



Belgian  
Red Cross  
Flanders



Annual report 2023

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# A year of many and growing activities

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders was omnipresent in 2023, a year of many and growing activities. What stands out is the increase in natural disasters and heat waves due to global warming on the one hand, and new conflicts and wars due to increasing polarisation on the other.

The polarisation within and between many countries, powerfully fuelled by social media, poses challenges to a non-polarising organisation such as the Red Cross.

The Red Cross, the largest and longest-standing humanitarian organisation, is founded on seven fundamental principles: neutrality, impartiality, independence, humanity, voluntary service, unity and universality. These principles define the way the organisation carries out its mission: preventing and alleviating human suffering, regardless of nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions.

The Red Cross invariably does not take sides, and is regularly criticised for doing so, often even from both sides. The migration issue illustrates this: on the one hand, we are portrayed as Gut-menschen because we try to offer the most humane reception possible to asylum seekers; on the other, we are accused of failing to expose, or insufficiently exposing, the shortcomings in migration policy.

We consciously undergo the criticism because helping people in need is more important than principled - sometimes justified, sometimes simplifying, often polarising - positions. Our mission is first and foremost to help people in need. We are sometimes criticized for this lack of activism, but at the same time it is what we are proud of: it is what makes us unique and explains why the organisation has had an impact for 160 years now. It is the DNA of our movement. Paradoxically as it may sound, when we receive criticism from both sides, it indicates that we are taking the right actions to pursue the Red Cross mission.

Neutrality does not equal indifference to injustice or human suffering. On the contrary! Our unique status as 'Helper to the Government', facilitates a constant dialogue with the relevant authorities where we do share our concerns, only not readily publicly.



Our views are always informed by scientific research rather than opinion or personal preference. "Logical not ideological" is therefore our slogan, to maximise impact for vulnerable people rather than scoring in the (social) media.

The combination of respect for the basic principles of the Red Cross and good factual knowledge also makes 2023 a particularly impactful year for Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, about which this report informs you.

Happy reading!



**Philippe Vandekerckhove**  
Chief executive officer, CEO  
Belgian Red Cross-Flanders

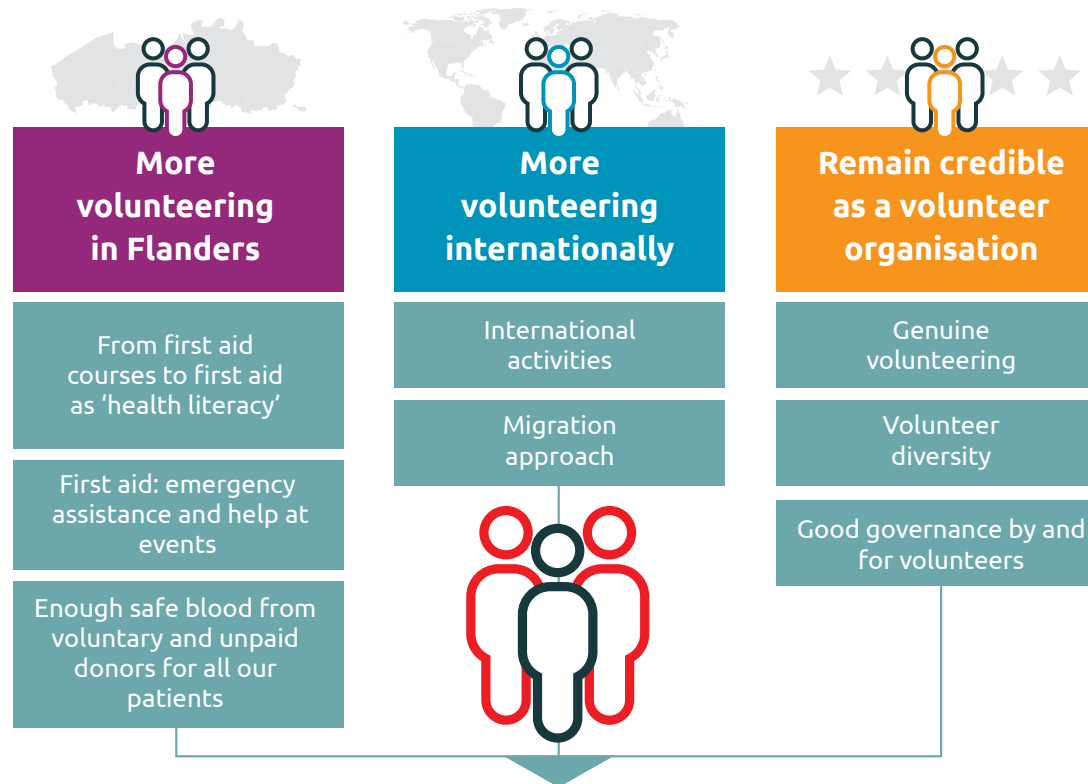


**Laurette Steenssens**  
Community Chair,  
Belgian Red Cross-Flanders

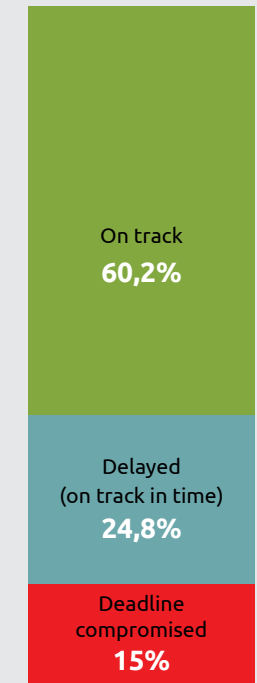
## Strategy 2025: Keep connecting. Everyone can help someone.

In 2010, it was efficiency (doing things right). In 2015, effectiveness (doing the right things). And through the years 2015 to 2020, we are firmly committed to innovation. Where do we put our focus? Today, we live in a world where inequality between people is growing. In which more and more disasters affect the weakest. In which social cohesion takes a hit. As Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, we want to provide an answer to this in our new strategy. Stand ready: no fewer than 13,000 volunteers. And 2,000 employees. Together they form the engine of our aid organisation. Reliable, flexible and robust. This is our plan for 2025.

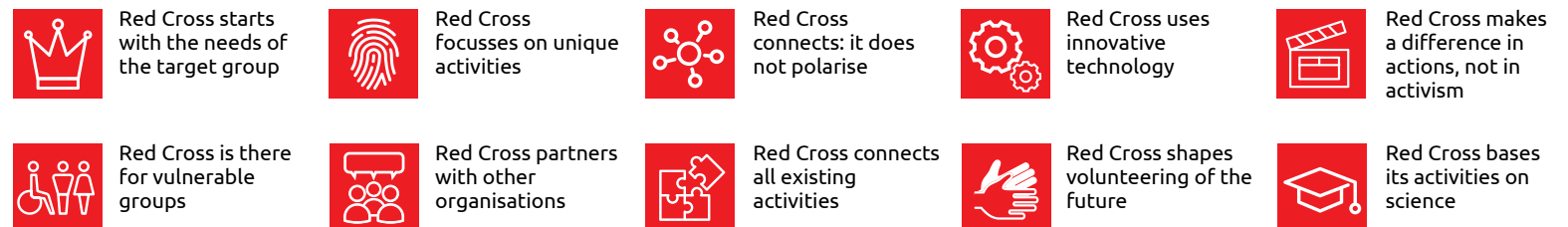
# More volunteering in society 3 focus areas



## Status projects Strategie 2025: Q4 2023



## (added) value of the activities measured against 10 pillars





# Looking back on a fantastic 2023

2023 was a banner year for many. We would like to look back at some of the achievements with you:

## Blood activities

### Providing sufficient and safe blood

- **240,000** blood donations
- **145,000** plasma donations
- **16,000** platelet donations

### Matching donor and patient for transplantation

- **375** organ donor typings for 501 organ transplants
- **722** stem cell donor typings for 313 stem cell transplants
- **2,540** new candidate stem cell donors registered and typed for global database expansion

### Matching of donor and patient for transfusion

- **44,000** red blood cell concentrates matched and administered at partner hospitals
- **15,400** platelet concentrates matched and administered at partner hospitals
- **11,000** plasma bags matched and administered at partner hospitals



