

BELGIUM



0.44% GENUINE AID/GNI

0.48% TOTAL AID/GNI



“In these times of uncertainty, international cooperation is surely the only way forward.”

– Meryame Kitir, Belgian Minister for Development Cooperation

MAIN CHANGES IN 2020

Belgium can be commended for increasing its official development assistance (ODA) in 2020, both in real terms and as a percentage of GNI.¹ Belgian ODA rose from €1.97bn in 2019 to €2.01bn in 2020, an increase from 0.42% to 0.48% GNI. The increase in ODA as a percentage of GNI must be put into perspective, however, as it follows a 10% drop in GNI itself. Belgian ODA is still less than the European average.

Fortunately, since October 2020 the new government has officially committed itself to implementing a binding growth trajectory starting in 2021, to bring ODA to 0.7% of GNI by 2030. The new minister for development cooperation has also confirmed that ODA will be concentrated in LDCs and fragile states, with a particular emphasis on social protection and decent work. New trends have been identified in the areas of migration, agriculture and support for the private sector. Regarding agriculture, the new minister for development cooperation has clearly stated her willingness to support the transition to sustainable food systems by respecting agro-ecological practices, focusing on small-scale agriculture. To support the private sector, important criteria have been reiterated, such as access to social protection, respect for decent work, environmental and fiscal standards, and the need to exclude investment in the privatisation of public services such as education and health care. The new vision pays special attention to micro- and small enterprises, including smallholder farmers. Some private-sector support instruments introduced under the previous minister have not been renewed, while others are still merely encouraged. So a clarification of the private-sector support strategy seems necessary, to make it more coherent with the vision of the new minister.

TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS FOR 2021 AND BEYOND

Despite the government's commitment to a binding growth trajectory for ODA, it seems that unfortunately the increase in Belgian ODA is not here to stay. According to recent budget projections, it is already expected to decrease in 2021, dropping to 0.41% of GNI. The new focus areas identified by the minister for development cooperation are expected to lead to positive action, hopefully through clarified strategies for agriculture or support for the private sector, to avoid schizophrenic implementation measures mixing the new and the old visions.

CASE STUDY BOX: MIGRATION: A NEW VISION



The new minister for development cooperation can be commended for clearly stating that “Development cooperation is not subordinated to the migration agenda”.² More recently, a draft strategic note on the relationship between migration and development has been prepared by the foreign affairs ministry, stating “When migration is safe, orderly and regular, resulting from a free, conscious and considered choice, it is both a development strategy and a development result.” This promotes a positive approach to mobility and recognises the contribution of migrants to sustainable development.

The vision enshrined in the strategic note also largely avoids major risks, including the diversion of development resources away from the most marginalised people and/or towards restrictive migration management projects, and also the migration conditionality of development cooperation. For example, the note clearly states that the countries where Belgian cooperation is active “receive official development assistance according to their level of human development and regardless of the origin of migratory movements”. While Belgium can already be commended for this, the implementation of the strategic note in practice will determine whether these risks have indeed been averted. It remains to be seen whether it will help make legal migration channels truly accessible, encompassing the diversity of migration profiles.

¹ OECD, COVID-19 spending helped to lift foreign aid to an all-time high in 2020, 13 April 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/ODA-2020-detailed-summary.pdf>.

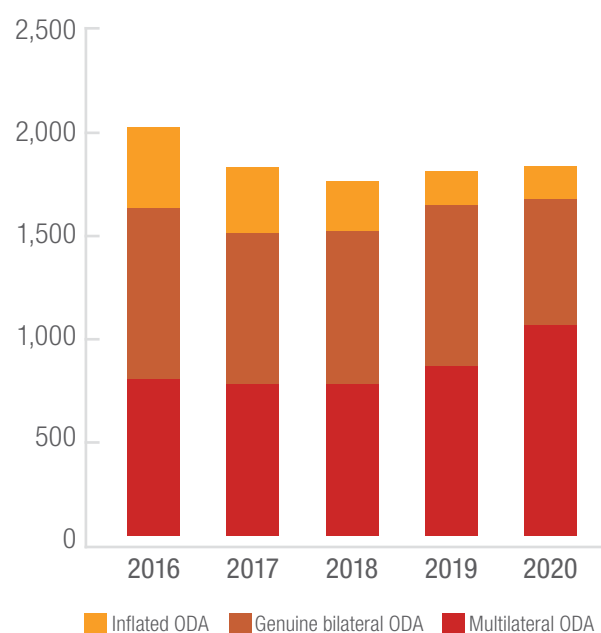
² https://diplomatie.belgium.be/sites/default/files/downloads/2020_kitir-beleidsnota-note_de_politique_2021_kitir.pdf p 14.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT

