



Belgian  
Red Cross  
Flanders

Annual report **2021**



[www.rodekruis.be](http://www.rodekruis.be)



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## Foreword

### “Everyone can help someone”: volunteering as a catalyst for social cohesion

We live in unusual times. The pandemic has reminded us that even rich countries in temperate regions are vulnerable to infectious diseases. The July 2021 floods also showed that even a country which traditionally saw few major disasters – and especially major natural disasters – has become more vulnerable due to climate change.

To deal with the changes that accompany such challenges, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has launched its “Strategy 2025”. Our previous strategic exercises have led to greater **efficiency** (2010), greater **effectiveness** (2015) and more **innovation** (2020). For 2025, the emphasis is on **volunteering** and new **technologies**.

It is because of this constant striving for improvement that Belgian Red Cross-Flanders was ready: ready to confront the pivotal years 2020 and 2021. The last two years have presented us with major challenges: they demanded an abrupt change of pace in terms of emergency aid and exposed shortcomings in our emergency operations. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders was involved in all manner of ways and demonstrated the flexibility that is expected of an emergency aid organisation.

For example, the deployment of civilian volunteers who took on more than 30,000 shifts, from logistical support in care homes and rapid testing in education to assisting during the flooding in Wallonia.

We also supported the Belgian government in housing refugees in Flanders, as we have done in other countries in partnership with the local Red Cross Societies. At the same time, we safeguarded stocks of blood, plasma and platelets despite drastic shortages worldwide.

Moreover, responding fast in times of crisis has led to solutions that can be put to use in ‘normal’ times, such as a volunteer platform that has already deployed more than 34,000 citizens, for when a lot of helping hands are required at short notice. Or, for example, a manual and accompanying app for mental health first aid. The new edition of the Help! – First Aid for Everyone manual, the ‘gold standard’ for first aid based on the latest scientific insights, is an example of this.

The activities of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders are sometimes taken for granted, perhaps because our organisation will soon celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary; to a certain extent we are embedded into the lives of people in Flanders. But this is not the whole picture, as the typical diversity of our activities shows. We provide first aid in case of emergencies, provide a preventive presence at events, ensure there is always a safe and adequate supply of blood products, train people in life-saving skills every day and so much more. The list of activities – seen and unseen, in the spotlight and in the shade – is impressively long. We’re a sort of Swiss army knife: reliable, versatile, flexible and robust, but also compact and inconspicuous when not needed.

Financial independence, in order to be able to do this work more autonomously, has gradually become more important. More than ever, our activities are made possible thanks to the support of the people. That’s not just financial but also in the form of the volunteering aid they provide.

You see, volunteering – to close the circle – is a crucial factor in rebuilding the fragmented social cohesion in our society. The slogan “everyone can help someone” sums up this idea: the help that people voluntarily want to give each other is an essential element in the fight against inequality and polarisation. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders also has a role to play in this by supporting and promoting volunteering in every way possible.

Never underestimate the value of ‘the volunteer’, whether on the small scale of each of their actions, or on the macro level. Recent research shows, for example, that countries with higher levels of volunteering were not as badly hit by COVID-19. Blood stocks and plasma collections have proven more resilient: countries with volunteer donors are better protected against systemic shocks. This is because, in the depths of a crisis, citizens act out of solidarity, not because of remuneration.



**Philippe Vandekerckhove**  
Executive Director,  
Belgian Red Cross-Flanders



**Laurette Steenssens**  
Community Chair,  
Belgian Red Cross-Flanders



## 12,920 thank yous and another 20,000 thanks!

We closed 2021 with 12,920 Belgian Red Cross-Flanders volunteers, spread throughout 228 local branches. The number of volunteers remained roughly the same in relation to 2020 – when we counted 12,930 – and this means that Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is still the largest volunteer organisation in the country. Approximately one in four volunteers (23.42%) is aged between 16 and 30, demonstrating that the next generations are ready and waiting.

And those volunteers are heroes, each one of them. Heroes who volunteer for a whole range of activities, from manning Red Cross aid posts at various events, to supporting blood collections, to helping vulnerable children with their schoolwork. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders wishes to thank them all very much for their unrelenting efforts.

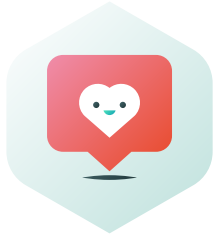
Again, 2021 was greatly affected by the coronavirus crisis, which made it difficult to maintain contact with members at times. Happily, the local branches found a range of creative solutions, such as Sinterklaas home visits, an online quiz team-building session or taking a walk together as part of a nightly drop.

In addition, more than 20,000 other volunteers signed up on the platform for civilian volunteers, the former crisis volunteers' platform, in 2021. Around 4,800 were effectively deployed for one or more projects, such as in care homes during the Covid waves. They helped make up beds, assisted residents in calling family online, delivered mail and more. They too deserve nothing less than a round of applause.

Are you interested in becoming a volunteer yourself? Sign up:

- as a Red Cross volunteer at [rodekruis.be/vrijwilliger](https://rodekruis.be/vrijwilliger)
- as a civilian volunteer at [rodekruis.be/burgervrijwilliger](https://rodekruis.be/burgervrijwilliger)





## July 2021 floods: an unprecedented emergency followed by unprecedented solidarity

Between 13 and 15 July 2021, six Belgian provinces – from Walloon Brabant to Luxembourg – were hit simultaneously by heavy rainfall, resulting in catastrophic flooding. This represented an unprecedented emergency that affected no fewer than 209 municipalities, primarily in the province of Liege, equivalent to a total area of around 100 square kilometres.

