



Belgian
Red Cross
Flanders



Annual Report 2025

www.rodekruis.be



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2025 was a year in which our organisation once again fully fulfilled its social mission. Thanks to the efforts of thousands of volunteers, staff, donors and partners, we were able to provide rapid and effective assistance, organise care and support people in vulnerable situations. The results set out in this annual report demonstrate a broad and stable operation, rooted in local communities and underpinned by professional commitment.

At the same time, we are operating in a context that is undergoing radical change. Current geopolitical developments – including ongoing armed conflicts, rising international tensions, migration pressures and climate-related emergencies – are having a direct impact on humanitarian needs worldwide. In Flanders, too, these developments are leading to increased social vulnerability and heightened expectations of emergency aid and care organisations. In this environment, the role of the Red Cross is more relevant than ever. Our neutrality, independence and humanity provide a stable frame of reference in a polarised and complex world.

The past year was therefore characterised not only by implementation, but also by strategic reflection. Through our work towards **Strategy 2030**, we have refined our priorities for the coming years. We have assessed where our greatest social added value lies, which competencies we need to further strengthen, and how we can deploy our resources as efficiently as possible. The focus is on sustainable impact, strengthening our local operations, further professionalisation, digital support and close collaboration within the Red Cross network and with external partners.

Strategy 2030 provides a clear framework for making targeted choices in an uncertain environment. It supports us in strengthening our preparedness and agility, without compromising on quality and reliability. In this way, we ensure that, in the future too, we can respond swiftly to crises, address structural needs and continue to fulfil our social responsibility in a transparent and efficient manner.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to our volunteers, staff, partners and donors for their continued trust and commitment.



Philippe Vandekerckhove
Chief Executive Officer
Belgian Red Cross-Flanders



Hans Verstraete
Community President
Belgian Red Cross-Flanders

Looking back on an impactful 2025

2025 was yet another year in which the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders was fully committed to serving society. Through countless initiatives, campaigns and projects, we made a visible difference to thousands of people, both at home and abroad. The figures illustrate the breadth and impact of our work over the past year.

Blood donation activities

New donors



Number of donations



7,250

new prospective stem cell donors



Research

21 publications in scientific journals

4.5

median impact factor (calculated over 21 publications)



€1,570,595

external funding received for scientific research

Looking back on an impactful 2025

Aid in flanders

545

repatriations following disasters



17,526

people accommodated in our reception centres



54,311

enrolments on first-aid training courses (also first-aid for mental health issues)



62,236

patient contacts at events



75,000

Zorgbib consultations



Looking back on an impactful 2025

15 countries received support from the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders
(Benin, Burundi, Burkina Faso, DRC, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Uganda, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Sudan, Mozambique, Rwanda, Jamaica, Senegal, Malawi)



529,264

people assisted through international emergency aid

64 tonnes

of emergency aid supplies donated

33

missing persons reunited through our Restoring Family Links programme



Belgian Red Cross-Flanders deploys more than 1,000 volunteers during carnival parades

During the spring carnival season, our volunteers were on standby at dozens of parades across Flanders. With first-aid posts and mobile teams, we provided assistance in case of injuries, intoxication and other emergencies.

Carnival is not just a celebration: it is also an exercise in crisis management. Large crowds, alcohol and limited mobility make coordination and communication crucial. It is also an opportunity for the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders to keep its disaster preparedness up to date for large-scale emergencies.

Training volunteers for large-scale emergencies

Carnival parades allow us to test and improve our operations, alongside other major events. In this way, we train our volunteers to deal with real-life emergencies, enabling them to provide maximum support to hospitals and emergency services.

Last year alone, more than 1,000 of our volunteers were deployed across Flanders during the carnival season. Aalst Carnival remains the largest carnival event, with the highest number of medical interventions and the most extensive first-aid posts. The most common issues? Cuts, fractures, eye injuries, gastrointestinal complaints and alcohol poisoning. Our teams consistently provided swift and appropriate first-aid and referred patients where necessary. ■

Launch of volunteer corps

On 4 April 2025, the Flemish Defence Plan was presented to the Flemish Government, a policy framework designed to address current international tensions.

This involves strengthening social resilience. In this context, the government decided to award the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders a project grant of €4.26 million for the period 2025 to 2029. These funds will be used to develop and support municipal volunteer corps.

The Belgian Red Cross-Flanders is responsible for the launch, management and monitoring of these local corps. The aim is to relieve the administrative and organisational burden on cities and municipalities whilst simultaneously increasing society's preparedness. The allocated funds will be used, amongst others, for the training and ongoing professional development of volunteers, the further development of a digital crisis management application, the organisation of annual refresher courses and training scenarios, and the deployment of specialist crisis coordinators. ■





Belgian Red Cross-Flanders launches emergency kit

Floods, power cuts, severe weather, extreme temperatures, communication failures, but also geopolitical or industrial risks. The list of potential crisis situations that could arise is extensive, and global warming threatens to make it even longer.

70% of Flemish people say they consider it important to have an emergency kit at home, but more than 50% find it difficult to put one together. That is why we decided to offer a plug-and-play emergency kit ourselves, based on our national and international experience, and to provide a clear checklist for those who want to put one together themselves.

What does an emergency kit contain?

