

Evaluation of the Belgian strategy for humanitarian aid

How does Belgium meet the needs of people affected by humanitarian crises?



Special Evaluation Office of the Belgian Development Cooperation
Final report - September 2022

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Sarah is one of 3 other siblings raised by their single mom in the Bekaa, Lebanon. Her two brothers had to work to support the family that UNHCR also supports. © UNHCR

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Evaluation of the Belgian Strategy for Humanitarian Aid



Final report

September 2022

The evaluation is conducted by ADE (www.ade.eu), the evaluation team was led by Martine Van de Velde. The Special Evaluation Office ensured that the evaluation complied with the Terms of Reference and benefited from the support of a Reference Group.

The opinions expressed in this document represent the authors' points of view and do not necessarily reflect the position of the FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation.

Contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Evaluation features	4
1.2	Subject	5
1.3	Context.....	5
1.4	Evaluation methodology	9
2	Findings against Evaluation Questions	12
2.1	EQ1 – Relevance: Priorities and needs.....	12
2.2	EQ2 – Relevance: Evolution in humanitarian content	16
2.3	EQ3 – Relevance: Principled allocation of resources	24
2.4	Q4 – Relevance: Connectivity.....	27
2.5	EQ5 – Effectiveness: Results for populations	30
2.6	EQ6 – Efficiency of modalities.....	35
2.7	EQ7 – Efficiency of BAHIA approach	39
2.8	EQ8 – Organisational efficiency	41
2.9	EQ9 – Effectiveness of advocacy and visibility	45
2.10	EQ10 – Connectivity and Sustainability.....	47
3	Conclusions.....	51
4	Recommendations.....	55

Abbreviations and acronyms

AZG	Artsen Zonder Grenzen
BAHIA	Belgian Alliance for Humanitarian International Action
C2A	Call to Action
CAR	Central African Republic
CBPF	Cash-Based Pooled Funds
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CoPi	Comité de Pilotage
CRB	Croix-Rouge de Belgique
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
D5.1	DGD unit in charge of Humanitarian Aid
DGD	Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid
DGM	Directorate-General for Multilateral Affaires and Globalisation
DNH	Do No Harm
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DREF	Disaster Response Emergency Fund
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EQ	Evaluation Question
GB	Grand Bargain
GFDRR	Global Fund for Disaster Risk Reduction
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship
HA	Humanitarian Aid
HCT	Humanitarian Coordination Team
HIB	Handicap International Belgium
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRCRCS	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks (now The New Humanitarian)
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IRA	Immediate Response Account
JC	Judgement Criteria
JSF	Joint Strategic Framework
MdM	Médecins du Monde
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODA	Official Development Aid
oPT	Occupied Palestinian Territory
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
PoC	Persons of Concern
PSS	Psycho-Social Support
PWD	Persons living with Disabilities
RD	Royal Decree
RG	Reference Group
RKVI	Rode Kruis Vlaanderen
RRM	Rapid Response Mechanism
SEO	Special Evaluation Office of the Belgian Development Cooperation
SFERA	Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SOM	Senior Officials Meeting
TF	Tear Fund Belgium
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCERF	United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
VSF	Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Belgium
WFP	World Food Programme
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit

1 Introduction

1.1 Evaluation features

This independent evaluation by ADE was commissioned by the Special Evaluation Office of the Belgian Development Cooperation (SEO). The objectives and scope of this strategic evaluation were set in the Terms of Reference (*ToR, Annex A: Summary Terms of Reference*).

It has been followed up by a Reference Group (RG) comprised of actors involved with Belgian humanitarian assistance including representatives of the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD), cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation, diplomatic missions, and NGO federations.

The scope of the evaluation includes all the DGD's humanitarian interventions between 2014 and 2021.¹ While part of the analysis will cover all four of the used instruments for the roll out of the Belgian strategy – core funding, flexible funding, programmes, and projects – the main focus will be on the programmes and projects and their relevance to humanitarian action. The study focuses on a selection of 15 recent interventions in three countries (DRC, Lebanon, and Palestine).

The evaluation has a dual objective as outlined in the ToR:

- (i) to conduct an independent evaluation of the Belgian strategy for humanitarian aid, with a focus on the relevance, coherence, sustainability and the realisation of results under projects and programmes. It will also consider the other financial instruments used; and
- (ii) to formulate recommendations to improve the Belgian strategy and thereby the roll-out of future interventions. To this extent, it mainly serves the DGD (D5) to update the current humanitarian strategy, which dates back to 2014.

Box 1: Belgian instruments for humanitarian aid

- **Projects:** to address specific short-term needs or to ensure adequate funding of under-funded or forgotten crises; regulation, accountability and evaluation are adapted to a short-term perspective.
- **Programmes:** agreements with partners for longer-term funding with some flexibility within the framework of pre-established rules, with a geographical or thematic focus, or both.
- **Flexible humanitarian funds:** flexible funds that can finance urgent humanitarian needs in the very short-term basis.
- **Core funding:** contributions to international humanitarian organisations, intended for the general resources of the recipient organisations.

Source: 2014. Belgian Strategy for Humanitarian Aid.

¹ Extended from what was specified in the TOR (2014-2020), during the start-up phase.

1.2 Subject

The subject of the evaluation is the Belgian Strategy for Humanitarian Aid. It was approved by the Minister of Development Cooperation on 3 July 2014. It follows recommendations made by the OECD/DAC in 2005 and 2010, and by the internal evaluation of the Belgian humanitarian instruments in 2008.²

The strategy is based on a principled approach based on humanitarian law, Good Humanitarian Donorship principles and practices, and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. It focuses on a number of geographical and thematic priorities that correspond to Belgium's interests and sectoral experience in development and humanitarian cooperation.

The geographical priorities identified in the humanitarian strategy are the Sahel region, the Great Lakes region, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt). Thematic priorities include food aid, nutrition and agricultural recovery, protection with special attention to the needs of children, basic health, sexual and reproductive health, coordinated humanitarian logistics, and disaster preparedness. Gender and the protection of the environment and natural resources form the main cross-cutting themes.

The strategy aimed to support Belgium's capacity to respond to sudden-onset and underfunded crises. The implementation modalities were based on a limited number of competent partners, predictability and speed of aid, and knowledge management.

1.3 Context

1.3.1 International context

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has grown significantly over the past decade, from 62 million in 2014 to 166 million in 2019, before rising to 439 million in 2020 (including 203 million as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic).³ In June 2022, the estimated number of people in need was 306 million.⁴ The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and West and Central Africa regions continue to have the greatest humanitarian needs due to protracted crises that show no signs of abating.⁵

The situations that call for humanitarian intervention are constantly changing. The number of natural disasters has almost doubled in the last two decades compared to the last two in the 20th century. This has led to an increase in the population affected. In addition, countries' efforts to improve their capacity to cope with the effects of climate change have been proven effective but insufficient to counter the impact on affected populations.⁶

With the increasing trend of extreme weather events and climate change, including droughts and floods, environmental degradation and freshwater shortages, has led to migration flows

² DGD (2014). Belgian Strategy for Humanitarian Aid, p.7.

³ Humanitarian Insight (OCHA).

⁴ OCHA (2022). Humanitarian Needs Overview, Snapshot June 2022.

⁵ OCHA (2022). Global Humanitarian Overview 2022.

⁶ CRED, UNDDR (2020). Human cost of disasters: an overview of the last 20 years (2000-2019).

and is having a devastating impact on food security with acute malnutrition is rising in the most vulnerable countries.

In addition, the total number of high-intensity conflicts (war and protection risk) has increased over the same period. In 2021, there were 40, half of them categorized as wars. These took place almost exclusively on the African continent and in the Middle East.⁷

In parallel to these developments, the global humanitarian funding gap is growing significantly (Figure 1). The figure below shows that, despite the increase in global resources, there is a growing gap between funding needs and funding secured by the UN for appeals during the period 2012-2021. In the face of this scarcity of resources, there is a growing call from various actors including donor countries and governments that humanitarian aid must aim for greater effectiveness and efficiency to be able to meet the challenges it faces.⁸

Figure 1: Global Humanitarian Funding Gap (2015 – 2021)



Source: OCHA (2021), Global Humanitarian Overview 2021: December Update.

1.3.2. National context

In the recent OECD peer review on development co-operation, Belgium is described as "a strong voice for the cause of least developed countries (LDCs) and fragile contexts, and a strong humanitarian partner. Committed to the principles of partnership, it empowers multilateral, civil society and private sector organisations to fulfil their mandates." Furthermore, Belgium is recognised as being well placed to strengthen the link between humanitarian, development and peace and support a comprehensive approach. However, the OECD peer review highlights that the focus is more on interdepartmental co-ordination at headquarters and not sufficiently addressing the strategic challenges on the ground.⁹

Belgium is a relatively small humanitarian donor, representing around 1 percent of global contributions. Between 2014 and 2021, annual Belgian humanitarian funding through all four instruments combined averaged EUR 163.8 million.¹⁰ This represents approximately 9 percent of total Belgian Official Development Assistance (ODA) over the observed period.

⁷ Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (20221). Conflict Barometer 2021.

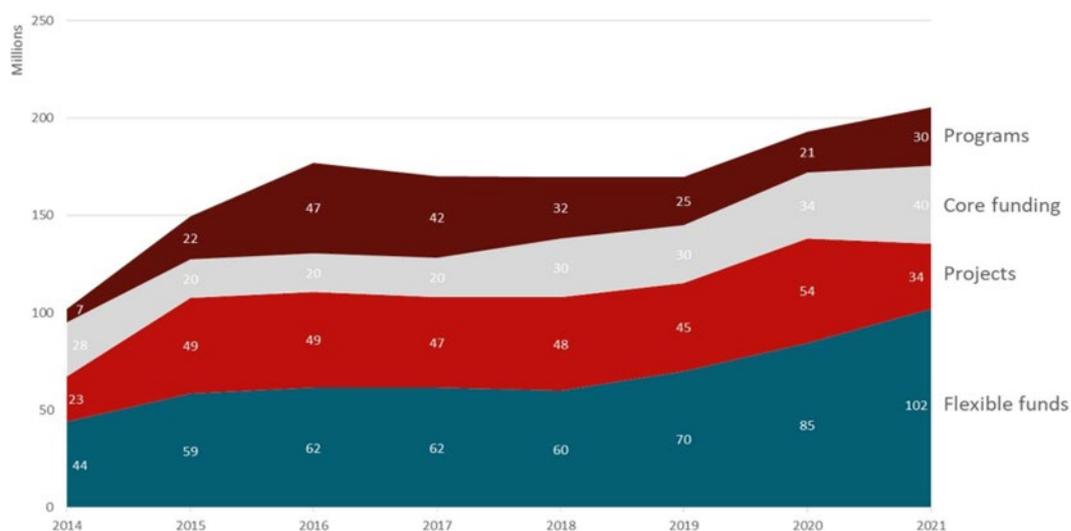
⁸ Development Initiatives, Global Humanitarian Assistance Reports (2013, 2017, 2021). Nations Unies, Aperçu humanitaire mondial 2021.

⁹ OECD (2020), OECD Reviews of Development Cooperation: Belgium 2020, pp.83-93.

¹⁰ Or EUR 1.31 billion over period 2014 - 2021

The funding analysis shows that Belgium's humanitarian assistance between 2014 and 2021 was, to a large extent, aligned with Belgium's strategy for humanitarian aid (2014). Figure 2 illustrates a recent increase in total humanitarian funding, after a period of relatively stable total funding between 2016 and 2019. The increase in humanitarian funding between 2014 and 2016 is almost entirely driven by Programmes and Projects, with flexible funding also increasing in absolute but not in relative terms. The reverse is observed for 2017-2021, with projects and programmes decreasing from over 50 percent to 32 percent of total contributions in 2021, while flexible funding increased to half of the total funding.

Figure 2: Distribution of DGD Humanitarian Aid funds by Funding instrument (2014-2021)



Source: Data received from D5.1, graph by ADE.

The recent evolution of distribution between the four instruments reflects the DGD's commitment of allocating 60% of the humanitarian funding to core funding and flexible funding instruments and signifies Belgium's commitment to the Grand Bargain's objectives of decreasing the earmarking of contributions and facilitating multi-year planning and funding.

UN agencies made up the largest group of recipients of Belgian humanitarian aid (72 percent), mainly through core funding and flexible funds. The main recipients were OCHA and WFP, together accounting for 49.5 percent of the funds to UN agencies (2014–2021). OCHA is a large recipient of Belgium's humanitarian assistance as one of the main managing agencies of the flexible funds or Country-based Pooled Funds (CBPF), which reflects Belgium's support for multilateralism.

The main recipients of the Belgian funding through programmes and projects are illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 4 illustrates the breakdown of the four funding instruments by type of partner. Core funding and Humanitarian funds go mainly through UN institutions (respectively 76.8% and 98.6%). The only contribution through flexible funds that does not go through UN institutions is the annual contribution to the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRCRCS). Main UN beneficiaries of DGD's flexible funds during the observed period are OCHA (€315m), UNHCR (€140m) and WFP (€54m). Combined these agencies account for just below 80 percent of the total budget for flexible funds.

Belgian NGOs receive funding almost exclusively through programmes. While NGOs received project funding in the past (EUR 11 million on average between 2014 and 2018), the only project funding since 2019 was for the Belgian Alliance for Humanitarian International Action (BAHIA) in 2020.¹¹

Of the total budget allocated for projects and programmes (EUR 573 million over the entire period), 87 percent of it linked to a specific country; just over one percent to a region; and the remainder went to projects and programmes without a specified geographical coverage.

Figure 3: Division of partners by partner types (Total 2014-2021)

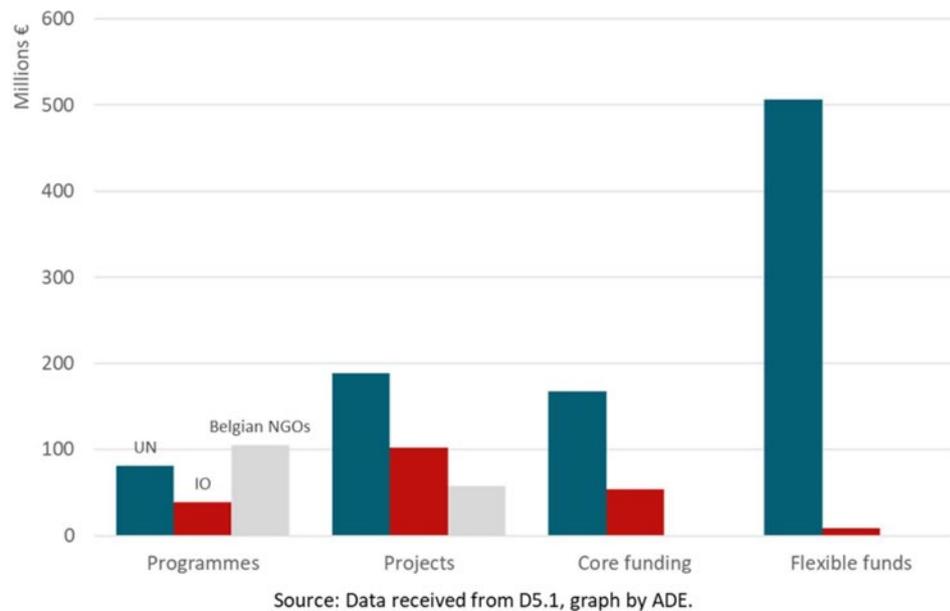
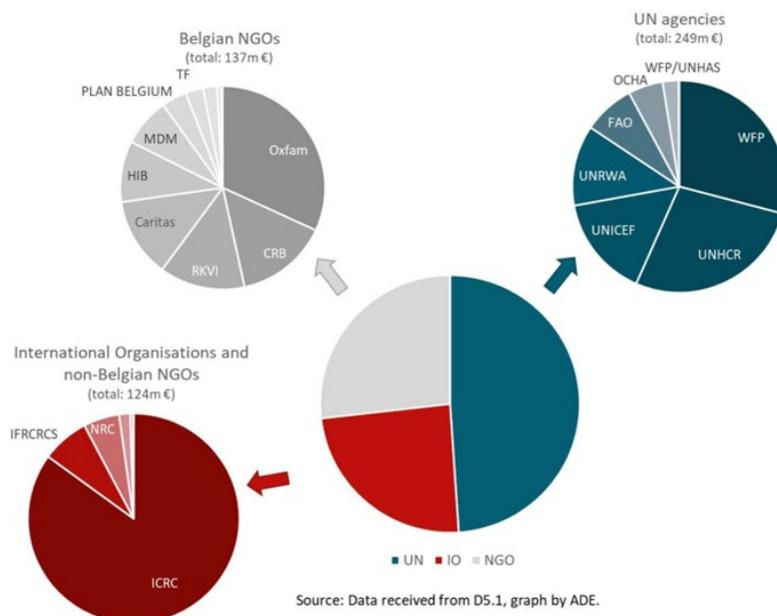


Figure 4: Distribution of funds through programmes and projects by partner category (Total 2014-2021)



¹¹ UN: FAO, HCR, OCHA, UNICEF, UNDP, UNICEF, UNRWA, WFP and WFP/UNHAS; IO: ALNAP, GFDRR, ICRC, IFRCRCS, IRIN, NGO INTERN. and NRC; Belgian NGOs: 11.11.11, AZG, Caritas, CRB, HIB, MDM, Oxfam, PLAN Belgium, RKVI, TF, VSF.