The floods affected more than 40,000 families. Some have lost everything. Municipalities like Pepinster and Verviers were completely devastated: streets have disappeared, cars were washed away, buildings have collapsed. In some houses, the water reached the first floor. Sadly, 39 people also lost their lives.

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders (RKV) and Belgian Red Cross-French Community (CRB) quickly set up a joint solidarity campaign using the 2525 account number. The Flemish people also demonstrated their solidarity with the flood victims: we collected 44.2 million euros, 21.9 million of which in Flanders. CRB handled the coordination and day-to-day running – as the emergency took place entirely within Wallonia – and RKV provided support on request.

CRB was also responsible for spending the 44.2 million euros that were collected. They spent the funds on seven priorities:

1. First aid and local support
2. Food aid
3. Aid with accommodation and returning home
4. Targeted financial assistance
5. Financing local projects
6. Aid for schools and affected students
7. Specific needs for the winter

Both Belgian Red Cross-Flanders and CRB want to give huge thanks to everyone who gave their support. It is entirely down to their support that the Red Cross can make such a difference to the victims.





## Zorgbib: 462 lending points and almost 700 volunteers

While Zorgbib is one of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders's less well-known activities, it is an incredibly valuable initiative, one that is greatly appreciated by its users. Residents of care homes can always use some recreation, and a good book, a pleasant chat or a fun board game are always welcome. And that's exactly where Zorgbib can help: as well as lending various kinds of books, CDs, DVDs, board games, materials for activities etc., volunteers also find the time for a brief visit, a chat, a reading or an enjoyable activity with patients and residents.

Zorgbib was active in 462 locations in Flanders in 2021; these include care homes, hospitals, reception centres for those requesting international protection, rehabilitation centres and psychiatric centres. What's more, the service is entirely free thanks to the 700 volunteers who were involved in 2021. Together, they have put in more than 13,000 hours of volunteer work for Zorgbib throughout the year. A volunteer's tasks can be highly diverse: from lender (volunteer on the book round), activities volunteer (volunteer involved in small-scale activities), reader to manager of a Zorgbib lending point.

Finally, in December, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders launched a recruitment campaign for Zorgbib volunteers. It was a success: 578 new candidates signed up.



## Rapid test centres for schools in partnership with Department of Education and CLB

As requested by Flemish Education Minister Ben Weyts, in early 2021 Belgian Red Cross-Flanders helped set up 53 'rapid test centres' for primary and secondary education. We worked on this with, in addition to the Department of Education, the CLB and in many cases the various Flemish primary care zones. The department established 25 regions in which to set up one or more rapid test locations. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders handled the testing itself, along with part of the logistics and administration.



In these rapid test centres, students who were considered high-risk contacts based on the contact survey by the CLB or the school were tested. Later on, teaching staff were also made eligible for testing. The CLB then contacted the students and their parents to make appointments. Dozens of volunteers from Belgian Red Cross-Flanders attended an information session on the organisation and running of the tests as well as practical training.

The project came to an end in mid-May 2021.



## 100 online first aid courses

As 2021 was also a year dominated by the coronavirus, many of the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders staff and volunteers had to be creative in order to continue to do their work. Many first aid courses for companies were forced to go online.

During about a hundred live online sessions, participants were trained in their own homes – using laptops, smartphones and tablets - in first aid for a number of common (emergency) situations. They learned how to approach and assess the situation safely, to call on specialist help and to provide first aid in the case of bleeds, skin injuries, burns and much more. In addition, another 900 people followed an online mini-course via e-learning.

Although physical practice using dummies, for example, was not an option during an online course, the participants were pleased with the alternative. They were still able to update their skills and therefore keep their certification. Furthermore, in this way those who were quarantined were not excluded and it was also sometimes convenient for the trainers to be able to work at home. “Every disadvantage has its advantage,” as Johan Crujff would say.

In June 2021, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders largely resumed physical courses.

## New first aid manual - 'Help!'



In September 2021, the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders First Aid service was proud to present the new version of the 'Help! – First Aid for all' manual. 6,876 copies were sold or given away in the first few months – a major success. The book lays out the most up-to-date – and most importantly, science-based - first aid guidelines. It's a handy, comprehensive manual, for anyone who wants to know what to do in the case of an accident or illness.

Compared to the previous edition in 2016, much has been added and updated based on the latest evidence-based input. Obviously, a section on first aid during a pandemic has been added, but the new Help! also provides information on a number of other topics and techniques. For example, there are new sections on choking in wheelchair users, first aid for nettles and hogweed, or what to do in the case of oak processionary caterpillars.

In addition, many photos and diagrams have been thoroughly renewed. Some because they looked somewhat dated and others because scientific knowledge and therefore the techniques based on them have evolved.

The next update? Coming in 2026.





## Belgian Red Cross-Flanders internationally

### Fighting COVID-19 in Tanzania and Rwanda

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders also had projects in 2021 in Tanzania and Rwanda that were part of the fight against the coronavirus. This help was especially welcome in Tanzania, as for this East African country the coronavirus crisis was just one more crisis on top of the existing ones. The company has struggled for some time with other epidemics – such as cholera – as well as an increased risk of natural disasters and famine. Between February and November 2021, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders worked with the Tanzania Red Cross Society to offer financial support to those who had grown the most vulnerable due to the pandemic, enabling them to continue to provide for their basic needs.

For example, 6,212 families were helped in Mbeya and Kigoma. The Tanzania Red Cross Society also rolled out another set of initiatives in Dar Es Salaam, such as an awareness-raising campaign on the prevention of COVID-19 infections. A number of different ‘hand hygiene stations’ were placed in four schools and a COVID quarantine centre.

