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Preface

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders helps others to help, even during one of the greatest ever health crises

2020 will go down in history as a memorable year. The world has been hit by a pandemic that we will not quickly forget. But Belgian Red Cross-Flanders helps others to help, even in times of crisis. We should be very proud of the things we achieved as an organisation in such a short time, and would like to thank everyone who contributed to this. Without the selfless commitment of volunteers and the dedication of our employees, we could never have provided assistance on such a large scale.

It will not be surprising that our annual report is all about the impact of COVID on our organization and its activities. We faced major challenges: the cancellation of various activities, new scientific research, emergency assistance in care facilities, support for test laboratories, fluctuating demand for blood products, prevention campaigns in Africa, supporting the 112 network, staffing COVID-19 triage posts, setting up a network of rapid test centres for schools... a long list of things we didn't think we would ever need to do. And yet we did them.

"The incredible commitment of so many, at a time when they are undoubtedly worried themselves, is touching. This is the very essence of the Red Cross motto 'tutti fratelli' (we are all brothers), as coined by our founder Henri Dunant when he created our organisation. And that is exactly what we saw in 2020, the year the world encountered COVID-19."



Philippe Vandekerckhove
Managing Director
Belgian Red Cross-Flanders



Laurette Steenssens
Community President
Belgian Red Cross-Flanders

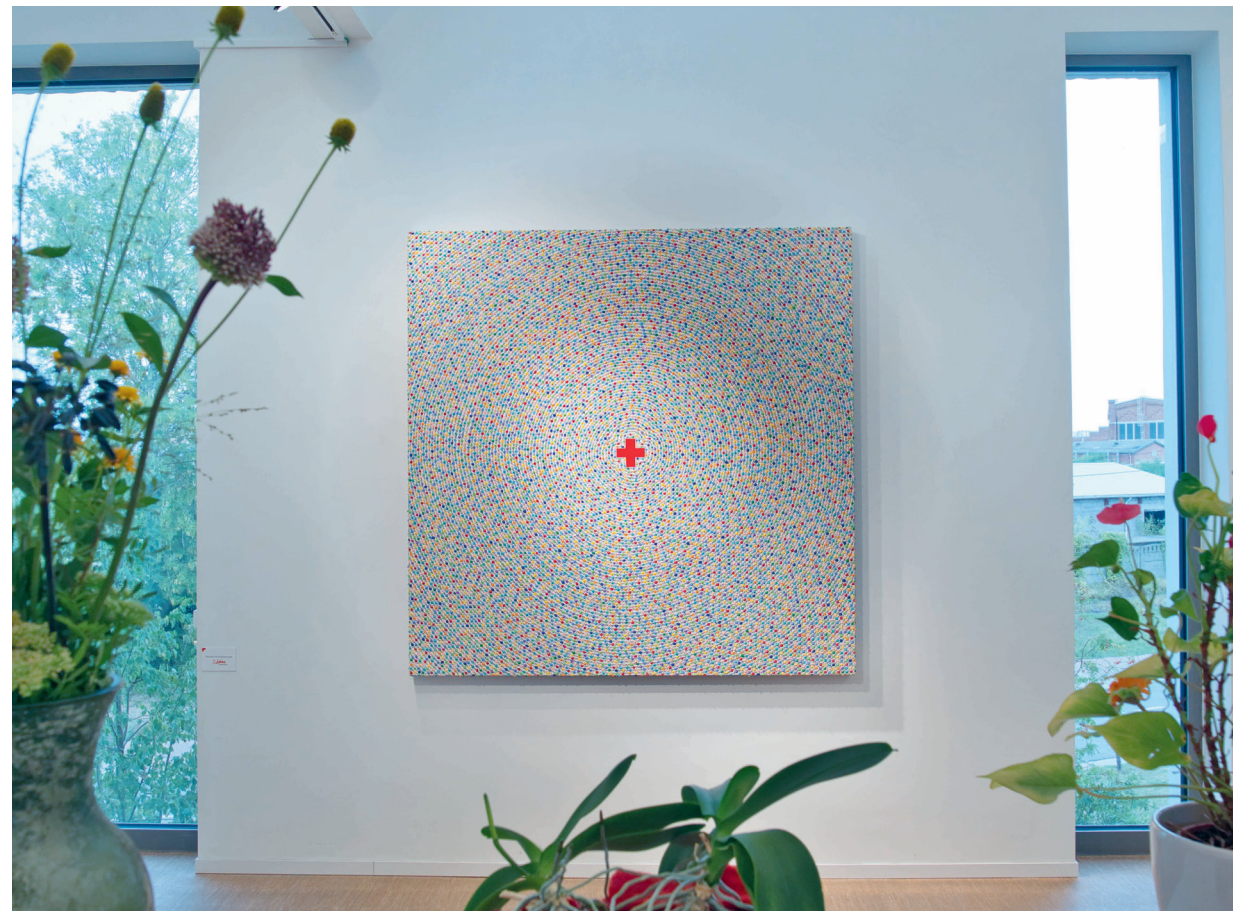


Living memory and hope for the future

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders wants to keep alive the memory of the COVID period, of the sheer intensity of the crisis, and thank its volunteers and employees for their unwavering commitment. That is why we are dedicating a unique painting by Delphine of Saxe-Coburg to them. This work of art is not just a token of our gratitude, it is also intended as a beacon of hope and courage for the future.

