

Dutch Decision-Making on Humanitarian Assistance: Strengths and Weaknesses

*Substudy for the Evaluation of the Humanitarian Assistance Given by
the Netherlands – Funding and Diplomacy 2015-2021*

22 September 2021

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1. Introduction

This paper, which results from IOB's investigation of Dutch decision-making on humanitarian allocations, is intended to feed further research on the effectiveness of Dutch humanitarian donor relations and of Dutch humanitarian partners. It is the first sub-study conducted under the policy evaluation of Dutch humanitarian assistance and diplomacy for the period 2015–2020.¹ It is mentioned in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for that policy evaluation and was conducted to respond to parts of the following main question and subsidiary questions:

RQ 2 What kind of funding relationship does the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) have with its various partners, and how does this relationship enable them to effectively deliver humanitarian aid?

- 2.1 How are funding decisions made within the MFA?
- 2.2 What different types of relations between MFA and recipient organisations emerge from these decisions, and how do these relations enable the humanitarian assistance to be effective?
- 2.3 In what way have the priority themes of innovation and localisation been promoted within these relations?
- 2.4 How have policy changes in response to the IOB Policy Review of 2015 been implemented, and to what extent have these changes contributed to achieving Dutch humanitarian goals?

The core of this paper is a reconstruction of how funding decisions are made, informed and justified, and to which breakdown of allocations this leads in terms of core funding, semi-earmarked funding and thematic funding of key humanitarian partners. The paper also elaborates on the decision-making process of some likeminded donors, because the comparison offers valuable insights for the assessment of the Dutch decision-making process. The paper ends with a description of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing decision-making processes. Conclusions are presented, together with starting points for future research. A detailed reconstruction of Dutch humanitarian policy is presented in Annex 2; Annex 3 describes how IOB collected and analysed the data for this study.

The research team consisted of Johanneke de Hoogh and Charlotte van Eijk from the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the MFA. The research team would like to thank Hans van den Hoogen (former DSH-HH)² and Waldo Serno (DSH-HH) for their valuable feedback on the report. The research team is also grateful for the feedback from the internal review board of IOB, which consisted of Wendy Asbeek Brusse, Rens Willems, Meie Kiel and Rob van Poelje.

2. Internal decision-making processes and basis for funding

2.1 An annual roadmap

The decision-making on humanitarian assistance is centrally managed by the humanitarian assistance unit of the Stabilisation and Humanitarian Affairs Department (DSH-HH), which operates from the MFA in The Hague. Embassies and Permanent Missions may be consulted but do not play a decisive role in shaping decisions. Despite attempting to clearly map out how decisions on funding and diplomacy are made, IOB found no straightforward answer to this question. Yet all respondents referred to an underlying system that had been developed and further refined during 2015–2020 (the years under evaluation). This system, which is considered to be leading for all policy work in the Stabilisation and Humanitarian Affairs Department (DSH), provides the deadlines and moments for decision-making in the calendar year:

¹ Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 October 2020. Terms of Reference. Humanitarian Assistance of the Netherlands. Funding and diplomacy 2015–2020

² Humanitarian Aid Division of the Humanitarian and Stabilisation Department (DSH-HH) of the MFA

- February or March: early provisional planning to establish and agree on thematic priorities for recurrent and protracted crises and to reserve funding for acute responses
- Early autumn: a stocktaking moment to channel possible underspending³ on broader official development assistance (ODA) budget lines for humanitarian purposes
- Early December: if necessary, another stocktaking moment to channel possible underspending on broader ODA budget lines for humanitarian purposes.

In addition, throughout the year, ad hoc decisions are taken to respond to acute crises.

2.2 Towards a more solid basis for decision-making

Both the IOB evaluation of 2015⁴ and the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 provided strong incentives to clarify the basis for decision-making and priority setting. Growing demands from Dutch NGOs to qualify for more and more predictable funding also increased the necessity to transparently justify funding decisions. In its annual letters to parliament during the evaluation period, DSH became more informative about how the Index for Risk Management (INFORM) as well as the needs assessments and appeals from the UN and Red Cross would guide its decisions on funding. Specific decisions were backed up by an internal memorandum for decision-making addressed to the Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade. Having perused these memoranda and conducted interviews⁵, IOB concludes that for most of the humanitarian budget, DSH-HH's assessment and analysis was leading. This means that the minister's decisions on funding were based on informed advice the policy department gave on priority setting. At the same time, it should be noted that the informed advice of DSH-HH on humanitarian priorities was motivated by both humanitarian and political considerations. Policymakers stated that when shaping funding decisions, they take account of parliamentary debate and public concerns. The interviews also suggest that decision makers were very aware of the political support needed to secure approval of the yearly humanitarian budget and that they closely follow the mood in parliament and society.

Paragraph 2.4 gives more details on political guidance in humanitarian decisions.

2.3 A set of technical criteria to back up humanitarian considerations

In 2018, DSH adopted a set of technical criteria for measuring and comparing the severity of different crises. This set of criteria was intended to provide a sounder basis for decision-making.⁶ IOB was told that these criteria were especially helpful for justifying allocations to country-based pooled funds (CBPF) at the beginning of each year. The same criteria, but slightly modified, were used to assess possible humanitarian responses to acute crises during the year. As such, the set informed funding decisions involving the discretionary budget, which averaged some 30–40% of the budget. The set was

³ The budgetary routine within the ministry means that the humanitarian budget profits from underspending on other ODA budget lines.

⁴ In 2015, IOB noted that the ministry's approaches and working methods were still strongly geared towards managing projects, and too little time was being spent on action focusing on key themes and priorities. Many individual activities were supported (300 between 2009 and 2014), and much work was involved in managing this project funding. IOB recommended reducing the number of activities and concentrating on multi-annual contributions to humanitarian agencies. IOB also concluded that decision-making on the choice of channels and modalities required a more solid basis. In 2015, IOB concluded that neither the organisation of, nor the capacity for, policy implementation was in line with policy ambitions. The ministry was not well informed on what happened at operational level and in the field and relied to a considerable extent on the UN to account for spending. However, the quality of UN accountability left much to be desired. Given the magnitude of the challenges, IOB recommended that the ministry apply a long-term perspective to policy and specific themes.

