HNS Cell should be in charge of defining appropriate procedures to enable effective HNS and should be properly staffed and be ready to operate any time. Its personnel should be able to communicate effectively in English and be trained and exercised, in particular in the principles of Union Mechanism operations, communication and coordination tools used during international emergencies, such as CECIS and vOSOCC. In case Member States and Participating States deem it appropriate, the HNS Cell could be constituted by only one HNS Liaison Contact Point appointed to facilitate HNS to incoming assistance. In this case, all considerations made for the HNS Cell in this document apply to the appointed HNS Liaison Contact Point.
  25. The HNS Cell in charge of coordinating HNS to International Response Capacities during emergencies should be in charge in particular of:

- (a) *Sharing of basic information:* this HNS Cell should prepare and keep updated the Country Profile, which should include the country's disaster response structure including emergency command and control, operational conditions, environmental and climate issues, safety and security risks, cultural and political aspects. The Country Profile should be available to all Member States and Participating States;
- (b) *Identification of entry points:* this HNS Cell should identify the country's entry points for incoming International Response Capacities and in-kind assistance including land, air, in-land waters and sea entry points, as appropriate, and make available a catalogue of these points with practical information, contacts and limitations. It should ensure that all the country's stakeholders are informed of the list of possible entry points to the country for incoming International Response Capacities and in-kind assistance.
- (c) *In-country transportation:* this HNS Cell should identify options of public and private companies that can offer transport service of people and goods and financial procedures ready to cover operational costs;
- (d) *Accommodation and subsistence:* this HNS Cell should ensure pre-agreement for provision of lodging and accommodation, and meal service for the personnel of International Response Capacities as well as financial procedure ready to cover operation costs;
- (e) *Medical support:* this HNS Cell should check how to ensure access to medical service for experts or international team members;
- (f) *Telecommunication (such as terms, systems, limitations, and frequencies):* this HNS Cell should facilitate for incoming International Response Capacities the use of their communication systems or access to Host Nation telecommunication capacities. The HNS Cell should check limitations on the use of radio frequencies and ensure that procedures exist to obtain the required permissions, the assignment of dedicated frequencies, and the use of specific types of equipment;
- (g) *Fuel supply:* this HNS Cell should arrange an appropriate fuel and operating fluids supply system for incoming International Response Capacities. Note that in some cases a specific type of fuel and operating fluids may be required, such as for airplanes and helicopters;
- (h) *Taxes, tolls, and other fees:* the HNS Cell should check whether customs service taxes, road tolls, and other fees can be waived before arrival of International Response Capacities and in-kind assistance;
- (i) *Waive transport regulations like limitation or ban of travel:* the HNS Cell should plan how to inform in advance police and other authorities involved in transport regulation of the arrival of International Response Capacities and in-kind assistance to waive limitations to transport and travel that may be enforced during an emergency;
- (j) *Interoperability of technical equipment:* to the possible extent, the HNS Cell should cross-check possible gaps due to different standards in technical equipment of Sending Nation and Host Nation to be solved prior to arrival of International Response Capacities;

- (k) *Financial issues*: the HNS Cell should check if specific channels and procedures exist or can be established to appoint dedicated funds to cover cost of International Response Capacities and to expedite and facilitate reimbursement of the incoming assistance;
- (l) *Transit Nation arrangements*: if International Response Capacities or in-kind assistance pass through a MS/PS on its way to a country requesting international assistance, the HNS Cell of the Transit Nation should plan for relevant aspects (clearance, escort, possible accommodation, fuel supply, waiving of transport regulations, etc.) to facilitate the transit;
- (m) *Language issues*: this HNS Cell should provide simultaneous translators, to assist the communication with international personnel operating in the Host Nation;
- (n) *Waste management and environmental restrictions*: this HNS Cell should provide indications for waste management and environmental restrictions in force in the Host Nation.

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PHASE AND COORDINATION ON-SITE**

- 26. In the aftermath of a disaster, as soon as a request of international assistance becomes a possibility, the HNS plan should be activated and the HNS Cell should become operational. The HNS Cell should inform and pre-alert all actors involved in the HNS process of a possible request of international assistance, so to be ready to do the necessary to authorise the request.
- 27. The Host Nation should use CECIS as the primary tool to send a request of international assistance to the Union Mechanism and to communicate with other Member States and Participating States.
- 28. To ensure an effective Union Mechanism response, requests should include precise information about what is needed, relevant situational context, expected timeframe for the deployment, information about the operational environment, and contact information to answer further questions. Annex 2 contains a form for request for assistance summarising the information that will be introduced in the CECIS emergency management workflow.
- 29. CECIS or vOSOCC should be used to provide regular updates regarding the situation development, response, consequences of the emergency including casualties and damage, entry points and procedures, follow-ups of requests for assistance and to inform all international participants of any special cultural, religious or traditional habits of the affected country, weather, safety and security issues. The vOSOCC should be used when CECIS is not available to countries involved in the disaster management.
- 30. In this phase, the availability of the updated Country Profile should be ensured for the incoming assistance to prepare its deployment. Annex 8 of this document contains a template for the preparation of the Country Profile.
- 31. The affected country should initiate an exchange of information with the teams of incoming International Response Capacities prior to their arrival on site. This will help both the teams and the affected country to prepare to overcome any potential obstacles more rapidly.