The painting 'The Red Cross Radiates Love' was given pride of place at the head office in Mechelen and radiates not just love, but optimism too. Employees and volunteers walk past it daily and are thus reminded of the intense times we have lived through together. At the same time, they can regard this painting as a big 'thank you' for all their efforts. All 241 local Red Cross sections also received a replica of the artwork as a sign of our appreciation and gratitude.

The work is a remake of one of Delphine of Saxe-Coburg's existing works. A red cross was added at the centre of the original work, with expanding circles of love rippling around it. For the artist, the work reflects the impact that Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has on society. An impact which, in her view, became even more visible and poignant during the health crisis we have been living through. In other words, the influence of the Red Cross ripples out throughout society, with the assistance provided by its volunteers having a much wider impact. The deployment of thousands of aid workers supported many people at a difficult time, helped the healthcare sector to keep its head above water, and ensured the government had a reliable partner in managing this health crisis.



Book: 'Helpen Helpt – vijf decennia Rode Kruis in Vlaanderen'

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is a household name in much of Flanders. But how has our organisation grown to become a movement of 13,000 volunteers? How have we evolved into a professional organisation with one vision, united by one policy? And how was the Flemish wing of the Red Cross born?

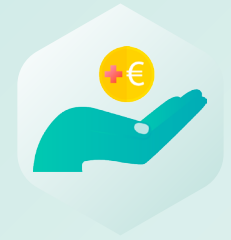
The road we have travelled has been inspired and eventful. Our evolution over the past 50 years has now been committed to paper in the book *Helpen Helpt – vijf decennia Rode Kruis in Vlaanderen* (Helping helps - five decades of Red Cross in Flanders). The book documents our rich history, offering a chance to find out more about it, and above all, ensuring it cannot be forgotten.

The highly-recommended book covers the whole story: from the early years during the unitary Belgium and the selfless commitment of volunteers, to the establishment of blood donor centres in Flanders, the interventions during the terrorist attack in Brussels, to the evidence-based approach that ensures our actions have real impact. Many thanks go out to the author and driving force behind the book, Tuur Hoste.

[The book is for sale online here.](#)



An eventful year to raise much needed funds

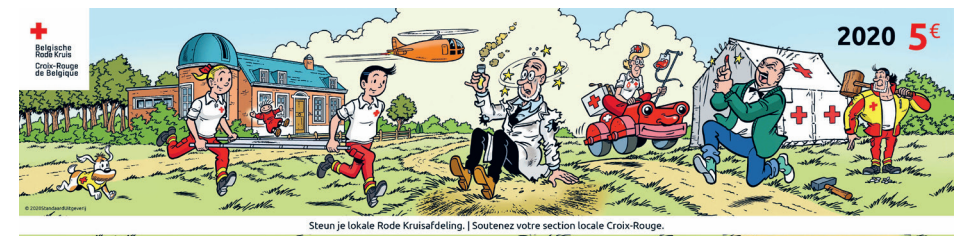


2020 was an eventful year for our fundraising. Due to COVID restrictions, our usual fundraising activities could not always go ahead as planned. So we had to adjust, adapt and get creative. The generosity of the Flemish people – for which we are incredibly grateful – has ensured that the balance of all our activities was nonetheless largely positive.

Spring 2020 was when the annual Red Cross sticker sales should have taken place; our biggest fundraising activity for the benefit of the local Red Cross sections. We were fully prepared, and ready to go. 700,000 stickers had been printed, featuring comic book characters Suske and Wiske (known to British and American audiences as Spike and Suzy or Willy and Wanda respectively). But then the whole of society shut down. We decided to give the stickers away instead, posting them through Flemish letterboxes alongside a plea to support local Red Cross sections financially. The sticker sale, the alternative distribution and additional activities in this area resulted in less than a quarter of normal proceeds in 2020: € 830,000, compared to € 3.3 million in a 'normal' year.

Fortunately, the local Red Cross sections could count on Flemish generosity in the autumn. The Lokale Steunactie 2020 (local support action 2020) raised almost €2 million from around 52,000 donations. That is a record amount for this campaign.

Every donation to the Red Cross ensures that we can help people in the best possible way. Locally and worldwide. Today and in the future.