An emergency kit is designed to help you get through the first 72 hours (three days) following a disaster or emergency. The essential components of your kit should consist of:

- Long-life water (bottles, nine litres per person);
- Non-perishable food (tinned food and a tin opener);

- Got a baby in the family? Make sure you have baby powder.
- Pets? Make sure you have extra food and water.
- A rechargeable radio (or one that runs on batteries);
- A light source;
- A first-aid kit;
- Items to keep you warm and dry (poncho, blankets, thick jumpers, thick socks, etc.);
- An emergency whistle;
- Hygiene products (soap, sanitary towels, toothbrushes, toilet paper, etc.);
- Essential medication;
- Copies of your identity documents (in a waterproof container);
- A list of emergency numbers;
- Spare keys (house, car, etc.);
- Sufficient cash.

In addition, we strongly recommend that you also pack the following items:

- A high-visibility jacket;
- A power bank for your mobile phone or smartphone;
- Strong tape and tools;
- A multi-purpose pocket knife;
- Candles and waterproof matches;
- Possibly also a safety rope and a water filter.



These are items that many people in Flanders already have at home, but which are often scattered around the house. Make sure you keep all your emergency supplies in a single rucksack or bag – ideally one that’s waterproof. Store the kit in an easily accessible but elevated place – so not in the basement.

Check the contents

If you use anything from your emergency kit, it’s important to replace it. It’s best to check that your items are in working order, as well as the contents and expiry dates of all products in your kit, every six months.

Is the radio still charged, does the power bank still work, is your water supply still in good condition? These are the things you should check.

For more information on our emergency kit, check www.rodekruis.be/noodpakket. ■





Efficient evacuation following an industrial fire in Staden

During the night of Friday 11 to Saturday 12 July, Westrozebeke, a sub-municipality of Staden, was shaken by a major industrial fire. The seriousness of the situation called for an immediate and decisive response. To ensure the safety of vulnerable groups, a swift decision was taken to first evacuate all residents from the care home and then the remaining 3,000 residents of the sub-municipality.

To carry this out as efficiently as possible, an alert was sent to the nearby Red Cross branches. Several ambulances and support vehicles, manned by volunteers, arrived on the scene to provide assistance. The evacuees were assisted by volunteers from our Psychosocial Support Services. ■





Hafsa and Berrin put a human face on the difficult search for a suitable stem cell donor

For some patients, the search for a suitable stem cell donor is particularly difficult. Children with non-European ancestry have less chance of finding a life-saving match due to greater genetic diversity. Hafsa (11) and Berrin (8) were the faces of that struggle and of a wider campaign to find more ethnically diverse stem cell donors.

Two children, one hope

Berrin (8) from Zonhoven and Hafsa (11) from Heist-op-den-Berg both suffer from a serious, life-threatening blood disorder. Their daily lives are dominated by hospitals, treatments and transfusions. For both girls, there is only one real solution: a stem cell transplant from a donor who is a 100% genetic match.

For Berrin, it all began at a very young age. What initially appeared to be leukaemia turned out to be a rare blood disorder, later followed by a diagnosis of *moyamoya* disease. She has already suffered several strokes and now needs a blood transfusion every four weeks.

'We know the chances are slim,' says her mum, Derya, but we're doing everything we can to save her.'

Hafsa, too, is waiting anxiously. She has *beta-thalassaemia* major and needs a transfusion every two weeks to survive. Her dream is to become a doctor one day, but without stem cell transplant, that future remains uncertain.

Why their search is so difficult

The crux of the problem lies in genetics. Stem cell donation requires an almost perfect match in tissue types.

These odds are linked to ethnic background. Within the family, the chance of a match is approximately one in four. Outside the family, that chance drops to one in 50,000.

For people of European descent, the chance of finding a suitable donor in the global database is still relatively high: around 96%. For patients of Turkish, African or mixed heritage, that figure drops to around 66%, and sometimes even lower.

This difference is entirely down to the composition of the donor registers. Worldwide, there are around 40 million registered stem cell donors. In Flanders, there are around 80,000, but only a small percentage have an ethnically diverse background. Fewer than 3% of Belgian stem cell donors have Turkish or North or Central African roots. The result: one in three patients from these groups never finds a suitable donor.

A campaign with real faces

In 2025, the Red Cross and the Belgian Stem Cell Register are focusing more than ever on targeted awareness-raising. Not with abstract figures, but with real stories. Hafsa and Berrin became the faces of that campaign.

Their stories make it clear what this is all about: not statistics, but children who want to play, learn and dream just like any other child. 'You can really save lives by donating stem cells,' says the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. 'Not just Hafsa's or Berrin's, but also those of many others who currently cannot find a match.'

That appeal is beginning to have an effect. Following the campaigns, hundreds of new donors registered within a short space of time, a strikingly high number of whom were from diverse ethnic backgrounds. A hopeful sign, although there is still a long way to go.



Barriers and misconceptions

Fear and ignorance remain a major obstacle. Many people still believe that stem cell donation is painful or always involves a painful bone marrow puncture. In most cases the donation takes the form of routine blood collection, during which stem cells are filtered from the blood. The procedure takes a few hours and is safe.

Anyone aged between 18 and 40 can easily register. Following a medical check-up and a blood sample, you will be added to a global database. The chance of you being called upon is small, but if it does happen, it can literally make the difference between life and death.