The partner hospitals are UZ Leuven, UZ Brussel and UZ Gent

## Research

### Launch of teaching package for 8-10-year-olds on 'First Aid for Difficult Feelings' based on

- **155** studies and 11 systematic reviews
- **29,266** references in 3 scientific databases
- **23** additional stakeholders from academia, mental health and youth work in Flanders

### First aid blended learning - a method that research shows is effective for teaching first aid

- More than **2,000** downloads of the First Aid in Africa app
- Rollout of methods in **9** countries



# Looking back on a fantastic 2023

## Help in Flanders

### Sharing expertise in first aid \*

- **50,189** enrolments in first aid courses
- **736** enrolments in FAMP courses

### Reception of applicants for international protection

- **18,430** persons were accommodated for at least one night
- **440** additional reception places in 2023 compared to the previous year provided

### Supporting the vulnerable

- **177** adults with disabilities were able to enjoy a carefree WOW holiday
- **128** socially vulnerable children were able to enjoy a WOW camp, and were able to tell wonderful camp stories after the summer
- **27** socially vulnerable children with disabilities were able to join WOW camp+
- **75,586** interviews were conducted with persons in care facilities and 64,330 borrowers of books or other materials were counted

### Help with events

- More than **6,800** preventive relief actions
- More than **60,000** patient contacts

### Help with disasters

- More than **280** repatriated persons
- **64** medical and psychosocial interventions
- More than **10,000** patient contacts, including 105 and 112 calls



Both First Aid and First Aid for Mental health Problems

## Help worldwide

### Helping with disasters and conflicts worldwide

- **11,026,380** funds allocated to relief projects worldwide by 2023

### Sharing expertise

- **3,973** people trained in first aid in our project countries
- **418** blood collections and recruitment activities supported in our partner countries
- **4,985** people supported with financial or material assistance in our partner countries

### Tracing missing persons

- **309** search files opened
- **47** search files positively closed through Red Cross assistance
- **252** family reunification files opened

### Disseminating international humanitarian law

- **455** people trained on international humanitarian law
- Able to reach more than **1 million** Flemish people about international humanitarian law



Date of publication: April 2024





# New CEBaP publication on the scientific underpinnings of 'Luister!' and 'Houvast'



Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has already published a book '[Luister! Eerste hulp bij psychische problemen](#)' and the accompanying app '[Houvast](#)'. In it you will find tips and tools to offer help as a layperson to friends or family members who are experiencing psychological difficulties. More specifically, it includes recommendations on how to recognise the first signs, provide initial support and, if necessary, refer them to further help, professional or otherwise. The guidelines described in the book and the app are evidence-based. How this worked, you can read below.

First, researchers from CEBaP (Centre for Evidence-Based Practice) carried out a systematic literature search for interventions that are feasible for lay people in the field of communication, for various topics related to mental well-being (including depression, addiction, grief). In total, they selected 90 scientific studies, which were then summarised into 58 evidence conclusions on positive and negative effects of different forms of communication on mental well-being.

The scientific evidence was then presented to an expert panel consisting of psychiatrists, psychologists and mental health professionals by experience. For 85% of the conclusions, the evidence base from the literature was very low, so the input of these experts was very important in formulating and validating the recommendations.

In the end, 33 evidence-based recommendations and a lot of good practice points were formulated. These not only form the basis of the manual 'Luister! First aid for mental health problems' and the app 'Houvast', but also the free training in First Aid for Mental health Problems (FAMP). This training lasts a total of 12 hours and is organised by several local branches of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. ■

*Date of publication: June 2023*





# Red Cross Youth celebrates 100 years of helping and being helped by young people

**At the provincial domain De Gavers in Geraardsbergen, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo - together with chairman Jeroen Verbrugghe and CEO of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders Philippe Vandekerckhove - gave the official starting shot on 2 September 2023 for the new operating year of Red Cross Youth, which is celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary.**

The youth movement has 64 cores, with some 1,200 participants and more than 600 volunteers. One hundred years of Red Cross Youth means nothing less than one hundred years of helping hands of young people working for a caring world. "The enthusiasm of young people to help and learn to help others enjoys all respect," said Prime Minister De Croo.

Some 100 leaders aged between 16 and 35 gathered at youth hostel 't Schipken in Geraardsbergen on Saturday morning, 2 September, for their traditional Start Day.

"It is a special edition because we are also celebrating our 100th anniversary. The essence of the Start Day is bringing together volunteers from different local chapters all over Flanders. And in the process, the volunteers can attend a lot of workshops. These range from practical workshops on child makeup, for example, to more in-depth topics such as first aid

for psychological problems or dealing with cross-border behaviour. The experience our volunteers gain here, they take with them to pass on to many others in the coming days, weeks and months," said Jeroen Verbrugghe, chairman of Red Cross Youth.

In addition, on a Launch Day, the annual theme that Red Cross Youth wants to work on together with its participants from the various cores during the coming working year is also announced. This time, that reads 'Together sustainably'.

"And you may interpret that broadly: we will not only literally work on sustainability in terms of environment and climate, but also on sustainable relationships between people. The theme fits 100% with our mission: teaching children and young people to alleviate and prevent suffering that happens to people" said Jeroen Verbrugghe, chairman Red Cross Youth.

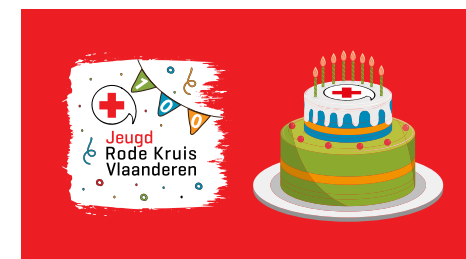
## Support and respect

The leaders of Red Cross Youth were given a helping hand at the Start Day by the CEO of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders Philippe Vandekerckhove. The official starting shot of the new operating year was given by Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, who also immediately received a quick course in CPR.

"Working together with others. That is the key to success in life. The enthusiasm of young people to help and learn to help others enjoys all respect. Today, young people often face individualism and obstacles to self-development and discovery. All youth movements in our country play an important role in this. At Red Cross Youth, this often adds a dimension of unconditional first aid - both physical and mental - and this obviously deserves our great support. It is an honour to officially open this new year of operations and to give the starting shot for another 100 years of help to and from young people," said Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

## Often unknown, but very much loved

For many people, Red Cross Youth is still often a noble unknown. However, the youth operation of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is one of the oldest active youth movements in our country. Red Cross Youth was founded on 23 February 1923. Founder and inspirer was Louis-Clément Picalausa, at the time also



head commissioner of the Boy Scouts of Belgium. In the early years, the emphasis was on forming health habits in children and young people, forming a group spirit and instilling the sense of mutual solidarity. Core values that are still important to the organisation and have evolved over the years.

"Today, our focus is mainly on four areas of action. On the one hand, it is about first aid, including initiations and courses for toddlers, children and young people, and social activities, with, for example, play activities and camps for everyone - including socially vulnerable children. On the other hand, also about the importance of blood (giving) and organising and participating in international projects, to broaden children's and young people's view of the world. We are an open youth movement where everyone is welcome. You don't have to pay membership fees with us, and the children, young people and their parents can decide for themselves which activities they participate in. This is why we talk about participants instead of members. For them, our youth centres organise numerous fun and educational activities and unforgettable camps," said Jeroen Verbrugghe, chairman of Red Cross Youth. ■

*Date of publication: September 2023*





# Belgian Red Cross-Flanders launches 'First Aid for Difficult Feelings': first aid tips for mental wellbeing on a child's scale



**Belgian Red Cross-Flanders wants to focus attention on a target group that has so far remained underexposed: children. That is why the organisation is launching three packages with first-aid tips for mental well-being tailored to children, under the heading "First Aid for Difficult Feelings".**

These are games and tips that focus mainly on the peers around the struggling child. Friends, classmates, teammates, ... They can all be an important helping hand. "The packages are specifically developed to suit children aged 8-10, because they are sometimes somewhat forgotten when it comes to mental well-being," clarified Philippe Vandekerckhove, CEO of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. "For the slightly older age category, adolescents, there are already many teaching packages. But even a 9-year-old child who is struggling a bit mentally will obviously benefit from peers who can offer support".