⁵ Interviews were conducted with policymakers and decisionmakers within the MFA using the interview guide in annex 4

⁶ These criteria are: 1. the level of vulnerability of the population, 2. the number of people that need humanitarian aid, 3. The UN appeal in a specific year, 4. The ICRC appeal in a specific year, and 5. the funding shortfall per crisis. These criteria are explained further in annex 1.

not used to inform decisions on core funding. The share of core funding in the total budget grew from 41% in 2015 to 55% in 2020. Decisions on core funding were found to be based on the same funding decisions taken previously year after year. More details on this are given in paragraph 3.2.

The findings regarding the yearly discretionary budget suggest that the technical criteria played a role in rationalising the allocation process within the humanitarian team, as they enabled policymakers to look beyond the remit relating to a particular crisis and their own dossier. Over the years, the way the set of criteria was used varied: a few indicators were added or deleted to achieve a balance between technical and political considerations or for common sense reasons. Adhering to certain indicators too strictly, for example, would have led to large sums of money being spent in populated countries in protracted crises. Policymakers would argue that such crises are better served by the humanitarian–development–peace nexus (known as the triple nexus) approach and development aid budgets than by yearly humanitarian allocations.

2.4. The balance between humanitarian and political considerations

The Netherlands has responded to the increased complexity of emergencies and to rising humanitarian needs across the world by maintaining a humanitarian policy that is founded on the humanitarian imperative and follows a needs-based approach. The humanitarian imperative is the conviction that action should be taken to prevent or alleviate humanitarian suffering arising from disaster or conflict, and that nothing should override this principle. Dutch humanitarian policy is based on the still widely accepted – although by no means universally implemented – principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality. The ambition is to deliver humanitarian assistance where it is most urgently needed, and to prevent aid from being used as a political instrument. This overriding principle has led to a system of centralised decision-making in The Hague which promotes a global comparison of humanitarian needs assessments and crises analyses and discourages ad hoc decisions that are based on fragmented assessments of needs in individual countries made as crises occur.

Nonetheless, in decision-making on humanitarian funding and thematic priorities, there is always a balance to be made between humanitarian considerations, in which international humanitarian law and international agreements on human rights are central, and political considerations, which are often based on vision and interpretation. DSH-HH is accountable to the Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade. Decisions on humanitarian funding and humanitarian diplomacy are taken within a political context where wider foreign policy, security and trade interests of the Netherlands are at stake. As explained earlier, policymakers take parliamentary debate and public concerns into account when shaping funding decisions.

Predictable and flexible core funding has become routine, which has helped to shield a large part of the humanitarian budget from ad hoc political interests. The semi-earmarked and earmarked contributions are more vulnerable than core funding to friction between humanitarian and political considerations, as decisions on these types of funding are taken every year and additionally during the year whenever a crisis strikes or deteriorates. The earlier mentioned set of technical criteria has helped to justify funding decisions on this part of the budget more transparently. IOB found that informed advice given by the policy department on priority setting was leading for decisions about the largest part of the humanitarian budget.

From the documents perused and interviews conducted, it seems that the decisions made by the hierarchy within the ministry from 2015–2020 were based on a certain confidence in the policy department’s expertise in humanitarian matters. IOB found limited evidence of top–down instructions to earmark money for specific humanitarian crises or partners but did find specific cases of political guidance being given either by the minister or by parliament via amendments to the budget. Examples

that illustrate this are the intensive exchanges of thoughts between the minister and DSH-HH on the humanitarian response to the Syria crises in 2015 and 2016. Another example of political guidance concerns the creation of Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) in 2015, which came about after parliament pushed for an increase of humanitarian funding specifically for Dutch NGOs. From the documents and informants IOB consulted, it is clear that the priority given to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in humanitarian crises from 2018 onwards was also seen as a top-down decision. Moreover, IOB concluded that the decision to give humanitarian assistance to refugees in Greece in 2020 led to friction between the political interest to act and the humanitarian interest to cover more urgent needs elsewhere.

What these and other cases⁷ have in common is a context of political urgency, a persistent lobby, or a clear political agenda of the minister in charge. Most of these cases led to robust debates within the ministry, especially where political interests interfered with priority setting based on humanitarian needs assessments. At times, arguments of efficiency and accountability also determined the stance taken by DSH-HH. Overall, IOB found that DSH-HH responded to political realities with a certain degree of common sense, upholding humanitarian considerations as much as possible. Thus the initially purely humanitarian response to the Syria crisis was quickly transformed into a separate budget line to support lasting solutions to protect refugees in the region. This decision had the deliberate objective of safeguarding the humanitarian budget for urgent humanitarian needs in Syria and elsewhere in the world. The creation of DRA was accompanied by clear ambitions on flexible funding, and requirements for Dutch NGOs to coordinate and prioritise on the basis of needs, and to promote locally led humanitarian action and innovation. In the same spirit, the decision to assist refugees in Greece affected the budgets ring-fenced for non-ODA spending and did not compromise the funding of more dire situations in non-ODA countries.

3. High-quality funding for experienced partners

As explained earlier, the Netherlands aims to act in accordance with the humanitarian imperative and humanitarian principles, to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected and that aid is provided to those who need it most. In the pursuit of these objectives, the Netherlands actively seeks coordination with other humanitarian donors and cooperates closely with a core number of experienced humanitarian partners. At the international level, the Netherlands is committed to international agreements and initiatives, including the Grand Bargain, the Agenda for Humanity, the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative, which guide Dutch decision-making on humanitarian funding towards multi-annual unearmarked funding.

In this context, the Netherlands has developed a strong ambition to facilitate financing to its humanitarian partners that aligns with the above commitments. The Netherlands currently allocates around 40–55% of the humanitarian budget as predictable, flexible and unearmarked funding to a limited number of experienced humanitarian partners with whom it has a long-term relationship. Most of this funding is core and flexible funding to be spent where these partners see the need. In addition, during the year, the Netherlands makes softly earmarked funding available for responding to new developments in ongoing chronic crises and to unforeseen acute crises. On average 30–40% of the overall budget is allocated to partners for humanitarian assistance in specific crises. No earmarking takes place below the country or crisis level. Only 5–10% of the Dutch humanitarian

⁷ The following examples for the period under review were mentioned by more than two respondents: UNICEF humanitarian funding (2014), Dutch Relief Alliance (2014, 2015, 2016), Wings for Aid (2015), a humanitarian hub for Venezuela in Curacao (2019) and the humanitarian assistance to Venezuela.

budgets consists of earmarked contributions to promote crosscutting thematic priorities as well as in-kind assistance.