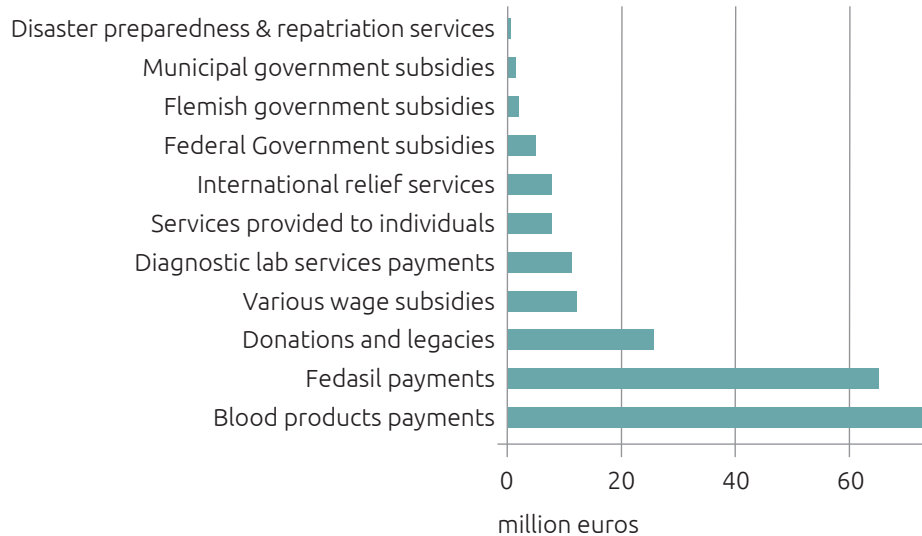


Financial overview for Belgian Red Cross-Flanders

2020 revenue

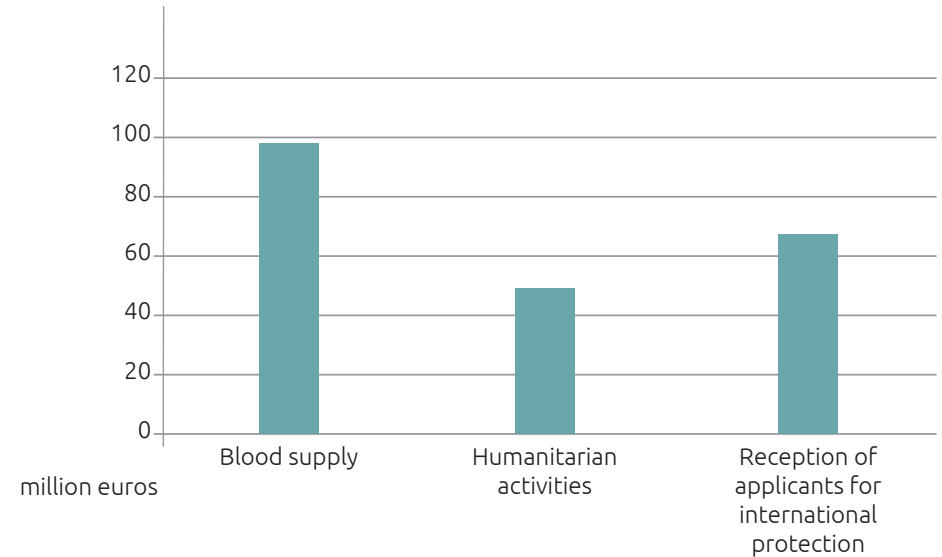
In 2020, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders received € 212 million in revenue.

34.5% of this revenue is made up of payments we receive from hospitals for the supply of blood products. 30.7% is from fees paid to us by Fedasil for supporting applicants for international protection. Only a small part of our income comes from subsidies from the various governments.



2020 costs

For all of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders' activities, we can count on the unpaid efforts of volunteers. Apart from these helping hands, we need buildings, vehicles, equipment, training and support to enable our activities. Below you will find an overview of the operational costs per area.





Blood collection reinvented

COVID-19 forced a drastic decision in March 2020: a strict lockdown across our country, with non-essential travel prohibited. Suddenly the number of donors dropped dramatically, and many mobile blood collections could not take place at the planned locations. The Donor Relations and Collection teams were inundated with queries and had to almost reinvent the whole process of blood collection. They came up with a new system requiring donors to make an appointment to avoid overcrowding, increased communication to mobilise enough donors and inform them of the preventive measures in force, went in search of suitable locations, drew up strict hygiene measures, worked out alternatives to collection in office buildings, and so on. The blood supply had its ups and downs for a time, but on the whole as an organisation we are proud to say that we have managed to supply hospitals with the blood products they required at all times. All this is down to the commitment of the entire team and all donors who continued to attend the centres. Our thanks go out to all of them!

In May 2020, nurse Valérie made a [vlog](#) about adapting in times of COVID.



Blood service in figures

154,840 successful plasma donations

Plasma is the liquid part of your blood that contains sugars, fats, minerals and proteins. Not everyone knows this, but plasma can be donated separately. It works almost exactly the same way as giving blood, but instead of all your blood being collected, it runs through a centrifuge and the red blood cells and platelets are returned to your body. That way, we only extract your plasma. Your red blood cells are not collected, meaning you recover more quickly after a plasma donation and can donate again after two weeks. Demand for plasma increases every year, not because there are more people in hospital needing plasma transfusions, but because plasma is also used to produce life-saving medicines that are helping more and more people. That is why in recent years we have been focusing on raising awareness around plasma, to ensure all patients in our country can be provided with the medication they need. And our efforts have not been in vain: in 2020 we recorded 154,840 successful plasma donations, 20% more than there were in 2019! A big thank you to all plasma donors: because of you, we are building a future in which Belgian patients will not need to rely on imported plasma for the production of vital medication.

Would you like to donate plasma? Check out rodekruis.be/plasma or just make an appointment at one of our donor centres.





45,811 new donors

Every year, we lose 10% of our donors due to moving house, lack of time, illness, etc. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is therefore constantly looking for new donors to keep up its blood supply. Of the 194,409 donors we welcomed in 2020, 45,811 gave blood, plasma or platelets for the very first time.

Donors usually receive a white wristband for identification purposes. New donors are given a red wristband so Red Cross staff can really look after them and make their first donation a great experience. Because let's be honest, wasn't everyone a little nervous the first time?

Do you also want to take the leap and help us to save lives? Complete the online [self test](#) to check if you are eligible to donate.



Which is the stronger donor sex?

It is an age-old question: are men or women the stronger sex? Well, for donors it depends on the type of blood product. When it comes to platelets, 62% of donors are male, but 58% of plasma donors are female. For whole blood, women just edge ahead of men, with 52% versus 48% of donors respectively. We can only conclude that each and every donor is a hero!



297,336 safe blood products supplied to hospitals

Every day, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders provides hospitals in Flanders - as well as a handful in Brussels - with sufficient and safe blood products. We always issue a full guarantee on the safety of our blood products. No matter how often a person donates, we test their blood, plasma and platelet concentrate thoroughly every time. Our [Centraal Laboratorium \(CELA\)](#) tests all donations for HIV, hepatitis B and C and syphilis.