"To be clear: it is not so much the intention to directly help children who are having a hard time themselves. Rather to give their friends, classmates, teammates, ..., the tools to be able to support their peer who

is not feeling well. The packs are specifically tailored to the target group and are available free of charge to all. So parents, teachers, youth movement leaders or sports club coaches can all easily get started. For example, our own youth movement, Red Cross Youth, is already using it", Philippe Vandekerckhove.

Specifically, there are three interactive bundles. For parents of 8- to 10-year-olds, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders developed the 'Living Environment' package, an audio story of about 20 minutes that can be played anywhere, with an accompanying manual on how to start a conversation on the subject afterwards. For teachers, there is the package 'Education', a board game that they can play in the classroom to start a conversation. And the 'Organised leisure' package focuses on youth movements, for example. The latter is a more elaborate game, consisting of several parts, with a story as the common thread. "Ultimately, they are all built from the same content elements, which should enable children to help their peers when someone is struggling. This then involves, for example, recognising signs that someone is not feeling well and then how to deal with

that, or, for example, how to also continue to take care of yourself when helping others. And that explained in a way and in a language they understand. By the way, the focus is clearly on 'first aid', just like first aid for physical ailments. So it is definitely not about skills that are the responsibility of adults or professionals. Even more so: one of the things it covers is teaching them how to seek help from an adult," Philippe Vandekerckhove.

### Underexposed target group

The decision to now develop such tools for younger children as well is a response to the alternatives that already exist for the other age categories. "For example, for adolescents, the slightly older age category: for them there are already many teaching packages. Which in itself makes sense, as this is when teenagers' development gains momentum. But of course, this does not mean that younger children do not need it, quite the contrary. Even a 9-year-old child who is struggling a bit mentally will obviously benefit from peers who can offer support," said Philippe Vandekerckhove.

The packages were developed in cooperation with the Centre for Evidence-

Based Practice (CEBaP), the scientific cell of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. In other words, the tools were developed based on input from scientific research on psychosocial first aid tailored to children and young people, combined with input from experts in the field. ■

*Date of publication: Oktober 2023*



# Belgian Red Cross-Flanders helps 'De Westhoek'

**Belgian Red Cross-Flanders launched a large-scale solidarity action for the municipalities and citizens affected by the flooding in West Flanders. To this end, it had asked the mayors of the affected regions to indicate the material and psychosocial assistance needed by their inhabitants. Based on this analysis, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders mobilised its more than 2,000 volunteers in West Flanders to clean up homes and make them habitable again, do shopping and provide the necessary psychosocial assistance.**

'De Westhoek' was badly hit by the flooding. Red Cross-West Flanders already took action by keeping the shelter open and manning the federal emergency number. Now we went a step further and committed ourselves to helping those affected/evacuated return to their homes, giving them a hand with cleaning up and making their homes habitable again, but also, for example, with shopping. If necessary, we could also call in our psychosocial assistance team SIS (Social Intervention Service).

All mayors of the affected municipalities were informed that their citizens could call on Red Cross-West Flanders. Our 2,000 West

Flanders volunteers were on standby and, if necessary, we could also call on a pool of civilian volunteers. As soon as the first calls came in, the relief action was launched. ■

*Date of publication: November 2023*



## Successful disaster drill at Brussels Airport

"Hiking club 'the Witloofknots' from Kampenhout will exist 50 years in 2023. The board is organising a surprise trip for all members for the occasion. Destination unknown... However, joy soon turns: a helicopter collides with the plane's tail during a failed emergency landing, after which a fierce fire breaks out with all its consequences."

The very scenario for the 29 simulants from different provinces who took part in the successful disaster exercise at Zaventem airport on 14 October, together with a large delegation of volunteers from the emergency service and Social Intervention Service (SIS). ■

*Date of publication: Oktober 2023*

## Belgian Red Cross-Flanders x Rock Werchter

Werchter's meadow once again became the place where thousands of music lovers gather from mid-June. Good for hundreds of hours of help from local Red Cross branches. From psychosocial assistance to standard first aid problems, the volunteers were once again on hand to help the many festival-goers who needed their help. ■

*Date of publication: June 2023*







# Football supporter survives second heart attack at Jan Breydel stadium courtesy of our Red Cross aid workers

**When he went to a football match at the Jan Breydel stadium with his daughter Isabel (42), son-in-law Günther (48) and grandson Gilles (13), he suffered a heart attack for the second time. “This time it happened in the stands,” Johan (75) looks back.**

All his life, Johan Van Meulebroeck has been a Club Brugge supporter. “In my younger years, together with my friend Rudy Van Coellie from Loppem, I never missed a single home match,” Johan explained. “With the arrival of my children Stijn and Isabel, that changed and I started following football at home on TV. But about five years ago I picked up the thread again. Since then, I had a season ticket again and attended every home match. Exactly at the same spot in the stands, I went into cardiac arrest again.”

On 24 September 2021, what should have been a fun football outing ended completely differently. During a Club Brugge match against OHL, Johan suffered a heart attack. “As I was leaving the stands I collapsed,” explained Johan, who was resuscitated for 15 minutes. “Fortunately, attentive Red Cross staff had seen me

collapse and were immediately with me to resuscitate me with an AED device.” Had I had my heart attack a few minutes later, the emergency workers would never have noticed me and I probably would not have survived,” said Johan, who received four bridging stitches and had to undergo lengthy rehabilitation. “To prevent the stitches from my open-heart surgery from opening, I had to wear a harness for months. It took a year before I was back to my old self,” Johan said.

Completely surprised by the fact that he suffered a heart attack, Johan was not. “Both my father and my four brothers died of heart attacks. So it is in our genes. If it hadn’t happened in Club Brugge’s stadium, it would have happened somewhere else. Because to now say that I had a heart attack by getting annoyed with the referee and the opponent, I think that is also far-fetched.”

After that heart attack, Johan sold his season ticket and decided not to attend any more Club Brugge home matches. Until early November when his daughter informed him that she had four tickets for the Club Brugge Lugano European match.

“I had just visited the cardiologist and felt good and decided to go along. Together with my daughter Isabel, her husband Günther and their son Gilles, we once again sat in grandstand 324. Actually, it did something to me to be back in the place where I had suffered a heart attack. Never could I have imagined that I would have another heart attack in exactly the same place. Yet the impossible happened and I fell against my daughter on 9 November 2023 during the Club Brugge - Lugano match. Coincidentally, in the row in front of us were an ambulance driver and a nurse, who did not hesitate and immediately started to resuscitate me. “Red Cross also shot back into action and after 20 minutes of CPR, there was a pulse again, I was later told.”

A month and a half later, Johan, who now goes through life with a defibrillator, is happy to recount. “My ribs still hurt a bit from the resuscitation, but other than that, I’m completely back to normal. From now on, I will never go to the Jan Breydel Stadium, though. Home matches I will follow in café Het Eerste Huis,” said Johan, who then enjoyed a nice end-of-year period with friends and family. ■

*Date of publication: January 2024*





# Red Cross Summer

**On 14 June 2023, to coincide with World Blood Donor Day, we launched our summer campaign #rodekruiszomert.**

The summer campaign consisted of two major actions: an active call for blood donations and our traditional summer campaign for plasma donations, which started on 21 June 2023. We do this because the summer months are traditionally a difficult period for the blood supply due to 10% fewer donors coming through.

“The explanation is not far off: people are on holiday, taking trips, going to festivals and so on. Then giving blood is only somewhere at the bottom of the ‘to do’ list. Moreover, some people are also temporarily excluded from donating because of certain destinations they travel to, such as areas with a high malaria risk,” says Marketing Manager Jolien Pardon.

However, patients in hospitals continue to need blood, which is why Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is asking for an hour to be set aside in the busy summer schedule anyway.

The action was certainly successful, below some figures:

**8.058 donoren** donors registered online, and **just over 56%** of them opted for five donations.

Relative to the full number of active plasma donors between 1 June 2022 and 31 May 2023, **about 21%** participated in the action. ■

*Date of publication: June 2023*

## New donor centre in Beringen

The new donor centre in Beringen opened in April 2023. After Genk, this is the second centre in Limburg. We especially want to attract new plasma donors with this.