3.1 Experienced humanitarian partners

To address the needs within a specific crisis, DSH allocates resources to a funding channel or partner⁸ considered to be the most advantageous in terms of the quality and timely delivery of aid. The policy reconstruction presented in Annex 2 shows the various explicit and implicit assumptions IOB identified as underlying the allocation of money to the most significant of the Netherlands' humanitarian partners and funding channels. IOB found that trust in the professionalism of longstanding humanitarian partners played a significant role in allocating funds. MOPAN (Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network) assessments as well as score cards and some evaluations were used to further justify specific allocations. IOB found that decisions on core funding were based on the previous year's decisions. The breakdown of funding allocations to UN, Red Cross and NGOs remained the same year after year, as it was difficult to justify significant changes.

Some interviewees described the decision-making on whom to fund as a balancing act between predictability of funding and the wish to innovate and learn. In the words of one of the interviewees: *"There are difficult questions to answer if the average breakdown of funds between the UN, Red Cross and NGOs radically changed from one year to the other or, on the contrary, if it remained unchanged year after year"*. Radical yearly changes would compromise the much-needed predictability of funding, whereas no change at all would promote a status quo of privileged humanitarian partners, which leaves very little room for innovation and new policy decisions. Interviewees found the following questions difficult to answer: Why would you increase funding for NGOs and as a result decrease funding for the United Nations or Red Cross? Or vice versa? Which humanitarian or political arguments could be used to inform such a change in the breakdowns of contributions to partners? The interviewees argued that there was no sound reason for radically changing the prioritising of humanitarian partners. They had no up-to-date evidence on the effectiveness, efficiency and relevance of these partners, nor did they have the capacity or ambition to micromanage large sums of money. For these reasons, the breakdown of funds between the UN, Red Cross and NGOs only changed significantly when additional funding became available. The creation of the DRA came about with additional money, not at the expense of core funding to other key humanitarian partners.

Decision-making on which partners to fund was also determined by considerations of a different nature. In its policy evaluation of 2015, IOB observed that the DSH policy department had limited capacity and no ambition to manage many small activities. DSH responded to the recommendations of this evaluation by setting out a strategy which concentrated on multi-annual contributions and focused action on key themes and priorities.

3.2 Core funding

Over the years, the Netherlands has become a strong advocate for multi-annual unearmarked funding to trustworthy humanitarian partners, including the UN, Red Cross and NGOs. This is reflected by an increase in Dutch multi-annual unearmarked contributions: from an average of 41% of the total humanitarian aid budget in 2015 to 55% in 2021. This type of funding allows for more flexible, predictable and efficient aid delivery and improved capacity to respond to acute or so-called "forgotten" crises.⁹

⁸ A channel could refer to, for instance, the United Nations, INGOs, or funding mechanisms (pooled or otherwise), whereas a partner refers to a specific partner organisation.

⁹ IOB Policy Evaluation 2015

The increase in multi-annual unearmarked contributions is a deliberate policy choice and results from the Dutch commitment to the Grand Bargain objective of gradually raising the unearmarked and semi-earmarked funding by donors to a minimum of 30%¹⁰ of their humanitarian aid. It is also a practical and convenient practice for a department (DSH-HH) that has a core function of “funding” but has limited staff (mostly based in The Hague) and limited on-the-ground knowledge. Unearmarked contributions are invaluable to humanitarian organisations, and the assumption is that this allows the Netherlands to become a more influential donor. (IOB expects this assumption to be tested by a separate effectiveness study that will explore the effectiveness of donor relationships.) It is furthermore assumed that experienced humanitarian organisations are inclined to look positively at Dutch thematic priorities and will target assistance according to these; this will also be tested by the abovementioned effectiveness study.

DSH has neither the ambition nor capacity to micromanage funds. Core funding, combined with regular policy dialogue to put emphasis on specific crises and themes, is intended to encourage the partners to spend the money where they think humanitarian needs are most urgent, in alignment with DSH’s priorities. It also minimises priority setting based on political motives, as the Netherlands deliberately refrains from giving donors detailed guidance. Instead, the Netherlands seeks to influence the performance of these core partners through policy dialogue and when renewing long-term funding arrangements.

At present, however, it is not clear whether the Netherlands is effectively succeeding in influencing the performance of core partners through policy dialogues. IOB expects the earlier mentioned effectiveness study will shed light on this question. A parallel study on humanitarian diplomacy will explore to what extent Dutch humanitarian diplomatic efforts influence the effectiveness of humanitarian actors and how these efforts contribute to achieving concrete results on Dutch humanitarian priority themes. IOB has commissioned a separate effectiveness study to explore how donor relations have enabled or hampered the effectiveness of humanitarian aid delivery.

3.3 Semi-earmarked funding for specific crises

As already noted, during the period evaluated, around 30–40%¹¹ of the humanitarian budget was allocated to specific crises that emerged during the year. This part of the budget is set aside at the beginning of each year and enables the Netherlands to allocate yearly funding directly to protracted crises. Additionally, an amount of around EUR 15 million is set aside to respond to new developments and acute crises that may occur throughout the year.

In most years, additional money becomes available for humanitarian spending because of underspending on other ODA budget lines. DSH will mostly semi-earmark this money to respond to specific crises (for example, via UN Country based Pooled Funds) or it may be given to specific humanitarian partners, like UN agencies, the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), or the Dutch Red Cross. The Netherlands attaches great importance to not earmarking these allocations below the country or crisis level.¹²

When an acute crisis occurs, DSH prefers to reinforce existing contributions to UN CBPF’s, or uses existing mechanisms with the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Red Cross family and DRA. The Netherlands Red Cross and DRA funding arrangements contain a separate budget that enables these organisations to react flexibly and rapidly when acute crises occur.

¹⁰ <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/Quality-funding>; Min-BuZa.2018.1522-25. 27 juli 2018. Memorandum R: Voorstel verdeling humanitaire middelen 2019-2021, p.3.

¹¹ The figure for 2020

¹² ToR, Humanitarian Assistance of the Netherlands Funding and Diplomacy 2015–2020, 2020, MFA IOB, p. 11

Currently, they are only required to seek prior permission from DSH if an acute crisis response exceeds EUR 400,000.