In Rwanda, the ‘DP4 programme’, in the districts of Nyanza, Huye and Nyaruguru supported 4,333 people with their health insurance. In addition, personal protective equipment was purchased in September 2021 to combat the coronavirus, such as face masks, liquid soap and hand gels. In the fourth quarter, a number of awareness-raising campaigns for COVID-19 prevention were set up via mobile radio. Rwanda Red Cross also mobilised thousands of people to get vaccinated against COVID-19.







## Nyiragongo volcanic eruption (Democratic Republic of Congo)

On 22 May 2021, a volcano erupted in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This was the Nyiragongo volcano, close to the Rwandan border, and it forced more than 100,000 Congolese to cross the border to safety. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders worked with Rwanda Red Cross to provide humanitarian aid in the form of first aid and food, as well as other items such as blankets, sanitary towels, soap and masks. We helped over 1000 people, funded by 38,000 euros from the Emergency Aid Fund.



## Nduta refugee camp (Tanzania)

In 2015, a political crisis arose in Burundi, forcing more than 400,000 people to flee the country in search of safety in neighbouring countries. Around 230,000 ended up in Tanzania, where they were put into refugee camps. Since February 2021, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has supported the Tanzania Red Cross Society in providing basic healthcare to the inhabitants of the Nduta refugee camp, about 30 kilometres from the border with Burundi. People were also trained in first aid and the Tanzanian Red Cross organised blood collections in the surrounding region. On 31 December 2021 there were still 76,851 Burundians in the camp.


Some figures:

**168.961**  
patients helped

**2.063**   
patients referred to hospital

 **442**  
blood donations

**78**   
persons trained in first aid

 **3.071** children vaccinated (measles, tetanus, rotavirus etc.)



## International Humanitarian Law

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is highly committed to spreading knowledge of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in Belgium. To this end, we offer training to various target groups that come into contact with IHL professionally, such as Belgian policy makers, military personnel, magistrates, lawyers and journalists – and also law students.

In 2021, we trained 26 policy makers and 998 professionals. Using an interactive and practical approach, we strengthen their knowledge of IHL so that they can apply it in their field of work and help promote it.



## Restoring Family Links: an increase in the number of files from Afghans

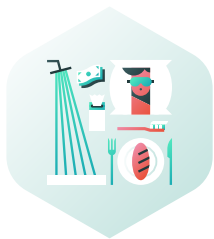
Restoring Family Links (RFL) is the free service provided by the worldwide International Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to help estranged family members to find each other.

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is also involved in helping search for missing family members and restoring contact between them, as well as providing information on the Belgian procedures surrounding family reunification.

In 2021, RFL saw a 12% increase in the number of cases (228) compared to the previous year. This increase was largely due to the doubling of the influx of Afghans to Belgium, caused by the withdrawal of the US Army from Afghanistan and the subsequent takeover by the Taliban. No fewer than 56% of the RFL files held by Belgian Red Cross-Flanders in 2021 concerned Afghan persons.

In the final quarter of 2021, we recruited five volunteers to the Restoring Family Links team as ambassadors. Their job is to raise as much awareness as possible of the RFL services, by specifically targeting associations and communities that are linked to the target group. In recent months, presentations were given to nine different organisations including a number of Fedasil and Belgian Red Cross-Flanders reception centres.





## Reception centres for people seeking international protection: the major impact of unrest in Afghanistan

On 31 December 2021, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders had a total of 4,036 spaces available in the 18 reception centres we run on behalf of Fedasil. Over the year, they accommodated 8,202 individual occupants. In addition, our Reception service also included 10 guardians who took on the guardianship of 371 unaccompanied foreign minors.

In the second half of 2021, the US Army's withdrawal from Afghanistan had a major impact on the reception centres. From September the number of people from Afghanistan applying for international protection also increased steadily. Whereas in August, the percentage of Afghans in our reception centres was 26%, by the end of the year it was 32.5%.

Obviously, this meant there was a sudden spike in the need for accommodation. The emergency shelter in Sijsele was expanded from 300 to 450 places. And the emergency shelter in Leopoldsburg – whose capacity had only just been reduced since July – went back to its initial capacity of 500 places.

The Reception service at Belgian Red Cross-Flanders also worked on Operation Red Kite, the Belgian government initiative aimed at evacuating not only Belgian and other EU citizens, but also persons of Afghan nationality, from Kabul. We housed 40 evacuated Afghans, mainly families, who requested asylum in this country.

Furthermore, the impact of Covid on the reception centres in 2021 should not be underestimated. The pandemic had severe implications for various aspects of centre life: the daily monitoring of infections, the cancellation of most group activities, and some centres even had to go into lockdown. All of this hindered the integration with local residents, an essential aspect of any reception centre. Fortunately, the first residents were vaccinated starting in late May following a successful awareness-raising campaign.

Despite this, many reception centres were able to respond creatively to the tricky situation, organising all manner of pleasant initiatives such as the art exhibition in Beveren, the walking trail in Lint or the open day with a summer bar in Sijsele. The centres made a special effort to maintain links with their neighbourhoods and life in the area, including setting up a Facebook page for every reception centre.





## Opening of 'Club@thelake' at Domein Polderwind

A few years ago, Domein Polderwind opened its doors: a unique Belgian Red Cross-Flanders holiday site in Zuienkerke that is fully equipped to accommodate people with disabilities. In 2021, the Club@thelake on the site was opened: a friendly multipurpose space with an adjacent sheltered patio in beautiful green surroundings. The new building also houses a spacious storage area, an administrative space and a bathroom with showers.