In the new donor centre in Beringen, people can donate both blood and plasma. And it is important that this will happen, said community chairman Laurette Steenssens: “There is a worldwide need for plasma, and in order to become completely self-sufficient, we need to increase our capacity.” The intention is therefore to attract new plasma donors in Beringen. “It is important to make the donor potential as wide as possible. People can give often, but it is safer to aim for more people, who give even a tad less.” The location of the new donor centre was not chosen by chance. “We mainly look in which region there is a large donor potential, so where we can find people who are willing and can give plasma,” Steenssens said. “We also look a bit at local Red Cross branches where blood collections are already being organised. Those people can also help motivate donors.” ■

*Date of publication: April 2023*





## Scientific research

# Breakthrough TReC published in renowned journal JTH

**The 'platelet biology' team within the Transfusion Research Centre (TReC) in Ghent conducts fundamental research on platelet biology. Its efforts in recent years have now led to a breakthrough published in Journal of Thrombosis & Haemostasis, a renowned journal in the field of blood and coagulation.**

### Platelets and receptors

Platelets have 'barbs' that serve to stick properly when we injure ourselves and threaten to lose blood. In jargon, we call these barbs receptors. The main receptors on platelets are called GPIIb/IIIa. These receptors are slowly but systematically cut off during circulation in the blood. They are also cut off during storage of platelets for transfusion. As a result, there should be fewer and fewer barbs on old and preserved platelets. TReC is investigating how the phenomenon of 'clipping' works on a biochemical level and what it should then serve in relation to clotting and transfusion. Because even though this process of 'cutting off' has been known for decades, nobody knows why it takes place in our body or in a blood bag.

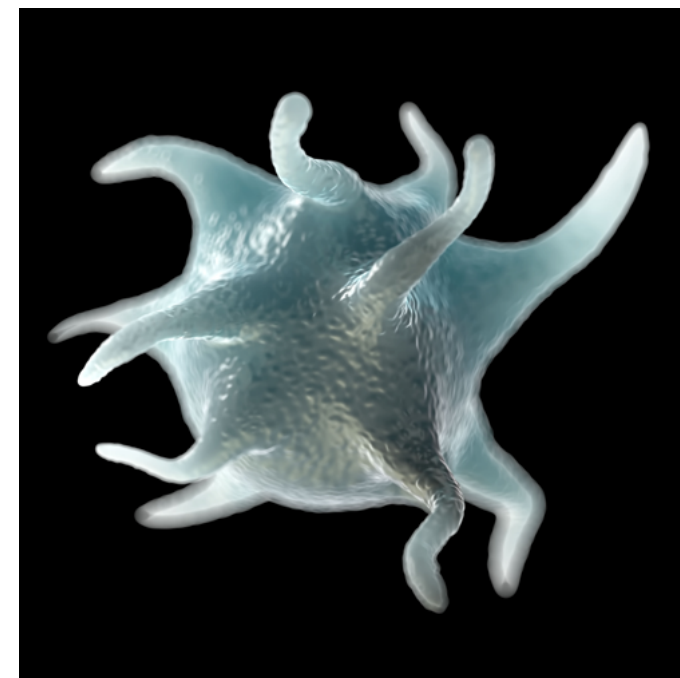
TReC's research results now show conclusively that the GPIIb/IIIa receptors being cut off are not on the surface of platelets at all, but inside the cell. This is good news for the ageing platelets in a blood bag, which thus retain their barbs (at least on the outside) to stick to injuries after transfusion. This discovery is innovative within the field of research and raises new questions about the role of those

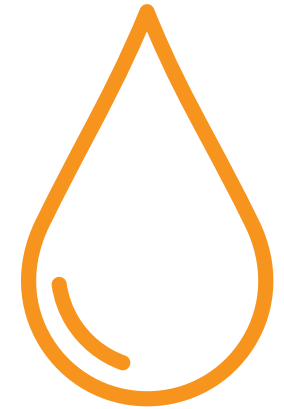
internal GPIIb/IIIa receptors that do get clipped.

So the research is not stopping there. Scientific associate at TReC, Caitlin Debaene, will continue working on the topic. She will investigate whether there is a role for GPIIb/IIIa clipping in the immune system.

You can read the full article here: [GPIIb/IIIa shedding in platelets is controlled by strict intracellular containment of both enzyme and substrate - Journal of Thrombosis and Haemostasis \(jthjournal.org\)](https://jthjournal.org/). ■

*Date of publication: April 2023*





## Scientific research

# Belgian Red Cross-Flanders develops nasal spray with plasma against spread of viruses

**A new study by Belgian Red Cross-Flanders was published in the scientific journal eBioMedicine. This is a study using plasma-based nasal drops to counteract an airborne viral infection. In this study, the tests were done with - what would you expect - coronavirus.**

Specifically, so-called “convalescent plasma” was administered. This is plasma from a donor who has recently been infected. This is because his plasma contains the antibodies against the virus in question, which give the nasal drops their protective effect. “This technique is a fast and efficient way to arm ourselves against the next pandemic,” says Hendrik Feys, Chief Investigator at the Transfusion Research Centre (TRC) of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. “After all, as soon as the first infected patients are cured, you can already start using their convalescent plasma.” The plasma is already proving very effective in tests on hamsters. The researchers are now taking the necessary steps to start tests on humans, in the form of a nasal spray. At first glance, it might be a bit of an odd picture: a researcher dripping some plasma into a hamster’s nose with a small pipette, only

to put another hamster with COVID-19 next to it. But exactly that research is now leading to promising results. Because it turns out: that first hamster is very well protected from infection thanks to the so-called “convalescent plasma” in its nose.

“When someone goes through an infection, that person develops antibodies. Those antibodies are located in the liquid component of our blood: plasma. Convalescent plasma is therefore the blood plasma of a donor who has recently had an infection of a well-defined virus. This research was specifically about COVID-19 convalescent plasma, which now shows that it offers very good protection against infection with the virus when you administer the plasma to an uninfected individual.” Hendrik Feys

Research into the protective effect of convalescent plasma is not new. Scientists have been trying to use it to arm ourselves against all kinds of viruses for decades. But they almost always looked at transfusion with plasma, i.e. direct administration into the bloodstream, in patients who were already ill.

“The results of all those studies - as recently with the transfusion of COVID-19 convalescent plasma - were very mixed. This made us wonder: wouldn’t it work better if you administer this plasma preventively, at the place where the virus tries to enter our body? So for viruses that spread largely through the air, such as coronavirus, that is in the nose. That now appears to be a good strategy, because the results of our tests with the nasal drops in hamsters are enormously promising,” Hendrik Feys told us.

## Protection against the next pandemic

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is already taking the necessary steps to soon be able to test on humans too, with a nasal spray based on convalescent plasma. If that research can produce the same good results, this new technique will be a very strong weapon against the next pandemic, according to the researchers.

“Of course, let us hope that we will be spared from another pandemic for a while yet. But if it does happen, this nasal spray could be a very strong weapon to protect us. Don’t get me wrong: you may not see this as an alternative to a vaccine. But

developing a vaccine for a new virus takes a long time. Whereas with this convalescent plasma, we can move much faster, bridging that development time. Because as soon as the first infected patients are cured, you can already start using their plasma. In this way, we can slow down the rapid spread of the new virus right from the first phase,” says Hendrik Feys

The use of a nasal spray with convalescent plasma could, incidentally, be rolled out all over the world in an accessible way. After all, blood - and thus plasma - is collected all over the world. ■

*Date of publication: May 2023*





## Wetenschappelijk onderzoek

# How often can you donate plasma as a donor: a randomised study in collaboration with UCLouvain

**With this study, in collaboration with UCLouvain, we investigated possible side effects in people who donate plasma more frequently. The higher goal is to be able to collect more plasma in the future without risk to the health of the donor. And that to be able to help patients better and faster.**

Worldwide, the need for drugs (such as immunoglobulins) prepared from human plasma is growing. This is because there are an increasing number of inflammatory, neurological, haematological and immunological disorders that can be effectively treated with these drugs.

Today, 70% of the plasma needed for these drugs is collected in the United States of America. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a 20% drop in plasma donations in the United States. Globally, this created a shortage of drugs manufactured from human plasma. It thus once again became clear that it is important for Belgium and Europe to collect more plasma and thus become more self-sufficient, in order to ensure that patients in Belgium and Europe continue to have access to these life-saving drugs.