Funding of projects and programmes became increasingly geographically focussed to Belgium's humanitarian priority areas throughout the evaluation period, with two main exceptions: Central African Republic within emergency food aid and protection, and responses to calls of the UNHCR and ICRC for women empowerment in Afghanistan, both in 2019. The analysis shows that programmes are to a larger extent concentrated in the strategy's priority areas (91% of funds in 2021) than projects. And, given the longer-term character of programmes, funding to countries with ongoing programmes is more stable. A more detailed analysis of the recipient countries of programme and project funding is given in Annex B.

1.4 Evaluation methodology

1.4.1 General

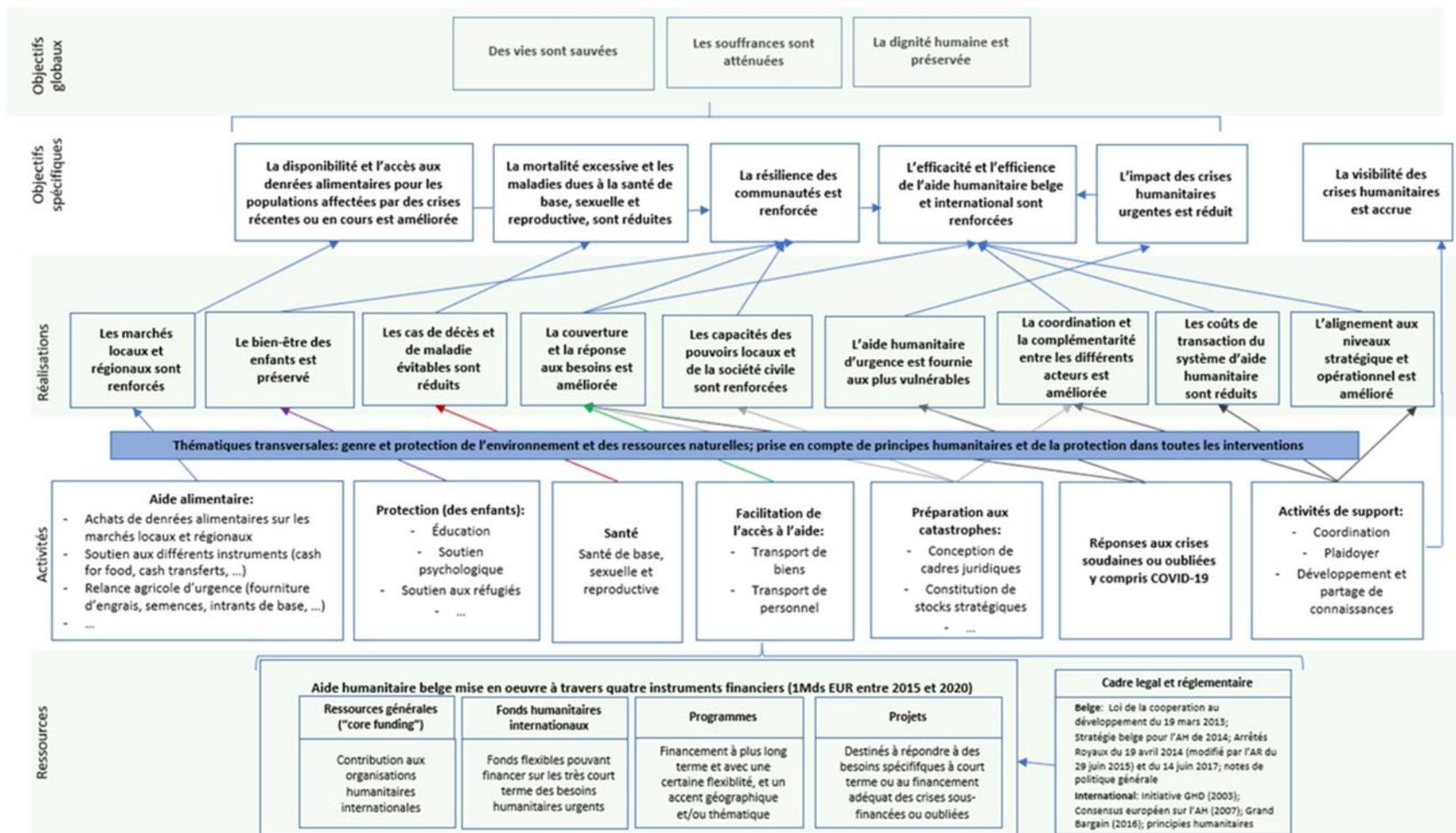
The methodological approach for this policy / strategic evaluation followed the OECD-DAC framework. To this extent, a non-experimental design relying on contribution analysis principles was applied. A Theory of Change (ToC) was developed and provided a starting point and reference against which the Belgian strategy for Humanitarian Aid has been evaluated (Figure 5). The Theory of Change was finalized during the study phase and served as the basis for the development of the evaluation matrix (Annex B: Evaluation Matrix), structured around a set of evaluation questions (EQs) and judgment criteria (JCs).

The evaluation used a mix of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools and analyses. In addition to a desk review and key informant interviews, the evaluation included a quantitative analysis of all Belgian humanitarian funding between 2014-2021 and three in-country missions (including visits to project sites and consultations with communities and Persons of Concern (PoC)).

The evaluation had to overcome some limitations, but these are not deemed to affect the general validity of the findings of this evaluation:

- While the team emphasised direct consultation with persons of concern and communities supported through Belgium's humanitarian aid, the team was not able during the in-country visit to the DRC to meet with beneficiaries or local partners in the geographic areas where projects and programmes were supported by Belgium.
- Available resources allowed the evaluation team to visit only a limited number of projects in Palestine and Lebanon. The evaluation team addressed some of these constraints through prioritising local communities while in-country, and relying on remote consultation with partners.
- While the evaluation used the most recent available data from DGD and its PRISMA database, possible reporting delays may cause a difference between the data for 2021 used for this evaluation and the final reporting.
- Limiting the scope to the project and programme modalities, as specified in the ToR, limited to some extent the team's capacity to extrapolate findings and conclusions to the Belgian Humanitarian strategy as a whole. The scope of the evaluation did not include the humanitarian core funding or flexible funds. It also did not include the activities implemented by D5.2.

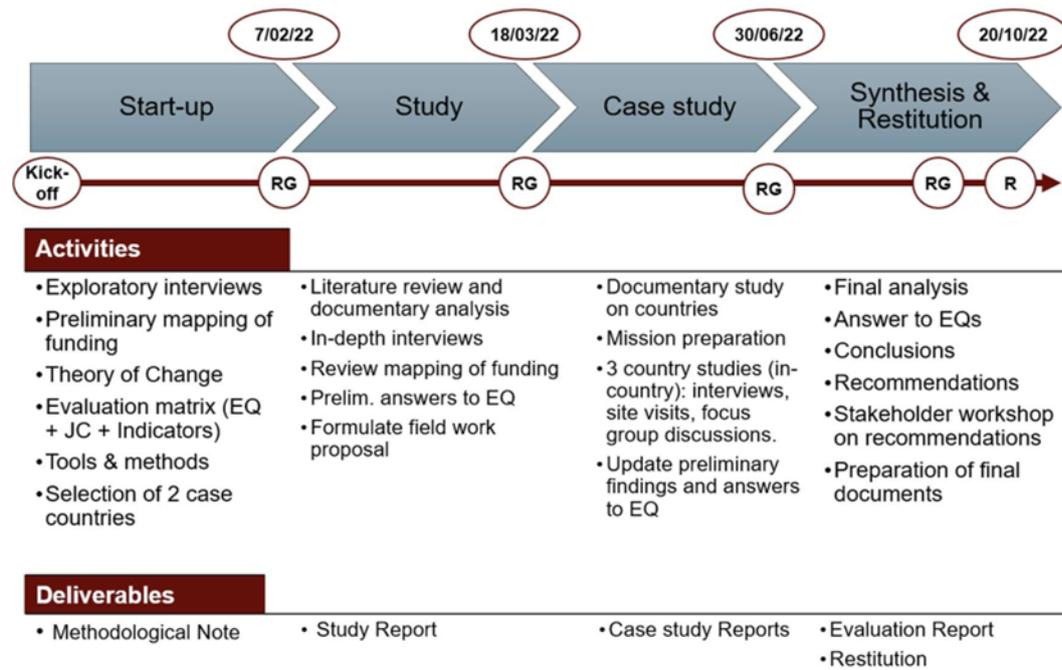
Figure 5: Theory of Change



Source: ADE, sur base de: la Loi de la coopération au développement du 19 mars 2013; la Stratégie belge pour l'aide humanitaire de 2014; le Consensus européen sur l'aide humanitaire (2007); le Cahier des charges; le site internet de la DGD; l'Évaluation de l'aide humanitaire belge (2008)

1.4.2 Evaluation phases

Figure 6 : Overview of the evaluation phases



2 Findings against Evaluation Questions

2.1 EQ1 – Relevance: Priorities and needs

EQ 1: To what extent do the two financial instruments (programmes and projects) respond to: 1) the geographical and thematic priorities of the humanitarian aid strategy, and 2) the needs of local populations?

Summary response

During the period under review, humanitarian assistance has been increasingly allocated to geographical priority areas identified in the humanitarian strategy, particularly in relation to programmes. Project funding is the preferred instrument to respond to humanitarian needs outside those geographical priority areas. Overall, funding allocation for projects and programmes is aligned with the priority needs of the affected people and thematic areas identified in Humanitarian Needs Overviews and Humanitarian Response Plans*. Since 2021, there has been a stronger focus on protection, an area often underfunded under the Humanitarian Response Plans.

Allocation of funding is mainly steered from Brussels and guided by the partners through their proposal submissions. Identification and targeting of the most vulnerable is done based on needs assessments conducted by the partner organisations and inputs from local implementing partners. The vulnerability criteria that have been applied, and the process to select the geographic areas and final direct beneficiaries, is not always evident.

* The Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC) is a coordinated series of actions undertaken to help prepare for, manage and deliver a coordinated humanitarian response. The HNO and the HRP are key instruments in the coordinated approach at country level to the prioritisation of the needs of affected people.

2.1.1 Alignment with geographic priorities

Humanitarian assistance has been increasingly allocated to geographical priority areas identified in the humanitarian strategy, particularly in relation to programmes.

The majority of the humanitarian funding allocated for projects and programmes is allocated for the priority regions identified in the 2014 humanitarian strategy. Eighty percent of funds for programmes and projects were allocated to Belgium's humanitarian priority areas in 2020 and 2021. In 2020 Belgium identified 17 priority countries for its humanitarian funding. Of those, eight countries were not partner countries for development cooperation.

The total humanitarian funding in 2020 was EUR 194 million and in 2021 206 million.¹² Over the entire observed period the following proportions were given to each region:

- 14.2 percent to the Great Lakes region (Democratic Republic of Congo-DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda)
- 30.1 percent to respond to the Middle East (Syria – including the Syrian refugee crisis – and neighbouring countries – Yemen, Iraq, Palestine)
- 11.8 percent to the Sahel region (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan).

¹² Data received from DGD.

Figure 7 and Figure 8 illustrate the geographical distribution of project and programme funding. During the period under review – 2014–2021 – the DRC received the largest volume of programme (17.6%) and project (13.1%) funding totalling 14.9 percent

Palestine was the second largest recipient of project funding (11.1%) and the fifth largest recipient of programme funding (5.9%).

The five main country recipients of the more long-term programme funding were DRC, Mali, Niger, Burundi and Palestine, which are also partner countries of Belgium’s development cooperation.

The five main countries for project funding were the DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR), Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. See Annex E: Mapping of Funding, for a more detailed analysis of the recipient countries of programme and project funding.

Figure 7: Main destination countries of projects and programmes (Total 2014-2021)

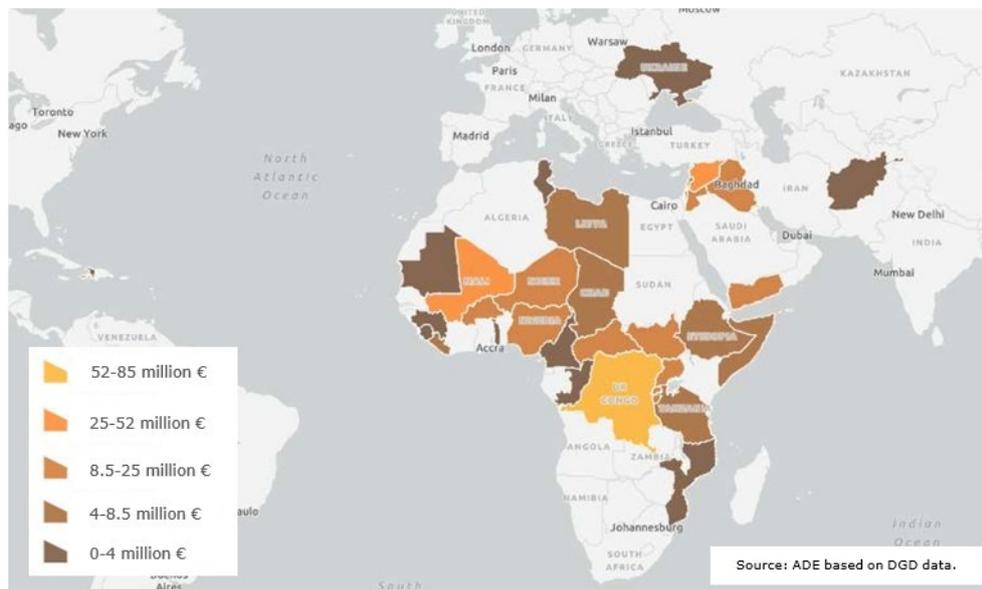
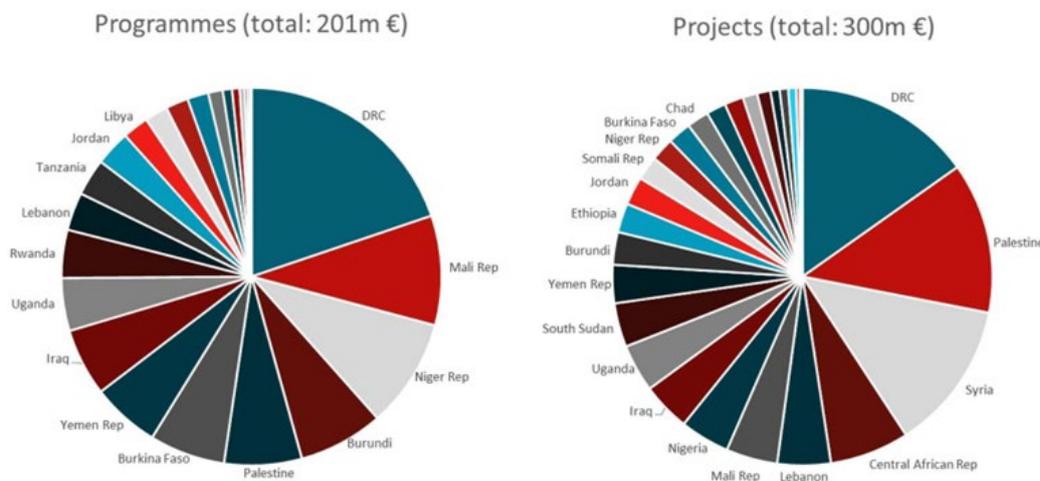


Figure 8: Main destination countries of programmes and projects (Total 2014-2021)



Source: Data received from D5.1, graph by ADE.

Project funding is the preferred instrument to respond to humanitarian needs outside the geographical priority areas of the Belgian humanitarian strategy. The instrument's use is strongly divided between humanitarian priority and non-priority countries. Project funding was apparently used to respond to i) short-term humanitarian crises outside the humanitarian priority regions and ii) engaging in protracted crises to fill gaps in the response.

2.1.2 Alignment with thematic priorities

Overall, projects and programmes are addressing priority needs and thematic areas identified in humanitarian needs assessments and response plans at country level.

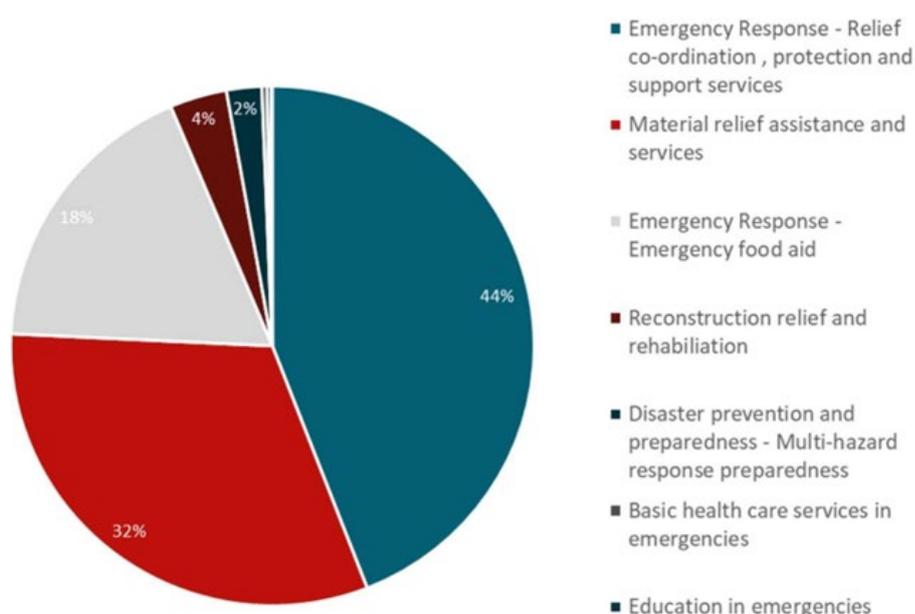
The sub-sectors in DGD's PRISMA database are not one-on-one comparable to the thematic priorities outlined in the humanitarian strategy.¹³ However, based on the review of the different allocations it is evident that funding is allocated based on the thematic priorities identified in the humanitarian strategy.