The room – which has its own bar! – has space for around 70 to 100 people. The new room is also a nice bonus for the adapted holidays for senior citizens and people with illnesses or disabilities that Belgian Red Cross-Flanders organises in Polderwind.

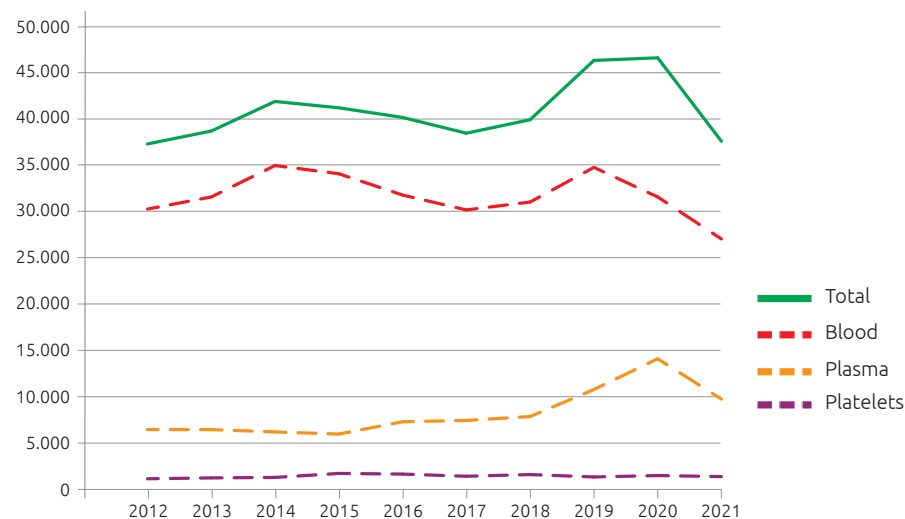


## Almost 37,000 new donors

In 2021, our 13 donor centres and numerous mobile blood collections saw 36,883 new donors. These people came to give blood, plasma or platelets for the first time: 26,450 blood donors, 9,353 plasma donors and 1,080 platelet donors.

It is of course a good thing that Belgian Red Cross-Flanders attracts new donors every year, but this 36,883 was the lowest number since 2012. This may have something to do with the fact that 2019 and 2020 were two successful years in this regard, with 45,512 and 45,793 new donors respectively. The drop was particularly noticeable in plasma donors: there were 30% fewer in 2021 than the previous year. After all, 2020 was an exceptionally good year for plasma.

Anyone wishing to contribute to blood supplies in order to help all kinds of patients can make an appointment through the [donor portal](#) or by calling 0800 777 00 for free.





## 415,036 successful donations

The Belgian Red Cross-Flanders donor centres and mobile blood collections completed 415,036 successful blood, plasma and platelet donations in 2021. This brings us to a total that is approximately the same as the number of successful donations in 2020: 417,059.

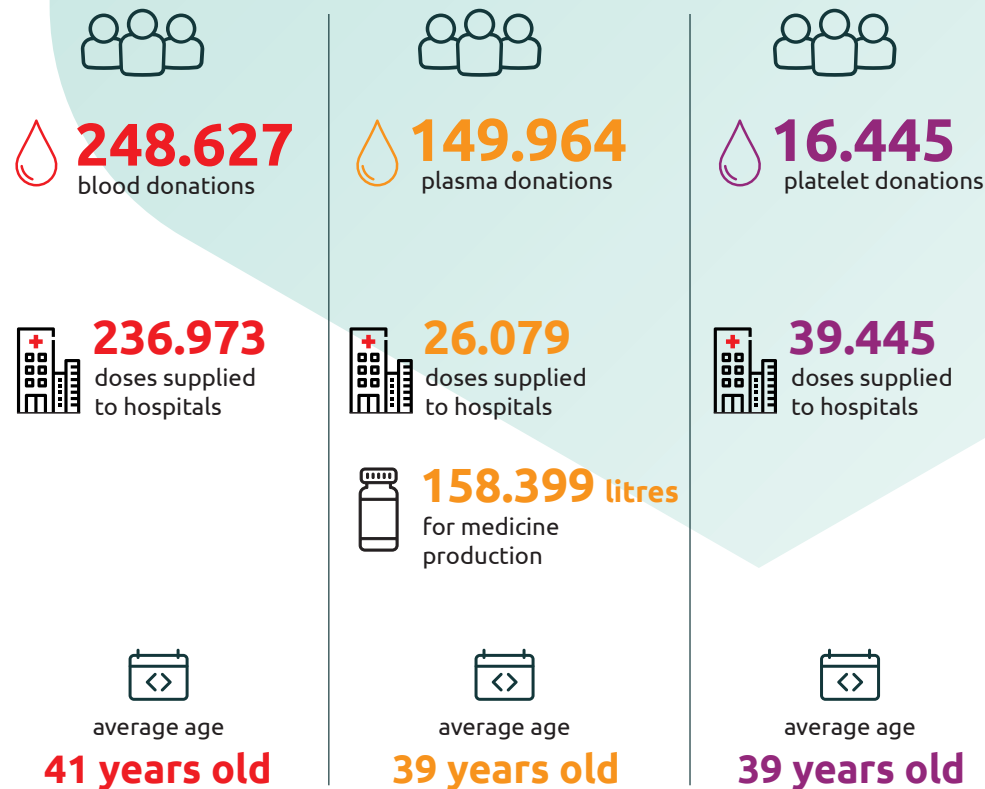
This includes **248,627 blood donations**, which enabled 236,973 blood bags to be supplied to hospitals in Flanders and Brussels. A small proportion of the blood bags is always rejected to ensure the safety of the blood. No matter how often one donates, we always test the blood products thoroughly. The number of successful donations increased by 2.1% in relation to the previous year, and the average donor age was 41.