32. Prior to the arrival into the affected country, the Transit Nation should facilitate quick transit of International Response Capacities and in-kind assistance through their territory by removing all potential obstacles, among other ways by provision of escorts, route planning, waiving restrictions or regulations, and by providing a single point of contact, which should be represented by the HNS Cell of the Transit Nation.
33. The Sending Nation should be responsible for negotiating with the Transit Nation arrangements to facilitate quick transit. A number of transport-related restrictions and regulations of different countries can be found in “transport questionnaires” available in CECIS.
34. After the activation of the HNS Cell, the Host Nation should communicate the identified suitable entry points, consider setting up Reception and Departure Centres and inform all concerned counterparts. If the Reception and Departure Centre is not set up at the entry points, the Host Nation should consider sending HNS Liaison Officers to receive incoming International Response Capacities at the respective entry points.
35. The HNS Cell should establish a Base of Operations located in close vicinity of the affected area. When the Host Nation requests the support of a EUCP Team, the latter can also support the coordination of HNS to the incoming assistance.
36. The Host Nation should take into account the Base of Operations requirements such as access to water, electrical power, and sewage, access for cars and trucks, closeness to the disaster site.
37. Upon entry in the Host Nation, the International Response Capacities should be welcomed by the HNS Liaison Officer at entry point or Reception and Departure Centre and in a safe area away from the emergency area, in order to receive a general briefing and to arrange its transfer to the assigned Base of Operations.
38. The HNS Liaison Officer should provide the International Response Capacities information that should cover: Country Profile, general briefing on the situation at local level; command and control structure; role of HNS Cell; telecommunication system and arrangements for the incoming teams; maps; information regarding the area and the population; media and possible procedures for interacting with the media; inputs to the safety and security plan of the team and agreement on possible plans; coordination of activities and management of Base of Operations; general Notices such as ordinances and decrees established by the concerned mayors or other authorities. The HNS Liaison Officer should also take note of needs and requests expressed by international teams, and will agree on the way of working together, including timing for daily meetings and daily Situation Reports (‘SitReps’).
39. During operations the HNS Cell should ensure that appropriate communication is established and maintained between International Response Capacities, the ERCC Liaison Officer, the EUCP Team, if present, the Local Emergency Management Authority, the local incident commander(s), and other relevant counterparts involved in the emergency operations.
40. Moreover, the HNS Cell should be responsible to provide logistic support to the International Response Capacities. This includes route planning support and the provision of necessary transport arrangements such as transport capacities, safety and security including escorts and maps, material handling equipment, fuel and other operating fluids, food and accommodation, starting from the entry point and lasting for the entire operation.

41. The HNS Cell should provide logistic support for the incoming teams and the general maintenance of their equipment, while the Sending Nation is responsible for the specialised maintenance of their equipment, including bringing specialized spare parts for their equipment to ensure self-sufficiency for the whole mission. The Sending Nation should ensure the adequacy and sufficient quality of the offered assistance, in particular food, medicine and its proper packing, respecting international standards. The Host Nation should communicate all specific requirements connected to the delivery of incoming in-kind assistance such as labelling and packaging.
42. The Host Nation should be responsible for the take-over, storage and distribution of in-kind assistance received.
43. The Host Nation should facilitate the use of means of telecommunication and the establishment of the necessary arrangements and facilities to maintain communications with and within the locations of the International Response Capacities operation. The Host Nation should also ensure that procedures exist to obtain the required permissions to use specific type of equipment and to assign dedicated frequencies at the latest upon entry.
44. The HNS Cell should ensure that updated information on the evolution of the event and necessary HNS adaptations are provided to International Response Capacities.
45. The HNS Plan should cover actions related to the end of operations and exit strategy. This phase should cover hand over procedures, assistance to be provided during demobilisation that may include further logistic support, and the facilitation of custom procedures to leave the country.
46. Whereas the entry point has been pre-identified by the Host Nation, the decisions concerning the points of exit should be made bilaterally between Host Nation and Sending Nation to ensure the most cost effective and smooth exit transportation route.