3.4 Earmarked funding for thematic priorities

During the evaluation period, up to 10%¹³ of humanitarian funding was earmarked to promote crosscutting thematic priorities that aim to stimulate positive change in the humanitarian system. The IOB policy evaluation in 2015 recommended more focused action on key themes and priorities. In response, since 2015, DSH has mostly identified thematic priorities in response to ongoing international debates about rethinking the humanitarian system. This was the approach DSH was using to decide on the emphasis to put on innovation and localisation of humanitarian action in connection to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Some of the policy themes resulted from the specific ambitions of the minister and parliament. For example, the position of women and girls, the response to Sexual Abuse and Harassment (SEAH) and attention to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in humanitarian action are known to be themes brought up specifically by consecutive Ministers for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade who saw a need to influence humanitarian partners and stakeholders and stimulate change. It was assumed that the Netherlands would find a niche and would positively influence further development of these priorities within the humanitarian world. Funding for these thematic priorities was earmarked to partner and theme but was disbursed early in the year to give organisations timely access to resources and enable them to determine where they had added value and to deploy them as effectively as possible. It is important to note that since 2015, the number of thematic priorities of Dutch humanitarian aid policy has grown (see Table 1 below).

Thematic priority/ Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Reform of the Humanitarian System							
Innovation							
Improved preparedness							
Safety of aid workers							
Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)							
Women and girls							
In-kind assistance							
Localisation							
Accountability							
Education (ECW)							
SRGR							
Support vulnerable people in crisis areas							
Grand Bargain (cooperation)							
Triple nexus							
MHPSS							

¹³ In-kind assistance is also paid out of this part of the budget. It concerns deployments of Dutch water expertise and UNDAC members, as well as the preparedness and response of the Urban Search and Rescue team.

Conflict & Hunger							
Risk sharing							
Covid-19							
Total number of thematic priorities	9	12	14	17	17	18	18

Table 1: Dutch thematic priorities from 2015–2021 (source: letters to parliament, the Dutch strategy papers for humanitarian aid issued in 2011 and 2018 and interviews with present and former policy officers). PSEA = Protection against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse; SEAH = Safeguarding against Sexual Exploitation Abuse and Harassment; ECW = Education cannot Wait; SRGR = Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights; Triple Nexus = the term used to capture the interlinkages between the humanitarian, development, and peace sectors; MHPSS = Mental Health and Psychosocial Support. *In 2015, Development Approaches to Forced Displacement were still financed through the humanitarian budget. *Proactive Emergency Response was mentioned online as thematic priority in 2020

3.5 The case of COVID-19

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has widely challenged the delivery of humanitarian aid. For international humanitarian actors, access to affected populations became more difficult due to travel restrictions. Restrictions of movement also led to increased poverty, which put more pressure on the already overburdened social and health systems in conflict areas. Accordingly, humanitarian needs burgeoned in 2020. Large international organisations, notably the UN and the WHO, developed COVID-19 response plans to be able to continue providing aid to people in need. Here, coordination, coherence and cooperation between different humanitarian actors have been central. The international organisations’ restricted access to the people in need made it necessary to strengthen cooperation with local partners.

IOB found that COVID-19 has not fundamentally challenged the decision-making procedures described above, and therefore during the evaluation period there was no need to change any underlying assumptions. Established policies and priorities continued unchanged. In line with its humanitarian policy, the Netherlands opted for a multilateral response, and in its communications to parliament stated that it aimed for high impact and a flexible, quick and effective use of resources. The largest part of the COVID-19 budget was thus allocated as unearmarked contributions through existing funding channels, including the UN, Red Cross family and DRA. The assumption here was that the use of established channels and partnerships allowed for rapid, flexible deployment of resources to the people that most needed it.¹⁴ It is important to note that because of the unearmarked nature of the funding, no explicit information is available about where it has been spent, which shows once again that the Netherlands trusts the knowledge and expertise of its humanitarian partners.¹⁵

At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the Netherlands provided EUR 5 million to the Contingency Fund for Emergencies of the WHO and EUR 6.3 million to the Red Cross family to mitigate the challenges posed by the pandemic.¹⁶ Shortly afterwards, the Netherlands made available a financial aid package of EUR 100 million, of which EUR 35 million was specifically intended for humanitarian assistance, with the remaining EUR 65 million to be used for socio-economic recovery and “building back better”. The additional funding facilitated the start of extra COVID-19 related activities, as well

¹⁴ [Kamerbrief inzake hulp, handel en investeringen infectieziekte bestrijding](#); [Kamerbrief over Humanitaire hulp en diplomatie 2021](#); HH-referentiedocument - COVID19 - GHRP - NL-steunpakket -humanitair 04-05-2020

¹⁵ Algemene Rekenkamer. 2020. Resultaten verantwoordingsonderzoek 2020 Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Den Haag.

¹⁶ These expenditures came from the regular humanitarian aid budget

as the amendment of existing activities.¹⁷ For all these activities, the Netherlands made clear that it would continue to draw attention to Dutch priorities, including the empowerment of women, girls and vulnerable groups, localisation, SEAH, MHPSS, Grand Bargain, humanitarian access and respect of international humanitarian law.¹⁸

IN 2021 the Netherlands allocated EUR 10 million of additional money in the humanitarian budget to the DRA because of the strong network that DRA has with local organisations that operate in poor and fragile areas. This decision was motivated by DRA's assumed focus on close cooperation with local partners. Given the restricted access of international NGOs to the people in need, it was considered necessary to strengthen cooperation with local partners.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) received an additional one-off contribution of EUR 15 million. The assumption here was that funding through CERF enables financial support to be provided rapidly to affected populations worldwide.