Also included are **149,964 plasma donations**; a reduction of 3.7% compared to 2020. This can be attributed to the fact that 2020 was an exceptionally good year for plasma donations, increasing by 23% compared to 2019. From a long-term perspective, the number of plasma donations is on the increase. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders supplied 26,079 doses of plasma to hospitals and 158,399 litres of plasma to CSL Behring, who process it for use in various medicines. The demand for plasma for the latter purpose increases every year, as the medicines for which plasma is needed are given to more and more patients. The increase in plasma donations is also important in reducing Europe's dependence on imported plasma from the United States. With an average age of 39, plasma donors were slightly younger than the average blood donor.

Finally, in 2021 there were also **16,445 blood platelet donations**, an 8% drop from the previous year. However, this was amply compensated for by the increase in blood donations, from which platelets are also produced. In total, we produced 39,630 doses of platelet concentrate for hospitals. The average donor in this group, at 43, was slightly older than the blood and plasma donors.

All these donations come from 173,071 different donors. So, a sincere thank you to each and every one of you! You really are making a difference.

## DONATIONS 2021





## **Bloedserieus: 9,235 student donors**

Twice a year, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders joins forces with six student towns to organise Bloedserieus: a mass blood collection by and for students. We look for new blood among students (literally and figuratively) who potentially have a long donor career ahead of them. It's already been made a habit among some students, but for many their first donation happens during Bloedserieus.

In 2021, we once again welcomed students in Leuven, Antwerp, Ghent, Brussels, Diepenbeek and Kortrijk – once in the spring and again in the autumn. In total there were 9,235 student donors, an increase of 24% compared to 2020. This major increase is of course largely due to the coronavirus: 2020 was a difficult year for the Bloedserieus campaigns thanks to the pandemic.



## **Giving blood with a view: 611 donations at 8 heritage sites**

In partnership with Herita, the network organisation for architectural heritage, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders organised a special initiative in the summer of 2021: blood collections in unique locations. Eight stunning heritage sites were selected throughout Flanders: the Verbeke Foundation in Stekene, the Kunsthal in Ghent, Alden Biesen in Bilzen, Eperon d'Or in Izegem, C-Mine in Genk, the Grote Post in Ostend and both the Havenhuis and De Roma in Antwerp. Anyone wanting to donate blood in a special location had plenty of options last summer.

The initiative was launched by Matthias Diependaele (Flemish Minister of Architectural Heritage), Mathias De Clercq (mayor of Ghent) and Matthias Francken (managing director of Herita), who gave blood together in the Kunsthal in Ghent on 12 July. For Herita, this partnership was a way of demonstrating that heritage sites are not dusty old buildings but living places that fulfil an important role in our society.

The campaign was a major success: more than 90% of the available places were taken, making a total of 611 blood donations with a view.





## Results of research into 'convalescent plasma' as a treatment for COVID-19

The nationwide DAWn plasma study (Donated Antibodies Working agaiNst COVID-19) is a scientific study that started in May 2020 under the supervision of UZ Leuven. It examined whether 'convalescent plasma' can prevent hospitalised patients from requiring ventilation or reduce the likelihood of death. Convalescent plasma is blood plasma from a donor who has recently been infected with or vaccinated against a particular virus – in this case, of course, SARS-CoV2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

Almost 500 hospitalised COVID-19 patients took part in the research, two-thirds of whom were treated with convalescent plasma. The remaining patients served as a control group and were not given plasma. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders and Belgian Red Cross-French Community took care of the collection of convalescent plasma: 1,458 doses in 2020 and 704 in 2021, making this the first international study that involved such a large amount of plasma with this many antibodies. In the past, convalescent plasma has had a promising effect on certain other infections, so it was a logical step in the case of SARS-CoV2.

In September 2021, UZ Leuven published the first results of the study. It showed that, in any case, administering convalescent plasma is a safe treatment, as the study did not observe any serious side effects among patients. However, the positive effects that were hoped for were not yet observed. Therefore, patients treated with convalescent plasma required mechanical ventilation just as much as the control group, and the number of deaths was also similar.

However, a second major clinical study is underway in Belgium, run by the university medical centre in Liege. This study focuses on COVID-19 patients in intensive care. The results are expected in 2022.



## Modernised donor centre in Edegem

There has been a Belgian Red Cross-Flanders donor centre on the campus of the Antwerp University Hospital in Edegem since 1980. It was therefore due for an update; our colleagues moved to a new, more modern location in september 2021. Fortunately, they didn't have to go far: the donor centre stayed on campus but in a different building.

The new site has plenty of natural light and has been decorated entirely in the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders image. All of the day beds are set up in one rectangular room, around the central work tables: more efficient for the staff and more pleasant for the donors.

Residents of the region surrounding Antwerp were welcome to donate blood, plasma or platelets in the new donor centre from 7 september.





## Plasma: no contract yet for 'subcutaneous' medication

Demand for plasma products has been increasing worldwide for years. On one hand, this is a consequence of the evolution of techniques in healthcare; on the other, it results from the fact that we are reaching more and more people worldwide with this healthcare. The whole world is highly dependent on plasma from the United States: 70% of the world's plasma comes from paid donors in the US. This also applies to Europe, meaning that we have little control over the price we pay for plasma.

Belgium is an exception in a sense: we are much more self-reliant than other European countries in terms of plasma. In recent years, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has continued to invest in plasma donation. Awareness-raising campaigns inform new and existing donors of the importance of plasma and there has been investment in new plasma donation machines. Furthermore, new donor centres have opened in recent years: plasma can only be donated in permanent centres, not during mobile blood collections. We aim to collect more plasma each year, as consumption is increasing in this country too.