The largest portion falls within the sub-sectors of *Relief coordination, protection, and support services* (44 percent) and *Material relief assistance and services* (32 percent), both of which cover the second and fourth strategic priorities.

Eighteen percent has been spent on projects and programmes for Emergency Food Aid and 4 percent was allocated to Reconstruction Relief and Rehabilitation, both part of Belgium's first strategic priority. Only a small portion of funds was dedicated to disaster preparedness. The latter was also highlighted by the OECD Peer Review of Belgium indicating that the share of ODA earmarked for peacebuilding and crisis prevention remained relatively low.

A more detailed analysis of the recipient countries or programme and project funding is included as *Annex E: Mapping of Funding*.

Figure 9: Distribution of DGD HA Programme and Project Funds by Sub- sector (Total 2014-2021)



¹³ Belgian thematic priorities as specified in the Strategy of 2014: (i) Food aid, nutrition and agricultural rehabilitation; (ii) Protection with special attention to the needs of children; (iii) Basic health, sexual and reproductive health; (iv) Coordinated humanitarian logistics; and (v) Disaster preparedness.

2.1.3 Reflecting priority needs

Projects and programmes reflect the humanitarian priorities of the country where implemented. A more detailed contextual analysis informing programming – informing barriers and opportunities - done by partner organisations varied in quality.

A more general context analysis was included in all projects and programmes under review in the three countries selected for the case studies. In all three countries the projects and programmes were aligned with the Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs), Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs), and Refugee Response Plans. The analysis - conducted by the partner organisations who had received funding - was found to be often broad (at country or sector level) with limited context analysis linked specifically to the activities and interventions. For instance, no analysis of power dynamics at community level influencing the interventions and limited gender analysis or analysis around Persons living with Disabilities (PWD) needs.

The alignment with humanitarian priorities was achieved through the efforts of each agency individually in a specific context. Where there was a joint analysis to support a coordinated approach then this was limited to development cooperation. For instance the NGOs' Joint Strategic Framework (JSF) for Palestine identified development initiatives without focusing on the humanitarian needs and the humanitarian response. The 2020 peer review also highlighted the absence of tailored context analysis for the countries of intervention. Not having a comprehensive approach contributes to both development and humanitarian assistance being implemented in silo's This observation is also linked to EQ10 where connectedness and the nexus are reviewed.

For Palestine, interventions were carried out both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in response to an increase in humanitarian needs as a consequence of the continued occupation, Covid-19 pandemic and the deteriorating economic situation. In Palestine, projects and programmes were aligned with the humanitarian priorities in the country. Humanitarian funding was concentrated in the Gaza Strip to address the humanitarian consequences of increasing poverty and high unemployment, particularly amongst youth. Emphasis was placed on supporting vulnerable families in finding livelihood opportunities and the protection of children through access to education and psychosocial support (PSS).

In the case of Lebanon, the projects and programmes were aligned with the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan for the Syrian refugee crisis. Interventions were focused on reaching the most vulnerable Syrian refugees through cash assistance and supporting livelihoods. Project funding enabled humanitarian actors to reach both vulnerable Syrian refugees and Lebanese population groups.

In the DRC, funded project and programmes were aligned with the priorities identified by the humanitarian community and responded to the centrality of protection needs, including sex and gender-based violence (SGBV), health, including reproductive health, and acute food insecurity. North and South Kivu, Ituri and Tanganyika and the Kansai regions were prioritised in the humanitarian interventions supported through Belgian humanitarian funding. The DRC is one of the main countries of focus for Belgian cooperation assistance, including humanitarian aid in East DRC. In 2021, the DRC attracted 53 percent (EUR 15,689,704) of the humanitarian funds dedicated to the Great Lakes region, which was the second most important region for assistance after the Middle East.

2.1.4 Supporting local needs and consultation of beneficiaries

Vulnerability assessments or needs assessments were conducted, and done so in a consultative manner. Nevertheless, it is not always clear on which criteria targeting was done and whether it allowed for reaching the most vulnerable.

The review of the NGO programme proposals for the three country case studies indicates that proposals were based on vulnerability assessments or needs assessments. While these informed the design it is not always evident whether this allowed for reaching the most vulnerable. Experience of targeting the most vulnerable, as shown in the country case studies, was mixed. Larger humanitarian organisations – leading humanitarian responses – rely on their own targeting and vulnerability assessments. While these were found to be thorough, evaluations do show that reaching the most vulnerable can still be a challenge and that accountability and community feedback mechanisms are not always effective. NGOs work in close partnership with local partners and often close to the communities they support. This local community knowledge – if properly built on – can ensure that the most vulnerable are being reached.

Overall, assessments were conducted in a consultative manner with communities, consulting beneficiaries and seeking inputs from local partners. In some instances, specific thematic analysis (e.g., for SGBV) was conducted. It was found that these assessments varied in quality depending on the allocated resources.

For the targeting and selection of beneficiaries, the proposals indicated coordination with other humanitarian actors in order to avoid duplication and to support optimum coverage. The larger UN humanitarian agencies, such as WFP, UNRWA and UNHCR, used their own registration and vulnerability assessments and prioritised the most vulnerable within their own beneficiary lists. For the NGOs, selection of beneficiaries was done at the community level in consultation with community stakeholders. To what extent coordination was effective – to avoid duplication in targeting – could not be verified by the evaluation team.

2.2 EQ2 – Relevance: Evolution in humanitarian content

EQ 2: To what extent and through what mechanisms have developments in the international humanitarian landscape and international commitments been taken into account in the implementation of programmes and projects?

Summary response

Belgium's international commitments to the Grand Bargain and Good Humanitarian Donorship (see EQ3) are, to a large extent, reflected in the programmes and projects, for instance in cash transfers, localisation, flexibility and connectedness. However, there has been limited translation of these priorities into strategic guidance for the design and implementation of projects and programmes. As an example, the Call for Proposals for Programmes does not give guidance on localisation. Similarly, synergies between partners, programmes and projects are mainly left to the initiative of the actors. Belgium supports flexibility and is recognised for this, but strategic guidance at the operational level has not been sufficiently developed. Guidance around climate change adaptation and resilience was also limited.

2.2.1 Evolution in funding in response to international developments

Belgium's commitments to the Grand Bargain and Good Humanitarian Donorship are to a certain extent reflected in the financing of projects and programmes. Funding was allocated to protracted and forgotten crises.

During the evaluation period (2014–2021), the humanitarian landscape has seen significant changes. The number of people in need of assistance has almost quadrupled. This reflects an increase in extreme weather events, in high-intensity conflicts, and in the duration of humanitarian crises which has almost doubled (Context 1.3).

Table 1 provides numbers of affected people in the main humanitarian crises in 2021.¹⁴

Table 1: Number of people in need of humanitarian assistance

Country Region	Number of people affected by crisis in 2021	Remarks
Syria	13.4 million	Needs of affected people in Syria are exacerbated by economic decline
Syrian refugees	6.8 million	Mostly in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan
Yemen	20.7 million	Climate crisis and protracted conflict
Afghanistan	24.4 million	Following the withdrawal of the international coalition (2021)
Ethiopia	25.9 million	Climate crisis and conflicts
DRC	27 million	Including 5.6 million internally displaced. ¹⁵
Sahel	14.7 million	Figures for central Sahel only: Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger

Belgium has worked towards supporting major changes in international development and humanitarian mechanisms. It has been an active player in major international initiatives such as the Grand Bargain (GB)¹⁶ and the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD)¹⁷ (see EQ3). It has also continuously supported the UN Reform process, in the framework of multilateralism, including through the Funding Compact and the reform of the UN Development System (UNDS).

Belgium's approach as a humanitarian donor has increasingly aligned with the growing scale of crises. Overall, it doubled its humanitarian aid funding, from EUR 102 million in 2014 to EUR 206 million in 2021. It also aimed at identifying well the most-at-risk humanitarian crises and the best placed organisations to respond (see Table 2). DGD's selection was based on the criteria used by the INFORM Risk Index¹⁸, ECHO's Forgotten Crises Assessment Index¹⁹ and the humanitarian priorities reported by Belgium's partners.

¹⁴ OCHA (2021). HNO, March 2021; <https://www.unocha.org/global-humanitarian-overview-2021>

¹⁵ Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP). <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info>

¹⁶ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). See: <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>

¹⁷ See: <https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/home-page.html>

¹⁸ European Commission. See: <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk>

¹⁹ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/needs-assessment/forgotten-crises_en

Table 2: Total Belgian humanitarian funding to selected emergencies (2014-2021)

Humanitarian emergency	Total (EUR)	2021 only (EUR)
Syria	101,942,894	16,375,659
Yemen	51,485,258	5,791,250
Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)	128,490,208	14,898,454

Source: Data received from D5.1

Partners were supported, mainly through core funding or flexible funding mechanisms, such as pooled funds administered by international organisations or UN agencies. To a limited extent, funding was also provided through programmes and projects.²⁰

2.2.2 Evolution in thematic priorities in response to international developments

Belgium adapted to thematic humanitarian challenges in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and famine.

- The changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the allocation in the 2020 humanitarian budget for the COVID-19 response, EUR 22 million was provided through flexible funds²¹ and the BAHIA consortium was set up (see EQ 7).
- Widespread hunger and the risk of famine in four highly vulnerable countries (Nigeria, Yemen, South Sudan, and Somalia). This led to food assistance being prioritised as a "special effort" in the humanitarian approach from 2017 onwards.²²

These changes were acknowledged by DGD5 in their annual reports for 2020 and 2021. According to the latter, the topics most widely discussed by the international humanitarian community during that year were: (i) the increase in food insecurity driven by climate change; (ii) the impact of COVID-19 in conflict areas; and (iii) localisation, anticipatory action²³, gender equality and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

²⁰ Based on data received from DGD D5.1, 35 percent of total humanitarian funding went to projects and programmes in 2020-2021, versus 40 percent in 2014-2015.

²¹ Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF – OCHA), Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF – IFRC), WFP and FAO.

²² Data received from DGD D5.1 shows that funding to these countries peaked at EUR 33.5 million in 2017 against EUR 4 million in 2014. The average annual funds to these countries between 2017-2021 is considerably higher than that of 2014-2016, respectively EUR 20.7 and 7 million.

²³ European Commission (2021). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles: "Anticipatory action involves pre-planning early actions based on which funding can be disbursed quickly before a natural or human-induced disaster takes place or any other trigger for action is reached. It is also relevant for other types of anticipated emergencies, not only those linked to climate change. Brussels, 10.3.2021, COM(2021) 110 final.

In the context of these changes, all the thematic priorities of Belgium's humanitarian strategy, which has not been updated since 2014, remain relevant and are being responded to through the programmes and projects, in addition to core and flexible funding. However, the 2014 strategy does not yet include the priorities of the Grand Bargain (signed in 2016) (see EQ3), and Belgium's other international commitments to the Good Humanitarian Donorship and the EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. As these international commitments were developed, Belgium adopted important new initiatives such as cash assistance and localisation, but the operationalisation of these commitments was not always followed through sufficiently on the ground.²⁴

2.2.3 Flexibility and quality funding

Flexibility is at the core of Belgium's humanitarian strategy, enabling funding for sudden onset emergencies or under-funded crises, providing there is the budget, and partners are able to respond.²⁵ In this respect, Belgium is considered an approachable donor, flexible in responding to partners' proposals in relation to contextual changes within the limitations of its funding instruments, financial and legal framework and staff resources. This flexibility is also noticeable in how projects and programmes are being funded.

Partners have sufficient leeway to design their own projects and programmes within the broad parameters, set by DGD5, highlighting thematic and sectoral priorities. Sectoral priorities mainly relate to funding allocations for programmes, which takes place through a Call for Proposal. Allocations for project funding are more flexible with – for instance - UN agencies having more autonomy in proposing how the funding is used.

Belgium's focus on quality funding endeavours to provide a high share of multi-annual funds (for programmes for Belgian NGOs) and flexible funding (for core funding for multilateral partners, mainly UN agencies). Project funding usually covers one year but funding to UN agencies was often repeated annually for the same intervention.

Some guidance was incorporated in the calls for proposals (see relations with the partners below) and in the design of projects and programmes that generally provided flexibility and facilitated quality funding to a certain extent, in particular:

- A standard reporting mechanism, through the use of the Single Form (similar to an older ECHO format), was expected to reduce reporting burdens on NGO partners, most of whom are already familiar with the format. Multilateral partners are able to use their own reporting formats. However, different views were shared by those interviewed on the use of the Single Form, which tends to be long and not always focused on presenting higher level results. The evaluation team also found that contextual analysis tends to be too general and does not encourage an analysis of the context linked to the intervention or an analysis of power and conflict dynamics in the communities or areas where the project is being implemented.

²⁴ Localisation and cash assistance were among DGD's "Priorities 2020 – Grand Bargain" for funding, active support and coherence.

²⁵ Chapter III, paragraph 2 of the Humanitarian Strategy.

- DGD has developed in-house guidance on protection based on the ICRC 1995 definitions and informed by the relevant ECHO policies.²⁶ This guidance steers the relevant calls for proposals²⁷, with protection prioritised as a cross-cutting issue in programmes and projects and as a key priority in the design of proposals and reporting from partners. Some improvements can still be made as reporting does not always sufficiently reflect which changes have taken place in terms of protection risks for vulnerable people. It was evident from the evaluation interviews that there is a lack of understanding by partners and DGD on how best to operationalise the concept of “putting protection central” to humanitarian actions.

2.2.4 Relations with implementing partners

Belgium’s humanitarian strategy priorities are mostly aligned with the mandates of its main partners, which facilitates thematic funding: food assistance (WFP, NGOs), logistics (WFP), protection, in particular of children (UNICEF, UNHCR, NGOs), health (ICRC, NGOs), disaster risk reduction (DRR) (NGOs). Gender, as a cross-cutting issue, has been adopted by all partners and for some gender-based violence (GBV) is a key priority (ICRC).

Between 2014 and 2021, UN agencies made up the largest group of recipients of Belgian humanitarian aid (72 percent), mainly through core and flexible funding (the policy of core funding for international partner organisations was adopted in 2009).²⁸ In accordance with the Grand Bargain commitments, the share of core and flexible funds reached a planned target of 60 percent of total humanitarian funding in 2020.²⁹

Coordination with both UN and NGO partners is generally good, as evidenced through the regular meetings, working groups with NGOs³⁰ and attendance on CBPF advisory boards and executive boards of key UN agencies. Belgium has also been a member of the (rotating) Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) Advisory Group, WFP Executive Board, OCHA Donor Support Group, UNHCR Executive Committee and the ICRC Donor Support Group.

2.2.5 Thematic calls for proposals

Adaptations to evolutions in the humanitarian landscape, such as new geographic or Grand Bargain priorities, have not been specifically reflected in the guidance on thematic calls for proposals by DGD5 for programmes and projects. Instead, these have been covered by special budgetary commitments (such as for COVID- 19), flexible funding, or are treated as cross-cutting approaches in implementation (protection, cash, localisation).

²⁶ ECHO has a specific policy for protection, which is also considered as a cross-cutting issue in most other ECHO policies concerning food aid, cash, health, gender, disability, shelter, WASH, DRR, education or forced displacements. (https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/policy_guidelines_humanitarian_protection_en.pdf);

²⁷ A complete list of protection-related activities that Belgium wishes to support can be found in the financing framework prepared by DGD in 2020: pro-active prevention and response to violence; protection monitoring and analysis; community-based protection; coordination for protection; legal aid; mine action; child protection; gender-based violence (GBV); and information dissemination about protection.

²⁸ The policy was adopted in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) summer session in Geneva (6–30 July 2009) and was enshrined in Belgium’s Law on Development Cooperation of 2013 (art 24).

²⁹ Just after the Grand Bargain commitment made in 2016, this share was 47.9% in 2017.

³⁰ In 2017, mixed working groups – DGD and NGOs – were set up to address some key humanitarian thematic issues, such as innovation, cash, flexibility and localisation.

Strategic initiatives of programmes and projects generally come from DGD5 (thematic calls for proposals, addressed either to multilateral partners or NGOs) and sometimes from the partners themselves in their proposals, in particular when related to specific appeals by the ICRC or UN agencies.

From 2017 to 2019, calls for proposals launched by DGD5 covered, for example, innovation, DRR, forgotten or under-funded crises for UN agencies and priority areas of Belgian humanitarian aid for NGOs.³¹ In December 2019, the cross-cutting priorities of the humanitarian strategy (gender and environmental mainstreaming) were integrated as eligibility preconditions for the call for proposals to NGOs.

Proposals are assessed based on a comprehensive list of criteria (experience, relevance, vulnerability, estimated needs, intervention logic, budget, coordination and sustainability).³² Analysis of the proposals by field experts is followed-up by flexible responses for implementation from DGD. In early 2021, an innovative call for proposals was launched with specific amounts pre-allocated to eight NGO partners.³³ and without the need for further selection procedures. The focus was on protection activities in all the priority geographical areas. As a result, all eight proposed programmes were deemed eligible. This new approach was appreciated by the partners as there was no competition for funding, although the quality of outcomes has still to be evaluated.