This goal can be achieved either by increasing the frequency of donation (in the United States, donors are allowed to donate twice a week) or by further expanding the donor base.

To explore how we can sustainably grow plasma in a safe manner for our donors, we conducted a randomised controlled scientific study with UCLouvain from May 2022 to December 2022 with the aim of investigating the physiological, biochemical and unwanted side effects associated with different donation frequencies.

A total of 63 voluntary donors participated in the study.

They were randomly divided into four groups:

- **Very high frequency group VHF:** two plasma donations per week (n:16)
- **High frequency group HF:** three plasma donations per month (n:16)
- **Low frequency group LF:** one plasma donation per month (n:16)
- **Placebo group (sensation of donation):** one notional plasma donation per month (n:15)

In addition to plasma donation, participants were expected at UCLouvain three times for physical testing and blood sampling: once before the start of the study, once midway through the study and once in the week after the end of the study.

The duration of the study for one participant was three months.

Physiological parameters, which were tested by cycling tests and strength tests, were not affected by donating plasma. Body composition (bone density and % body fat) also did not change under the influence of plasma donation. Biochemically, it was found on blood samples that immunoglobulins decreased significantly in the VHF group. A small effect on haemoglobin and ferritin was also observed in this study group. A small decrease in immunoglobulins was noticeable in the HF and LF groups. Few adverse side effects were observed throughout the study.

To consult the overall results, please refer to the website: [medrxiv \(the preprint server for health science\)](#).

Those findings affirm that the plasma donation frequencies used by Belgian blood establishments have no negative effect on the measured biochemical and physiological parameters. Since increasing the donation frequency results in biochemical changes, it seems prudent to increase the volume of plasma by betting on a larger donor base that can maintain the donation frequency. ■

*Date of publication: September 2023*



# Historic edition of Donordate in 2023

**2023 also saw the start of our Donordate campaign, during the campaign period, from 2 October 2023 to 30 December 2023, as many as 3,149 donordates were registered. This means that at least 3,149 people donated plasma for the first time. Thanks in part to this crazy number, we managed to widen the active donor base of plasma donors by 3.2% in 2023 compared to 2022. This broadening is necessary to meet the growing need for plasma.**



Here are some records that were broken last year:

In the week of 25 December 2023, for the second week in a row, we recorded the highest number of plasma donations from new donors in a week ever (474 plasma donations).

In December 2023, we recorded the second highest number of plasma donations from new donors in a month ever (1,616 plasma donations).

During the campaign period, we recorded a total of 3,764 more plasma donors and 3,651 more plasma donations compared to the same period last year. ■

*Date of publication: January 2024*

## 2,000<sup>th</sup> donordate: mother and daughter honoured in Beringen

**Belgian Red Cross-Flanders' 2,000th donor date took place at the donor centre in Beringen on 6 December 2023.**

Daughter Greet Loenders from Lommel took her mum Lieve Bergmans with her that day to donate plasma at the donor centre in Beringen. This makes them the 2,000th "couple" to go on a donor date in Flanders.

Limburgers appear to be donating plasma en masse, according to the Red Cross. The donor centre in Beringen has only been open since 7 April 2023 and yet 3,200 plasma donations have already taken place. ■

*Date of publication: December 2023*







# Cooperation between Belgian Red Cross-Flanders and Flemish government: 60 or so generators provide power for life-saving infrastructure in Ukraine

**The ongoing conflict in Ukraine continues to have a major impact on ordinary citizens. Especially during the winter months, the situation is very precarious. In particular, the damaged energy infrastructure in the country causes a severe lack of mobile energy sources such as generators.**

“Even healthcare facilities and schools no longer have a reliable, constant power supply. Sometimes, even in large parts of the country, there is no electricity at all. That is why the Flemish government gave 2 million euros worth of additional appliances and materials to Belgian Red Cross-Flanders in 2023, to help meet these needs,” said Jan Jambon, Flemish minister-president

## Flemish generators provide potable water and electricity

The first Flemish generator is already operational, at the Dubnivska water supply company in Loetsk. There, the unit contributes to the crucial energy supply for processing and distributing potable water. In addition, a second generator is also being installed in the same region at the Lutsk City Clinical Hospital.

“In other words, the first generator ensures that almost 127,000 residents can continue to get potable water, which is more than half of the population of Loetsk. And the second unit provides power for a hospital with a capacity of some 700 beds, caring for about 40,000 patients a year. So the generators will be used for the most crucial basic services, which unfortunately cannot rely on a reliable supply of energy from the power grid at the moment,” said Philippe Vandekerckhove, CEO of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders

## Support package of 2 million euros

The two devices were part of an additional support package from the Flemish government. It involves 2 million euros that Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is deploying for the Ukrainian Red Cross’ so-called “winterisation” programme. This is an emergency relief plan through which the local population receives extra humanitarian support during the harsh winter months to meet their basic needs.

“We mainly committed those weeks to generators: there will be about 60 in total, of which 16 have already arrived

in Ukraine in the meantime. Then we also looked at other emergency relief items for the remaining amount. Think for instance of gas burners, torches or powerbanks. Furthermore, other humanitarian needs for ‘non-food’ items remain high, such as hygiene kits, blankets and even ambulances. We are gradually putting this logistical puzzle together with the Ukrainian Red Cross,” said Philippe

Vandekerckhove, CEO of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. ■

*Date of publication: January 2023*





## One year of conflict in Ukraine: 8 international artists call for continued support for victims



What do Ed Sheeran, Rudimental, Editors, Twenty One Pilots, George Ezra, Years & Years, Tame Impala and Roméo Elvis have in common? All eight, one by one, did the shooting of their music video in Ukraine. Given the conflict, that wouldn't be possible today. That is why the artists, in cooperation with Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, decided to remove all this footage from their videos. Because that is the harsh reality: people and infrastructure are still at risk of disappearing in the conflict zone too. The result? "Video unavailable".

In this way, the artists and Belgian Red Cross-Flanders wanted to call on everyone to continue supporting the victims of the conflict. Because after 1 year, the more than **17 million victims still need our support. Some 8 million Ukrainians have fled the country and 6.5 million civilians are fleeing domestically.** Moreover, a huge number of buildings have been damaged or destroyed and there is a severe shortage of basic resources such as water and energy. Belgium currently hosts 65,000 Ukrainian refugees including 1 in 3 children. ■

*Date of publication: February 2023*

## Emergency relief for earthquakes in Turkey and Syria

Heavy earthquakes hit parts of Turkey and Syria on Monday 6 February 2023. The material damage was enormous and the human toll was also high. This is why Belgian Red Cross-Flanders immediately released 200,000 euros from its emergency relief fund for humanitarian aid on the ground.

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders provided direct financial support to the Turkish Red Crescent and the Danish Red Cross, which is helping the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. They helped 3.75 million affected residents in Turkey and Syria, day and night.

### Review one month after earthquakes Turkey & Syria

6 March 2023 was exactly one month since earthquakes hit large parts of Turkey and Syria. The material damage is huge and the human toll is high:

More than  
**50,000** killed and  
**110,425** injured

**509,347** people  
lost their housing

**12,718** buildings and  
**248** schools destroyed

### Red Cross achievements after one month in the affected area

**85 million**  
food parcels distributed

**107,580** blankets  
provided

**54,070**  
tents for  
shelter

**370** mobile  
kitchens

**140,000** cash vouchers  
to affected households for  
basic services

**30,000** hygiene products  
for victims

*Date of publication: February 2023*





## Belgian Red Cross-Flanders donates 100,000 euros for humanitarian aid after storm Freddy

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders released 100,000 euros from its emergency relief fund for humanitarian support following storm Freddy in south-east Africa. Indeed, after three weeks of severe weather, the situation on the ground was worrying: nearly 600 people had already been killed, some 400,000 displaced and a huge amount of material damage. In addition, some 100,000 hectares of farmland had been affected, threatening food shortages.

### Storm on top of cholera outbreak

The effects of storm Freddy were greatest in Malawi - where the president had already declared a state of emergency in the 10 most affected districts - but Mozambique also suffered extensive human and material damage. In an earlier phase, storm Freddy also hit Madagascar.