Greater diversity, greater opportunities

The message remains clear in 2026 too: without greater ethnic diversity in the donor registers, children like Hafsa and Berrin will continue to be searching for a needle in a haystack. Their faces make us realise just what is at stake. That is why every new registration counts! ■



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Plasma donation has no negative effect on sporting performance

A study by the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, in collaboration with the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain), shows that donating plasma has no negative impact on sporting performance – and that’s quite important information for all our sporty donors.

Once and for all, let’s settle the debate: plasma donation has no negative effect on sporting performance. A total of 63 athletes took part in our study. They were divided into groups based on donation frequency: from once a month to twice a week, alongside a control group. Over a period of three months, the researchers examined numerous parameters, including blood values, muscle strength and body composition, and carried out a ‘maximal effort test’ on a bicycle.

The conclusion of our study is clear:

- Donating plasma once a month has absolutely no effect on sporting performance or physical fitness.
- Even at higher frequencies (three times a month), performance levels remained stable.
- With excessively frequent donations (up to eight times a month, which is four times more often than the limit in Belgium), there is a decrease in antibody levels in the blood.

In Belgium, the limit is 26 donations per year (approximately twice a month). The Belgian Red Cross-Flanders emphasises that this limit protects the donor and is safe.

The results of our study were published in *Vox Sanguinis*, the international journal of transfusion medicine. The study was awarded as ‘Best Article of the Year’ by the journal. ■



Flanders' first donor club opens in Pelt

In 2025, we were delighted to open Flanders' very first donor club in Pelt. With this new location, based at the Noorderhart Maria Hospital, Limburg gained an additional venue where donors can go to donate plasma. This initiative represents an important step in expanding a flexible and local service, enabling donors to give plasma even closer to home.

The need for plasma-based medicines is growing year on year, both in Belgium and internationally. Whilst more than 25,000 Belgian patients depend on plasma-based medicines, our country is currently only half self-sufficient. This makes additional plasma donations vital.

The donor centre in Pelt offers a small, efficient setting where four people can donate at the same time. Moreover, Limburg has long demonstrated a strong commitment: in four years, the number of plasma donations in the region has risen by 108%. An impressive development, which confirms the importance and potential of plasma donation. ■



Research into a nasal spray containing convalescent plasma shows promising results

The Belgian Red Cross-Flanders investigated whether administering COVID-19 convalescent plasma (i.e. plasma from people who have recovered from the disease) via a nasal spray could limit the spread of the virus and offer protection against future infections by stimulating immunity.

What were the findings?

In our study, we treated hamsters intranasally with COVID-19 convalescent plasma. These animals did not develop severe lung infections, which is consistent with our previously published findings in the scientific journal *eBioMedicine*. We did, however, observe that the virus was able to replicate to a limited extent in the upper respiratory tract, comparable to a mild cold. Notably and promisingly, all treated hamsters developed antibodies against the virus, thereby protecting them against subsequent reinfection.

Why is this important?

Our results suggest that convalescent plasma, administered as a nasal spray, could be a new way of protecting against viral infections.

The next step is to investigate whether the same effects occur in humans. Clinical trials involving healthy volunteers will therefore follow in 2026–2027. ■





Two new donor centres expand our presence across Flanders

In 2025, the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders took significant steps to make donating even more accessible. With the opening of two new donor centres in Ostend and Oudenaarde, we are further expanding our network and bringing blood and plasma donation closer to the people.

Oudenaarde: A festive launch in the heart of the city

Since 3 March, donors have been able to visit Oudenaarde to give blood, plasma or platelets. The official opening of the new donor centre was celebrated on 22 March, with a warm welcome and refreshments for all donors.

Oostende: New donor centre by the sea

Ostend also welcomed a brand-new donor centre. On 8 September, we opened the doors of our brand-new donor centre by the sea.

With the opening of these new donor centres, we are responding to the rapidly rising demand for plasma, which – due to equipment that is difficult to transport – can only be donated at a donor centre. These openings bring the number of donor centres in Flanders to 16. ■

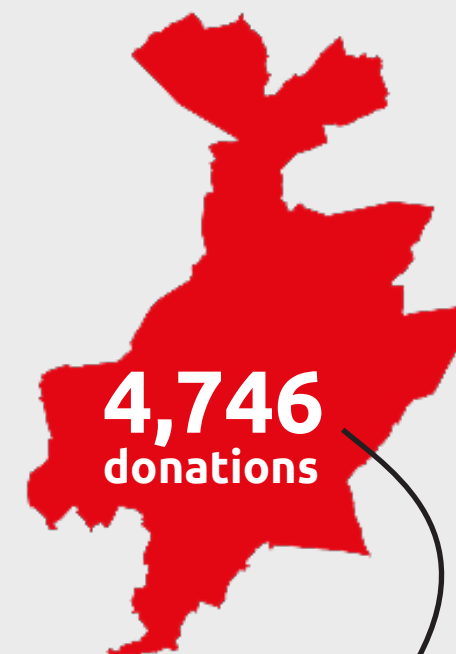
Students donated more blood in 2025 than ever before

Student life is about much more than just studying. So, we once again encouraged students at colleges and universities to donate blood. And it was a success! Thanks to the enthusiasm of students and student societies, we achieved our target of 12,000 donations.

Leuven leading the way

The largest contribution this year came from Leuven. KU Leuven recorded 4,746 donations, accounting for 40% of the final total. The 'Bloedserieus' campaign is growing in popularity among students every year. Turnout figures from recent years show a clear upward trend. ■

Leuven



4,746
donations

40%
of the final
total



Which company had the biggest heart in 2025?