8,018 times Bloedserieus

Bloedserieus are blood collection events organised for and by students together with Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. Twice a year, Bloedserieus travels across Flanders and pitches its tents in six student cities: Kortrijk, Ghent, Diepenbeek, Brussels, Leuven and Antwerp.

In 2020, campuses were often closed and many students tuned into lectures from home. But this did not stop them from attending one of the Bloedserieus events, with over 8,000 beds used this year!

Want to know about the next edition of Bloedserieus? Keep an eye on the [website!](#)



Donating in four unique locations

Together with our volunteers, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders organises around 15 mobile blood collections a day across Flanders, in addition to the 13 permanent donor centres. Parish halls, canteens, cultural centres, multi-purpose rooms... anything is possible. And in 2020 we went even further. We sought and found four unique locations in Flanders that for one night only became more than an iconic sports or cultural venue: they were places to go and make a difference. The King Baudouin Stadium, the New Exchange in Antwerp, 't Kuipke in Ghent and the Ancienne Belgique all welcomed the Red Cross. The number of appointments made proved that donors love the combination of sport, culture and giving blood.





2,363 male plasma donor candidates in the fight against COVID-19

In 2020, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders supported two major national studies investigating whether plasma from COVID-19 patients who had recovered could help to treat the disease. Our organisation went in search of plasma donors with sufficient COVID-19 antibodies. Their plasma is rich in antibodies and could help others to recover faster. 2,363 donor candidates came forward, with 424 of them found to have sufficient antibodies to donate plasma, resulting in nearly 1,000 donations!

Apart from the two studies – coordinated by UZ Leuven and CHU de Liège – hospitals were also able to use the antibody plasma for the urgent treatment of patients with underlying health conditions or over 75 years of age. 81 seriously ill COVID-19 patients received a plasma transfusion under this emergency programme.

Plasma studies were carried out in other countries as well, and in order to draw reliable conclusions as quickly as possible, all European blood agencies worked together. To this end, a central European platform was set up, supported by the European Commission. Scientific data from plasma studies in the European Union is uploaded onto this platform, allowing different research groups to make use of international data sets for scientific analysis. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is one of the leading groups in this consortium and has developed its own test for finding COVID antibodies.





Innovative platelet research

We collect blood and supply hospitals with safe blood products across Flanders, and we strive to provide the best possible service. We can guarantee this by conducting scientific research into, among other things, the storage, quality, processing, safety and new applications of blood products. The **Transfusion Research Center (TReC)** focuses mainly on platelets, how they work and what their role is in transfusion medicine.

In 2020, after five years of research, a doctoral thesis was published discussing two major projects. One related to the storage of platelets at lower temperatures, which would allow them to be kept longer than the current five-day period. The research showed that storage at lower temperatures (4°C or -80°C) makes platelets less suitable for the prevention of bleeding in patients with low platelet counts. The data did suggest, however, that these platelets could work equally well or even better for the acute treatment of bleeding patients with low platelet counts.

A second part focused on making platelets from human stem cells. The research team was able to 'grow' functional platelets in the lab. This research is still in the discovery phase and additional research is therefore needed. The yields are currently too low to have any application in transfusion medicine. It will take a few decades to determine whether this is a viable way of, for example, dealing with shortages for certain risk groups who have very rare platelet types.





12,843 COVID-19 PCR tests in support of hospital labs

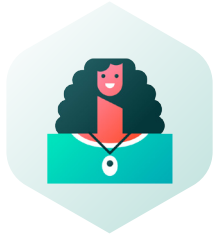
From the very beginning of the COVID crisis, it was clear that performing diagnostic PCR tests would play an important role in fighting the spread of the virus. But many hospital laboratories did not have the capacity and resources to handle all the nose and throat swabs they were being asked to test. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders helped by rapidly freeing up capacity at the **Central Donor Laboratory (CELA)** in Mechelen. Several Red Cross employees volunteered to test the nasal and throat samples for the presence of genetic material from the COVID-19 virus. This was not without risk and required them to step out of their comfort zone, as they would usually be testing blood samples. Thanks to their commitment and expertise, and the automated devices at CELA, a total of 12,843 swabs were tested for COVID-19. This excellent piece of teamwork allowed hospital laboratories to reorganise themselves internally so they were eventually able to carry out all PCR testing themselves.



Degree of COVID-19 immunity in blood donors

Both Belgian Red Cross-Flanders and Croix Rouge de Belgique helped Sciensano with a large-scale population study to map the degree of immunity and the spread of COVID-19 among the Belgian population. For this purpose, both blood services provided biweekly residual samples of blood donations, which were then analysed by Sciensano for the presence of COVID antibodies. The regular supply of a large number of samples enabled the evolution of immunity in our country to be mapped throughout 2020. Blood donors are an ideal test population because they are representative of the healthy Belgian adult population and can provide a large number of samples from all over the country. In 2020, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders delivered a total of 32,283 free residual samples to Sciensano and will continue to offer this service until the end of 2021.