In 2021 the Netherlands channelled EUR 5 million of the additional humanitarian budget through UN CBPF to support countries already suffering from humanitarian crises and severely affected by the pandemic, like the Central African Republic, Sudan and Somalia. CBPF money was allocated to UN humanitarian organisations and INGOs, as well as to local organisations that were vital for the delivery of humanitarian assistance because of the limited access to conflict-affected countries. By channelling funding through the CBPF, the Netherlands aimed to strengthen its reach to local organisations and make up for the more limited access and capacity of implementing organisations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁹

Finally, at the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was granted an extra budget of EUR 5 million, because of the good access ICRC has in conflict areas. The ICRC had shown great interest in supporting MHPSS, which was one of the thematic priorities for Dutch humanitarian assistance.²⁰

3.6 Triple nexus

From the information obtained in the interviews, IOB is unable to conclude that internal coherence of decisions on Dutch humanitarian assistance with broader development goals was secured through regular coordination and contact between the respective humanitarian (DSH-HH) and development cooperation divisions²¹ in the Dutch MFA. It was mentioned that DSH-HH maintained some contact with thematic divisions on education and refugee protection. A few interviewees argued it would be neither fair nor feasible to entrust DSH-HH with much responsibility for connecting with broader development goals, as crisis-prone areas do not always match up with the Dutch government's ODA priorities. The planned studies on the effectiveness of humanitarian partners and effectiveness of donor relations are expected to explore to what extent the Netherlands has been able to influence the performance of humanitarian partners on the triple nexus.

¹⁷ [Kamerbrief inzake hulp, handel en investeringen infectieziekte bestrijding](#); HH-referentiedocument - COVID19 - GHRP - NL-steunpakket - humanitair 04-05-2020; Algemene Rekenkamer. 2020. Resultaten verantwoordingsonderzoek 2020 Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking. Den Haag.

¹⁸ HH-referentiedocument - COVID19 - GHRP - NL-steunpakket -humanitair 04-05-2020.

¹⁹ [Kamerbrief inzake hulp, handel en investeringen infectieziekte bestrijding](#)

²⁰ [Kamerbrief inzake hulp, handel en investeringen infectieziekte bestrijding](#)

²¹ Development cooperation divisions when referring to thematic divisions dealing with specific budgets for longer term development cooperation aimed at for example water, nutrition, food security, environmental programs, peacebuilding, stability.

3.7 Conclusions:

For about half of its humanitarian aid budget, the Netherlands relies on the professionalism and capacity of experienced humanitarian partners to deliver humanitarian assistance based on the humanitarian imperative and principles. The Netherlands allows humanitarian partners to decide on priorities, without the interference of bureaucratic procedures or direct political guidance. This strategy is based on the validated assumption that this way of funding allows for more flexible, predictable and efficient aid delivery and improved capacity to respond in the event of acute or so-called “forgotten crises”.

For about one-third of its humanitarian aid budget, the Netherlands has actively sought funding arrangements that enable experienced humanitarian partners to have maximum flexibility (no earmarking below country level) and has ensured the Netherlands gives political support to responses to specific humanitarian crises. It is this part of the budget that has some flexibility to respond to instructions from the minister or parliament about where to spend humanitarian money. This limited discretionary budget for acute crises also seems an effective way to promote humanitarian aid budgets and assure continuing wide political support to secure these budgets, as it shows that the Dutch government responds to severe humanitarian crises around the world.

The Netherlands earmarks up to 10% of the humanitarian budget for specific themes,²² with the aim of activating change. This is one of the avenues that the minister or parliament can take for giving specific instructions on where to spend humanitarian money. Between 2015 and 2021, the number of thematic priorities grew from eight to 18, but there is no evidence of a proportionate increase in the DSH-HH’s in-house thematic humanitarian expertise.²³ IOB will explore this issue further in the effectiveness study on donor relations.

4. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

The findings show that DSH-HH spent limited time and energy on monitoring, evaluation and learning during the period under review. IOB’s perusal of a sample of assessment memoranda and decision-making memoranda to the minister revealed few indications of decisions being justified by newly acquired knowledge or evidence from recent evaluations. One reason for not using the latter evidence is that the results of evaluation often arrive too late to be considered. The memoranda mostly paraphrased parts of former assessment and decision-making memoranda and to have referred to the justifications given the previous year. Based on interviews with internal stakeholders and consulted reports IOB concludes that the two humanitarian staff members based in Amman and Nairobi had been able to acquire a feeling about what partners had achieved in Lebanon, Turkey and Iraq and to do in-depth monitoring in Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. There were examples of critical information leading to discussions with the partners involved. A few interviewees felt that MEL activities are hampered by the limitations MFA’s travel policy imposes on travel to conflict areas like Syria and Yemen.

Overall, interviewees argue that the management of large sums of money takes up much effort and leaves little time to focus on the results and performance of partners and to acquire new knowledge and feed it into the policy dialogue with key partners. The insistence on accountability and risk-averse behaviour within the wider ministry also makes new funding decisions time consuming. One would expect that the insistence on core funding and semi-earmarked funding would lead to efficiency gains

²² This percentage excludes COVID-related expenses in 2020 and 2021.

²³ To follow up on recommendations of the IOB policy evaluation to better align implementing capacity with policy ambitions, DSH selected two additional humanitarian experts to be posted in crisis-prone regions. In 2015, IOB recommended a long-term focus on more specific themes for which the Netherlands contributes added value.

and to more time for strategic policy dialogue and humanitarian diplomacy. IOB will look further into this issue in the framework of the effectiveness and humanitarian diplomacy studies.

IOB's investigations have left it with the impression that the quality of the policy dialogue with key humanitarian partners depends on the expertise and experience of a limited number of senior policymakers and humanitarian experts in DSH and embassies. Most interviewees pointed out that MEL was poorly incorporated in the decision-making. They almost unanimously agreed that there is room for improvement in the embassies' role in monitoring humanitarian programmes and advising on needs. More could be done to train staff at embassies and in The Hague on humanitarian programming and policy. Some interviewees argued that humanitarian budgets should be accompanied by a proportionate secondment of knowledgeable and dedicated staff to embassies, as is done for large development budgets on food security and water. This issue will be explored further by IOB in the effectiveness study.

In 2021 the approach was taken to contribute to UN CBPF in only the countries where the Netherlands can meaningfully participate in the donor board. IOB supports this decision as it helps to focus on quality of aid delivery and to feed knowledge from the field into the funding decisions for the following year.

5. Other European bilateral donors

IOB interviewed humanitarian policy staff at relevant ministries in Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and Sweden – four donor countries with humanitarian policy agendas similar to that of the Netherlands, yet with slightly different approaches towards the allocation of the aid budget to their humanitarian partners and funding channels. Germany, Denmark and Sweden use a centralised decision-making process to compare and prioritise humanitarian needs.