Moreover, the situation in Malawi and Mozambique was extra precarious because this crisis came on top of two other crises: there had already been heavy flooding in

southern Mozambique in early February, and there was a major cholera outbreak, which particularly affected Malawi. This new heavy rainfall by storm Freddy, resulting in new flooding, ensured that the cholera outbreak continued to spread.

“So obviously there was a great need for humanitarian aid. That is why we put 100,000 euros from the emergency relief fund to support the victims. Initially, we focused this financial support on Malawi, because the need was highest there. With this 100,000 euros, we are investing in shelter and things to combat the cholera outbreak. Think for example of tents and tarpaulins for the displaced or hygienic products - such as chlorine tablets for water purification and soap - to prevent cholera infections,” says Sofie De Jaeger, Manager International Cooperation - Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. ■

*Date of publication: March 2023*

## Flooding in Libya due to passage of Hurricane Daniel

**In the early hours of Sunday 10 September, Libya was hit by Hurricane Daniel. The extreme rainfall led to the breaking of two dams, resulting in catastrophic flooding in the east of the country.**

The town of Derna, where many residential houses along the river banks were washed away, was declared a disaster area. As the scale of the disaster became clear, the Libyan Red Crescent's emergency response department reported that an estimated 20,000 people had been displaced and more than 9,800 were missing. According to authorities in eastern Libya, at least 2,800 people were dead and thousands injured after a few days.

The Libyan Red Crescent is working with local and other government agencies to provide assistance to those affected. A central emergency department has been set up, and emergency and rescue teams have been deployed to provide urgent assistance, provide basic supplies and shelter to those affected, and provide

necessary medical care to the injured. ■

*Date of publication: September 2023*





## Belgian Red Cross-Flanders releases 150,000 euros for life-saving aid in Sudan

**On 20 June 2023, we released €150,000 from the emergency relief fund for life-saving humanitarian support in Sudan. The money was deployed through the International Red Cross, which supports the Sudanese Red Crescent in their relief operations. The priorities were medical support and supplies on the one hand, and distribution of potable water and food on the other.**

After two months of violence in Sudan, there was no immediate prospect of improvement. Consequently, the impact on the civilian population was significant. At that time, there had already been 1,000 civilian casualties and some 2 million people on the run.

“The situation on the ground is obviously not hopeful, especially in Khartoum and the Darfur region: humanitarian needs there are enormous. Many hospitals have been destroyed and there is a lot of damage to energy and water supply infrastructure, so there is hardly any clean water. Consequently, the risk of an outbreak of diseases such as cholera is also high. In Khartoum, civilians often have to hide - or risk their lives - for long periods to get food, water and medicine. Moreover, food scarcity was already a problem in Sudan even before the outbreak of the conflict, so it is only getting worse now,” said Philippe Vandekerckhove, CEO Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.



The local population thus lacked access to essential basic supplies and services. Because of these ongoing humanitarian needs, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders decided to mobilise its emergency relief fund to provide additional assistance.

“We are releasing 20 June 2023 150,000 euros from the emergency relief fund, which we are deploying through the International Red Cross. They support the relief operations of the Sudan Red Crescent, that’s the name of the Red Cross there. Currently, that is really about life-saving things, such as medical support and supplies, and distributing potable water and food” said Philippe Vandekerckhove. ■

*Date of publication: June 2023*

## Belgian Red Cross-Flanders releases 200,000 euros for humanitarian aid after earthquake in Morocco

**Belgian Red Cross-Flanders released 200,000 euros from its emergency relief fund for humanitarian aid after the earthquake in Morocco. These funds were immediately deployed in support of the Moroccan Red Crescent. They used the funds to provide the most acute assistance to those affected locally.**

The 6.8-magnitude earthquake near Marrakesh during the night of Friday 8 September to Saturday 9 September has already killed more than 1,000 people and injured more than 1,200. The material damage is enormous. The Flemish, Walloon, Brussels and federal governments together already released 5,880,000 euros to help the earthquake victims. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders added another 200,000 euros to provide first aid.

“Our thoughts go first and foremost to the families of the earthquake victims. Our priority is to quickly administer the necessary care to the survivors. This is not easy in the mountainous area. The funds we are releasing serve to support the Moroccan Red Crescent teams, who are on the ground coordinating all aid with the local authorities, as quickly as possible in the rescue operation and search for deceased under the rubble,” said Sofie De Jaeger, Manager International Cooperation of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. ■

*Date of publication: September 2023*



# Belgian Red Cross-Flanders provides 100,000 euros for humanitarian aid in Israel and the Occupied Territories

**Belgian Red Cross-Flanders donated 100,000 euros from its emergency relief fund on 10 October for humanitarian support to the violence in Israel and the Occupied Territories. The money was used to assist the most vulnerable by, among other things, supporting hospitals on the ground.**

The situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories is worrying, with more than 1,200 dead and thousands injured as of October 2023. Essential infrastructures such as water and energy supplies were under pressure. Food and medicine were scarce. Moreover, many roads were damaged or inaccessible, making access for ambulances difficult. That is why Belgian Red Cross-Flanders immediately released 100,000 euros from the emergency relief fund.

“The money will be deployed through the International Red Cross, which is active on the ground in all regions. They are now focusing on the most urgent needs of the most vulnerable victims. Initially, this is mainly about medical assistance. For instance, they provide beds and stretchers - and offer general support to the hospitals. Moreover, the need for that humanitarian

aid will only increase in the coming days, weeks and months. After all, many signs point to the conflict escalating even further,” said Sofie De Jaeger, Manager International Cooperation of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders called on the warring parties, one month after the escalation of the conflict in the Middle East, to respect international humanitarian law and allow sufficient humanitarian aid. The humanitarian toll is high and the Red Cross movement is deploying all resources to help the affected population. But the organisation says it should be able to do so more smoothly. “Every day some 300 people die, 150 of whom are children. The situation in the region is getting worse every day. The humanitarian aid needed is unprecedented,” said Sofie De Jaeger, International Cooperation Manager of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.

The intense armed conflict in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories has now been going on for one month. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is urging the warring parties to speed up and improve humanitarian aid for victims on the ground.



“People in Gaza are experiencing the worst consequences of the current conflict. In addition to the many thousands of victims, nearly three quarters of the entire population is now displaced and people do not have safe access to food, water or other essential supplies. Reports and testimonies from civilians paint a bleak picture of growing despair. Families are unable to provide their children with sufficient daily

meals,” said Sofie De Jaeger, International Cooperation Manager of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. ■

*Date of publication: Oktober 2023*





## In the picture

# Seven questions about staying neutral during a war

1.

**Sometimes it is abundantly clear that an army or other armed group is doing very nasty things. So why doesn't the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement take sides?**

The Movement always remains neutral during a conflict. We do so because, first and foremost, we want to help people. We help everyone who needs help, it doesn't matter to us what your nationality, religion or political affiliation is. So we are impartial.

We can only help people during a war if we are not attacked ourselves. That is why we have never taken sides since our inception. Warring factions around the world know this, and that is why they let us in to provide assistance. They would not do so if they think we are supporting their enemy.

Besides, we remain neutral because we want to remain in dialogue with all warring parties. Chances are that a country or group will not want to talk to us if we speak out against them.

2.

**If people are attacking each other with bombs and guns, then engaging in talks no longer makes any difference at all, right?**

Especially when there is a lot of violence, it is hugely important that we talk to all concerned. We do this at a high diplomatic level, but also with local authorities, and everything in between. In such a conversation, we try to achieve three things: We remind parties of their obligations to abide by humanitarian law of war.

That is a set of rules that apply during a conflict. The purpose of those rules is to prevent as much suffering as possible. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is the protector of humanitarian law of war and thus raises awareness of rules of war worldwide. We call on parties to protect civilians. We want parties to give us safe access to the conflict zone so that we can help people.

3.

**It remains strange: the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is a protector of humanitarian law of war, but when a party breaks the rules, you think nothing of it?**

We think everyone should abide by humanitarian law of war. But a court or criminal court judges whether a party has broken the rules, not the Movement. Determining whether war crimes have been committed requires careful investigation.