With the outstanding achievement of five plasma donations per employee, the Ondernemershuis in Mechelen was awarded the title of Flanders' 'Company with the Biggest Heart' in 2025.

The award is part of the 'Company with a Big Heart' campaign run by the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. The aim: to encourage companies to motivate their staff to donate plasma at one of the donor centres in Flanders. After all, plasma is literally lifesaving: it is used in the production of essential medication, in the treatment of severe burns and in newborn babies with severe jaundice.

'We are proud of this recognition,' says Guanita Croo, Assistant Office Manager at the Ondernemershuis. 'We have a strong sense of social commitment here. For many, donating plasma, blood or platelets was a logical step: it takes barely an hour, and you save lives in the process. Thanks to the opportunity to do this during working hours, taking part became a lot easier.'

'Going to the donor centre with colleagues gave it extra meaning. Various businesses

within the Ondernemershuis have also contributed via their own initiative, which further strengthened the sense of community. As an organisation, we have therefore actively supported this initiative.'

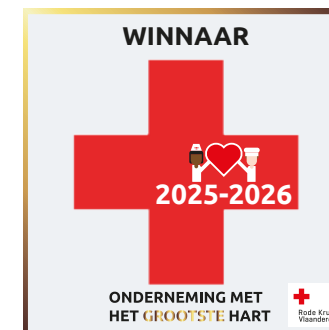
KBC, the company with the most donations

The company responsible for the highest number of donations in this edition is KBC bank. With no fewer than 570 plasma or blood donations, they stand out from the rest. David Moucheron, CEO of KBC Belgium: 'At KBC, we believe in the power of solidarity and commitment. Our colleagues donated blood in large numbers – a heart-warming act with a huge impact. Their commitment demonstrates what we stand for: being there for our customers and for the community of which we are a part. That is why we fully support initiatives such as that of the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.'

Voka

'This campaign brings social commitment and entrepreneurship closer together.' Voka, the Flemish network of businesses, also supports the initiative.

The project is in full swing. 'Company with a Big Heart' shows how businesses can fulfil their social role, not with words, but with concrete action,' says Hans Maertens, Managing Director of Voka. 'We therefore congratulate the Ondernemershuis.'



In total, 228 companies took part in the first edition of 'Company with a Big Heart' in 2025. Any company wishing to take part in the challenge is more than welcome. The current total stands at 290 companies.

By the end of May 2026, we will know which company will succeed the Ondernemershuis in Mechelen as Flanders' 'Company with the Biggest Heart'. ■



In 2025, Ondernemershuis in Mechelen was awarded with the title of 'Company with the Biggest Heart' in Flanders.



Restoring Family Links: Reuniting families

Through our Restoring Family Links (RFL) service, we help people reconnect with their loved ones. The search for missing family members is often complex, intensive and emotionally draining. Yet our teams, together with our international partners, make a difference every day.

By the end of 2025, we had 589 active cases in Flanders, involving 701 people who needed to be located across 26 countries. Worldwide, the Red Cross is working on a staggering figure of more than 200,000 missing people.

Behind these figures lies a much bigger story: only a fraction of the people who are missing a loved one find their way to our services. The true number of missing persons is therefore much higher.

How we search: a global network in action

The search for missing family members follows various avenues. The Red Cross can count on:

- 12 million volunteers worldwide;
- National Red Cross Societies in virtually every country;
- Local volunteers who go out into the field – from villages and refugee camps to hospitals.

In Flanders, too, a dedicated team of volunteers and permanent staff is on hand to conduct initial interviews, follow up on cases and coordinate the search with colleagues around the world.

An enduring humanitarian mission

Every person reunited, every family reconnected, is a victory. But new cases are added every day. That is why the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders remains committed to helping people living in uncertainty about the fate of their loved ones.

Through our RFL programme, we continue, together with our international partners, to build what matters most to many families: certainty, reunification and hope. ■





Living together in Berlaar: Three years of reception that made a difference

In the summer of 2022, a reception centre for refugees opened in Berlaar. What began for many as a time of uncertainty grew, over the course of three years, into a story of connection, resilience and collaboration between residents, volunteers and the local council.

From the beginning, the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders opted for an open and accessible approach. Through Open Days, information sessions and regular updates, residents were given an insight into daily life at the centre. This openness helped to dispel misunderstandings and, step by step, built trust.

Meanwhile, a warm community developed behind the gates. Children found their way to local schools, where a new reception class for non-native-speaking newcomers grew into a permanent initiative. Residents got involved with local businesses, volunteered at the care home and, in doing so, became part of village life.

Small encounters – such as a chat at the market, a child playing with a dog, or searching for frogs together in the woods – made a huge difference.

The dedication of the many volunteers in and around Berlaar was also crucial. They accompanied children to school, gave language lessons, organised activities and lent a listening ear. Thanks to them, despite the temporary infrastructure, the centre felt more like a place where people could find peace and dare to look to the future once more.

Many residents built up a network in Berlaar and found work in the region. For some, the

village became a familiar place, even when they had to move to another reception centre.

In December 2025, the reception centre closed its doors. The site has reverted to a military function, but the impact of three years of hosting remains palpable. Initiatives that emerged during the reception period are continuing, and the collaboration between residents, the local council and the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders remains a valuable foundation.