Like the Netherlands, these donors were found to rely on their experience of and prior working relationship with key humanitarian partners and to entrust them with appropriate allocation of unearmarked core funding, which comprises a large part of their budget. In all four countries, the average breakdown of funds between UN, Red Cross and NGOs had a similar basis as in the Netherlands, i.e. a strong preference for using the multilateral channel to create impact and coordinate humanitarian aid, and using the special ties with the Red Cross family because of its unique mandate. NGOs were often given funding from this budget because of their specific expertise. They were also included in this budget to avoid incurring large overheads from working with them via the UN.

The findings suggest that for all donors the exact breakdown of funds between UN, Red Cross and NGOs has also entailed arbitrary decision-making. One donor deliberately chose to divide the total humanitarian budget into three equal parts, others referred to dynamic decisions in response to larger humanitarian crises over the years and mentioned their ambition to be perceived as a predictable donor. All four donors struggle with limited capacity and large sums of money to manage. One interviewee pointed out that there is a trade-off between an allocation model that is based on relevance and humanitarian needs on the one hand, and the number of strategic humanitarian partners that can be managed.

All four donors and the Netherlands base their decisions on crisis-specific funding on an assessment of humanitarian needs. Even though their resources may differ, to justify which crises to prioritise they use sets of technical criteria similar to the set used by the Netherlands. Denmark attaches special importance to the assessments of the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). Switzerland sets great store on knowledge from

its extended development expertise in its embassies around the world. For Germany, the expertise and assessments of UN partners are leading. In Sweden it is SIDA (Sweden's government agency for development cooperation) which analyses and monitors humanitarian crises around the world and decides which partner fits best. SIDA staff are employed on a 35 full-time equivalent (FTE) basis in Stockholm and Swedish embassies. All four donors and the Netherlands agree that the technical criteria are useful for transparently justifying funding decisions yet must always be applied judiciously.

The findings suggest that donors with greater in-house humanitarian expertise and capacity put more emphasis on MEL, informed policy dialogue with partners and knowledge-based decision-making. For example, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs justifies new financial decisions on core funding in terms of its proportion of core funding among total funding compared to other donors (Sweden aspires to be one of the five largest donors in the world). The published evaluations and audits of humanitarian organisations and on whether partners delivered on the promises made in the previous year's consultations on Swedish policy priorities. SIDA feeds the MFA with arguments from the field.

6. Strengths and weaknesses of the DSH's current decision-making processes

Based on the above, IOB has identified the following strengths and weaknesses in the decision-making processes currently in place in DSH.

6.1 Strengths

1. Dutch humanitarian policy steadfastly adheres to the humanitarian imperative yet responds to political realities with a certain degree of common sense.
2. DHS expertise is respected within the MFA.
3. There is a strong focus on funding for areas with the greatest humanitarian needs. Central decision-making is based on information that facilitates such context-specific needs-based funding.
4. Partners are experienced partners and are in a position to effectively prioritise and address the most urgent humanitarian needs, based on timely available context assessments. This enables the Netherlands to focus on strategic policy dialogue with them.
5. The Netherlands has a strong ambition to facilitate high-quality financing to humanitarian partners in the form of funding that is predictable and can be used to fund core activities. Evidence suggests that this type of funding allows for more efficient and effective aid delivery that responds better to changing needs.
6. The established practice of providing predictable core funding has also helped to shield the largest part of the humanitarian budget from ad hoc political interests.
7. Earmarking only takes place for a limited part of the budget (5–10%), where it is applied to specific themes and partners. This earmarking has a specific aim: to promote clearly defined change.

6.2 Weaknesses

1. There is a risk of promoting a status quo of privileged humanitarian partners, which may lead to a lack of critical reflection and a certain automatism in monitoring, subsequently creating overconfidence in these partners.
2. Spending more than 90% of budget on flexibly deployable multi-annual core funding leaves little budgetary room for innovation and new policy decisions.
3. There is insufficient evidence that through its policy dialogues the Netherlands effectively succeeds in promoting strategic linkages between the Netherlands and its core partners and among its core partners, thereby leading to improved performance.
4. There are too many priority themes: the increase from eight in 2015 to 17 in 2021 brings the risk of not paying due attention to each theme. The rise in their number has not been matched by a

proportionate increase in thematic humanitarian expertise in the DSH policy department and in embassies.

5. The quality of the policy dialogue with key humanitarian partners depends on the expertise and experience of a limited number of senior policymakers and humanitarian experts.
6. Managing large sums of money takes up a lot of time and human resources, leaving too little time for strategic thinking and MEL and for acquiring new knowledge and data for informing the policy dialogue with key partners.

7. Concluding remarks and starting points for further study

1. IOB sees promoting unearmarked funding through a centralised humanitarian decision-making process in The Hague as a strength, as it enables and promotes needs-based funding decisions. This raises the question of the quality of coordinated needs assessments and priority setting of long funded humanitarian partners. The effectiveness study is expected to shed light on this.
2. In 2015, IOB concluded that humanitarian decision-making on the choice of channels and modalities required a sounder basis because funding decisions were not explained and lacked arguments based on MEL; moreover, little was known about what really happened in the field. Core funding seems to complicate MEL, as for most of the Dutch humanitarian budget it is difficult to trace the countries receiving Dutch funding. The findings of this study suggest that the MEL of partners and programmes is still poorly incorporated in decision-making. Many interviewees argued that in the end, the funding allocations in successive years have always largely determined how to move forward in the year ahead. However, at a more generic level, the DSH policy department has done much work to incorporate a transparent and more technical analysis of humanitarian needs assessments into funding decisions. So far, this has not greatly affected decisions on large sums of flexible core funding for preferred humanitarian partners, but it has affected the basis for yearly and acute funding decisions related to protracted, recurrent and sudden crises.
3. IOB recommends that DSH formulate a clear ambition and narrative on MEL at central level and supports embassies and missions accordingly. This narrative should set priorities and can build on the correctly chosen approach to contribute only to UN CBPF in countries where the Netherlands is able to meaningfully participate in the donor board. Similarly, MEL should contribute to achieving more local humanitarian action by collecting data on localisation and using data and analysis to encourage humanitarian partners to incorporate more locally led humanitarian action where this appears to be insufficient in their ways of working.
4. At the same time, it is questionable whether this call for more MEL and evidence-based decision-making at the donor level also leads to a better humanitarian response, compared with a more hands-off approach. The studies on effectiveness of humanitarian partners and donor relations are expected to explore this question further, for example by comparing the Dutch approach with the approaches of other donors such as Sweden, who rely more on data when making their strategic decisions.
5. It is assumed that being a large core funder gives the Netherlands influence as humanitarian donor and diplomatic actor. The study on effectiveness of donor relations is expected to shed light on the validity of this assumption by responding to the questions *“Has the Netherlands succeeded in influencing the performance of core partners through policy dialogues? How have these donor*