Plasma is primarily used in the manufacture of medicines, including for patients with immune or coagulation disorders. We can sort these medicines into two types: the first is the 'intravenous' medication, administered via the arteries. This usually takes place in hospitals. The second type is the 'subcutaneous' medication, administered just under the skin, which is something the patients can do themselves.

The federal government has a contract with a pharmaceutical partner for the preparation of the first type of medication. In this way, prices are agreed and the partner is also under an obligation to supply the Belgian market exclusively. The government has asked Belgian Red Cross-Flanders to ensure that we can supply at least 50% of the requisite quantity. It's working; we are actually doing much better, with 68%.

However, in the case of the subcutaneous type of medication, the government does not yet have a contract with a pharmaceutical partner. In other words, the country is still 100% reliant on foreign supplies. Such agreements with the government must be renewed every four years and as such, the tender was revised last year and granted for the 2022-26 period.

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has urged the government to include the subcutaneous medication in this new tender but to no avail.

We call on the government once more to use plasma from Belgian donors for the subcutaneous medication, so that these products can also be sold on the Belgian market. In this way, patients would no longer be totally reliant on foreign products and, as a result, the government would be able to prevent excessive price increases.





## Luk's story: "The day of my stem cell transplant was like being born again"

Luk Nowak is a proud father, 'Schellenaar' and Chief Inspector with the Integrated Police. The last few years, he's also been a leukaemia survivor thanks to three rounds of chemotherapy and a stem cell transplant. His story speaks volumes and makes abundantly clear why stem cell donors are so important: they save lives.

Luk had worked for the Integrated Police for over 25 years when his boss told him to see his doctor. "I hadn't been feeling well for a few weeks and got tired very easily. I'd had headaches for weeks and was taking painkillers like they were sweets," says Luk. A blood test brought bad news: his blood values were highly alarming. He was immediately sent to the emergency room and ended up in the UZA, in the Haematology department. There he was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia.

Treatment began immediately: two rounds of chemotherapy. The doctors of the UZA were looking ahead and started the search for suitable stem cell donors; finding a good match is not an easy task. "The first round of chemo wasn't too bad, but the second was much more intense. I had a high fever for days on end, I was shaking out of my bed. I totally lost my appetite and everything tasted and smelled of cardboard. When I really started to struggle mentally, I thought of my family, friends and colleagues," says Luk. By the end of the second round of chemotherapy he was depleted: he had lost 17 kg and was very weak. Luk was given 52 bags of blood and plasma to build his strength back up.

The tests following chemotherapy were cautiously positive, but the UZA staff decided to refer him for a stem cell transplant anyway. Not an easy decision, Luk thought: "I was a borderline case, but in such cases it does get discussed. It was a heavy conversation, and the pros and cons made my head spin. Together with my wife, we decided to go for it. Two potential donors were found: a woman in the UK and a man in Germany."

Prior to the stem cell transplant, Luk had one last, incredibly intense round of chemotherapy, to prepare to body for the donor stem cells. The German donor turned out to be a 9/10 match: the physical build and blood group matched. The doctors were convinced that the transplant had a good chance of working.



"The day came on 26 October; it was like being born again. I received the stem cells from my donor. I would really love to thank that man. He made the effort to help a total stranger receive treatment. We sent him a thank you card via the hospital; further contact was not possible," explains a grateful Luk.

The treatment is an intense process, but it does its job. And, step by step, Luk is getting back to his old self. In fact, he has even resumed his job with the Integrated Police full-time.

Read Luk's complete story [here](#).



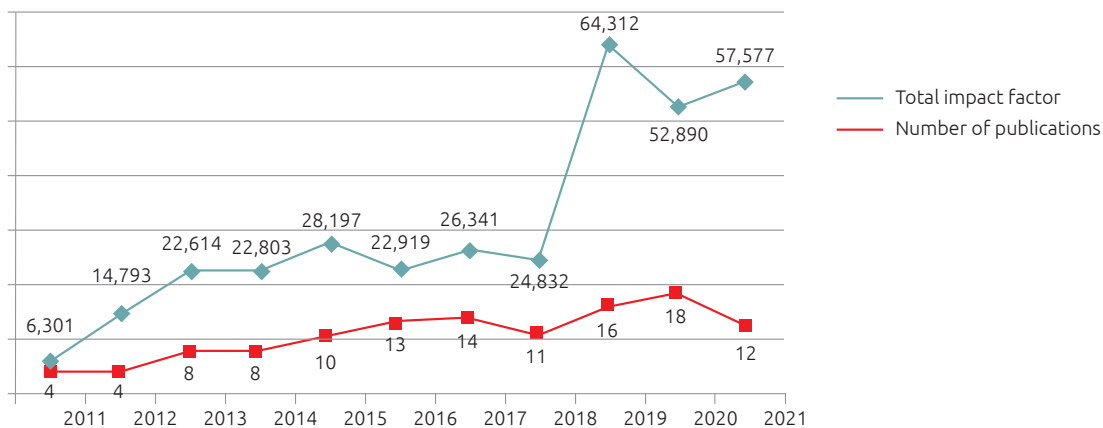
## Belgian Red Cross-Flanders and scientific research: 12 new publications

Working in an *evidence-based* way as much as possible is one of the absolute top priorities for Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. As a humanitarian organisation, we obviously want to help people, but we also want to be certain that this help has as effective an impact as possible. We can make sure of that by basing our activities on scientific research.

We share our scientific findings through news bulletins and blog, and we also publish in scientific journals. In doing so, not only do we use this knowledge for our own work, but we also make our findings available to other organisations.