This can sometimes take years. This investigation is done by specialists. That is not our role. However, the Movement is there to help people as soon as possible. We can do that by staying in dialogue. Above all, we try to convince parties not to make any more mistakes. That way, we can prevent further suffering.

4.

**What can an aid organisation still do when entire cities are being bombed?**

Especially when there is heavy fighting in an area, help from a neutral organisation can save lives. What we do, for example:

- We provide medical aid to victims of the violence.
- We bring food and water into an area.
- We help people get out of an area.
- We investigate whether people are treated humanely, for example by visiting prisoners of war.
- We shelter people who have fled from an area.

We can only provide this help if all warring parties allow us to do so. That is why it is so important that we remain neutral.

## More volunteering internationally

### International activities



5.

**So why do I hear that you are not present in some conflict zones? Isn't it your responsibility to help people in need?**

The party in control of an area must ensure that civilians are safe there and that they have enough food. Such a party can give the Movement access to the area, for instance to distribute food and drink. But it is still that party's responsibility to ensure that the population has the means to survive.

6.

**Is it true, then, that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement helps everyone? Even people who are fighting?**

We help anyone who needs help during a conflict, no matter what the cause. Furthermore, it is good to know that people are by no means always left behind to fight. For example, we see in Ukraine and in Armenia/Azerbaijan that many elderly and vulnerable people have also been left behind in besieged areas, for example because they could not get away or because they had no place to go.

7.

**Sometimes you hear about people being forced to evacuate, is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement helping with that?**

No. We help evacuate, but only if people want to do so themselves. This applies to all emergencies. So if the ground floor of your grandmother's house floods and your grandmother refuses to leave, we will not force her to leave either.

For that matter, warring parties are also not allowed to evacuate people against their will, but in practice that can happen. Then when people arrive in another country and they need help there, we are there to give help. Because we are always there when people need help, no matter where or why. ■

*Date of publication: Oktober 2023*





## More refugees also means more lost relatives: Belgian Red Cross-Flanders already helped 150 people in their search this year

**During the first six months of 2023, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders already helped 152 people - mostly refugees - in their search for lost relatives. In fact, the number of cases per year almost doubled during this period, a logical consequence of the rising number of refugees. To continue helping all these people, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders plans to open a satellite office for their “Restoring Family Links” department within a few weeks. “The exact location is not fixed yet, but in any case it will be somewhere in the region between Bruges and Ghent. So we are already looking for West and East Flanders volunteers who want to commit at least six hours a week, to help track down missing persons,” clarified Marijke Peys, Head of Restoring Family Links at Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.**

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has been contributing to the “Restoring Family Links” project of the International Red Cross Movement for more than 85 years. Through this service, the Red Cross offers free help to people - mainly refugees - around the world whose relatives have gone missing. Thus, during the first six months of this

year, the Flemish branch already helped 152 people in their search. This is the highest number since 2017.

“By comparison, in 2018 we had 174 ‘cases’ out of a whole year. Since then, that number has increased every year, so it has almost doubled in the meantime. This is a logical consequence of the rising number of people fleeing. The United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, has calculated that some 110 million people worldwide have currently had to leave their homes due to wars, conflicts, persecution or violence. That is about 20 million more than a year earlier and thus the highest number ever,” said Marijke Peys, Head of Restoring Family Links at Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.

Among others, the conflicts in Ukraine, Sudan and Syria, as well as the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, have caused these figures to rise so sharply in recent years. At the Restoring Family Links department of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, they therefore see many Afghans asking for help in searching for their missing relatives.

“About half of our clients are Afghans. In addition, many Somalis, Eritreans and



Syrians also ask for help. And last year, not illogically, Ukraine was also one of the most frequent countries of origin. Because our clients are looking for one or more family members who could, in principle, be anywhere, it is often searching for a needle in a haystack. But the International Red Cross Movement - so all Restoring Family Links departments combined - finds one missing person about every hour,” Marijke

Peys, Head of Restoring Family Links at Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. ■

*Date of publication: July 2023*





## Making dream catchers together. Visit by State Secretary Nicole de Moor at the reception centre for applicants for international protection in Beveren

**Playing together and having fun is of all cultures. CM's youth service Kazou, with the support of supervisors at the Red Cross reception centre in Beveren, set out to give the children and young people a memorable summer. In the process, they received a visit from State Secretary for Asylum and Migration, Ms Nicole de Moor, on 1 August 2023. She briefly joined them as a monitor and had high praise for the initiative. She was also given a tour of the centre by one of the residents.**

Children and young people in asylum centres do not always have the opportunity to go on holiday. That is why Kazou brought holidays to the youngsters in a dozen asylum centres in Flanders. The monitors stayed in the reception centre so they got to know the youngsters well and they could plan activities together throughout the day.

"A two-month summer holiday can be very long if children spend this time only in the environment of the reception centre," Ms De Moor noted. "However, it is also a perfect way to learn Dutch while playing. Furthermore, this is also the first contact with youth work for all those children. Hopefully, after all those camps, there will be enough jitters to join a regular



youth movement afterwards. It promotes integration."

The reception centre in Beveren is located in the former offices of the tax authorities and accommodates some 140 residents, about 30 of whom are children. "There is good coexistence here, but of course it is a lot busier when the children are continuously present all summer," said centre manager Anse De Bock. "We do try to provide some distractions ourselves and also organise activities and day trips, but Kazou's help is more than welcome."

And on a rainy day, there was tinkering with the Secretary of State and very appropriately making a 'dream catcher'. ■

*Date of publication: August 2023*

## Over 18,000 people received shelter from Belgian Red Cross-Flanders in our country in 2023

**Throughout 2023, 18,430 people received shelter for at least one night in a centre operated by Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. The organisation's figures show this. These were applicants for international protection and also Ukrainian refugees.**

15,697 applicants for international protection were accommodated for at least one night in a Belgian Red Cross-Flanders centre, compared to 2,733 Ukrainian refugees. This is a sharp drop compared to 2022, when 10,453 Ukrainians were hosted by Belgian Red Cross-Flanders for at least one night.

As of 31 December 2023, Belgian Red Cross-Flanders had 23 reception centres in Flanders and Brussels. Two of these are for Ukrainian refugees: the emergency village in Mechelen and transit centre Ariane in Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe, where applicants for international protection have also been received since autumn 2022.

Four of the reception centres took youth accommodation under their wing to create additional reception places for families with children as part of Fedasil's winter plan. The centres in question are Alsemberg, Heusden-Zolder, Leopoldsburg and Sint-Niklaas. ■

*Date of publication: January 2024*





# Workshops ‘Restoring Family Links in Emergencies’ in Rwanda

**Belgian Red Cross-Flanders together with the Rwandan Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) facilitated a series of workshops on Restoring Family Links in Emergencies (RFLiE) during August and September 2023. Due to emergencies in the Congo-Rwanda border region, the workshops aimed to prepare Rwandan RFL volunteers for a sudden influx of refugees with potential RFL needs.**

## Emergencies

A number of recent emergencies in Rwanda made RFL volunteers benefit from an RFLiE workshop. For example, the Nyiragongo volcano erupted without warning on the morning of 22 May 2021. On the south side of the volcano, lava flowed into nearby Congolese (DRC) villages and into the city of Goma. The region experienced severe earthquakes, houses collapsed and many sanitation facilities stopped working. People could not return to their homes and this caused an influx of refugees to neighbouring Rwanda as the Nyiragongo volcano and its mountainous landscape presented a natural obstacle.

Another emergency was the flooding of the Sebeya River in May 2023. Heavy rains then caused the Sebeya River, located

in Rwanda near the Congolese border (DRC), to burst its banks resulting in heavy floods and landslides. Again, there were fatalities and people had to leave their homes. Furthermore, the renewed violence in the Kivu region also caused refugee flows of Congolese and Rwandans in the Congolese-Rwandan border area. The Red Cross repeatedly called for respect for international humanitarian law.

The above events have in common that they create RFL nodes for those affected. For example, people flee, phones may be lost or inoperative, resulting in loss of contact between family members.