511 stem cell donor candidates for Hafsa

In December 2020, the Belgian Bone Marrow Registry – part of the Belgian Red Cross – supported the search for a suitable stem cell donor for Hafsa, a cheerful girl from Heist-op-den-Berg with a rare genetic blood condition called Beta-thalassemia major. She receives blood transfusions every month to combat the anaemia caused by the condition. In the long term however, these transfusions will create an excess of iron that can lead to life-threatening heart and liver failure. A stem cell transplant is her last chance of a longer life. But because of her non-European roots, finding a compatible stem cell donor is easier said than done. Her school, together with a few partners, set up a campaign to find a suitable stem cell donor. This included a heart-warming video with Hafsa and her sister Mariam – who also suffers from Beta-thalassemia but has already found a suitable donor – in the leading roles. Their efforts were rewarded. In the space of a week, 511 donor candidates came forward. For comparison: for the whole of November, there were 188.

How is the Red Cross involved in stem cell donation? The [Belgian Bone Marrow Registry](#), which manages the genetic data of stem cell donor candidates and supports Belgian donors in their search for a suitable match, is part of the Belgian Red Cross. In addition, our [Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics Laboratory](#), or HILA for short, draws up genetic profiles for patients who need stem cells, as well as for potential stem cell donors. In this way, we contribute to an international stem cell donor bank that contains as many as 38 million stem cell donors - or 38 million chances of survival for each patient.

So why is it harder to find a match in Hafsa's case? Although 38 million is a huge number, there are few donors with Central African, North African, Turkish or mixed roots. As a result, we are unable to help 1 in 3 patients with this profile. This is why we are always on the lookout for men aged 18 to 40 with non-European or mixed roots, so we can help patients like Hafsa. Would you like to become a donor? [You can find more information on our website.](#)



“Fact check by Belgian Red Cross-Flanders”

SARS-CoV-2 not only turned daily life upside down. The world of science had to pull out all the stops to learn more about this new type of coronavirus, as quickly as possible. Numerous studies were published at an incredible pace, often disregarding the usual review period where other experts can give feedback and ask for additional experiments or data. The result? A proliferation of low-quality scientific publications. But how can experts and policy makers make sense of it all? Which studies should they use to steer policy and which ones should they ignore? As Belgian Red Cross-Flanders strongly values an evidence-based approach, our [Centre for Evidence-Based Practice \(CEBaP\)](#) joined an international project that categorises studies into a summary table. By giving precedence to the highest quality studies, experts who consult the ‘live map of COVID-19 evidence’ can quickly and easily find the most reliable data on a particular subject.

But it doesn't stop there. CEBaP also did a factcheck on a subject that is close to their hearts: the relationship between COVID-19 and your blood group. Here too, several studies appeared, with as many different results and hypotheses. The last update was released on October 30, when the conclusion was as follows: *“Generally speaking, we can conclude from preliminary study results that individuals with blood group A are more susceptible to COVID infection. However, the evidence is very low quality, meaning further research is absolutely necessary before we can be confident about this conclusion. Moreover, susceptibility to infection is completely separate from the likelihood of a patient developing severe symptoms. Again, the certainty of the evidence is very low. We therefore conclude that there is insufficient evidence for a difference in COVID-19 risk among the different blood groups. Everyone, regardless of their blood group, should strictly adhere to the measures to prevent the spread of the virus.”* Want to know more about our comprehensive analysis? Head over to [our website](#).

CEBaP also worked on ‘rapid systematic reviews’ in 2020 to quickly gather the most up-to-date information on a specific question. For example, we investigated which elements contribute to the mental well-being of healthcare workers during the COVID crisis. Read more about this further on in our annual report.



Study of mental well-being among healthcare workers during COVID crisis

The Belgian Red Cross-Flanders **Centre for Evidence-Based Practice** published a study in 2020, examining the factors that contribute to the mental well-being of healthcare staff during the COVID crisis. In this way, the Red Cross wants to contribute to the development of prevention and awareness campaigns, among other things. Studies show that regular contact with COVID patients and fear of infection are significant risk factors for the development of post-traumatic stress, depression, restlessness and sleep problems. Moreover, healthcare workers who are required to quarantine have an increased risk of acute and post-traumatic stress, anger and depression.

Support from supervisors and colleagues, on the other hand, makes employees better able to cope with the pandemic situation and less likely to develop mental problems. Clear communication and precautionary measures from the employer are central to this. In concrete terms, this means ensuring a safe and efficient working environment, with attention for both the individual employee and the bond between colleagues, allowing room for discussion. If healthcare workers feel in control of the situation, believe in themselves and in their own abilities, their mental well-being will benefit and they will be able to cope with the situation for longer.

It is not just colleagues who have an important part to play; friends and family do too. Talking about feelings and humour can reduce the risk of stress-related problems.

But how do you start that conversation? What do you do when you notice someone around you struggling? With the 'Houvast' app, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders provides tools to help others. The app offers concrete tips on how you can emotionally support others, while continuing to care for yourself. The app does not focus specifically on healthcare workers but is accessible to everyone.