What began with uncertainty grew into a shared story of care and humanity. The experience in Berlaar shows just how much of a difference it can make when a village, staff and volunteers work together to prioritise closeness, clarity and respect. ■

Pressure on the reception network

The pressure on the reception network for asylum seekers seeking international protection was felt in 2025 in a persistent waiting list, particularly for single men. Solutions in the form of emergency accommodation required flexibility from staff and volunteers, both in rapidly scaling up and scaling down operations.

Winter shelter in youth centres

In the winter of 2025–2026, on behalf of Fedasil, we temporarily opened the doors of several youth accommodation centres to provide shelter for families with children. For the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, opening these doors means getting all the facilities up and running, deploying a strong team of staff and volunteers, informing and involving the local community, ensuring the children attend school where possible, but above all, making the reception centre feel like a home for its new residents.

Our headquarters coordinated the set-up and phasing out of

each emergency shelter. Day-to-day support and follow-up were provided from the nearby Red Cross reception centre.

In total, winter accommodation was organised in six youth centres, with a capacity of 40 to 100 places and an additional temporary capacity of 300 places:

- De Lork (Heuvelland)
- Peace Village (Mesen)
- Den Bookhamer (Zele)
- Zozimus (Bekkevoort)
- Woutershof (Kinrooi)
- De Kariboe (Oudsbergen) ■

Skibidi 112!

Children can save lives. With this slogan, we launched a social media campaign and an online game to teach children and young people how to act in an emergency.

What if mum falls down the stairs or grandad suddenly becomes unwell and stops responding? Many children don't know how to react, even though the first few minutes are crucial. Research shows that in countries where more people have first-aid skills, the chances of survival following a cardiac arrest are higher. Gaëlle Huysentruyt, Red Cross Youth Manager at Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, explains the campaign, which began in February 2025.

'Figures from the Belgian Heart Rhythm Association show that the survival rate following a cardiac arrest is four times higher in Germany than in Belgium. Here, CPR is initiated just as often, but Germans are twice as likely to have completed first-aid training as Belgians. With this campaign, we want to make children aware of the importance of first-aid from an early age and encourage adults to refresh their knowledge.'

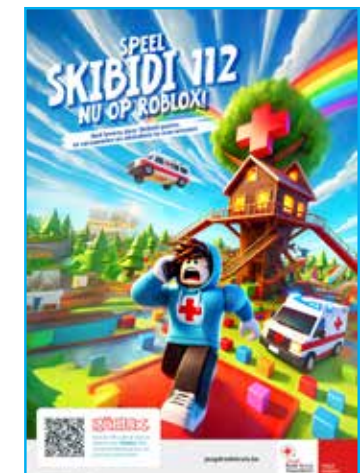
'Why Skibidi 112? We noticed that many young children don't always know the number 112 by heart. Yet children aged six and over can alert the emergency services. But children can do much more: a 13-year-old

is perfectly capable of placing a person in the recovery position or even applying a pressure bandage. They just need to be taught. With the video from the Red Cross Youth, we're trying to raise awareness of this further.'

Social media campaign with online game and video

The Red Cross Youth produced the video for the social media campaign. It was no coincidence that the campaign was launched on 11 February, European 112 Day. Through this initiative, the Red Cross Youth aims first and foremost to raise awareness among parents and children of the importance of first-aid. For the very youngest, it's all about being able to call 112 and give the correct information: where you are, what has happened and who the injured people are.

'Teaching your child how to react can really save lives. For young people and adults, it's useful to refresh their knowledge regularly. To help with this, we're making our first-aid app available free of charge,' concludes Gaëlle. ■





International emergency aid

Below is a brief overview of the countries where the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has provided emergency aid in response to natural disasters, severe weather and armed conflicts.

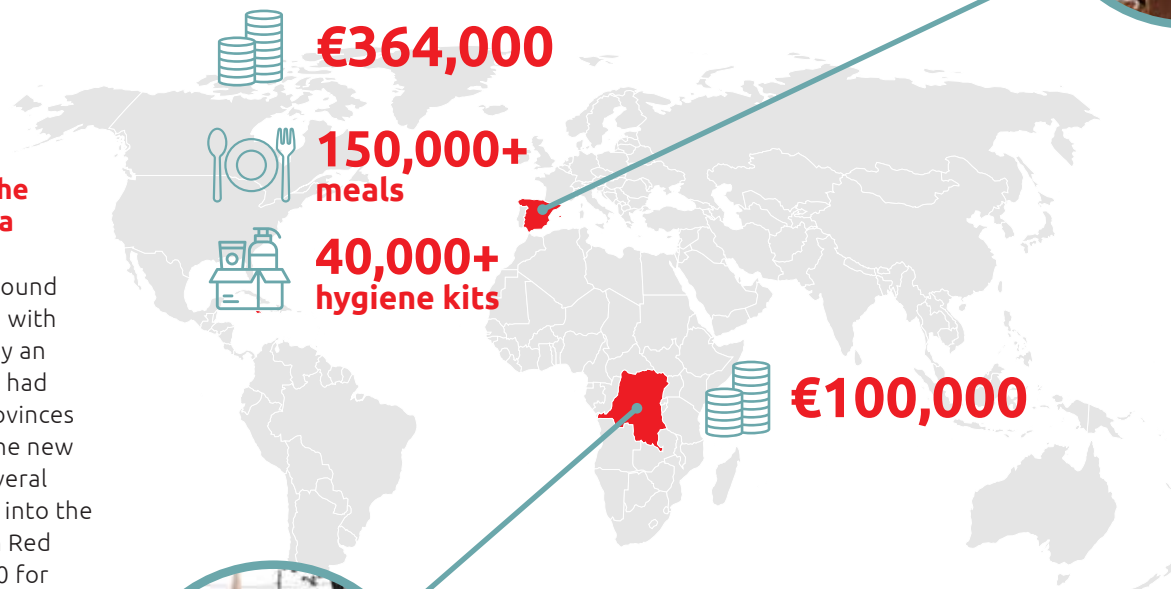


Severe weather in Spain caused heavy flooding

At the end of 2024, Spain was hit by severe flooding.