2.2.6 Humanitarian diplomacy

DGD has been active in humanitarian diplomacy and advocacy on several levels, but limited human resources have been a major constraint in maximizing Belgium’s potential as a global humanitarian actor.

Despite its limited human resources Belgium has tried to maximize its presence in various humanitarian coordination and executive board meetings. Belgium is co-chairing with Finland the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. As co-chair Belgium is having a stronger role in improving good humanitarian donorship practices at a time when the need for humanitarian assistance is higher than ever.

Belgium is also an active member of the Humanitarian Senior Officials Meetings (SOM) bringing together the United Nations, the European Union, other donor countries and stakeholders to discuss the humanitarian situation in countries and regions including for instance the Central Sahel, Yemen and Syria. It is also an active member of the executive committee of UNHCR, the executive board of WFP, the advisory commission of UNRWA and the donor support group for OCHA and the ICRC.

Belgium is often seen by UN agencies and external observers as an independent and neutral donor that promotes respect for the humanitarian principles. This principled stance, coupled with expertise, such as in DRC, gives Belgium influence with other donors despite its relatively small size. In Palestine Belgium was considered a donor that worked with other donor countries to support programmes in Area C and took a principled stand on supporting Palestinian civil society.

³¹ Examples of calls for proposals in 2017 include, for example, the themes of Innovation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) for NGOs and under-funded crises for UN agencies. In 2018, a call for proposals from NGOs concerned the “priority areas of Belgian humanitarian aid”. 2018 was also named “year of innovation” and EUR 20 million were allocated to innovative projects run by a number of UN agencies and NGOs.

³² The acceptance rate of NGO’s responses to DGD’s calls for programmes and projects was 60% in the period 2018-2020.

³³ Vétérinaires Sans Frontières (VSF), Plan International, Oxfam, CRB, HIB, MdM, Caritas and RKV. The total budget was EUR 53 million.

Within the EU framework, DGD participated in COHAFA (Council on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid) monthly meetings. This resulted in joint messaging on the risk of famines and the DRC crisis (in 2017, the UN declared a Level 3 emergency covering the Kasai region, Tanganyika and South Kivu provinces). A summary of COHAFA common messages was made in 2021.³⁴ In addition, efforts were made in cooperation with the Development Cooperation Minister and the Belgian embassy (who had an active role in the GHD advocacy group).

DGD also participated in the annual meetings of the EU Humanitarian Aid Committee (HAC) and was in regular contact with Belgium's diplomatic representatives in the UN headquarters in New York and Geneva and in Rome and Jerusalem. At a higher level, as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council between 2019 and 2020, Belgium was involved in high-level discussions on major humanitarian issues.³⁵ When serving as an elected member of the UN Security Council Belgium had set conflict prevention, protection of civilians and the performance of United Nations missions as thematic priorities for its diplomatic engagement. Belgium also used its field expertise – particularly in Central Africa, the Sahel and the Middle East – to champion human security, human rights and respect for international humanitarian law.³⁶

Belgium should be recognised for its sustained efforts in humanitarian diplomacy especially at headquarters level. However, it was found that at country level advocacy around certain important thematic priorities could be further strengthened. For instance in the participation of Belgium on some of the CBPF advisory boards at country level localisation was not appropriately considered (see next sub-section).

2.2.7 Outstanding issues in adapting Belgium's approach

Issues remain in adapting Belgium's humanitarian approach to changes in the international humanitarian landscape.

Developing strategies on how to better operationalise certain issues on the ground requires further attention. It was found that there is limited strategic guidance or useful definitions around, for example, localisation, the nexus (see EQ 10), anticipatory action, climate change adaptation or resilience. DGD is working on some of these areas but progress is constrained because of limited resources. The capacity strengthening for rapid response through programmes and projects has also not been addressed (see EQ 4).

- **It was found that the concept of localisation is often understood differently by different partners and that localisation is interpreted in some countries and by some UN agencies as national NGOs having a sub-contracting role.** In the Grand Bargain framework, Belgium undertook to provide at least 25 percent of its humanitarian funding to local actors. However, Belgium's legal framework does not allow for direct funding to local organisations. Therefore, this objective was achieved in 2017, with 30.3 percent of funding allocated indirectly to support local actors.³⁷

³⁴ It concerned general advocacy on the conflict in the DRC with messages to the international community on the need to place this crisis higher on their agenda, fund it more consistently, integrate humanitarian aid and development through the nexus process and give more focus to SGBV and localisation. There were also appeals to all parties to the conflict to protect the civilian population, to the DRC authorities (regarding access, justice and resources), to the UN (to strengthen the nexus and prevent sexual exploitation and abuse) and to all humanitarian actors (on accountability and humanitarian principles).

³⁵ Syria, Yemen, DRC, Burundi, occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), sanctions, counter-terrorism, humanitarian access and food security. <https://newyorkun.diplomatie.belgium.be/belgium-unsc>

³⁶ FPS, Foreign Affairs, 2020.

³⁷ Aperçu de l'aide humanitaire 2017, DGD 15 January 2018.

DGD has also set out its expectations for NGOs and multilateral partners.³⁸ Efforts by partners at strengthening localisation were identified during the evaluation field visits but were not sufficiently consistent. For instance, in DRC, the pilot showing good practices on localisation by some partners were not discussed or disseminated. In Lebanon direct funding to local actors from the CBPF were considered as not sufficient, and Belgium did not make localisation a central theme in its engagement with the CBPF (Belgium is a member of the Advisory Board). In the oPt, there is no common understanding among donors and humanitarian or development actors around how localisation should be understood in the context of a complex and protracted crisis (see EQ 5). At the level of the CBPFs DGD5 has taken steps to provide guidelines for use by the Belgian focal points for the different CBPFs. These guidelines are expected to support a more effective engagement in the respective countries where CBPFs are supported, in Brussels, in New York and in Geneva by Belgium's Permanent Representation at the UN.

- The focus on the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has been strengthened through Belgium's participation in the UN's Call to Action on Protection from GBV in Emergencies.³⁹ Some field-level "roadmap" pilot projects have been carried out in Nigeria and the DRC, which Belgium took part in.⁴⁰ SGBV is also a main topic of ICRC's activities in DRC. In Lebanon, Belgium has maintained over several years funding to a local actor – with an office registered in Europe - to address violence against women in remote vulnerable areas.
- Fighting climate change is included in the humanitarian strategy as one of the components under the second cross-cutting thematic priority of "protection of environment and natural resources", together with droughts and deforestation. The impact of climate change was one of the main topics of strategic discussions mentioned in the 2021 annual report of DGD-5 2021, together with humanitarian access, the nexus and the impact of sanctions on humanitarian aid.⁴¹ However, how this prioritisation of climate change has been operationalised through projects and programmes could not be identified by the evaluation team.
- There is no definition of resilience in Belgium's humanitarian strategy or guidance on how it could strategically be applied. And supporting a resilience-based approach is not sufficiently understood in relation to developing a nexus-based approach. However, resilience is a core component of many funded programmes and projects being implemented by NGOs and UN agencies in the three country case studies.⁴²

³⁸ In 2020, DGD defined, as priorities in its action plan, the requirement for NGO and multilateral partners to: (i) specify the percentage of budget allocated to local actors (with accountability to be requested at Board meetings); and (ii) strengthen the capacities of local actors, including in CBPFs. Figures are not yet available.

³⁹ <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com>

⁴⁰ Belgium took part in the DRC pilot roadmap in 2019-2020, under Action 5.7 (impact evaluation). Most of Belgium's partners (NGOs Caritas, MdM and Oxfam; multilateral partners except WFP and the ICRC) were also involved. The outcomes have not yet been published.

⁴¹ The growing importance of Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in humanitarian aid and development (UN Framework Convention on Climate Change of 2011, Paris Agreement in 2016, annual COPs) and the publication of CCA policies by major international actors (EU, WFP, UNDP) should support advocating for this approach in a revised strategy.

⁴² AGIR – the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative, Alliance Sahel, or GFDRR – the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery

- A strategic note about fragile states was first published in 2013⁴³ and a new Guidance on Fragility was published in 2018.⁴⁴ While a focus on fragile states is gradually taking shape, the extent of its impact at the field level could not be verified. Engagement in fragile states through development and humanitarian funding is also important in relation to the operationalisation of the humanitarian- development and peacebuilding nexus.

2.3 EQ3 – Relevance: Principled allocation of resources

EQ 3 - Relevance: Has the allocation of resources been done in a principled manner and in line with Belgium's commitments and international principles and commitments (Grand Bargain, European Consensus, Good Humanitarian Donorship)?

Summary response

Belgium proved to be a principled donor, strongly committed to upholding humanitarian principles, International Humanitarian Law, and its international commitments. There is overall coherence between the thematic priorities of DGD (such as flexible funding, cash programming, and localisation) and those of three major international commitments: the “streams” of the Grand Bargain, the provisions of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship.

In budgetary terms, Belgium has achieved the planned budget allocations for its principled commitments to flexible funding. However, there is no systematic reporting on other commitments, such as protection, cash, or support to IHL.

Note: This evaluation only assesses the three commitments stipulated in the EQ and not the Call to Action (C2A) on Protection from GBV in Emergencies or the Global Compact on Refugees, in which the participation of DGD has been limited to date; for instance, Belgium took part in the Call to Action pilot roadmap in DRC (see also EQ2) and attended the Call to Action conference in Oslo in May 2019.

2.3.1 Upholding humanitarian principles

Belgium proved to be a principled donor, strongly committed to upholding humanitarian principles, International Humanitarian Law and its international commitments.

DGD stressed the importance of two strategic approaches in their work: (i) budget commitments; and (ii) upholding humanitarian principles during implementation. It did so in its annual reports 2017–2020. In its planning document for 2021, DGD still emphasises that its overall objective is to uphold the humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence) and maintain humanitarian aid as a “moral imperative and expression of universal value of solidarity between people”. This was confirmed by DGD staff, who also emphasised that humanitarian principles are the framework around which they base their work.⁴⁵

⁴³ Note stratégique pour les situations de fragilité; Coopération belge au développement, 2013.

⁴⁴ Guidance on fragility (Acropolis, 2018). The guide refers to the OECD document on “states of fragility” from 2016 and details principles and entry points (context, state-society relations, do no harm, prevention, whole-of-government approach, non-discrimination, alignment with local priorities, speed and flexibility and risk management).

⁴⁵ The principle of “do no harm” complements the humanitarian principles. Belgium’s strategy for humanitarian aid includes “first do no harm” and outlines that this requires humanitarian actors to not cause further damage and suffering as a result of their actions.

A recent D5.1 organisational chart (Annex H: Organigram D5.1) illustrates that dedicated staff have been allocated (resources permitting, see EQ 8) to cover Grand Bargain and Good Humanitarian Donorship areas – even if these areas cannot only be covered by some staff and need to be part of the overall DGD5 approach.

There is overall coherence between the thematic priorities of DGD (such as flexible funding, cash programming and localisation) and the “streams” of the Grand Bargain, the provisions of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the principles of GHD, which complement each other (see below).

Belgium is considered by its partners as a committed, pragmatic and approachable donor for programmes and projects, who will take informed and principled points of view, when needed, particularly with respect to sensitive issues.⁴⁶

Budgetary figures do confirm that the allocation of resources has been done in a principled manner to support international commitments, principally the Grand Bargain commitments for flexible funding. DGD also tracks its funding for localisation. But further presentation and analysis of DGD funding allocations is limited and is mainly focused on sectors, partners and geographical areas.

- **Flexible funding:** The Grand Bargain goal was that 60 percent of the total aid budget in 2020 should be allocated for flexible funding. Belgian flexible funding reached 60 percent in 2020 and 64.5 percent in 2021, by combining core and flexible funding instruments.
- **Localisation:** The Grand Bargain goal was that 25 percent of humanitarian aid funds should be allocated to local actors by 2020. This was already achieved by Belgium in 2017, at 30.3 percent.⁴⁷ However, this is mainly achieved through indirect funding to local NGO partners. Localisation under the Grand Bargain goes well beyond funding and beyond sub-contracting arrangements. Under the 2021 independent review of the Grand Bargain localisation, quality funding and participation remain goals that are still far from being realised.⁴⁸

Belgium's alignment to three key international commitments (Grand Bargain, Good Humanitarian Donorship, and European Consensus) with highly consistent objectives is summarized below.

2.3.2 Grand Bargain

Belgium has followed the Grand Bargain commitments.

The Grand Bargain, launched during the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul in May 2016, is a global agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations. The Grand Bargain currently includes 64 signatories (states, NGOs, UN agencies and the Red Cross Red Crescent movement). These represented around 84 percent of all donor humanitarian contributions in 2019 and 69 percent of the aid received by implementing organisations and agencies.

⁴⁶ For example, Belgium's participation in COHAFA joint advocacy messages (see EQ2).

⁴⁷ Aperçu de l'aide humanitaire 2017, DGD, 15 January 2018.

⁴⁸ ODI. 2021. The Grand Bargain in 2021. An independent review.
https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/Grand_Bargain_2022_ogGQS0m.pdf

Signatories agreed to implement 51 commitments, subdivided into “workstreams”, including localisation, cash assistance, participation “revolution”, quality funding, simplified reporting, transparency and coordination with development actors.

Examples of Belgium’s alignment include:

- introducing a Single Form NGO reporting template based on a format already used by ECHO, which most NGOs are already familiar with (see also EQ 2 and EQ 6);
- accepting the standard reporting formats used by UN agencies and the Red Cross Red Crescent movement;
- promoting localisation, although in practice there is still little coherence between the approaches followed by partners in the field (see EQ 5);
- accepting the use of cash-based transfers in funded programmes. Cash has generally been used by all partners where relevant and feasible (see EQ 5);
- quality funding by increasing the share of flexible funding to 60 percent by 2020;
- entering into discussions on operationally developing the nexus with partners and internally within DGD, although a robust position has not yet been reached.

In June 2021, a new head of the Grand Bargain refocused the process (Grand Bargain 2.0) on two enabling priorities: (i) quality funding; and (ii) support to localisation (leadership, delivery and capacity of local responders). This corresponded with DGD-5's approach, which outlined, in its 2020 annual report, the need to identify areas in which Belgium could deliver real added value, such as in quality funding.

2.3.3 Good Humanitarian Donorship

Belgium is aligned with GHD and is currently co-chairing the initiative.

GHD is an informal donor forum of 42 members with a network to facilitate collective advancement of GHD principles and good practices. By working together, donors can stimulate principled donor behaviour and improve humanitarian action. GHD's 24 principles commit members to: (i) respect humanitarian principles and IHL; (ii) ensure flexible and timely funding based on needs assessments, participation, localisation and transition to development; and (iii) support the roles of UN agencies and the Red Cross Red Crescent movement.⁴⁹

Belgium is strongly engaged in the GHD processes. During 2021–2023, it is co-chairing with Finland and has defined a set of priorities: impacts of COVID-19 and climate change; adverse effects of counter-terrorism and restrictive measures on principled humanitarian action; centrality of protection; quality funding, including flexibility and predictability; and the impact of the UN reform on humanitarian action.

Linked to GHD is the discussion around decolonising of aid. To bring clarity about what it means in practice Belgium is funding policy-supporting research around tracks for the decolonisation of the Belgian development cooperation.

⁴⁹ GHD. '24 Principles and Good Practice of Humanitarian Donorship'. Good Humanitarian Donorship. <https://www.ghdinitiative.org/ghd/gns/principles-good-practice-of-ghd/principles-good-practice-ghd.html>

2.3.4 Good Humanitarian Donorship

Belgium's humanitarian programmes and projects are consistent with the relevant provisions of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid with the exception of reducing risk and vulnerability through enhanced preparedness.⁵⁰ Most other 2018 Consensus chapters have been complied with, for example: chapter 3.1 "Coordination, Coherence and Complementarity" with OCHA and EU humanitarian donors (art 25-30); chapter 3.3 "Quality, effectiveness and accountability" (art 42-45). The nexus, localisation and disaster preparedness are still "works in progress".

The mainstreaming of humanitarian commitments by partners was confirmed during evaluation field visits, although the extent to which this is effective on the ground could not always be verified (see EQ 5). While document review shows that protection and accountability are mainstreamed in all interventions supported by Belgium, the evaluation team could not confirm the strength of the operationalisation of putting protection central to the humanitarian response.

2.4 Q4 – Relevance: Connectivity

EQ 4 - Relevance and Connectivity: How well adapted are project and programme instruments to current crises to (i) respond quickly to immediate needs (humanitarian emergency), (ii) respond structurally to protracted crises as part of a long-term strategy, and (iii) ensure connectivity between instruments in crises that present both emergency needs and structural vulnerabilities (see also EQ 10)

Summary response

In Belgium's humanitarian strategy, projects are designed to respond to short-term specific needs and forgotten and under-funded humanitarian crises, whilst programmes are meant to address protracted crises. In practice, due to decision and funding procedures that can take up to six months or more, rapid assistance is precluded for both programme and project funding instruments. The timeliness of the response is of particular concern in the case of sudden onset emergencies. For protracted crises situations both programme and project funding are not long enough to work on sustainability of interventions or address structural barriers where feasible. A crisis modifier has been built into projects and programmes to allow partners to redirect funding quickly to a humanitarian emergency. However, it was found that the use of the crisis modifier has been limited.

A lack of connectedness and the development of long-term strategies – especially in protracted crises – were observed. This has even been noted with NGOs who possess a dual mandate for both development and humanitarian assistance.