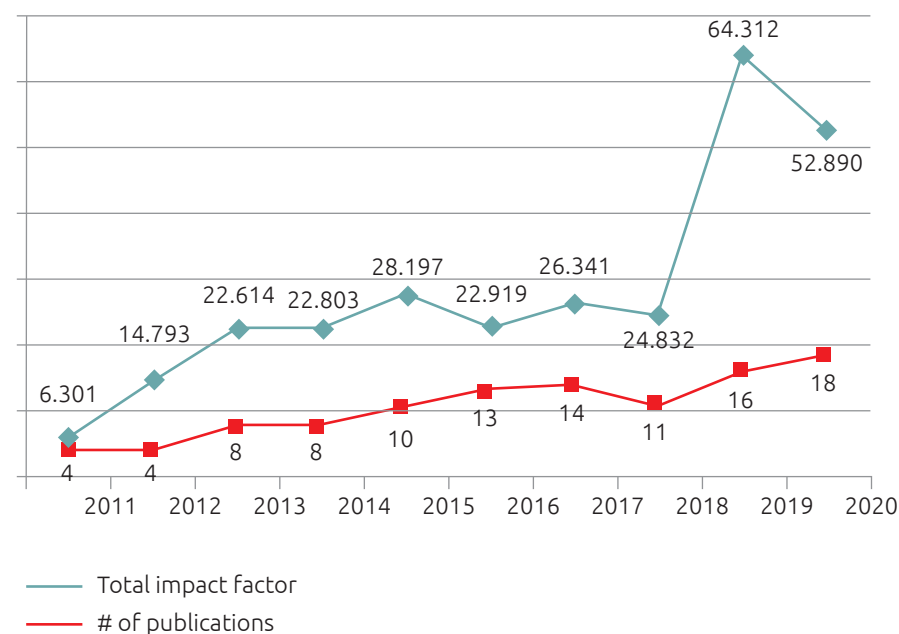
Houvast can be downloaded from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#).

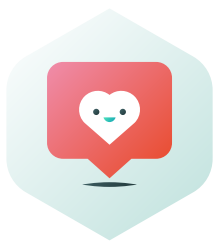


18 scientific publications

An evidence-based approach is of paramount importance to Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. As a humanitarian organisation, we want to help people but we also want to make sure that our interventions have a real impact. We do this by basing our activities on scientific research. On the one hand, we compile existing studies into a systematic review or evidence summary (the Centre for Evidence-Based Practice received an ISO 9001:2015 certification for this in 2019). On the other hand, we carry out our own primary research and publish our findings in reputable scientific journals. We publish our findings because aside from using this knowledge for our own operations, we also want to make it available to other NGOs and organisations.

In 2020, we published no fewer than 18 scientific studies in scientific journals, with a total impact factor over 52.





Incredible solidarity in Flanders

There is no doubt that the COVID crisis had an enormous impact on us all. Fortunately, in these difficult times we could count on each other and we were ready to help where needed. The huge number of volunteers signing up during both the first and the second wave of COVID infections in our country proved that.

In March, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders launched an appeal for crisis volunteers. The organisation did so for two reasons. On the one hand, we noticed an enormous willingness to help among the Flemish people. We received more and more queries from citizens who wanted to get involved in the fight against the virus and wondered whether they could do so through the Red Cross. On the other hand, more and more institutions called on our organisation for logistical and administrative support. The scope of this demand was such that we would not be able to manage them with our own volunteers alone. The largest volunteer organisation in Flanders instantly became even larger: a total of 15,000 people registered through the crisis volunteer platform.

The crisis volunteers were deployed for countless requests for help: from administrative support for GP practices to distributing food in residential care homes, and from helping people phone up family members and having a nice chat to carrying out rapid testing in schools.

[The unprecedented crisis has clearly stirred up an unprecedented sense of solidarity among Flemish people. Click here to read the story of crisis volunteer Wannes.](#)



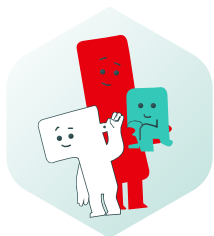


The Red Cross volunteer in times of COVID

12,930 Red Cross volunteers help people every day: everywhere, and wholeheartedly. The assignments and tasks are very diverse, and so are the different volunteer profiles: ambulance driver, First Aid teacher, mobile library volunteer, bridge builder, aid worker, animator, blood collection assistant and shelter worker. You name it!

But the COVID crisis also had a major effect on our volunteers. For some, their activities were temporarily halted, for others the demand for help and thus the nature of the work changed. Those who normally staff First Aid posts at sporting events would be helping out at triage centres, and those usually teaching could work on the telephone help lines. Red Cross volunteers stepped up to the challenge, and we depended on their selfless commitment.





Our First Aid app for mental health problems: Houvast

Even before COVID struck, almost 1 in 3 Flemish people said they did not feel good about themselves. So chances are that sooner or later they will need support from a close friend or relative. The chance that you can be an important support to others is even greater. But sometimes people are scared to get involved, or not sure what they can do to help.