The disaster claimed the lives of 231 people. The Valencia region was particularly hit hard, but other areas also suffered extensive damage. The Spanish Red Cross raised €94 million to carry out rescue operations and work on reconstruction.

Flanders also showed great solidarity. We raised €364,000. With our help, our Spanish colleagues were able to provide emergency accommodation for 4,293 people and distribute more than 150,000 meals and 40,000 hygiene kits in the worst-affected areas.



Outbreak of violence near the city of Goma in Congo, with a population of millions

In early 2025, the region in and around the city of Goma (Eastern Congo), with a population of millions, was hit by an outbreak of violence. The conflict had been ongoing for years. In the provinces of North and South Kivu, where the new fighting had been ongoing for several weeks, the death toll quickly rose into the hundreds. That is why the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders allocated €100,000 for emergency aid in Congo. With the funds made available, we supported relief efforts on the ground.



People fleeing the violence were in urgent need of medical support, shelter, drinking water and other necessities. In addition to emergency aid, we also focused on family reunification.



Hurricane Melissa hit Jamaica hard

On the night of 28 October, hurricane Melissa swept across Jamaica with unprecedented force. The impact was enormous: buildings, bridges and roads were swept away by flooding and landslides. A trail of destruction was left in its wake, prompting the government to declare the entire island a disaster area.

The Red Cross distributed relief supplies, provided medical and psychosocial support, and assisted with evacuations in Cuba and Haiti. Flanders showed its solidarity; we have raised over €30,000 for food aid, shelter, healthcare and drinking water.



€30,000

Disaster-stricken area in Afghanistan difficult to reach following earthquake

On the night of 31 August, eastern Afghanistan was struck by a severe earthquake (measuring 6 on the Richter scale). The earthquake caused extensive damage: hundreds of homes were damaged, several villages were destroyed, and thousands of people were injured. The death toll rose to 1,000, with more than 3,000 injured. Relief efforts were hampered by the fact that the disaster area was difficult to reach due to narrow and blocked roads. To support the urgent relief efforts, the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders allocated €100,000.



€100,000

Severe earthquake struck Myanmar

On 28 March, a severe earthquake struck central Myanmar (measuring 7.7 on the Richter scale, with an aftershock of 6.7). In the Sagaing and Mandalay regions, there was extensive damage to buildings and infrastructure. More than 18 million people were affected, and the need for safe shelter, drinking water and medical care were acute. A state of emergency was declared in six regions and international aid was requested. The disaster claimed the lives of more than 3,700 people and left over 5,000 injured. ■



hygiene kits for 500+ families



financial support for 400+ families



Belgian Red Cross-Flanders and Enabel are joining forces to rebuild the Ukrainian blood system

Over the coming years, the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders will provide technical support to the Ukrainian blood bank in rebuilding and modernising its system. We are doing this on behalf of the development agency Enabel, which is providing €2 million in funding as part of the Belgian *Be-Relieve* programme.

The initiative was launched during a five-day study visit, when a Ukrainian delegation of representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Ukrainian Transplant Coordination Centre (UTCC) and local NGOs visited our blood laboratories.



Challenges and shared expertise

The Ukrainian blood system faces major challenges. Since the outbreak of the war, the demand for blood has risen by 40%, whilst several blood establishments have been damaged or destroyed. Furthermore, Ukraine aims to comply with European regulations on blood supply, which means that quality control, transport, storage and collection must meet strict requirements.

‘Our mission in the coming years is to export our expertise in blood supply to

Ukraine. Conversely, it is a unique opportunity for us to learn from our Ukrainian colleagues, and more specifically how they manage to keep their blood bank operational despite a situation of conflict and uncertainty,’ says Philippe Vandekerckhove, CEO of the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.

The collaboration between Enabel, the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders and the Ukrainian blood bank will initially focus on the city of Chernihiv in the north of the country. Its blood centre serves the Chernihiv region and the neighbouring Sumy region, making it crucial

for the entire north-east of the country. The Belgian organisations are working with the Ukrainian authorities to renovate the blood centre and equip it with modern facilities, so that in the long run its operations will meet European standards.

Scaling up voluntary donations

In addition, we focus on scaling up voluntary donations.

‘Ukraine relies on voluntary blood donations, just as we do. This system has many advantages. It makes it crisis-resilient

and the donated blood much safer for the final recipient. However, in the short term, it presents the challenge of attracting new donors, retaining existing ones, and carrying out all this in a cost-effective manner. The Flemish upscaling of plasma donations is a best practice within Europe; we now want to apply that expertise to Ukraine,’ says Philippe Vandekerckhove. ■



Lysantum: Reducing animal suffering through innovation

The Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has developed a method to recycle expired platelets into the animal-friendly biotech product *Lysantum*. Numerous medical applications, such as vaccine production and cell and gene therapy, rely on the use of growth serum. Growth serum is also used in regenerative medicine to repair or replace damaged tissues and organs. To achieve this, scientists cultivate human cells in the laboratory to form new tissues or organs. It is this cell culture that requires the (controversial) growth serum.