⁵⁰ EC. 'Humanitarian Aid'. European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid_en (Accessed July 2022)

2.4.1 Respond quickly to immediate needs

The two instruments of programmes and projects are not adapted to respond quickly to immediate needs (humanitarian emergency).

In particular, the current 'project' funding mechanism does not work as initially intended in the strategy for short-term emergency response to sudden onset of underfunded humanitarian crises.

In the current practice, projects are generally used to fund international organisations (when core or flexible funding are not adequate), and some international (non-Belgian) NGOs. Two-year programme cycles are used to support Belgian NGOs in delivering assistance in protracted humanitarian crises.

For both instruments, the decision and funding processes are too lengthy to respond to emergencies, taking an average of 6 months between call for proposals, agreement on the programming by both DGD and the Cabinet, and actual availability of funding. NGO funds are allocated through the calls for proposals with no flexible funding set aside to respond to emergencies through Belgian NGOs.

Neither instrument has sufficient flexibility to redirect funding quickly to an emergency. After funding calls for proposals, there is often very little budget remaining to respond to emergencies. If some budget is still available, DGD may contract projects to "best placed" international actors.⁵¹ A built-in "crisis modifier" for programmes or projects that would allow partners to quickly redirect a share of their funding to newly escalating emergencies lacks currently a shared understanding between DGD 5 and partners, and is not supported by clearly established guidelines.⁵²

Crisis modifiers were used in Burkina Faso and Rwanda by CRB and RKB, despite the current lack of guidelines. Based on the evidence gathered there is not a coherent and joint understanding between DGD5 and its partners on the use of the crisis modifiers.

While NGOs would need to apply to other sources of funding (such as ECHO or CBPFs), UN agencies can draw on their own core funds and/or flexible funds and appeal for funding through flash appeals and other mechanisms⁵³ to respond to emergencies (DGD is already funding nine flexible CBPFs, IRA, SFERA, CERF, and DREF). This allows UN agencies to reach scale in a humanitarian response. The country based Pooled Funds can also be accessed by Belgian and International NGOs who have a presence on the ground in the country affected by the humanitarian crisis.

As such, programmes and projects do not comply with the Capacity and Rapid Response requirements of the European Consensus (as set out in chapter 3.5 of the Consensus). This, however, does not affect Belgium's humanitarian funding globally as the core and flexible funding instruments do support rapid responses by multilateral partners.

⁵¹ For example, EUR 3 million was available from the 2022 budget for the ICRC in Ukraine.

⁵² DGD's priority list of actions from 2020 onwards stated (in the nexus chapter) that DGD "will work to promote a crises modifier and early warning / early action mechanisms at the humanitarian level and in coordination with development".

⁵³ For example, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) administered by OCHA, WFP's Immediate Response Account (IRA), FAO's Special Fund for Emergency and Rehabilitation (SFERA) and the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).

2.4.2 Respond structurally as part of a long-term strategy

The programme and project funding instruments are also not sufficiently long for partners to develop a long-term intervention strategy. Based on a Do No Harm (DNH) approach, without funding guarantees partners are not in a position to make long-term multi-year planning and commitments. It was found that at times there is a disconnect between the analysis of the conflict, the underlying drivers of the conflict and the allocation of funding, as demonstrated by the provision of funding after the Beirut explosion. (See EQ 8)

The absence of a long-term strategy and limited multi-year allocations are also observed among other donor countries and humanitarian actors. Humanitarian funding to countries in a protracted crisis is not always allocated based on an analysis of the protracted nature of the humanitarian crisis including an identification of the structural barriers that need to be addressed through sustained efforts over a longer period of time.

But some progress is being made with the HNOs and HRPAs developed for countries faced by a protracted crisis increasingly addressing the need for multi-year programming. But it is also highlighted for instance in an independent study conducted by the NRC and OCHA that the potential of CBPFs to provide multi-year funding has yet to be fully realized.⁵⁴

2.4.3 Connectivity between instruments addressing emergency needs and structural vulnerabilities

Limited connectedness between development and humanitarian funding. In the absence of a country strategy bringing both humanitarian and development funding together the connectedness between both is limited. Connectivity or the lack thereof is assessed more comprehensively under EQ 10.

No connectivity was found between programmes and projects. There were no contacts or exchanges between partners who are funded through the two funding modalities, except through the cluster system and when meetings are organised by DGD or embassies.

Good connectivity between core funding for UN agencies and project funding. The field visits showed good complementarity between the core funding and the project funding for United Nations agencies.

⁵⁴ CERF Multi-Year Humanitarian Funding. Discussion Note. 27 November 2019.

2.5 EQ5 – Effectiveness: Results for populations

EQ 5 - Effectiveness: To what extent have programme and project objectives been achieved? Have the programmes and projects contributed to sufficient coverage of crisis-affected populations? What are the effects (intended or unintended) on the target populations?

Summary response

Projects and programmes made a difference in the coverage of crisis-affected populations where support was targeted at addressing funding gaps in humanitarian assistance and when aligned with humanitarian response plans. Coverage was supported through aligning with humanitarian response plans in-country. A number of interventions were strategically well positioned and made a noticeable difference in the lives of the target populations. Project funding was also used to cover gaps in service delivery caused by funding shortfalls in the core budgets of the UN agencies. Working with local partners took place across projects and programmes, but it was found that this does not equate with supporting locally led humanitarian action and empowering local actors to lead on decision-making and supporting local solutions. Projects and programmes were all relevant to the needs of the persons of concern and made a difference in people's lives. Whether the most vulnerable were always targeted could not be confirmed.

This evaluation question is based on the three country case studies (DRC, Palestine and Lebanon). The findings were developed following document reviews, interviews with NGO staff and visits to the three countries, which focused on consultations with beneficiaries in Lebanon and Palestine. Consultations with communities and beneficiaries was not feasible in the DRC. After an overall assessment for each country, the results are presented against the thematic or sector priority areas included in the humanitarian strategy. The response to this EQ does not go into the detail of each of the interventions that the evaluation team looked at. A more detailed review of these can be found in the country reports annexed to the report (Annex G: Country Reports).

Box 2: Summary of the interventions covered by the country case studies

DRC

Programme interventions supported by Belgian NGOs in South and North Kivu focused on agricultural resilience (Caritas), primary healthcare (Mdm) and disaster risk reduction (Oxfam). The evaluation looked also at project interventions implemented by WFP (food assistance), UNHRC (protection) and ICRC (support for survivors of SGBV).

Lebanon

No programme interventions were ongoing. The focus of the evaluation was on the project interventions implemented by UNRWA (Education in Emergencies), WFP (food assistance to Syrian refugees and Lebanese vulnerable families) and Amel Association (nexus programming). The evaluation team also looked at the CBPF.

Palestine

Programme interventions supported by Belgian NGOs in Gaza and the West Bank focused on protection and resilience (Oxfam, West Bank Protection Consortium), BAHIA supported interventions in Gaza (Caritas) and the West Bank (Oxfam) and project interventions implemented by UNRWA (Education in Emergencies). The evaluation also met with OCHA to discuss the CBPF.

2.5.1 Overall Assessment - Outcomes of programmes and projects achieved at country level

Belgium made a difference with its humanitarian assistance through projects and programmes which were aligned with the HRPs and HNOs. Projects and programmes have achieved the objectives set for their respective individual interventions.

But in the absence of a results framework that identifies priorities, objectives and expected results for Belgium's humanitarian funding it is challenging to have aggregated results at country level.

DRC Overall Assessment

Interventions aligned with the humanitarian strategy's thematic priorities have been implemented: food and cash assistance; nutrition and agricultural resilience for returnees; primary healthcare, with a special focus on survivors of SGBV; and disaster preparedness. Protection for vulnerable women and children and survivors of SGBV has been a priority in the DRC. **The multi-annual programmes have worked towards localisation. Limitations were linked to a lack of strategic focus in a context of severe underfunding and a lack of learning between NGO partners on localisation.**

Lebanon Overall Assessment

Overall, programme interventions have achieved their objectives in reaching vulnerable Lebanese families and Syrian and Palestinian refugees. The emphasis of the response has been on international burden sharing to support Lebanon to host over 1 million refugees. The support provided by Belgium through WFP and UNHCR has supported protection services and cash assistance for the most vulnerable refugees and host communities. Belgium has not developed its own strategic focus for Lebanon based on the needs and gaps in assistance; instead it fully relies on the strategies and knowledge of the partners it chooses to support. **The absence of a strategic focus has resulted in supporting a variety of interventions with several agencies.** Belgium is the largest contributor to the OCHA-managed CBPF.

Palestine Overall Assessment

Emphasis has been on protection, resilience and addressing funding gaps to cover basic needs. **All interventions supported by Belgium have a direct or indirect protection focus but the approach is fragmented across the interventions.** Protection interventions have aimed to provide a comprehensive approach addressing multi-faceted aspects of the protection crisis in Palestine. Funding has supported families to continue cultivating their agricultural lands, to have access to economic opportunities and to support their children to attend school.

2.5.2 Results against the thematic and sectoral priorities

Food security, food assistance, agriculture

Across the country case studies, Belgium has focused on food security and food assistance, mainly through support for WFP. While priority has been given to cash assistance it was not prioritised over in-kind food assistance in all cases. Vulnerable groups were targeted under Belgium's contributions, including SGBV survivors in DRC, vulnerable refugees and socio-economic vulnerable groups among the national populations in Palestine and Lebanon. Limited support was provided to resilience and livelihoods interventions linked to agriculture. An example of this is the Caritas programme in South Kivu that is supporting the reintegration of returnees by providing agricultural inputs.

Targeting criteria used by the partners prioritised the most vulnerable groups. However often the focus was on the provision of productive inputs at the beneficiary level and not sufficient focus on supporting the agricultural productivity at community level. Across the three case studies focus has been given to food security but the assistance was often short-term focused. The link with nutrition was not sufficiently developed which is ignoring the co-existence of food insecurity and malnutrition.⁵⁵

Protection

Belgium has provided support for direct access to protection services, mainly focusing on women and children. Access to protection services included assistance with civic documentation and legal aid through UNHCR in the DRC and Lebanon, and support for the West Bank Protection Consortium in Palestine providing a holistic approach to protection in communities vulnerable to eviction. In the three countries protection has been underfunded but this did not initially influence Belgium's funding decisions to prioritise its funding in these countries on protection. This was changed with a Call for Proposals in 2021 focusing on Protection.

The interventions supported by Belgium were useful and showed strong results. In Gaza and Lebanon support for Education in Emergencies protected – especially young girls – from dropping out of school. In Gaza the holistic protection support provided by Oxfam allowed persons of concern to have a pathway out of poverty and Caritas provided access to health services for extremely remote and vulnerable areas during Covid lockdowns.

At country level – in Lebanon and the DRC – it was found that there has not been a strategic dialogue between Belgium, UNHCR and the protection cluster where the most critical gaps in assistance are. With the WBPC Belgium has coordinated well with other donors to follow up on the impact and challenges on the ground.

Access to basic health services, sexual and reproductive health

The provision of emergency medical aid and access to reproductive and sexual health services in South Kivu Province and Lebanon has made a difference to the care given to SGBV survivors. The quality of the services provided and the lasting change this has made for survivors could not be confirmed. A holistic approach has been implemented by ICRC in DRC and Amel Association in Lebanon through providing health and protection services to survivors of SGBV and domestic violence. A holistic approach has meant that different types of services were provided based on the specific needs of mainly women and girls. Both ICRC and Amel Association worked with the national and local government health services to provide this integrated approach to SGBV and to raise awareness.

Disaster Preparedness

*Note: The humanitarian strategy includes, as its priority, Disaster Preparedness rather than Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR); this was done prior to the 2015 Sendai Framework international initiative, which focuses on DRR as its core concern.*⁵⁶

⁵⁵ WFP. 2021. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all.

⁵⁶ UNDRR. 'Implementing Sendai Framework'. <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/what-sendai-framework> (Accessed July 2022)

Funding provided for disaster preparedness interventions and anticipatory action appear to lack consistency. In 2017, DGD launched a call for proposals for disaster preparedness,⁵⁷ with a budget of EUR 11.5 million for humanitarian NGOs.

Logistics

Two projects related to WFP logistics were funded in the DRC: (i) EUR 200,000 for the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) in 2016-2019; (ii) and EUR 4 million for the food aid logistics platform from 2020 to 2021. Given the lack of infrastructure in the DRC, transportation and related costs amount to approximately 50 percent of the total cost of inputs delivered to beneficiaries. The supply chain can also be extremely long – up to one year between orders and delivery, for example, during the COVID-19 pandemic – which is out of step with one-year projects.

Localisation

Localisation is a priority focus for Belgium. However, a common understanding of how to operationalise localisation has not yet been developed. Across the three countries, localisation in practise involves the sub-contracting of national NGOs for service delivery and capacity strengthening of local networks and partners. Multilateral agencies and NGOs are also increasingly working with local governance structures in the delivery of assistance to communities affected by displacement. Localisation of humanitarian action or locally-led responses remains limited in terms of national humanitarian actors driving the response. The CBPFs are considered by Belgium a key modality in focusing on localisation. However, in both Palestine and Lebanon Belgium did not sufficiently advocate for direct funding to local NGOs through these funds.

In the three countries, WFP reaches scale in its operations by working with various national NGO partners for food distribution and with national financial institutions for its cash transfers. NGOs, such as MDM, work with, and strengthen, the capacities of local health structures in the DRC.

Under its legal framework, Belgium cannot provide direct funding to local actors. At the moment the focus has been on reviewing how much financial assistance is channelled through local actors to communities. However, feedback obtained during the field missions highlighted that a focus on financing limits the wider debate that needs to take place on locally-led responses.

Cross-cutting priorities: gender and environmental protection

Gender is mainstreamed by all partners, including multilateral partners and NGOs who provide good disaggregation of data on gender and age. Overall, across the three countries, there is a good focus on targeting women and girls in the planning, design and implementation of interventions. However, it was found that only a limited number of women-led or women-focused national partners have been included in the implementation arrangements.

Environmental protection has not been integrated in any meaningful way. At best it has been part of the risk assessments, but the environment or climate crisis were not considered.

⁵⁷ Four of the seven proposals were accepted: health risks from epidemics and climate change (MDM); capacity strengthening of national Red Crescent societies in Mali and Niger (CRB); localisation of DRR in the Great Lakes region (Oxfam); and capacity strengthening for multi-purpose cash response, also in the Great Lakes region (RKV).

2.5.3 Coverage

Belgium supports coverage and scale in humanitarian responses through its core contributions to multilateral agencies and contributions to a number of Flexible Funds. Funding under these modalities is used to share in the international response for large-scale humanitarian crises (such as the Syria refugee response) and to under-funded crises (such as in the DRC). Projects and programmes aimed to address other humanitarian needs and in all cases they were aligned with the humanitarian response plans.

In comparison with the humanitarian needs in the three countries that were reviewed, Belgium's support through projects and programmes is limited but still considerable. In a number of instances Belgium has contributed to increased coverage and scale:

- Through providing support jointly with other European donors to the West Bank Protection Consortium the most vulnerable communities could be covered. Combined with humanitarian advocacy, the coverage and scale through this joint effort was positive.
- Through providing additional support to UNRWA for Education in Emergencies Belgium has made a critical difference in sustaining access to education for Palestinian refugee children living with a disability or affected by very high levels of poverty in Lebanon and Gaza. Covering transportation costs to and from schools cannot be met by UNRWA's regular programme budget. Not covering these costs would mean that many more children would be forced to drop out of school.
- In the DRC, support for UNHCR's various protection services reached 250,000 internally displaced persons. Belgium's contribution made a significant difference to UNHCR's funding shortfall.

2.6 EQ6 – Efficiency of modalities

EQ 6 - Efficiency of modalities: To what extent have the modalities for implementing DGD interventions through programs and projects been conducive to achieving their respective objectives?

Summary response

Projects and programmes have provided a useful source of financing to provide humanitarian assistance in large-scale, protracted crises but both modalities have a number of shortcomings. Both modalities limited flexibility to accommodate emerging needs or sudden onset emergencies. The length of the approval process for projects and programmes does not facilitate a rapid humanitarian response. The introduction of the crisis modifier for programmes addresses this, but only to a limited extent because its use is restricted to programme implementation locations.

NGO presence was found to be stronger in Belgium's partner countries for development cooperation mainly with programme funding. Programme funding for NGOs is not a flexible funding mechanism that allows NGOs to respond quickly to sudden onset emergencies.

Funding for projects (usually for one year) did contribute to the set objectives but the one-year duration impacted negatively on the results.

While Belgium is considered a pragmatic and predictable donor at the country level, the timeliness of its funding, which is mainly linked to the approval process, was at times a concern.

There is no direct funding of local organisations since Belgium's legal framework does not allow this. Providing indirect funding to local organisations is still far from the goal of localisation, as stipulated in the Grand Bargain.

Across the programme and project funding modalities, Belgian partners are established humanitarian actors with expertise and experience in humanitarian assistance, which impacts on both the effectiveness and efficiency of the modalities.

In 2021, more than 60 percent of humanitarian funding was allocated (totally or partially) through flexible financing mechanisms, including core funding to UN agencies and flexible funds such as the CERF and CBPFs.⁵⁸

The TOR for this evaluation focuses on projects and programmes, but excludes two other funding mechanisms (core funding and flexible pooled funds). Their omission precludes an overall comparison on the efficiency of the different funding mechanisms in terms of approach and process.