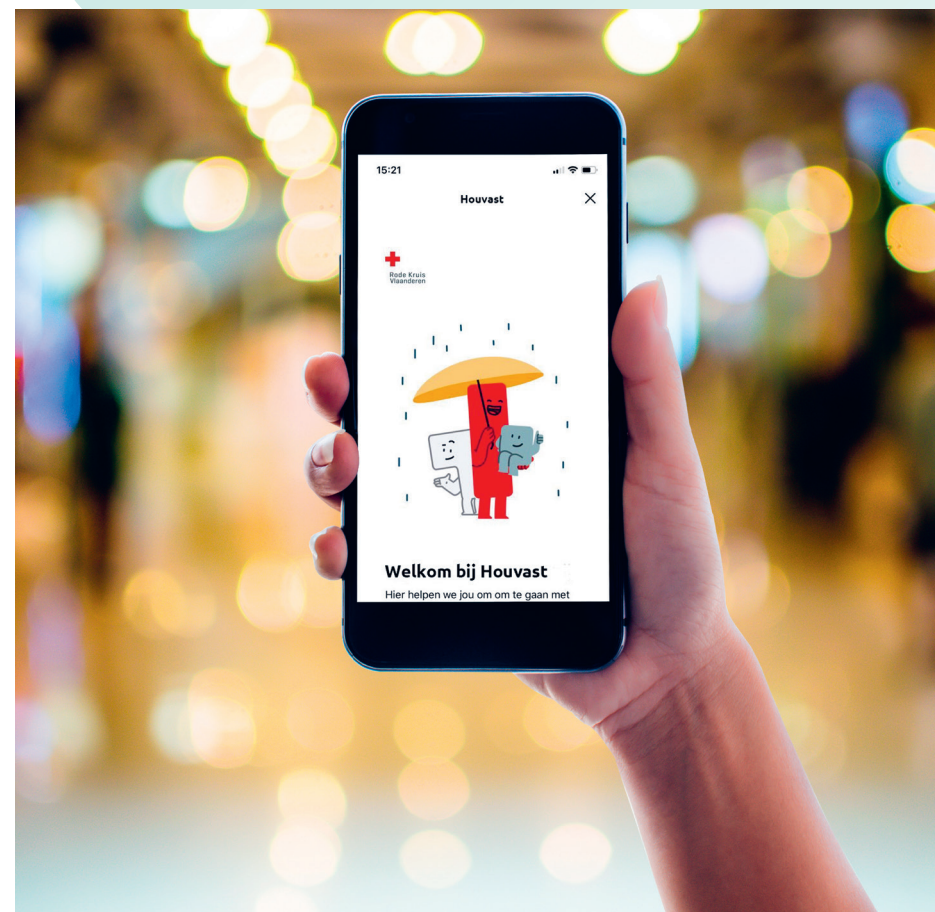
Everyone can help. With Belgian Red Cross-Flanders' Houvast app, we want to help people to support others who are struggling.

The app provides concrete tips and guidance on how you can help others with mild symptoms such as stress, bereavement and important life events or with serious problems such as depression, anxiety disorders, addiction, suicidal thoughts ... or with the impact of the COVID pandemic.

Houvast helps you to recognise signals, to start a conversation, to offer a sympathetic ear, to help others find more help and to set your own boundaries in the process. You will also find a list of organisations you can refer them to, tips for relaxing and tools to take good care of yourself, such as a self-care plan, a diary, ways to take a moment for yourself... The app also offers advice to take good care of yourself at a difficult time.

The app is not a replacement for the training course 'First Aid for mental health problems' or the book 'Listen! First Aid for mental health problems'. The app is intended to be an additional tool, something you always have to hand, with extra tips and videos which are also included in the training course.

The app has been downloaded 15,000 times so far. That is a great start, but we encourage everyone to get it now and be ready to support others when needed. You can download the app from [Google Play](#) or the [App Store](#). Get involved!





12,989 First Aid courses

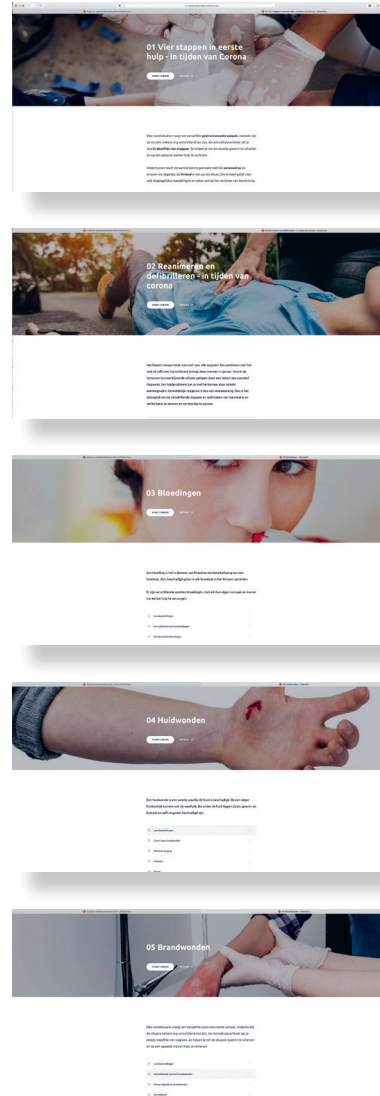
In normal times, we run a lot of First Aid first aid courses, but COVID forced us to completely rethink our approach. These First Aid courses are extremely useful for everyone - literally the entire population - to save lives.

During the lockdown, First Aid training for individuals ground to a complete halt. As an alternative, five free e-modules were made available to everyone. For companies, we looked at each case individually to see if and how the training could be carried out and whether it could be organised in a completely safe way.

These online courses also took into account the COVID measures, which meant that certain First Aid techniques were adapted.

In 2020, we gave First Aid training to 12,989 people. In 2019, that figure was 42,842. The impact of COVID is abundantly clear.

Of course, there is also our **First Aid** app, which has been downloaded more than 175,000 times since 2019. The app does not replace First Aid training, but it allows everyone to learn the basics of First Aid at home, or to look up what to do in an emergency. For both trivial injuries, such as a nosebleed or a graze, and serious accidents, it is important to be able to react quickly and correctly.





International humanitarian law

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders promotes the dissemination of international humanitarian law by interpreting related themes and events in the media. 2020 marks the 75th anniversary of atomic bombs being dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict flared up again. These are two issues Belgian Red Cross-Flanders turned its attention to.

75 years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the risk of nuclear weapons being used is great

In August 2020, 75 years after the nuclear bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki demonstrated their all-consuming destructive power, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders warned of the great risk that nuclear weapons still pose - and are increasingly posing. We are not prepared for the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons.