In 2021, various Belgian Red Cross-Flanders teams published 12 scientific studies in a variety of scientific journals. They have generally received a very high 'impact factor' score: a figure that indicates per journal how often its articles are cited. In other words, the amount of impact a journal has.

The 12 publications in 2021 received a total impact factor of 57, the second-best score of the previous 10 years.



## Scientific advice from CEBaP to the WHO: what is the best way to help prevent drowning?

In order to develop a new guideline for the prevention of drowning, CEBaP – the scientific research branch of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders – was asked by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to develop two systematic reviews. These are literature studies that collect relevant studies in a systematic way so that they can be critically evaluated and summarised.

The request arrived via Cochrane First Aid, the first aid branch of the Cochrane organisation: an international network of experts that makes available all healthcare research results in the form of such systematic reviews. Cochrane First Aid was set up in 2019 by CEBaP with the primary aim of translating and disseminating the reviews related to first aid and prevention to a wider audience. However, CEBaP and Cochrane First Aid also develop systematic reviews themselves.

The first review developed for the WHO examined the usefulness of swimming lessons and water safety training among children (from 0 to 17 years) in the prevention of drowning, as well as the effect on the knowledge, skills and behaviour around water safety. The second review investigated the value of crèches in developing countries – aimed at children between 0 and 6 – in the scope of drowning in open water, specifically in countries where this is a regular occurrence such as Bangladesh or South Africa.

The two reviews were submitted to the WHO and then used by a [panel of experts](#) as a basis for the [new guideline](#). This guideline strongly recommends providing swimming and water safety lessons worldwide, as well as the implementation of childcare programmes in developing countries with a high occurrence of drowning.



## Evidence-based first aid for mental health problems (MHFA) for children and young people

Several years ago, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, in partnership with Zorgnet Icuuro, developed an *evidence-based* guideline for mental health first aid (MHFA) for adults, specifically adapted to the Flemish context. This was based on a comprehensive literature study by CEBaP. The relevant available scientific evidence was translated into practical recommendations within Humanitarian Services.

These recommendations have now been integrated into the '[Luister](#)' manual, the 'Mental Health First Aid' course (MHFA) and the free mobile app '[Houvast](#)', with *evidence-based* recommendations in a concise, clear and accessible form. Certain parts of the guideline have even been used for the [international first aid guidelines](#) of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), published in early 2021.

In the wake of this, development began in 2021 on a MHFA guideline specifically aimed at children and young people at the request of the Agency for Care and Health. In order to tailor this to the target group, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders initially contacted the First Aid Service. They consulted a broad group of stakeholders including, of course, children and young people. On the basis of this input we then deployed the entire CEBaP team to find the best available scientific studies on the topic. Among other things, this concerned studies into the effect of different communication styles on the mental health of young people and children, for example.

A provisional guideline was drafted on the basis of these studies and is being refined over the course of 2022 with a comprehensive panel of experts. The aim of all this is ultimately to develop the educational material and an 'MHFA for children and young people' package.



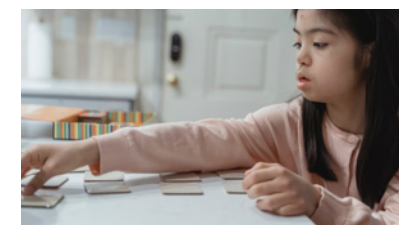
## 'Question from the volunteer': introducing volunteers to evidence-based practice

On a daily basis, CEBaP searches for scientific information on the different forms of assistance that Belgian Red Cross-Flanders offers. However, there is little independent, high-quality research available worldwide into the activities that our volunteers put their hearts and souls into. It is precisely for this reason that our organisation invests heavily in its own research and innovation.

Through the 'Question from the volunteer' project, we hoped to find out what our volunteers have always wanted to know in order to be able to 'help them to help'. Therefore, we sent out a call for the submission of a research question with the aim of responding to this question with an evidence review: a systematic summary of the best available scientific studies on the topic in question. This was a way to introduce our volunteers to the principles of evidence-based practice.

The question that was eventually selected was submitted by Youth Red Cross Ostend. It concerned the effectiveness of first aid training tailored to children and young people with mental disabilities.

The evidence review was worked on further in 2021 and the entire research process was explained on the volunteering website. Curious? Be sure to watch [this video](#).





## Local branch fundraising: a tough year

With characters from Studio 100 on the annual sticker, our volunteers were ready and waiting to organise a real sticker campaign again in 2021, especially as it was the sticker's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Of course, due to the coronavirus it was still a 'light' version – no sticker sales at junctions – but it was definitely an improvement on 2020 when the first Covid wave threw a spanner in the works and prevented volunteers from going out on the streets at all.

The sticker campaign – given a celebratory kick-off by Meneer de Burgemeester from Samson & Gert, raised 1,850,000 euros. This is just over half of a 'normal' year; in previous years the campaign raised approximately 3,300,000 euros on average. In 2020, the result was only 840,000 euros, but there was effectively no sticker campaign that year: stickers were distributed for 'free'; via letterboxes, accompanied by a letter in which the local branch asked people to make a donation of their choice online.

We note that the drop in these revenues has partly been compensated for by the Local Support Campaign, our other major fundraiser on behalf of the local volunteer work of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. This campaign raised 1,950,000 and 1,500,000 euros in 2020 and 2021 respectively, significantly more than in the last pre-coronavirus year (1,150,000 euros). Even so, this does not compensate enough to return the overall revenues to normal levels.

All of the funds from both the sticker campaign and the Local Support Campaign go straight to the 228 local branches. This enables them to continue to invest in their operations. For example, ambulances, protective clothing, materials for first aid training and so on.