Our organisation has developed this innovative method to obtain this growth serum from expired human platelets, thereby killing three birds with one stone.

Reduced animal suffering

The growth serum itself is currently obtained as a by-product of the meat industry in South America. In pregnant cows, the fetus is removed after slaughter and blood is extracted via a cardiac puncture on the fetus. The slaughter of the mother causes the calf to die of asphyxiation (lack of oxygen); the blood is then used to produce the serum. There are many ethical, as well as medical, objections to this method.

Independence from the US market

Several laboratories and companies worldwide are already producing a type of serum from platelets. This production is dominated by players in the United States, and their method of producing serum from platelets is not well suited for use in Europe.

‘In Belgium and most European countries, blood products are often treated differently after donation than in the United States. As a result, the method used in the United States to produce serum is not suitable for blood products from Europe. Our innovative method also addresses this problem. It enables us to build strategic independence from the US market,’ says Professor Hendrik Feys, Director of Scientific Research at the Blood Service of Belgian Red Cross-Flanders.

No wastage of expired platelets

We currently collect 35,000 platelet donations each year. Because platelets have a limited shelf life, some donations inevitably have to be discarded. In Flanders, this number is relatively small. However, when combined with discarded platelet



donations from other European countries, it represents a substantial volume – and therefore enormous potential.

Lysantum

The Belgian Red Cross-Flanders has patented its method to ensure that potential donations are used to the full to help people.

Our growth serum (Human Platelet Lysate) has since been launched on the market as Lysantum. ■

Further information is available at www.lysantum.com



Record: Red Cross volunteers sold 410,000 plasters

In keeping with tradition, volunteers from more than 200 branches participated in the annual Plaster Campaign. The third edition was once again a great success and set a new record. 410,000 plasters were sold – 5,000 more than last year.

The proceeds of €4.1 million will go entirely to the more than 200 local branches of the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders. CEO Philippe Vandekerckhove describes it as a success: ‘On behalf of all our volunteers, I would like to sincerely thank all the people of Flanders who bought a plaster. The people of Flanders have shown their generosity.

With the funds raised, the branches can buy teaching materials for free first-aid courses, invest in ambulances, emergency equipment and so much more.’

After more than 60 years of selling stickers, the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders switched to plasters in 2023. Flanders seems to have taken to this choice: in 2023, 400,000 plasters were sold: last year

that figure rose to 405,000. In 2025, that success was confirmed with a new record of 410,000 plasters. The plaster – resealable, cut-to-size and easy to use – has since become not only a practical product, but also a powerful symbol of a warm-hearted Flanders.

Volunteers on the streets

During the two week-long Plaster Campaign, thousands of volunteers took to the streets. You could find them at supermarkets, local markets, crossroads and in so many other locations. Always with the same aim: to raise funds for activities in their own neighbourhoods.

‘They are all committed people who do this voluntarily, in their spare time,’ says Vandekerckhove. ‘They ensure that the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders can be present wherever it is needed: from disasters and resuscitation incidents to festivals and care homes. They literally look after Flanders.’

Enabling local operations

All proceeds from the ‘Pleisteractie’ go directly to the local branches.

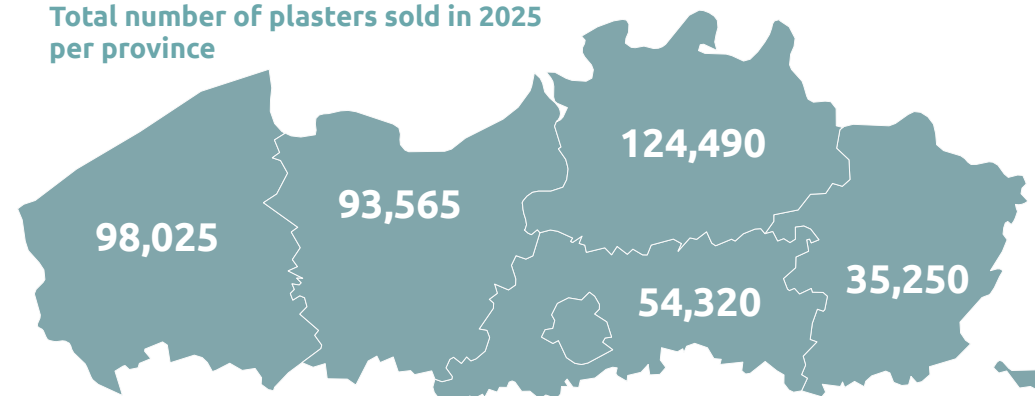
This enables them to fund, amongst other things:

- Free first-aid training courses
- Resuscitation manikins and teaching materials
- Uniforms for volunteers
- Tents and equipment for first-aid posts
- Social initiatives such as Zorgbib

In total, more than 200 branches took part in the campaign. ■



Total number of plasters sold in 2025 per province



Online: 4,350

Looking to the future: Strategy 2030

At the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders, we review our strategy every five years. With Strategy 2030, we are doing so more thoroughly than ever, because the world is changing rapidly: geopolitical tensions and climate threats are on the rise, polarisation is increasing, more people are struggling with mental health issues, and vulnerable groups are increasingly feeling let down.