## Workshop contents

The RFLiE workshops aim to prepare Rwandan RFL volunteers for a sudden influx of displaced persons or refugees into Rwanda. The workshops were held both at the Rwandan Red Cross headquarters in Kigali and in the surrounding provinces. Through theoretical presentations and practical exercises, skills and abilities were imparted in relation to the following Rwandan Red Cross RFL activities:

- Registration and reunification of unaccompanied and separated children;
- Provision of calling and charging facilities;
- Distribution of Red Cross messages.

Furthermore, knowledge on a number of other RFL aspects was refreshed with real-life examples, including:

- Referral to relevant actors for non-RFL needs;
- The rules regarding sensitive information and data protection;
- The principles of safe access to the field of work. ■

*Date of publication: August 2023*



## Reception of repatriated Belgians from the Gaza Strip

**On Saturday, 4 November, volunteers and colleagues from the Intervention Service assisted the FPS Foreign Affairs in supporting the repatriation of Belgians from the Gaza Strip. As many as 20 Belgians, after a long journey from the Gaza Strip via Cairo and Eindhoven, arrived in Brussels.**

Thanks to cooperation with the FPS Foreign Affairs, we were able to provide a huge amount of support, both during their short-term reception in Brussels and afterwards.

A team of SIS'ers (Social Intervention Service) from the Belgian Red Cross was already ready to receive them with open arms. Our Logistics Unit and Auxiliary Service volunteers were ready to use vans to bring those who had no transport safely home across Flanders. During the intervention, all the needs and requirements of the repatriated Belgians were carefully recorded via BITS so that our aftercare partners could continue to respond to them.

Team Intervention took on behind-the-scenes preparation and coordination so that our volunteers were free to do

what they are very good at: providing help to those in need!

The volunteers' efforts were tremendous and the impact of this mission was significant. The stories heard from the returnees were sometimes heartbreaking. Thanks to the warmth and commitment of our lead volunteers, the necessary aftercare is going to be offered to our volunteers. SIS volunteers are also deployed to provide individual counselling to our deployed volunteers.

In short, a fantastic team of volunteers went straight to work to provide the best possible care to the repatriated Belgians. Their efforts are invaluable and that deserves a big compliment! ■

*Date of publication: November 2023*

## Ter Dennen: a shelter with history

**The Ter Dennen shelter in Lanaken will have thirty candles on its birthday cake in September 2023.**

It is a moment to reflect on the history of this place.

The care centre is located in a green, wooded area of Lanaken, hence the name Ter Dennen. The building was initially erected there as a preventorium for children with tuberculosis. The healthy forest air made this an ideal place for care. There were also other facilities, and after the preventorium closed down, the site was designated a municipal swimming pool. On top of that, because this site has such a long history, there is even a small museum with objects and stories about Ter Dennen.

In 1993, the first refugees and applicants for international protection were received in Ter Dennen by Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, then divided into two centres: Ter Dennen 1 and Ter Dennen 2. Later these were merged into the Red Cross reception centre Lanaken or Ter Dennen as we know it today.

During the 2015 refugee crisis, an emergency Molenberg reception centre was temporarily started with an extra 120 places. This was closed again a year later.

During the 30 years of reception, we have had tremendous volunteer support. We currently employ 17 enthusiastic volunteers, 11 women and 6 men. These are all people who, with a heart for the residents of the Lanaken reception centre, gladly donate their time and expertise to those in need. ■

*Date of publication: oktober 2023*







## 100 years Red Cross-East Flanders

In 2023, Red Cross-East Flanders celebrated its 100th anniversary, something that naturally needed to be celebrated.



Therefore, all Red Cross-East Flanders volunteers were invited on 17 September to celebrate together in the provincial domain Puyenbroeck. Various activities were organised here, such as a demonstration of disaster relief work, a presentation of volunteer work, a reanimation exercise by the mayor and, of course, snacks and drinks. ■

*Date of publication: September 2023*

## Moving ZNA Cadix

ZNA Stuivenberg Hospital closed its doors for good on 18 September 2023 after 138 years. Some 40 patients moved to the new hospital ZNA Cadix. For the move, ZNA set up a large-scale operation that was planned from minute to minute. Belgian Red Cross-Flanders volunteers also helped. The patients were transferred to ZNA Cadix by Belgian Red Cross-Flanders ambulances. ■

*Date of publication: September 2023*

## Brussels Red Cross volunteer operation shifts up a gear

**The Brussels branch of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is looking to firmly expand its volunteer operation. In one year, the number of volunteers has already increased from 10 to 38, and another fourfold increase is planned by 2025.**

"Most of the new volunteers have come through our Bridge Figures project where vulnerable children receive extra support with their home tasks and study work," said Bert Van Driessche, Brussels-Capital manager for Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. "Last year, we were active in this in five Dutch-speaking schools and this year it is already 11."

Earlier in 2023, it was also announced that the range of free Dutch-language first-aid courses was being expanded. Thus, as many as 491 people were trained in first aid in 2023, compared to 290 last year, and at the moment 11 more volunteers are in training to teach these courses.

However, the Brussels branch of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders stresses that this is only the beginning. "We want to grow even more in the coming years, also in our other activities. Think, for example, of our Care Bib for the elderly, our WOW holidays for people with disabilities and our donor centre for blood and plasma donors. By 2025, the number of volunteers for this should at

least quadruple."

12 December 2023 Flemish Minister of Brussels Benjamin Dalle (CD&V) announced his intention to support the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders in this. "We are releasing 50,000 euros for this from the Flemish Government," he echoed. ■

Source: [Brusselse vrijwilligerswerking Rode Kruis schakelt versnelling hoger](#). (2023, December 13).

*Date of publication: December 2023*





# First plaster sale Belgian Red Cross-Flanders an instant historic success: 'The plaster is a keeper'

**After more than 60 years of selling stickers, Red Cross volunteers sold plasters for the first time in 2023. And that very first 'plaster campaign' turned out to be a historic success: more than 400,000 plasters were sold, worth around 4 million euros, divided among the 223 local branches. That success came at a good time, by the way, because corona had caused the proceeds of the former sticker campaign to fall sharply. "This is precisely why it is so important that this new action is now achieving such a good result: the local Red Cross branches desperately need these funds," Philippe Vandekerckhove, CEO of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, clarified. "So the patch is undoubtedly a keeper."**

In recent years before corona, the proceeds of the campaign - then still with stickers - fluctuated around 3.3 million euros each time. But since the pandemic, sales dropped. In 2020, there could not even be any sticker sales and only free contributions were used. That then yielded 'only' 850,000 euros. In 2021, there was a sticker campaign again, but with restrictions, leaving the proceeds at 1.8 million euros. In 2022, for the first time, there was a full-fledged edition back, raising 2.6 million euros.

"The 223 local Red Cross branches have had some difficult years financially, as this action is always their biggest source of income. This is precisely why the success of this first edition with the plasters is so important: the local branches desperately need this financial support. So we are extremely happy to see that the new formula is working. The plaster is undoubtedly here to stay," said Philippe Vandekerckhove, CEO of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.

With the proceeds from the sale, the volunteers invested in items such as ambulances, teaching materials for their first-aid courses or in their socially engaged activities, such as the operation of the Library service for hospitals and care institutions or the Bridging the gap project. The local Bruges Red Cross branch, for example, went on to purchase a new tent for their first aid posts.

"We are at various festivals and events with our first aid posts: Cactus Festival, Feest In Het Park, the 'Ronde van Vlaanderen', and so on. To continue helping people at these events in the future, we urgently need a new tent. And so it is thanks to all Bruges residents who bought a patch that we can now buy that tent," said Nicole Vande Castele, Red Cross-Bruges chair.

Belgian Red Cross-Flanders thanked everyone who contributed during the last plaster campaign.

"First and foremost, thanks to all Flemish people who bought the plaster, because thanks to you all these local Red Cross branches can continue their work. The same goes to the National Lottery, our structural partner, and their managing director Jannie Haek, who bought the symbolic last plaster. And, of course, we would also like to thank our 13,000 volunteers, who over the past two weeks - in all weathers - have gone out to sell the plasters," said Philippe Vandekerckhove. ■

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## Press and information

Motstraat 40  
2800 Mechelen  
0471 62 29 70  
[perszaken@rodekruis.be](mailto:perszaken@rodekruis.be)

### Responsible editor

Philippe Vandekerckhove, Motstraat 40, 2800 Mechelen

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