Whether the project and programme financing instruments are efficient has been assessed against the following criteria:

- The process from design to transfer of funds is timely, enabling a quick response and approval process;
- The modalities are adapted to allow for a response to humanitarian needs;
- Partners (Belgian NGOs, UN agencies and the ICRC) consider efficiencies in their implementation, including through local partners;
- The organisational efficiency of DGD D5.1 and its increasing workload (which is discussed under EQ8)

⁵⁸ 2021 Bilan de l'aide humanitaire belge (document interne).

2.6.1 Efficiency of the Programme modality

Lengthy approval process means programmes are not an efficient modality to respond quickly to sudden onset emergencies.

The programme modality supports interventions for a two-year period with some flexibility incorporated into the design. Based on key informants' feedback, the six to nine-month approval process for programmes – from design to transfer of funds – is too long for a humanitarian response and requires further review. Due to the lengthy approval process, this funding instrument is suitable only to support interventions in protracted crises (see EQ4). This was also confirmed by stakeholders in-country who highlighted that Belgium is known for its pragmatic attitude, flexibility and predictability, but that timeliness is, at times, of concern as approval processes tend to take longer compared to other donors.

There are several procedural issues that are impacting on an efficient process including: changes in staffing and procedures; the absence of a clear timeline for approval; and lengthy DGD accounting procedures to close programmes.

The programme modality characteristics that facilitate a humanitarian response include 100 percent funding of the proposals, flexibility in the design and the introduction of a crisis modifier.

One hundred percent funding for programmes is not always the case with other donors, such as The Netherlands or Switzerland, where NGOs are required to seek co-funding from additional donors. The use of ECHO's Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) accreditation process (following ECHO's standard reporting instruments) in the selection of NGO partners provides a level of stability to Belgian NGOs in terms of programme funding. The introduction of the crisis modifier is a positive step to further strengthen flexibility in programme funding. However, clear instructions and guidance on when, where and how to use the crisis modifier have yet to be developed. DGD and NGOs are actively exploring other opportunities for NGO funding, mainly linked to supporting NGOs to respond to new humanitarian crises.

Where programmes were implemented in collaboration with local partners the results at community level were stronger. To what extent the engagement of local partners was maximized could not be verified.

All NGO partners receiving programme funding work with, and through, local partners in different countries.⁵⁹ The quality of engaging local partners differs between the three country case studies, although the way of operating did not significantly change the power structures between the international and national NGOs and partnership practices remain hierarchical. This finding is in line with independent assessments on localisation under the Grand Bargain.

Based on the initial budget review, local partners are contracted to implement a number of activities with the international NGO responsible for the overall programme implementation (which the Belgian NGO is affiliated to). The level and quality of engagement of the local partners differs in the three in-country case studies. Feedback indicated that Belgium did not allow for sufficient overhead costs to be divided between the Belgium-based NGO HQ, the international NGO based in-country and the local partners. It is the opinion of the evaluation team that the core issue should be how to best maximize the financial support to local partners and communities.

⁵⁹ Countries where funded programmes of Belgian NGOs took place in 2020: Burkina Faso, Burundi, DRC, Mali, Niger, Palestine, Rwanda, Syria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Yemen.

In some cases, Belgian NGOs are compelled to work through the members of their own network based in-country, such as the national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies for CRB and RKB, or the local branch of Caritas in DRC. Based on interview feedback in-country it was found that funding for overhead costs for NGO HQ and country offices is adequate to support an efficient process.

2.6.2 Efficiency of the Project modality

As defined in the 2014 Humanitarian Strategy, the project funding modality is geared towards addressing specific short-term needs and/or providing adequate funding for under-funded or forgotten humanitarian crises.

Project funding is used to:

- support agencies to implement their core mandate (for example, UNHCR's cash assistance to refugees in Lebanon and DRC, and WFP's food assistance programmes in DRC and Lebanon); and
- target specific needs of beneficiaries that cannot be addressed through core funding (for example, UNRWA's psychosocial needs of Palestinian refugee children impacted by conflict).
- Support international NGOs – as the best placed actors - for specific interventions in certain contexts (for example: support NRC in oPt and Syria).

Project funding allowed for support to multilateral agencies to fill gaps in critical services delivery to vulnerable population groups in protracted crises but timeframe was too short.

The project modality provides one-year funding for interventions, mainly to UN agencies and international organisations, such as the ICRC and IFRC. One initiative that stands out is the support provided to the West Bank Protection Consortium (a group of European NGOs). The document review revealed that receipt of project funding took – for some agencies – up to three months and sometimes after the project starting date.

In some instances, project proposals (food assistance by WFP, protection by UNHCR, education by UNRWA) essentially repeat the same activity with requests for additional annual phases. However, this has not avoided lengthy annual funding approval processes.

A one-year intervention (minus the time for funds being approved and received) is not conducive to effective localisation since durable capacity strengthening of local actors can take much longer. Yearly approval processes also prohibit partners from integrating sustainability into their interventions. Both aspects are especially important when implementing in a protracted crisis. An assessment of the crisis did not inform whether multi-year project funding would be more appropriate.

Under project funding, the engagement with local partners was found to be limited to short term sub-contracting arrangements. With UN agencies, implementation through local partners is limited under project funding due to the nature of the humanitarian assistance programmes. For example, with large-scale cash transfers, cash is transferred either to banks – where refugees access this assistance through ATMs – or electronically to the recipients' smartphones, which enables them to receive cash where there are no local bank branches and provides a more dignified way of receiving the assistance. Where UN agencies work with, and through, local partners - for instance under livelihoods programmes – it is often through a subcontracting arrangement where local NGOs are tasked with implementing specific activities.

2.6.3 Efficiency of decision making processes for programme and projects

Decision-making processes around the project modality are not supported by clearly documented procedures or by accountable timeframes with transparent administrative steps and deadlines. However, the evaluation found that there is stability among the partners supported through project funding, as is the case with programme partners.

Programme modality is based on Call for Proposals exclusively accessible to Belgian NGOs. Each Call for Proposals is focused on a broad thematic area; the most recent was on Protection in 2021.⁶⁰ The objectives of the Call were sufficiently broad for Belgian NGOs to apply based on their own organisational mandate and expertise.

Documentation supporting the Call for Proposals did not include the different steps and timeframes of the approval process; it did provide guidance on protection with a detailed (but not exhaustive list) of protection activities that could be funded.

Proposals must be submitted using the ECHO *formulaire unique*. The evaluation found that there were different views on whether DGD D5.1's use of ECHO's Single Form is efficient and fit for purpose. As highlighted by ECHO in its self-assessment of workstream 9 (reporting requirements), the Single Form is quite complex, results in lengthy reports and seems to have removed technical project staff from the drafting and reporting process. Consequently, the information provided is not necessarily the most useful.⁶¹ The evaluation team found that a similar assessment can be made about the Single Form NGO submissions to DGD.

The Call also refers to the need for an external evaluation and audit at the conclusion of the programme. It also refers to *un contrôle financier ex-post*, for which no further explanation or timeline is provided. It was found that this *ex-post* audit can be significantly delayed. In some cases, programmes from 2018 have not yet been audited and therefore NGO accounts cannot be closed.

The Call for Proposals does not reference good humanitarian principles important to Belgium, for example expectations around localisation or participation by communities. Including these would increase both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the proposals submitted if the principles were considered from the outset in the proposal designs. However, this should not be interpreted that the NGOs are not including humanitarian principles or localisation in their proposals.

⁶⁰ Cadre de financement pour des programmes humanitaires mis en oeuvre par des ONG belges dans le secteur de la protection.

⁶¹ ECHO. Grand Bargain annual self-reporting exercise. (https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/echo_-_self-report_0.pdf)

2.7 EQ7 – Efficiency of BAHIA approach

EQ 7 – Efficiency of the BAHIA approach: What initial lessons can be drawn from the BAHIA initiative regarding the relevance and appropriateness of increased flexibility in the financing of humanitarian actions?

Summary response

The BAHIA design was initiated as a pilot project that could provide evidence on alternative funding modalities to enable Belgian NGOs to respond collectively to an emergency. The BAHIA approach was found not to be sufficiently different from project funding and is therefore not a mechanism that enables Belgian NGOs to respond to emerging needs or sudden-onset emergencies.

The evaluation team finds that BAHIA tried to give an opportunity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the allocation of the funding was not always driven by where the most unmet and acute needs were, what the needs were and who was best qualified to respond. It was also found that there was not coherent vision developed jointly by the NGOs in how best to support COVID-19 affected communities and to identify synergies. At the end the funding was spread too thinly to make a substantive difference.

2.7.1 Piloting an NGO collaborative response

Collaboration and funding processes to support humanitarian action through Belgian NGOs has been part of a DGD reflection process over the last few years.

The Belgian Alliance for Humanitarian International Action (BAHIA) was an initiative to pilot a different type of engagement between DGD and Belgian NGOs. It was the first time that Belgian humanitarian NGOs, who were eligible for DGD funding, entered into a close and collective collaboration – or "collaborative response" – in a humanitarian emergency.

- BAHIA's initial aim was to carry out a one-year pilot project to control the spread and reduce the impact of COVID-19 on pre-existing humanitarian crises.
- BAHIA was implemented in 2020-2022 (12 months initially with a 6-month no-cost extension) by seven Belgian NGOs⁶² – through their local affiliate organisations – in the Sahel region (Niger, Burkina Faso), the Great Lakes region (Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania) and the Middle East (Palestine, Lebanon). An independent evaluation has been commissioned by the NGOs, but the report – not yet finalised – was not available to the evaluation team. As part of the present evaluation the team visited BAHIA funded interventions in Palestine and Lebanon.

The main lessons that can be drawn thus far from the BAHIA project approach, in terms of increased flexibility in the financing of humanitarian actions through Belgian NGOs, include:

- The length of the DGD approval process indicates that this approach is not a pathway to introducing a funding mechanism to support NGO response to sudden-onset emergencies. The BAHIA process started in May-June 2020 and funding was only made available in March 2021.

⁶² BAHIA NGO include: MdM, Oxfam, Caritas, Oxfam, Plan International, Croix-Rouge Belgique, Rode Kruis Vlaanderen, Handicap International.

- The direct contact between the BAHIA consortium and D5.1. was limited to OXFAM as the consortium lead. This contributed to some efficiencies within D5.1. through reduced reporting. However, lack of regular direct exposure to D5.1. was seen as a limitation by some of the NGOs in the BAHIA consortium.
- Forming a collaboration between NGOs through such an initiative is time consuming in terms of developing a joint intervention logic and results framework. This is not conducive to supporting a rapid response in sudden onset emergencies.
- Having a Joint Results Framework enables the aggregation of results. However, the fact that agencies do not collaborate at the country level means that this type of consortium does not have a major influence at the outcome level within each country. Reporting, such as the Project Highlights Report, only describes the individual achievements of the interventions.⁶³ Having reviewed the BAHIA interventions in two countries, the evaluation team finds that BAHIA is not more than just the sum of its parts. In both Lebanon and Palestine, the funding that was made available to the partners in the targeted locations was not sufficient to meet the priority needs of vulnerable communities. In one area, it was evident that the funding was not needed as the needs had already been met.
- The available funding of EUR 6 million was divided equally between seven NGO partners. The individual NGOs did not concentrate the funding in one specific country but opted to divide the funding to operations in multiple countries, therefore there was no geographic concentration. The argument that this approach would be different if the response was for a sudden crisis in one specific geographical area does not hold since the response should be driven by needs.
- This lack of concentration significantly reduced the available funding to the partners and communities at the country level. When reviewing the different locations, it is evident that each NGO selected the locations individually. In the different locations NGOs did not jointly design interventions or work together. It was clear that the planning and development of BAHIA interventions was steered from the headquarters of Belgian NGOs and their affiliate NGOs.
- There was sufficient flexibility and room for Belgian NGOs to build on their core mandates and expertise under BAHIA while maintaining the identity and mandate of each NGO. However, BAHIA did not support collaboration between NGOs in the field, with the exception of Plan International with Handicap International in Uganda and CRB with RKV in Rwanda. This finding was confirmed during the field missions to Lebanon and Palestine where organisations funded through BAHIA worked in isolation from one another. The fact that BAHIA funding in both these countries was used for interventions in different sectors also did not facilitate coordination.
- An operational problem was that BAHIA was subject to the 15 percent rule limiting deviation from predefined budget headings without an approved budget revision. This is a limitation when working in a humanitarian crisis where needs and priorities can change quickly. An added constraint was the seven budget headings, some of them quite small (e.g., EUR 40,000 for equipment, which could easily go over the 15 percent limit). As a result, two budget revisions were needed during a short implementation period.

⁶³ BAHIA. Project Highlights Q.3. (1 June–31 August 2021).

2.8 EQ8 – Organisational efficiency

EQ 8 – Organisational efficiency: To what extent has the DGD given equal attention to the following tasks in order to achieve the objectives of the humanitarian strategy: strategic steering, execution and delivery of funds, quality control of program and project implementation?

Summary response

DGD's humanitarian team is small and has not grown in relation to increased humanitarian funding budgets over the years. Understaffing adversely affects achieving Belgium's potential as a strong humanitarian actor globally through policy engagement; it also negatively impacts the monitoring of, and learning from, projects and programme implementation. At the country level, the availability of resources to monitor and engage in advocacy is highly dependent on the levels of in-country staffing to follow up on development cooperation and humanitarian interventions. Overall, the resources allocated at both DGD HQ Brussels and in-country to provide steering and quality monitoring of Belgium's humanitarian assistance is very lean. Resources are not always prioritised for strategic priority areas. It was found that too much time is allocated to monitoring of long-standing partnerships mainly those with NGOs.

In response to this EQ, the evaluation team has considered DGD human resources capacity and vulnerabilities, both in Brussels and the in-country missions. It has looked at how monitoring in-country is conducted and whether monitoring observations sufficiently inform DGD HQ Brussels.

The evaluation team's initial assessment was that Belgium has opted for a partner-based model, which is often employed by donors who manage their humanitarian assistance with a small headquarters team. A partner-based model relies on strategic partnerships with trusted organisations and with the donor very hands-off at the project level. This model is mainly used by Denmark, The Netherlands and Australia.⁶⁴

However, it was found that Belgium does not carry through all the elements of the partner-based model and includes, in its approach, elements of the field-based model. This is reflected in Belgium's continuation with projects and programme funding and its rather heavy involvement in the planning and design stages to ensure the quality of the proposals submitted by Belgian NGO partners.

2.8.1 D5.1. HQ human resources capacity

D5.1. is confronted with several human resource vulnerabilities that affect the quality of Belgium's humanitarian engagement, including:

- staff rotations;
- insufficient resources to monitor funded projects and programmes and partners;
- availability of training opportunities; and
- inconsistent quality of information management due to staff turn-over.

⁶⁴ For more information on the field- and partner-based model: <https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/evaluation/2019/iha-evaluation-ahi.aspx?lang=eng>

While an assessment of human resources management or staff allocation is outside the scope of this evaluation's TOR, it is important to consider resource capacity. If the necessary resources are not available, then strategic steering or quality control cannot take place.

The evaluation looked at the human resources unit staffing from 2014. **The number of staff in 2014 was equal to the numbers in 2021, despite the humanitarian aid budget increasing by 75 percent. That said, the demands on the humanitarian unit are not linked to increases in budget alone. The humanitarian landscape has changed considerably over the years with greater focus on policy engagement and good humanitarian donor practice.** Belgium's ambitions for greater humanitarian engagement and the subsequent added responsibilities and expectations towards staff have also changed over time. Each of these factors has contributed to increased demands on the humanitarian unit. This is not unique to Belgium – other donor countries have reported similar challenges. However, in comparison with countries such as Finland or Switzerland, Belgium has not yet progressed to adjust its organisational structure or working processes.

The 2020 OECD-DAC Peer Review of Belgium highlighted the need for institutional stability at the DGD level after a period of reforms. The report also highlighted that DGD – including D5.1 – is not yet equipped to extract strategic information and continues to focus on operational aspects. The latter is also the case for the humanitarian unit.⁶⁵

Human resources management was considered a major challenge for the DGD in the peer review due to high staff turn-over and a general tightening of budgetary resources in the Belgian civil service. The evaluation team found, through a review of the staffing within D5.1., that the unit has not been able to reach a level of stability.⁶⁶

The DGD in general, and the humanitarian team in particular, is facing a high staff turnover rate and long-term absences, mainly due to increased stress and workloads. The Peer Review report singles out the humanitarian team and notes that it has been downsized while funding has increased significantly. This, combined with a high staff turnover, increases financial and reputational risks. In addition, the single career approach undermines knowledge management and institutional memory. The evaluation team supports these observations.

Human resources concerns are known to D5.1. and are regularly reflected in reporting, for example, in the 2020 Bilan de l'aide humanitaire belge – adaptation et flexibilité and the Bilan 2021 de l'aide humanitaire belge.

2.8.2 Resources to support policy engagement at the global level

Belgium is an active donor participant in the international humanitarian system. Apart from providing considerable flexible funding mechanisms, Belgium is also known for being a proponent of Good Humanitarian Donorship and committed to the Grand Bargain commitments. Belgium engages at the policy level through participation in executive and donor coordination bodies and in international meetings. While the D5.1 team is small, its members are skilled and highly committed but have limited time for higher-value analysis, research, policy engagement and knowledge sharing.

⁶⁵ OECD (2020). Belgium. Peer Review. p.57.

⁶⁶ OECD (2020). Belgium. Peer Review. p.60.