In a nutshell, like the previous year, 2021 was a difficult year financially for these local branches. That's why they deserve a sincere "thank you!" for continuing to give their very best through these difficult times.





## Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has 1,404 employees

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is known for its extensive volunteer corps: around 13,000 enthusiastic volunteers give their time without pay for many of our activities. But in order to keep an organisation of such size on track, you also need highly motivated permanent staff: accountants, communication workers, IT specialists, psychologists, administrative personnel, scientific researchers and so on. Some services consist almost exclusively of paid staff, like the various reception centres Belgian Red Cross-Flanders runs on behalf of Fedasil, the Blood Service or the International Cooperation service. These are almost all full-time jobs which often demand specific professional expertise.

At the end of 2021 Belgian Red Cross-Flanders had 1,404 paid staff, roughly the same as in 2020 when there were 1,422. A slight drop therefore, while the need for employees has increased slightly. We don't have to tell you that the 'war on talent' is a challenge for almost every employee in 2021.

It is precisely for this reason that Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is also innovating in the field of HR. For example, the 'onboarding' process was developed further in 2021: the process that a new employee undergoes from the initial job application to the first months of work was fully mapped out and tailored to the individual roles in 2021. There has also been an additional focus on internal mobility; never before have so many Belgian Red Cross-Flanders employees found new roles within our organisation. And finally, we relaxed our homeworking policy even further.

Are you interested in a career with Belgian Red Cross-Flanders? Check out [rodekruis.be/jobs](https://rodekruis.be/jobs). New talent is always welcome!

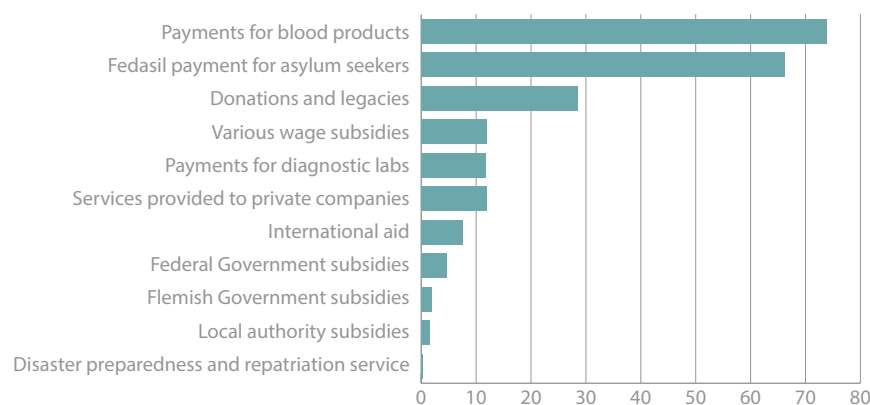




## Financial summary: Belgian Red Cross-Flanders 2021

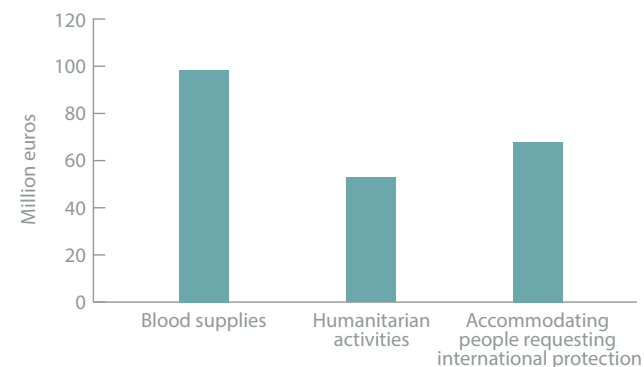
### Income

In 2021, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders had an income of 220 million euros. The bulk of this came from two sources: the payment we receive for supplying blood products to hospitals (33.6%) and reimbursement from Fedasil for accommodating people requesting international protection (30.2%). Income from donations and bequests also forms a substantial portion of the whole (13%). In other words, only a small proportion of our income is from subsidies from various governments.



### Costs

For some of the activities of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, we count on the unpaid efforts of volunteers, to whom we are of course very grateful. There is also the need for buildings, vehicles, materials, training courses and all kinds of support in order to make our work possible. Below you will find a summary of the operational costs divided into three main areas: blood supplies, humanitarian activities and accommodating people requesting international protection.





## Bequests and gifts to Belgian Red Cross-Flanders tax-free since July 2021

In 2019, the Flemish government announced that it was to reform fiscally the system of so-called 'duo bequests'. The duo bequest was a way of gaining fiscal benefits in your will in the case of a gift to a relative or acquaintance if you also gave part of the amount to charity. The charity in question would then pay the inheritance tax, creating a win/win situation: you could leave a larger net sum to your family member or acquaintance while also having an incentive to include a charitable donation in your will.

As these duo bequests were scrapped due to the fiscal reform of 1 July 2021, a lot of charities – including Belgian Red Cross-Flanders – risked losing a significant portion of their funding. For just this reason, we joined forces with Kom Op Tegen Kanker (Stand Up To Cancer) to take the initiative and hold constructive talks with the Flemish government. The aim was to examine how to ensure that charities remained an attractive beneficiary for gifts.

The zero tariff was brought up as a solution: from 1 July 2021 charities no longer have to pay inheritance or gift tax. Therefore, if someone leaves something to a charity in a will, inheritance tax is now 0% instead of the previous 8.5%. Also, charities are no longer required to pay gift tax on gifts while alive (previously 5.5%). This decree was approved by the Flemish Government on 17 March 2021.



### Responsible publisher

Philippe Vandekerckhove, Motstraat 40, 2800 Mechelen

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