relationships enabled or hampered the effectiveness of humanitarian aid delivery?" Recommendations are needed on how core funders can make best use of their leverage through key humanitarian partners. Even though the Netherlands tries to influence partners to align their policy to Dutch priorities, IOB found that MEL data have not been used to change the 2015 attitude towards the functioning of the agencies the Netherlands supports and the results they achieve to one that is more critical. The studies on effectiveness of humanitarian partners and donor relations are expected to investigate this more deeply. Another important question to consider is how far a core funder's influence reaches in promoting change. Findings suggest that there is a disjunct between the ambition to promote predictable flexible humanitarian funding and the aspiration to influence and nudge humanitarian partners towards innovation, localisation and facilitate links with development goals

6. It is assumed that experienced humanitarian organisations like the UN, Red Cross and NGOs can make independent assessments of humanitarian needs, work according to humanitarian principles, are inclined to view Dutch thematic priorities favourably and will target assistance accordingly. This also raises questions such as *"Are the assumptions under which funding of these humanitarian organisations took place valid? In other words, are Dutch humanitarian partners shielded from political and institutional interests and in a better position to make needs-based decisions than an institutional donor like the Netherlands? What can be concluded from evidence and field studies in Syria, South Sudan and Yemen?"* The study on the effectiveness of humanitarian partners is expected to test these assumptions for various core partners and funding mechanisms and for three thematic priorities: localisation, innovation and coherence with development goals (triple nexus). The study is also expected to assess the quality of partners' needs assessments.
7. The interviews did not yield evidence for IOB to be able to conclude that the internal coherence of decisions on humanitarian assistance with broader development goals is safeguarded. The planned studies on effectiveness of humanitarian partners and of donor relations are expected to explore to what extent the Netherlands has been able to influence the performance of humanitarian partners on the triple nexus. IOB is currently conducting two separate literature studies to review evidence on how the priority themes innovation and localisation can best be promoted within donor relationships with humanitarian partners.
8. The *"Less, Better and More Flexible"* initiative within the MFA has spurred DSH to focus on possibly reducing the number of projects. The assumption is that reducing the number of projects will free up time and energy to be invested in fostering relationships and policy dialogue with humanitarian partners and will therefore lead to better programming. IOB believes it will be useful to explore whether an insistence on fewer projects has been accompanied by a focus on better programming and policies for core partners. The studies on the effectiveness of humanitarian partners and of donor relations are expected to shed light on the question: *Has the DSH-HH made concrete steps in the direction of "Better"?*
9. It would be valuable to further assess which conditions are conducive to attracting, training and maintaining dedicated staff for humanitarian programming, policy and MEL at embassies, missions and in The Hague. IOB found that DSH-HH increased its capacity from 7 FTE in 2014 to 24 FTE in 2021 (17 structural FTE and an additional flexible shell of 7 FTE).²⁴ In the same period, the

²⁴ Figures to be checked with HDPO

annual budget increased from EUR 327 to EUR 375 million, with one-off increase to EUR 595 million in 2015 for the initial humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Furthermore, the number of priority themes increased from eight to 17. Further research is needed to find out whether the increases in the budget available and the number of priority themes were matched by a proportionate increase in humanitarian expertise in DSH-HH and embassies. The insistence on core funding and semi-earmarked funding could be expected to lead to improved efficiency and more time for strategic policy dialogue and humanitarian diplomacy. IOB will look further into this question in the planned effectiveness study.

Annex 1: Two sets of technical indicators

Allocation criteria for chronic crises

At the beginning of each year, DSH presents its humanitarian allocations to alleviate suffering in chronic crises in a letter to parliament. Since 2018, DSH has used a set of five technical criteria²⁵ when making decisions about allocating resources to chronic crises. All have equal weight in the decision-making process. They are explained below.

1. **The vulnerability of the population.** This is measured by the *INFORM Global Risk Index*²⁶ and the *INFORM Severity Index*.²⁷ First, the *INFORM Global Risk Index* provides a risk profile for the given country that indicates the risks of humanitarian crises and disasters and the availability of humanitarian resources to help people in need.²⁸ Then, the *INFORM Severity Index* is used to clarify the current state of crises worldwide. It measures the severity of each crisis against a common scale for all crises.²⁹
2. **The number of people needing humanitarian aid according to the UN and International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement** (in absolute figures). This number is taken as an indicator of the scale of the crisis as compared to the total number of people in need globally. DSH sometimes instead prefers to look at the relative number of people (proportion of a country's total population) as an indicator of the scale of the crisis relative to the severity/scale of other crises. DSH does so to prevent a bias towards highly populated countries and protracted crises. The implicit assumption is that a triple nexus approach should focus on more durable solutions in these crises.
3. **The UN appeal in the year in question.** This shows the amount of humanitarian assistance needed and is another indicator by which the scale of the crisis can be identified. DSH uses the *Global Humanitarian Overview*³⁰ published annually in early December by the UN, and its update in June. DSH also looks at the HRP³¹ that announces the necessary country-level funding and is issued in the first quarter of each year.
4. **The ICRC appeal in a specific year** is another indicator of the scale of the crisis. The ICRC appeal is not included in the UN appeal. Moreover, the ICRC uses a different framework of needs assessments and thus provides a different view on the crisis. It is assumed that the ICRC makes its appeal based on its capacity to respond and is unlikely to over-ask. The ICRC focuses on the needs for protection and immediate relief in manmade crisis situations.
5. **The funding shortfall per crisis.** To assess the financing requirements, DSH reviews the absolute funding shortfall of the UN appeal of the previous year (in USD million). DSH specifically looks at the absolute financing shortfall, in order to avoid too much weight being attached to small crises with relatively large funding shortfalls.

The severity of chronic crises may change during the year, and therefore the data entered into the spreadsheet sheet are updated in September of each year. Allocations to protracted crises may be added or increased if additional funds become available in August.