Belgium's commitment to core funding and pooled funds aligns with Good Humanitarian Donorship. However, some stakeholders interviewed indicated that this commitment to flexible funding may have also been influenced by efficiency outcomes. Some stakeholders consider that core funding and pooled funds require fewer resources from D5.1 in order to follow up, with the majority of the workload being transferred to partners managing pooled funds. Based on the evidence gathered it was found that both core funding and pooled funds has allowed humanitarian actors to reach scale in a timely manner and has also reduced fiduciary risks. It does require regular engagement from DGD5 and Belgium's permanent missions and in-country representatives on issues linked to good governance, effectiveness, efficiency and advocacy.

Belgium, through its comprehensive approach to building coordination between the DG administration and Belgian missions in New York, Geneva and Rome, has been able to diplomatically engage within the EU to ensure that forgotten crises and ongoing conflicts are high on the EU's agenda. During its mandate as an elected member of the UN Security Council, Belgium set conflict prevention, protection of civilians and the performance of UN peacekeeping and humanitarian missions as thematic priorities. Belgium also used its field experience to champion human security, human rights and respect for IHL.⁶⁷

2.8.3 Resources in-country to monitor projects and programmes

The evaluation looked at the organisational set-up in three countries (of which DRC and Palestine are partner countries for Belgium's development cooperation and Lebanon is not). There was a noticeable difference between the in-country capacity to strategically engage on broader humanitarian issues within the humanitarian network and to monitor the results achieved through projects and programmes.

Common elements between the three country case studies, in terms of in-country set up, include:

- Belgium's diplomatic service setup and system of rotation has meant that staff members with a background in development or humanitarian assistance are not always posted to countries with humanitarian crises. This has resulted in a steeper learning curve for diplomatic staff who do not have the expertise when they are posted to a country experiencing a humanitarian emergency.
- A wide range of partners and several sectoral or thematic priority areas make it more challenging to have regular strategic engagement with partners in-country. A fragmented portfolio makes it more challenging for Belgium to identify where it can bring more added value to their engagement in-country.
- Belgian diplomatic staff members change on average every four years, often with no overlap in personnel to ensure continuity. Lack of local knowledge in the office impacts negatively on Belgium's engagement with stakeholders.
- While D5.1 engages mainly with the headquarters of UN agencies or the main offices for NGOs in Belgium, it was found that communications from the main offices are not always transferred to in-country offices. Belgian missions in-country should be able to have transparent communication with partners, including around the continuation of funding.

⁶⁷ OECD (2020). Belgium. Peer Review. p.85.

This is especially relevant in a protracted crisis with reduced humanitarian funding and where it is good practice to inform the partners early as to whether the funding will be limited to one or two years or whether there will be a continuation.

- In only one of the three country case studies – DRC – there was sufficient capacity and expertise in the Belgian embassy to enable quality follow up and engagement with partners.
- Humanitarian assistance appears to be centrally managed from Brussels D5.1 with limited engagement or authority delegated to embassies or consulates in the partner country. The reason for this could not be confirmed by this evaluation. The institutional set up in Brussels focuses on partner organisations, and to a lesser extent on the country, which contributes to a fragmented approach at country level, especially when a country framework for interventions is missing.
- While Belgium is considered a reliable donor, its financial assistance is not always complemented with staff expertise or knowledge on humanitarian issues – in-country and at HQ - which could enhance certain sectors or thematic areas.
- The evaluation found that strategic priorities for humanitarian interventions were not always defined at country level. This contributes to fragmentation, but also restricts monitoring and the steering for results at country level.

2.8.4 Specificities for each country

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

In the Belgian embassy in Kinshasa, there is more Belgian and national staff expertise and experience available, and staff members are well informed and have the resources to follow up on humanitarian assistance. It was found that there is the potential to utilise staff members' knowledge in-country to better support DGD in their decision-making at headquarters level.

Lebanon

The resources available at the embassy level in Beirut are insufficient when it comes to following up on development and humanitarian interventions in addition to the regular consular services and representations provided by the embassy. The division of roles and responsibilities between DGD, representative offices of UN agencies and the Belgian Embassy in Beirut is not sufficiently clear. Based on the evidence gathered for this evaluation, there is not sufficient input from the embassy in the selection process for projects and programmes. It is not evident if this lack of consultation aims to alleviate the burden on embassy staff, but it does result in the embassy being insufficiently informed and unaware of Belgium's humanitarian engagement and priorities for Lebanon. Belgium's financial engagement has increased in Lebanon over the past years mainly with the Syrian refugees. Human resources did not increase in parallel.

Palestine

The consulate in Jerusalem has limited staff capacity and staff numbers have not evolved in parallel with the increase in humanitarian funding. There are no national staff members providing support on humanitarian assistance. While the team aims to follow up a broad humanitarian portfolio in one of the most protracted and sensitive crises, the humanitarian expertise in the consulate is very limited.

2.8.5 Quality control of programmes and projects

The documentation for project processing is not sufficiently comprehensive. The PRISMA data base was found, in some instances, to not have been updated with the most recent documentation or figures. Adaptations to project titles or implementation modalities by partner agencies were not always accurately reflected.

Overall, the quality of reporting from UN agencies could be improved and more feedback could be provided to Belgium on the results achieved and any changes, especially where funding was provided for consecutive phases of the same project. It was found that more strategic engagement with multilateral agencies at country level could take place.

For both project and programme monitoring in-country, the evaluation team was unable to confirm whether a monitoring tool was being used and how the findings and knowledge from monitoring visits was supporting Belgium's advocacy efforts, both in-country and steered from Brussels. It could also not be confirmed that there was systematic sharing of observations with partners in-country.

While the CBPFs are not specifically covered under this evaluation, the evaluation team was asked to look at the country pooled funds as a comparison. It was found that Belgium - while being on CBPF boards in-country – has not been advocating for certain strategic directions in terms of localisation or nexus programming.

2.9 EQ9 – Effectiveness of advocacy and visibility

EQ 9 - Effectiveness of advocacy and visibility: To what extent do interventions contribute to advocacy and visibility of humanitarian crises among the general public?

Summary response

Within DGD there is no coherent vision on an advocacy or communications strategy and there are insufficient resources to focus on the development of a coherent strategy. The evaluation found that humanitarian assistance does not receive systematic attention in comparison with, for example, development cooperation.

Visibility of Belgium's contributions within UN agencies and NGOs is varied. While visibility through the standard communication channels was found to be limited with most partners, this is not a reflection on the quality of the information provided by the partners on the humanitarian crises and their responses.

At the country level it was found that the visibility given to humanitarian assistance funding by Belgium does not always use the common logo "Belgium partner in development" while acknowledging that the logo does not include a reference to humanitarian assistance.

While visibility needs to be given among the general public this should be done in respecting the humanitarian principles, the dignity and safety of people affected and the safety of humanitarian agencies and workers.

2.9.1 Visibility and advocacy through government channels

Key informant interviews highlighted that visibility and advocacy aimed at the general public in Belgium was hindered by institutional factors, including:

- the absence of a coherent vision within DGD on the focus of visibility and advocacy; and
- the lack of resources within DGD to develop and implement communication strategies.

Pre-2016, DGD's Communication and Accountability Unit was responsible for the organisation's internal and external communications. The unit was dissolved in 2016 and communications is now centrally managed under *Direction Communication (DC)*, which provides support through a communications coordinator in each DG.

The move to a more centralised approach has contributed to the underutilisation or disappearance of a number of communications instruments previously used to inform and engage the wider public on humanitarian assistance, such as Globe magazine, Open Aid and awareness raising campaigns steered by DGD. DGD's data portal (openaid.⁶⁸) remains active but has not been updated recently and information on Belgium's humanitarian assistance is limited and out of date.

The evaluation team was not able to assess the effectiveness of the past instruments in raising awareness amongst the general public. On the central website (Diplomatie.belgium.be) there is limited reference to humanitarian assistance responses supported by Belgium. Media statements are more up-to-date, but the search index does not include 'humanitaire', which precludes searches on the frequency of humanitarian assistance appearing in the media.

The visibility of humanitarian assistance through official communication channels is not sufficiently developed. A tender has been released seeking interest from the private sector in developing a new communications strategy for DGD. An alternative approach, suggested by key informants, could have been to use the available funding to increase the size of the in-house team to continue working on the development and implementation of the communications strategy. It is not possible for the evaluation team to assess which approach, going forward, would be the most effective to improving communications outcomes.

Visibility and advocacy through partner organisations' channels

The evaluation team has reviewed NGO and UN agency websites to assess how Belgium's humanitarian funding support is acknowledged.

In relation to UN agencies, recognition of the contributions of individual donors is mainly provided on the corporate websites managed by the HQs of each UN agency. Some UN agencies post specific news stories linked to Belgium's contributions, for example in support of UNRWA's Education in Emergencies (during the COVID-19 pandemic) or OCHA's work in the DRC. In contrast, the websites of Belgian NGOs do not provide explicit visibility of Belgium's humanitarian contribution at HQ or country level. This poor donor visibility was also observed during the evaluation team's in-country visits to the three country case studies.

⁶⁸ <https://openaid.be/en>

2.9.2 Visibility in the three country case studies

The evaluation team found that Belgian embassy or consulate websites provided very limited (or no) information on humanitarian assistance funding. In Belgium's partner countries the information focus tends to be on development cooperation.

It was also found that external stakeholders, such as other governments and donors, had limited knowledge about Belgium's humanitarian assistance, mainly due to Belgium not setting country-level priorities for its humanitarian funding.

Overall, it was found that UN agencies do acknowledge Belgium's humanitarian contribution on their websites and through public information campaigns in the communities where interventions are implemented with Belgium's funding. Programme-funded NGO interventions provided less visibility of Belgian funding and Belgium's common logo "Belgium Partner in Development" was not consistently used.

2.10 EQ10 – Connectivity and Sustainability

EQ 10 - Connectivity and Sustainability: To what extent have projects and programs integrated the Humanitarian Aid and Development Policy Nexus? How can we best establish the conditions of connectivity to ensure a sustainable effect of humanitarian interventions, when they are intended to last?

Summary response

The operationalisation of the humanitarian-development nexus is gradually being considered through discussions inside DGD, with the partners, and in some country-level initiatives. The lack of integrated country strategies has prevented systematic consideration of the nexus, with the initiative being left to the partners. At country level, there were no examples of joint analysis or the setting of joint outcomes by development cooperation / humanitarian staff members in Belgian embassies or consulates. This analysis is also not steered by DGD HQ Brussels. The lack of connectedness between humanitarian aid and development at country level is a reflection of the institutional disconnect that exists within DGD HQ Brussels. Sustainability through incorporating exit strategies or localisation where possible was not systematically considered.

The response to the evaluation questions considers whether Belgium's humanitarian and development cooperation funding complements one another where possible and where relevant. In addition, it looks at the importance of adding the peace component in the operationalisation of the nexus. On a smaller scale, the report considers whether transitioning or sustainability is considered to avoid continued dependence on short-term humanitarian assistance.

2.10.1 Humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus programming

“Persons in need, victims of violence see no meaningful distinction between emergency and development assistance, between livelihoods and survival.” Barnett – Empire of Humanity

The protracted nature of humanitarian crises is now the new normal. There is increased recognition within the international donor community and humanitarian and development actors that most current crises and conflicts are the result of unaddressed fragilities, disputes and tensions from the past. Addressing those drivers of fragility and conflict should be at the core of collective efforts. However, comprehensive conflict and fragility analyses are often missing amongst international actors, including Belgium.

Recurrent and protracted crises have meant that stakeholders now need to consider how to strengthen existing operations and develop new working methods between humanitarian, development and peace actors.⁶⁹ This recognition is also noticeable within DGD with an overall agreement by DGD and partners in country that a more joined up approach is needed to address the challenges faced in crisis countries.

However, as recent international research highlights, the greatest impediment to applying the nexus approach is not conceptual but institutional.⁷⁰ This observation is to some extent also applicable to Belgium’s engagement in the nexus.

From 2017, discussions about the triple nexus (humanitarian–development– peace) have gradually influenced the humanitarian sphere.⁷¹ DGD took part in the EU Council discussions on the operationalisation of the double nexus (humanitarian– development) and as of 2019, Belgium aimed to integrate the triple nexus (humanitarian- development-peace) in its approach. Multiple donor countries and humanitarian actors moved to integrate resilience as part of their humanitarian-development nexus approach.⁷² DGD also took part in the discussions focused on the DAC Nexus recommendation. Belgium supports the operationalisation of the nexus and through its institutional set up would be able to incorporate humanitarian, development and peace components into an integrated framework at country level.⁷³ The OECD Peer Review highlights that the institutional framework that governs Belgium’s development cooperation has the potential to strengthen the coherence between a long-term strategic vision and short- and medium-term programming cycles in fragile contexts.⁷⁴ This means that **Belgium is well positioned to pilot innovative approaches at country level to inform learning to be shared with other actors.**

⁶⁹ IASC (draft). The Humanitarian-Development Nexus: A New Way of Working. https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/hdn_toolkit.pdf

⁷⁰ HPN (2022). Preventing the nexus becoming the next fad requires transformational change in the aid system. <https://odihpn.org/publication/preventing-the-nexus-becoming-the-next-fad-requires-transformational-change-in-the-aid-system/>

⁷¹ The EU Council conclusions (9383/17) of 19 May 2017 still concern the double nexus but outline that "Root causes of fragility and vulnerability and conflict need to be tackled in line with the five Peacebuilding and State-building Goals".

⁷² See, for example, the ECHO factsheet on Resilience and Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: "The EU places resilience, through a nexus approach, as a central objective in its development and humanitarian assistance".

⁷³ OECD (2020). Belgium Peer Review. p.89-90.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

There is a lack of connectedness inside DGD in Brussels as well as at the field level. No examples were found of joint analysis by humanitarian and development cooperation departments or of setting any joint outcomes in the partner countries for development cooperation. The absence of integrated (humanitarian-development) country guiding frameworks make the creation of synergies and joint programming challenging. This absence of connectedness was also present in NGOs' joint strategic frameworks (JSF) at country level. These frameworks did not consider the interoperability between humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. Identifying synergies should be done in a manner that respects the nature and differences of humanitarian and development cooperation with the former guided by the adherence to humanitarian principles.

The evaluation question considers only the humanitarian and development components. The OECD HDP Nexus interim progress review noted that interaction with peace actors remains limited and political engagement and other tools, instruments and approaches remain underutilised in joined-up efforts across the nexus to prevent crises, resolve conflicts and build peace.⁷⁵ In addition, the same review highlights that the peace- building component is not sufficiently considered.

“Without peace, humanitarian needs will not decrease and development objectives cannot be reached.”
OECD-DAC Senior Level Meeting – January 2022

Through this evaluation, anecdotal evidence shows that at the intervention level some efforts are being made. But this is far from a coherent and comprehensive approach.

Individual partners often include resilience in their proposals and this was noticeable in most of the funded proposals. Support for resilience can be considered as a first step in the humanitarian–development nexus approach. However, it is considered too limited as these are mostly local community level interventions that do not fit within an overall analysis of what the underlying drivers of the conflict are.

Examples

An IASC supported pilot approach for the triple Nexus has been ongoing in the DRC for the past two years with workshops and the development of LFA indicators in Tanganyika and Kasai.* Belgium applied in 2022 to become a member of the Nexus Core Team, however its participation was not approved.

In Lebanon, DGD supports a project on responding to SGBV from its transition funding. As mentioned in the country case study report, the project has made a difference to the lives of women survivors, but it was not evident why this project was funded from Belgium's transition budget.

In Palestine, funding for the West Bank Protection Consortium aims to bring a coherent and complementary approach to address humanitarian and development needs in fragile communities. It is also a very good example of how practical support can be given to communities to help them remain on their land.

* IASC Results Group 4. Country brief on the HDP Nexus in the DRC.

<https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2021-09/Country%20Brief%20on%20the%20Humanitarian-Development-%20Peace%20Nexus%20%28Democratic%20Republic%20of%20Congo%29.pdf>

⁷⁵ OECD (2022). The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Interim Progress Review. p.12.

2.10.2 Connectedness

More sustained efforts are required to support collaboration between D5.1 (humanitarian aid) and DGeo (development). Among the lessons learned by D5.1, as reported in the 2020 annual report, lack of coordination with other DGD units is a key issue. The annual report indicates that various initiatives have been launched to bridge this gap. In practice, however, cooperation between D5.1 and DGeo is generally limited to information sharing activities on partners. Beyond this, the two units are not involved in discussing joint strategic priorities in fragile states or countries affected by protracted crises. Similarly at country-level, humanitarian and development aid are implemented in silos and without connectedness.

This implementation in silos was also noticeable with partners who have a dual mandate for both humanitarian and development aid. In the DRC, NGOs cooperate to define a *Cadre Stratégique Commun* (CSC, Joint Strategic Framework) but this involves identifying which priority needs can best be responded to by development or humanitarian funding. The same observation is being made for Palestine.

2.10.3 Sustainability

Humanitarian assistance focuses on saving lives and addressing immediate needs. In funding these interventions, sustainability is not always possible to factor in, especially at the start of an emergency response. However, as a crisis becomes increasingly protracted sustainability can be considered in terms of the provision of services, repairs to infrastructure or providing livelihood opportunities.

It was evident from the country case studies that sustainability is not always considered when planning and implementing the interventions. Cash for work activities remain short term and do not provide a pathway out of dependence on humanitarian aid. The evaluation team does, however, acknowledge that there are factors prohibiting agencies from integrating sustainability more effectively, including the short-term funding cycles.