The catastrophic effects of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki would pale into insignificance when compared to the irreversible human and material damage that a modern nuclear weapon could cause. In addition, the Red Cross, with its deep and long-standing expertise in relief work and first-hand experience of the impact of nuclear weapons in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, argues that it will be impossible to adequately help the victims of a nuclear explosion. No state or organisation has sufficiently large and appropriate capacity to adequately relieve the humanitarian consequences of such a catastrophe. The use of nuclear weapons also seems difficult to reconcile with the rules of international humanitarian law, including the basic principles of distinction and proportionality.

What we cannot prepare for, we must prevent. This is why, since 1945, the Red Cross has been calling for complete nuclear disarmament, so that these weapons can never be used again. This is the only way to avoid a repetition of the disastrous fate that befell Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders believes that, in addition to acceding to and respecting the various international treaties, states must urgently take action to reduce the risk of accidental or deliberate use of nuclear weapons.

Serious concerns about the impact on civilians during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

In October 2020, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders expressed concerns about the humanitarian impact of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, which has now been rumbling on for 28 years and flared up again in late 2020. The Red Cross condemned reports of indiscriminate shootings and use of explosive weapons in towns, villages and other populated areas, and called on the warring parties to protect the civilian population and comply with the rules of international humanitarian law. According to the organisation, the use of high-impact explosive weapons should be avoided in densely-populated areas, unless sufficient measures are taken to limit their large-scale effects and the risk of harm to civilians.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been active in the region since 1992, working with the local National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Armenia and Azerbaijan to support local communities. For example, in November 2020, the remains of soldiers who were killed during the flare-up of the conflict were transferred from Azerbaijan to Armenia, in accordance with the rules of international humanitarian law. The ICRC facilitated the humanitarian operation as a neutral intermediary, to ensure that everything was done safely and in accordance with humanitarian principles.



Watch the video here: [Adequate relief for victims of a nuclear explosion? Impossible!](#)
- YouTube



ISO 9001:2015 certification for Restoring Family Links

Customer focus. That is what the services of Restoring Family Links are all about. An important prerequisite for putting the customer first is that your organisation and processes are focused on the beneficiary. That is exactly what an ISO 9001:2015 certificate can help with.

ISO 9001:2015 describes the criteria for a quality management system that aims to provide the beneficiary with the service required, in line with the organisation's strategy. Many humanitarian organisations are beneficiary-focused, but the formalised process approach to achieving this can often be improved.

ISO 9001:2015 is based on seven quality management principles:

1. Customer focus
2. Leadership
3. Engagement of people
4. Process approach
5. Improvement
6. Evidence-based decision making
7. Relationship management

In the past, no one would have connected the humanitarian sector with this kind of quality certification. The certifications were more obviously linked with companies wanting to improve their production processes. But gradually the focus shifted from the end product to the quality management process itself, making this a more suitable approach for the service sector, including Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. The quality system provided by the ISO standard has a customer-oriented approach with a focus on leadership, learning and improvement. We are proud and very happy to have achieved this ISO 9001 certification. We are the first Restoring Family Links section within the Red Cross movement to be awarded such a certificate.



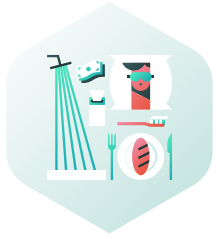
Acting now is 16 times more effective than once disaster has already struck

In 2020, we set aside €440,000 from our emergency fund to combat the spread of COVID-19 in Africa. By acting quickly and losing no time in informing the population about what they could do to prevent the spread of the virus, we made a real difference as an organisation. Every Euro invested in prevention has 16 times more impact than the same Euro being spent once disaster has struck.

These investments have allowed preventive action to be taken in several African countries. A great deal of effort was put into raising awareness of COVID-19 and what measures can be taken to prevent the spread of the virus. We used posters, mobile radios, radio ads and much more. In addition, buckets and soap were distributed so people could wash their hands.

The cost of doing nothing was very high during this global pandemic. According to the World Bank, every dollar invested in disaster-preparedness pays for itself 16 times over. In other words, preventive action has 16 times more impact than waiting until the disaster has occurred. So there is a high price to pay for doing nothing and waiting.

A great deal was done with the financial resources available. The South African Red Cross Society deployed large numbers of volunteers to raise awareness of safety precautions, such as social distancing and hand hygiene. The volunteers also distributed food parcels to people who lost their income during the lockdown, and carried out contact tracing for confirmed cases. In Mozambique, thousands of leaflets and pamphlets were distributed, giving people across the country accurate information on how to prevent infection.



Reception centres for people applying for international protection in times of COVID

It was a challenging time for residents and staff at the reception centres as well. COVID restrictions had a great impact on daily life at the centres. Quarantine rooms were provided in various centres for residents who tested positive or had a high-risk contact, and the situation was closely monitored.

But other measures were also taken. Group activities for the residents were cancelled: no more Dutch lessons, football matches or knitting evenings. All this was necessarily replaced by activities that allowed residents to engage in individual activities. This required a different approach from residents and staff, as we usually focus strongly on group activities as a way of living together more easily.

Remote working was not an option for our staff at the reception centres. Supervisors, logistical staff, handymen and others continued to do their jobs in difficult conditions. Temporary adjustments were made to ensure that the risk of contamination was kept to a minimum.

In 2020, we were active in 19 reception centres and welcomed 8,000 applicants for international protection with 81 nationalities. These people came predominantly from Afghanistan, Palestine, El Salvador, Eritrea and Syria. During the COVID period it was also decided to open a new reception centre in Sijsele, providing accommodation for 300 residents.





Publisher responsible

Philippe Vandekerckhove, Motstraat 40, 2800 Mechelen

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