²⁵ These five criteria are mentioned in the annexes of Min-BuZa.2018.1522-25 (2018) Memorandum: Voorstel verdeling humanitaire middelen 2019-2021, 27 juli 2018

²⁶ <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk>

²⁷ Min-BuZa.2018.1522-25 (2018) Memorandum: Voorstel verdeling humanitaire middelen 2019-2021, 27 juli 2018; <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/inform-global-crisis-severity-index>

²⁸ <https://ehs.unu.edu/news/announcement/inform-report-2019-published.html>

²⁹ https://www.acaps.org/sites/acaps/files/resources/files/gcsi_beta_brochure_spread.pdf

³⁰ <https://www.unocha.org/global-humanitarian-overview-2021>

³¹ Min-BuZa.2018.1522-25 (2018) Memorandum: Voorstel verdeling humanitaire middelen 2019-2021, 27 juli 2018; <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en>

Allocation criteria for acute crises

Since 2018, DSH has determined the allocation of this budget by considering the following criteria³²:

1. An appeal by the national government of a country hit by the crisis. If the national government is unwilling or unable to issue an appeal itself, the UN and/or ICRC can make an appeal.
2. The number of affected people, according to one of the following indicators:
 - Number of affected people > 1,000,000
 - Number of affected people > 50% of the population in the affected area (scale)
 - Number of cases > threshold for an epidemic.
3. Total amount requested (in USD million) in the flash appeal or in the adjusted HRP, compared with the funding requested for other acute crises.
4. An overview of the Dutch humanitarian funding that has been allocated to the crisis through other channels receiving core funding (e.g., CERF, DRA, Netherlands Red Cross (block grant), ICRC and UN). The Netherlands uses the overview to work out the extent to which an allocation would be additional to indirect core contributions.

The first two criteria are so-called “knock-out criteria”, i.e. if they are not met, funding will not be allocated.

³² Memorandum Min-BuZa.2018.1522-25 (2018): Voorstel verdeling humanitaire middelen 2019-2021, 27 juli 2018;

Annex 2: Policy Reconstruction

See separate PowerPoint file

Annex 3: Justification

For this study on the reconstruction of humanitarian policy and the strengths and weaknesses of the decision-making process, IOB conducted document research and interviewed policy officers and decision makers in the Netherlands and in likeminded donor countries. Focus groups with policymakers of DSH-HH were organised to test the initial findings.

The document research was conducted first, to better understand the humanitarian policy and the assumptions underlying the allocation of the humanitarian aid budget to humanitarian partners and funding mechanisms. The various documents consulted and analysed included the annual letters to parliament on humanitarian aid from 2015 to 2021 and underlying memoranda to the Minister for Development Cooperation and Foreign Trade, the “Theory of Change” created by DSH-HH in 2018, the strategy paper *Investeren in Perspectief*, policy frameworks from 2011 (“Aid to people in need”) and 2018 (“People first”), Humanitarian Diplomacy action plans and general instructions on Syria, Yemen, South Sudan and Conflict & Hunger, and a sample of decision-making documents (BeMos) on funding. IOB studied the BeMos for eight humanitarian partners and three funding mechanisms (CEFT, CBPF and DRA) for the years 2015–2016 and 2018–2019. These years were chosen to take account of the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit and its immediate as well as longer-term policy and funding implications. All documents were coded using Max QDA.

Using the document review, the humanitarian policy was reconstructed schematically. To ascertain whether current or former policy officers of DSH-HH identified with the reconstruction of the humanitarian policy, a focus group was organised. Participants’ input was used by IOB to revise the policy reconstruction. A second focus group was organised to check this revised version; its findings were used to refine the reconstruction.

The final report on the decision-making process, builds on a combination of this document research and 11 semi-structured interviews with policy and decision makers. First, an interview guide was developed, based on the earlier analysis of policy documents (mostly letters to parliament and decision-making documents). This guide comprised questions on the funding decisions, MEL, humanitarian diplomacy, priority themes and crises, changes in decision-making over the years and the impact of COVID-19. These questions provided guidance for the interviews with the Deputy Director General of International Cooperation, former directors of DSH, the head of DSH-HH, former heads of DSH-HH, the controller of DSH, regional humanitarian coordinators who were operating in the Horn of Africa and Amman, and policy officers who had been involved in the decision-making process on the allocation to CBPFs over the years.

To be able to compare the decision-making process of the Netherlands with likeminded donors, IOB carried out six interviews with humanitarian decision makers in Denmark, Switzerland, Germany and Sweden, using the same interview guide.

Annex 4: Interview guide

Interview guide

Decision-making in Humanitarian Assistance

- **Funding decisions**
 - How are funding decisions made?
 - Who is the most influential in this process? And who decides?
 - How many people do you have to make decisions and to assess your humanitarian assistance?
 - What is the role of politics in your decisions?
 - How do you ensure the humanitarian imperative and humanitarian principles in this process?
 - What factors are taken into consideration when making decisions about humanitarian aid? How do you motivate your funding decisions?
 - Why do certain funding channels and humanitarian partners receive more money and support than others? How do you justify the current allocations within your budget? (NL: 60% UN, 20% NGOs and 17% Red Cross)?

- **Monitoring Evaluation and Learning**
 - How do you ensure that the results from monitoring and evaluations are incorporated into the decision-making process?
 - What kind of monitoring and evaluation processes exist?

- **Humanitarian Diplomacy and Synergy**
 - Do you also engage in humanitarian diplomacy to achieve humanitarian goals? How?
 - To what extent do you strive for synergy between your funding and diplomacy efforts?

- **Priority themes/crises**
 - Are there any themes or crises that you prioritise?
 - How do you decide on these priority themes or crises?

- Why do these priority themes or crises receive more funding and diplomatic support than other themes or crises?
- How do you ensure coherence between humanitarian action, development aid and peacebuilding efforts (“triple nexus”)?
- How do you include the themes of innovation and localisation in your dialogue with humanitarian partners and other donors?

- **Changes in decision-making over the years**
 - Do you see a change in how funding decisions and choices for channels and partners have been made over the years?
 - Has the decision-making process concerning the choice of channels and modalities become more rigorous over the years (since 2015)?

- **COVID-19**
 - How has COVID-19 affected the decision-making process on funding?
 - How has COVID-19 led to a shift in allocations between partners or new partners?