- Increase the funding for development cooperation in the 2022 federal budget.
- Adopt a new law enshrining the binding growth trajectory, starting in 2021, so that Belgian ODA reaches 0.7% of GNI by 2030.
- Clarify the strategy on support for the private sector and adapt private-sector financing instruments by giving priority to the local private sector, which creates decent jobs and respects social and environmental standards.
- Review the 2017 Agriculture and Food Security strategic note, to enshrine the new vision of the minister for development cooperation, prioritising sustainable food systems with agroecology as their driving force. By 2023, double the share of agricultural projects that support agroecology.
- Promote Belgium's new vision for ODA and migration in the EU and international fora.
- Respect Belgium's commitment to allocate 50% of bilateral ODA to LDCs. Respect the international commitment to allocate at least 0.15% of GNI to LDCs.

BELGIUM – GENUINE AND INFLATED ODA

(€ million, constant 2019)



ODA TO LDCS (€ million, constant 2019)

LDC	ODA to LDCs	ODA to LDCS (% GNI)	ODA to LDCS (% total ODA)
2016	621.98	0.14	28.08
2017	583.47	0.13	29.19
2018	614.52	0.14	32.04
2019	664.63	0.14	33.70

ODA TO DRM (€ million, constant 2019)

DRM	ODA for DRM	DRM (% bilateral)	DRM (% total ODA)
2016	1.06	0.08	0.05
2017	1.43	0.12	0.07
2018	1.93	0.18	0.10
2019	1.50	0.15	0.08

AID MODALITY (€ million, constant 2019)

Year	Bilateral gross	Grants	Loans	Loans (% of gross bilateral)
2016	1,418.22	1,402.66	15.56	1.10
2017	1,213.00	1,195.12	17.88	1.47
2018	1,103.59	1,084.31	19.28	1.75
2019	1,026.34	1,008.84	17.50	1.70

ODA TO SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY (€ million, constant 2019)

Gender focus	Bi allocable	Total Screened	Not Screened	None	Significant	Principal	Significant (% of screened)	Principal (% of screened)
2016	926.67	926.58	0.09	381.14	520.42	25.02	56.17	2.70
2017	795.21	795.21	0.00	280.86	487.81	26.54	61.34	3.34
2018	780.69	710.65	70.04	275.24	409.00	26.41	57.55	3.72
2019	766.88	694.80	72.08	194.78	472.23	27.79	67.97	4.00

ODA TO SUPPORT CSOs (€ million, constant 2019)

CSO support	Non-CSO	Donor-CSO-Earmarked	International-CSO-Earmarked	Recipient-CSO-Earmarked	Donor-CSO-Core	International-CSO-Core	Recipient-CSO-Core	Total bilateral CSO support, % bilateral	Total bilateral CSO support, % total ODA	Core bilateral CSO support, % bilateral	Core bilateral CSO support, % total ODA
2016	1,107.81	58.43	23.70	2.45	175.80	4.26	0.00	19.28	11.95	13.12	8.13
2017	930.82	56.28	25.91	0.26	161.27	4.10	0.09	21.03	12.40	14.04	8.28
2018	843.92	58.60	16.62	1.16	162.56	8.39	0.00	22.66	12.89	15.67	8.91
2019	771.02	38.55	17.54	2.03	177.23	8.70	0.09	24.05	12.38	18.32	9.43