3 Conclusions

Belgium made a difference to humanitarian aid by being a consistent and principled donor that has aligned its allocations with international appeals for funding and shared in the international responsibility to respond to needs based on humanitarian principles.

Belgium has sought to increase its humanitarian assistance in line with increased needs. It has also achieved its target of providing 60 percent of its funding for core or unearmarked contributions. Belgium has also developed good contextual understanding and capacity in countries such as the DRC. Overall, Belgium's level of financial assistance and principled engagement has made it a significant humanitarian actor.

Belgium's humanitarian assistance has made a difference in access to basic services and providing protection services to the most vulnerable.

While programmes and projects have provided a useful source of financing for multilateral agencies and NGOs, these modalities need to be revised to be better adapted to recent changes in the humanitarian landscape. The main challenges are that they are not sufficiently differentiated and are not long enough in duration to respond in a protracted crisis or to respond quickly to sudden onset emergencies.

The increase in Belgium's humanitarian funding has not led to an increase in humanitarian expertise and management capacity to steer interventions strategically, leading to humanitarian engagement being not sufficiently strategic at operational level and in terms of humanitarian advocacy.

C1. Belgium's humanitarian assistance was principled and focused on burden sharing with the international community

Belgium's humanitarian engagement is aligned with the international commitments included in the Grand Bargain, Good Humanitarian Donorship and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Belgium's principled stance has contributed to it being considered by (mainly) multilateral humanitarian actors as a reliable humanitarian donor.

Belgian funding was allocated to all the major humanitarian crises where burden sharing by the international donor community was required. Belgium also prioritised forgotten humanitarian crises, such as those in the Sahel region.

International commitments aim to support the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian funding in a changing humanitarian context. By reaching the 60 percent target Belgium set for itself for flexible funding, Belgium shows a steady commitment to working on aid efficiency and effectiveness. However, aid efficiency and effectiveness are not achieved by supporting funding flexibility alone and needs to be complemented with strategic engagement and follow up from Belgium.

C2. Good results under the projects and programmes were observed in terms of improving access to basic services, livelihoods and protection

Funding for projects and programmes made a noticeable difference in the lives of vulnerable population groups by providing access to protection services to women and children, food and cash assistance to those in deep poverty and supported reconstruction efforts during conflict or after disasters. Funding made a difference in ensuring the continuation of education for extremely vulnerable children, especially girls.

Project funding was mainly used to fill gaps in assistance provided by multilateral agencies or to support joint interventions with other donor countries. Results of projects examined were affected by annual renewal processes with partners not knowing whether or not the funding will be continued for the same intervention.

Programmes examined showed good results where the partners developed a longer-term approach to interventions. However, it was noted that funding levels were not always sufficient to provide a sustainable approach to, for example, protection or livelihoods.

C3. Humanitarian engagement has not been sufficiently strategic at the operational level

Belgium's global humanitarian strategy incorporates a wide range of thematic and geographic priorities, recognising that humanitarian crises differ depending on the nature of the conflict or disaster. This is not an issue when these global priorities are then translated to priorities at the country level.

The humanitarian strategy is mainly a reference instrument for humanitarian partners based in Belgium and not a reference tool for partners in-country. However, because the strategy is so broad and encompasses a range of thematic and geographic priorities, projects and programmes by default are in alignment with the strategy.

At an operational level, the international commitments have not been sufficiently translated into strategic guidance influencing the design and implementation of projects and programmes. The absence of such a guiding framework at country level contributes to the fragmentation of interventions and reduces the impact that can be achieved.

C4. Humanitarian advocacy is not sufficiently developed and aligned with Belgium's expertise

Belgium has increasingly put forward localisation, participation and protection as strategic areas for its humanitarian engagement. These are becoming increasingly strategic priorities for humanitarian donors and actors. But developing advocacy around these areas is not sufficiently developed.

Belgium's humanitarian engagement is mainly through multilateral agencies. It has been a major contributor to several global rapid-response pooled funds and is a principled contributor in supporting core funding for UN agencies. Noticeable is Belgium's increased support for Country Based Pooled Funds that have the potential to support the localisation of humanitarian responses.

Under the Grand Bargain, the aim is to enhance quality funding for humanitarian action and to increase flexible and multi-year humanitarian funding. In its Grand Bargain self-assessment, Belgium put forward localisation and participation as priority areas. While Belgium has a solid record on increased flexibility and quality of funding, this does not automatically strengthen the Grand Bargain goals of increased localisation and participation in humanitarian responses.

Belgium's commitment to localisation is excellent and its high contributions to the CBPFs demonstrate this. However, Belgium is not making the most of its high contributions in-country, which provide it with an excellent advantage to advocate for localisation in a coalition of like-minded donors in terms of influencing the way CBPFs are run and developing new ways of directly financing local actors. This is seen as a missed opportunity.

C5. Programmes and projects were not fit for purpose for protracted crises and emergency response and require overhauling

In the humanitarian strategy, projects and programmes were originally used to differentiate between short-term funding to address immediate needs (projects) and more long-term engagement (programmes) with multilateral partners and Belgian NGOs able to access both funding modalities. In practice, there is no longer a difference between the types of interventions being funded, with project funding being accessed only by multilateral agencies – with the exception of BAHIA – and programme funding only by Belgian NGOs.

Projects, funded through annual funding cycles, support interventions in protracted crises and often receive renewed funding on an annual basis. Programmes, with a two-year funding cycle, are also used to support interventions in protracted crises. Funding cycles of one or two years in protracted crises are not efficient because of the lengthy approval process. Sustained funding over a longer time period is needed to enable partners to develop integrated approaches and to consider sustainability and transitioning where feasible in protracted crises.

Projects and programmes are also not the best modalities to support an emergency response, which in practice is supported by Belgium through two other funding instruments – core funding and flexible pooled funds.

The projects and programmes modalities do not sufficiently cover a long enough time period for a protracted crisis. They are also not suited to responding to emergencies or to adjusting quickly to changes in the context. It was found, from an efficiency point of view, that the distinction between projects and programmes is not relevant. Funding decisions, modalities and their duration should be guided by needs and by identifying partners based on their capacity and strengths in addressing those needs.

The absence of a built-in flexibility that would allow partners to redirect funding quickly to respond to a sudden onset emergency is another challenge for the two funding modalities. Not having this flexibility limits the capacity of partners to respond to escalations in a conflict situation or the emergence of acute needs. Responding to this constraint, Belgium has adapted a flexible attitude for partners to enable them to adjust their interventions based on contextual changes. However, these adjustments require approval and result in an increased administrative workload for both Belgium and the humanitarian actors.

C6. Belgium does not have a drawdown funding mechanism to enable the best placed actors to rapidly respond to sudden onset emergencies

Outside its contributions to core funding and flexible funds Belgium does not have a mechanism to respond quickly to emergencies that Belgium would like to emphasize. A revised emergency response modality should remain focused on the best placed partner(s) to deliver the response.

DGD and the Belgian NGOs have been exploring more flexible funding opportunities for Belgian NGOs to access. Currently Belgian NGOs can apply in-country for funding through the Country Based Pooled Funds but are unable to access Belgian funding when an emergency situation or disaster erupts. A review of funding modalities for Belgian NGOs should be driven by how to best deliver principled humanitarian life-saving assistance in line with best humanitarian practices. Such a set up should avoid a fragmented and too- thin on the ground response, as was the case with BAHIA.

C7. Capacity of humanitarian staff has not been sufficiently exploited to support policy and knowledge development

Belgium is regarded as a strong defender of Humanitarian Principles and Good Humanitarian Donorship but does not have sufficient policy weight. Humanitarian staff have good experience and expertise, but the workload carried by a limited number of staff members is problematic. Too much staff time is spent on administrative tasks with little time allocated for substantive policy work. Grant processes are heavy and time consuming and not sufficiently focused on gathering evidence for impact.

C8. Humanitarian engagement at the partner country level was not well defined with no frameworks steering Belgium's humanitarian engagement and its connectedness with other Belgian funding streams

In Belgium's partner countries for development, strategy documents exist for Belgium's development cooperation, but these do not integrate humanitarian priorities and funding for the partner country. In some countries, strategic priorities are clarified internally but are not publicly available. The absence of these guiding country-level frameworks contributes to humanitarian assistance and development cooperation being implemented in silos, making nexus programming or localisation more challenging. It also prevents systematic results monitoring and engaging with partners based on expected outcomes.

C9. Institutional barriers have limited progress on operationalising the humanitarian-development-peace nexus

There is an appreciation among staff members that in countries with major conflicts or large protracted crises that are holding back national development, they can do better if they work together on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. However, the existing planning and programming systems do not lend themselves easily to such collaboration.

A more systematic approach between the different DGD units in order to undertake joint analysis, planning and complementary programming is lacking at the moment, contributing to missed opportunities of nexus programming at the country level.

The insufficient developed collaborative effort between humanitarian aid and development has contributed to a lack of connectedness at the country level – in countries with a protracted crisis and in countries that are a priority for Belgium's development cooperation. The absence of collective outcomes, with joined-up approaches to planning and programming, limits coherence and complementarity. This is especially important in settings where humanitarian actors struggle to mobilise funding for long-running humanitarian programmes in protracted crises. This absence of a link contributes to missed opportunities to support persons of concern and to enable vulnerable communities to transition out of the dependency on short-term funding. This is a responsibility for Belgium as a donor but also for implementing partners, especially those with a dual mandate.

Genuine localisation, where local and national actors are equal partners and take joint responsibility for the delivery of a principled humanitarian response, is at the core of nexus programming. Belgium's legal framework prohibits direct funding to local and national actors. The absence of a common vision of localisation means that there is no common understanding and coherent approach to the goal of making humanitarian aid as local as possible and as international as necessary.

4 Recommendations

Seven main recommendations emerge from the findings and conclusions of this evaluation. A brief summary, the proposed responsible actors, and how they relate to the conclusions is presented in Table 3. More detail, including the proposed actions are provided below.

The recommendations require sufficient resources for DGD to carry out the various proposed actions. If need be, emphasis should be placed on the recommendations prioritized as 'high'.

Table 3: Summary recommendations

Recommendations	Responsible actors	Link with the conclusions	Priority
R1: Update the 2014 humanitarian strategy to set out clearly Belgium's current prioritisation under its international commitments, and adapt working practices with the aim of maximising efficiency and impact.	DGD, Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation	C1, C2, C9	High
R2: Replace programme and project funding modalities with a multi-year longer-term funding modality to engage in protracted, fragile and forgotten humanitarian crises that is accessible to both multilateral and bilateral partners.	DGD, Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation	C2, C5, C6	High
R3: Develop a new rapid response fund that allows Belgium - through the best placed actors - to respond timely, and in an effective and efficient manner in acute crisis situations complementing Belgium's regular support to the multilateral flexible pooled funds.	DGD, Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation, State Secretary of the Budget	C5, C6	Medium
R4: Strengthen further strategic partnerships and leaner grant mechanisms that put the responsibility with the partner to deliver results.	DGD	C6, C7	High
R5: In partner countries of the Belgian development cooperation, develop joint outcomes and approaches in planning and programming to advance coherence and complementarity.	DGD, Diplomatic posts	C3, C8	Medium
R6: Review the organisational structure, processes and capacity in order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Belgium's humanitarian action and become a more learning organisation.	DGD	C7, C8, C9	High
R7: Raise Belgium's profile as significant humanitarian contributor.	DGD, Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation, Partner organisations	C3, C4, C9	Medium

R1: Update the 2014 humanitarian strategy to set out clearly Belgium’s current prioritisation under its international commitments, and adapt working practices with the aim of maximising efficiency and impact.

Responsible: DGD, Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation

Based on C1, C2 and C9

Actions:

Flexible Funding:

- Maintain Belgium’s target of allocating 60 percent of its humanitarian funding to core and flexible unearmarked funding.

Themes and countries:

- Have a thematic or sectoral focus for humanitarian assistance in protracted crises aligned with priorities under development cooperation and Belgium’s added value.
- Focus to the thematic and sectoral areas of engagement based on Belgium’s expertise and added value.
- Be more strategic and focused on fewer crisis-affected countries.

Principles:

- Protection. Strengthen the centrality of protection in the strategy, including by focusing on sex and gender-based violence and child protection.
- Participation and Accountability. Elaborate, in the strategy, that responses should safeguard dignity and are empowering, accountable and inclusive of affected people.
- Localisation. Make this a niche area in coalitions with like-minded donors in terms of empowering local actors and developing new ways of direct financing to local actors.
- Nexus. Provide guidance on the operationalisation of the nexus approach at partner country level. At the institutional level identify areas of connectedness between humanitarian, development and political units. Support dual-mandate actors to identify and implement nexus-oriented pilot interventions.

Modalities:

- Have four funding modalities: core funding, pooled flexible funds, a modality for protracted crises, and a quick response facility.

Practices:

- Update the current strategy based on existing knowledge and good practices instead of developing own definitions and approaches.
- Set clear expectations for humanitarian partners in terms of localisation, participation, inclusion, centrality of protection, accountability to affected people and connectedness.
- Develop a high level results framework to guide the result reporting of partners.

R2: Replace programme and project funding modalities with a multi-year longer-term funding modality to engage in protracted, fragile and forgotten humanitarian crises that is accessible to both multilateral and bilateral partners.

Responsible: DGD, Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation

Based on C2, C5 and C6

Actions:

- Pre-commit funding to specific large-scale protracted crises in countries prioritised for humanitarian assistance.
- Have a 3-year funding agreement - with possible extension to 5 years - based on results.
- Identify the best placed and experienced humanitarian partners to respond in identified protracted crisis situations.
- Focus on sectoral or thematic priority areas for a specific protracted crisis based on needs of the affected population and gaps in the response.
- For protracted crises situations, focus on fewer countries where expertise, presence and capacity of partners can make a difference.
- Use longer-term frameworks that cross over with development based on joint analyses linked with the humanitarian response plans and the humanitarian needs overview.
- Integrate a crisis modifier to allow for budget re-allocation in case of deterioration in the humanitarian context.
- Set priorities strategically in terms of localisation, participation and accountability.

R3: Develop a new rapid response fund that allows Belgium - through the best placed actors - to respond timely, and in an effective and efficient manner in acute crisis situations complementing Belgium's regular support to the multilateral flexible pooled funds.

Responsible: DGD, Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation, State Secretary of the Budget

Based on C5 and C6

Actions:

- Maintain the current levels of financial support to multilateral flexible funds.
- Have a set of pre-registered partners who could rapidly receive funds and utilise them depending on the nature of the emergency.
- Select partners based on their rapid response capacity, their presence in affected countries, and their networks with local responders.
- Ensure that the maximum amount of funding reaches the persons and communities of concern.

- Avoid funding of micro-interventions to be substantive to make a difference in the response.
- Ensure the necessary resources and legal frameworks are in place to set up the rapid response mechanism.

R4: Strengthen further strategic partnerships and leaner grant mechanisms that put the responsibility with the partner to deliver results.

Responsible: DGD

Based on C6 and C7

Actions:

- Identify long-term strategic partners and develop a multi-year partnership.
- Harmonise further reporting requirements with other similar size humanitarian donor countries, with focused quality results reporting for both bilateral and multilateral partners.
- Have a higher results framework supporting the humanitarian strategy guiding the results reporting by partners.
- Ensure reporting requirements are lean and reflective of the strategic partnership based on long-standing expertise.
- Focus dialogue with strategic partners on a number of policy priorities and aim to minimize administrative burdens including more lean design and reporting forms.

R5: In partner countries of the Belgian development cooperation, develop joint outcomes and approaches in planning and programming to advance coherence and complementarity.

Responsible: DGD, Diplomatic posts

Based on C3 and C8

Actions:

- Establish a joint framework, in partner countries affected by humanitarian crises, encompassing development cooperation, predictable humanitarian assistance and diplomacy.
- Determine roles and responsibilities of different actors and funding streams with respect to nexus programming.
- Decide on a clear division of labour based on comparative advantages.
- Identify options to enable better financing across the nexus.
- Identify strategic pilot initiatives with strong nexus linkages to support learning.
- Deliver funding through national or local organisations where feasible.

R6: Review the organisational structure, processes and capacity in order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Belgium's humanitarian action and become a more learning organisation.

Responsible: DGD

Based on C7, C8 and C9

Actions:

- Free up staff time for more knowledge-based work, including to deepen their understanding of country contexts and programme performance.
- Streamline business processes to reduce the volume of project and information transactions undertaken by staff.
- Reduce the administrative burden on staff and partners by making reporting systems leaner.
- Consider assigning humanitarian focal points at a regional level to provide guidance and training for staff in in-country missions.
- Adopt a lean, results-based data collection and reporting system.
- Develop training and guidance packages for staff at HQ and in-country missions to ensure a continued and consistent level of humanitarian expertise in the rotational environment.

R7: Raise Belgium's profile as significant humanitarian contributor.

Responsible: DGD, Cabinet of the Minister of Development Cooperation, Partner organisations

Based on C3, C4 and C9

Actions:

- Develop a national communication strategy to raise awareness on Belgium as a humanitarian donor, highlighting its profile, actions and results achieved.
- Tailor it to the most relevant target groups, using appropriate tools for each of them (including social media for a broader audience).
- Raise Belgium's profile as humanitarian donor, internationally and nationally, based on a clear advocacy strategy, to further its humanitarian goals.
- Make Belgium's humanitarian strategy available in three languages including French, Dutch and English.
- Expand Belgium's logo to include humanitarian assistance in addition to development (Belgium Partner in Development and Humanitarian Assistance).

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Belgian Development Cooperation



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