### **LOGISTICS AND TRANSPORT**

47. Union Mechanism arrangements and procedures should be used to request and offer transport and channelled via CECIS. To streamline this process the templates provided for by this recommendation to request the international assistance and the corresponding answer forms for offering assistance (Annexes 2, 3, 4, 5) will be integrated in CECIS emergency management workflow. Member States and Participating States should ensure that the use of CECIS and of these forms is incorporated into the country's contingency planning, courses, trainings and exercises.
48. All Member States and Participating States should pre-identify entry points for International Response Capacities and in-kind assistance. Entry points can be any type of border crossing, such as at roads, rivers, railroads, airports and seaports. Member States and Participating States should develop a catalogue of these pre-identified entry points, including their capacities.
49. The Host Nation should make all necessary arrangements to receive the incoming International Response Capacities at the entry point, such as the provision of HNS Liaison Officers and instructions. As a best practice, it is recommended for the HNS Liaison Officers to join the incoming teams as early as possible.

50. In case of insufficient transport capacities to dispatch the assistance, the Sending Nation can request transport support in accordance with rules set in Commission Implementing Decision 2014/762/EU.

### **FINANCIAL ASPECTS**

51. Commission Implementing Decision 2014/762/EU in its Article 39(3) provides that a Member State requesting assistance shall facilitate board and accommodation for the assisting teams and replenish supplies, and provisions free of charge, as part of HNS. For this reason, the Host Nation should ensure in advance that appropriate financial channels and procedures are in place to expedite and facilitate an easy reimbursement of the incoming International Response Capacities if so required. The Sending Nation and Transit Nation should ensure in advance that appropriate financial channels and procedures are in place to invoice, and to waive needs for reimbursement or to receive payments if so required.
52. The Sending Nation should fill in the templates (Annex 3 and 5) to include the conditions under which the offers are made.

### **LEGAL ASPECTS**

53. Considering that many Member States and Participating States have either ad hoc and/or bilateral arrangements with neighbouring countries in place, it is recommended for a smooth delivery of international assistance that Member States and Participating States ensure that solid and systematic solutions are ready to identify relevant legal issues that may constitute obstacles to the overall objective of facilitating the provision of international assistance and, if appropriate, adapt their legislation.
54. MS and PS should consider the granting of legal exemptions, in particular the Host Nation and the Transit Nation should:
- (a) exempt goods and equipment requested from all custom duties, taxes, tariffs, tolls, or any governmental fees, and exempt them from all export, transit and import restrictions;
  - (b) simplify and minimise documentation requirements for export, transit, and import;
  - (c) permit the re-exportation of goods and equipment used, in the event that the Sending Nation wishes to retain what it originally owned;
  - (d) waive or reduce inspection requirements (where this is difficult use pre-clearance processes where possible to clear relief goods and equipment more rapidly);
  - (e) arrange for inspection and release outside of business hours and/or at a place outside the customs office to avoid unnecessary delay.
55. The Host Nation should be prepared to ensure that Sending Nations and relevant international organisations are provided with temporary authorisation to legally operate on their territory so as to enjoy the rights, inter alia to open bank accounts, enter into contracts and leases, acquire and dispose of property and instigate legal proceedings, for the purpose of providing assistance.
56. Personnel sent to assist countries after the disaster may possess specific skills and qualifications that are regulated in the affected state. Regulated professions usually include doctors, nurses, paramedics, engineers, and others. The Host Nation should,

whenever possible, recognize the relevant professional qualifications of relief personnel for the time necessary to carry out the disaster relief assistance.

57. The Host Nation should, when necessary and possible, exempt relief personnel from visa regulations and immigration inspection. Where visa regulations and immigration inspection cannot be waived, the Host Nation should expedite the necessary formalities at the appropriate entry point.

#### **LIABILITY**

58. In questions of liability during relief operations, amicable settlements between the Host Nations and Sending Nations should be found.
59. For damage suffered by third parties, Host Nations and Sending Nations should cooperate in good faith to facilitate compensation for such damage. In order to streamline and expedite this process of cooperation and to avoid any potential for misunderstanding, Host Nations and Sending Nations should agree on the principles for compensating the potential damage suffered by third parties as early as possible, ideally already during the process of requesting, offering and accepting the international assistance. Both the Host Nations and Sending Nations should declare its willingness or non-willingness to cover damage suffered by third parties that would exceed their legal obligations. For this the Host Nations and Sending Nations should use the templates for requesting and offering international assistance (Annex 2 and 4).

Done at Brussels, 29.11.2024

*For the Commission*  
*Janez LENARČIČ*  
*Member of the Commission*