To address these issues, we have launched a wide-ranging exercise. We have carried out a comprehensive analysis of the societal challenges and the challenges within our own operations. Strategic working groups were set up, in which volunteers helped to consider how we can tackle these challenges through concrete, realistic, yet ambitious objectives. In addition, in the spring of 2025, we visited every Flemish province so that every volunteer could have their say directly.

With Strategy 2030, we also aim to strengthen our public image. Everyone should recognise the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders as a professional, efficient and fair organisation. In doing so, we focus on

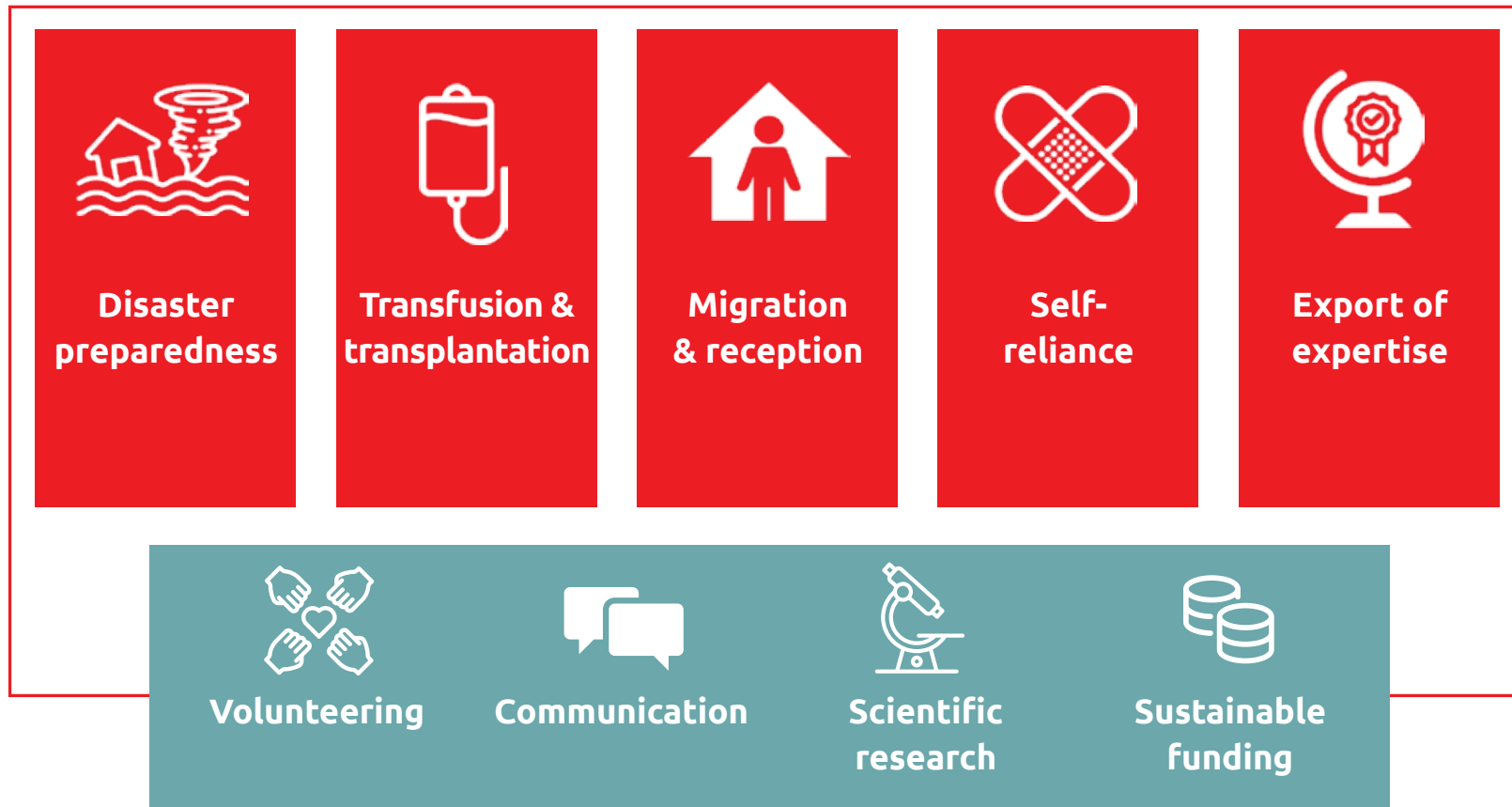
our strengths and highlight where we truly excel, so that we can further strengthen our credibility and the trust of the public. We recognise that we can only achieve our goals by working together, both vertically (across different levels) and horizontally (across different disciplines). We also aim to build an organisation that is agile and resilient enough to adapt to whatever the future may bring.

The result is a strategy that takes external societal needs as its starting point and prepares our organisation for the future. With Strategy 2030, we maximise our external impact by focusing on the areas where we make a difference, and we clearly demonstrate what the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders stands for. ■



Strategy 2030 at a glance

Strategy 2030 is structured around **five areas** and **four levers**. These levers are essential for achieving our objectives within the five areas. Together, they are the key to maximising our social impact and contribute to our mission to help vulnerable people, both at home and abroad.





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