



# Catalysing Change: Evaluation of Finland's Humanitarian Assistance 2016–2022 – Selected highlights of the report

## Why was Finland's humanitarian assistance evaluated?

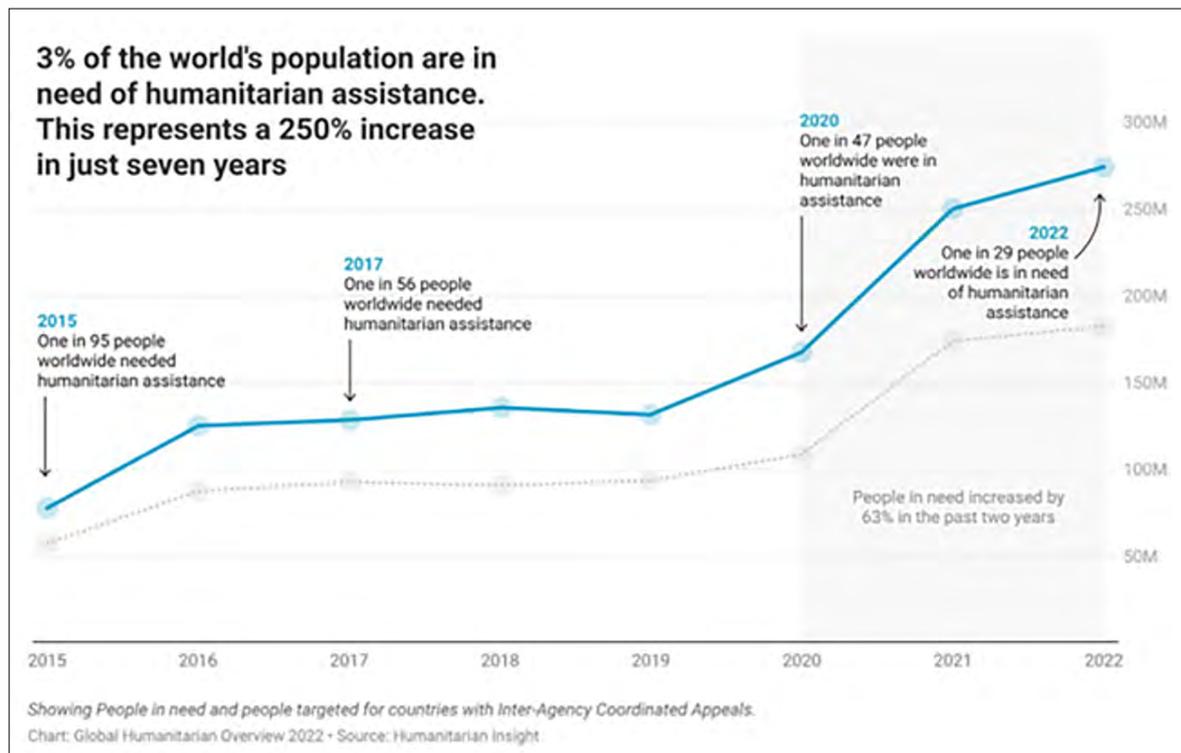
The evaluation aimed to help improve the effectiveness of Finland's humanitarian assistance by learning from its experience so far. The study was forecast in Finland's Humanitarian Policy (2019) and commissioned by the Evaluation Unit (EVA-11) of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA).

The evaluation reviewed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence and co-ordination of Finland's humanitarian assistance from 2016 to March 2022. This

included i) the role of the Humanitarian Policy as a guiding instrument, ii) the functioning of partnerships and the management arrangements for delivering assistance, and iii) the results achieved for affected populations.

The evaluation conducted case studies in three contexts: South Sudan, Bangladesh and the Syrian regional crisis, and reviewed a wide range of central-level and project documentation.

## The changing context for humanitarian action



Source: UNOCHA (2022) Global Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022

## How much humanitarian assistance does Finland contribute?

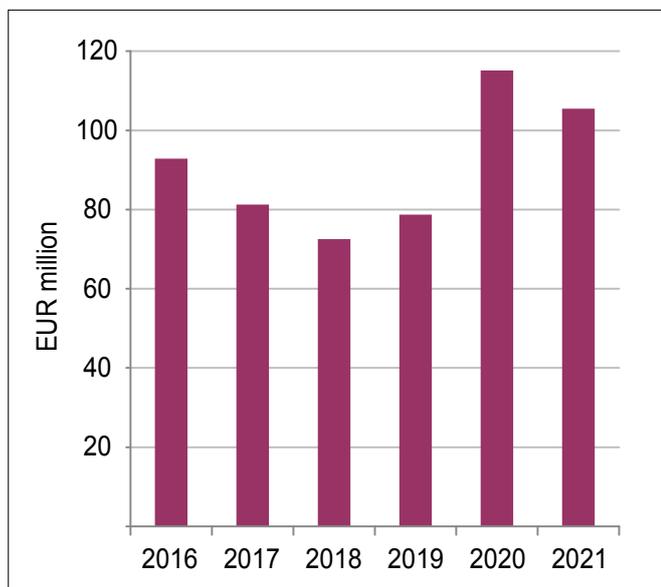
In 2020, Finland provided 0.47% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as *development* assistance, above the OECD average of 0.32%. This earned Finland a place as the 11th largest donor in terms of GDP% among the OECD countries, or 18th in absolute terms.

From 2016 to 2021, Finland contributed a total of EUR 546 million in *humanitarian* assistance. From 2016 to 2019 it provided between EUR 73 and 93 million annually, increasing to a record EUR 115 million in 2020 and EUR 105 million in 2021.

By May 2022, Finland had approved EUR 94.8 million for humanitarian assistance for the year 2022.

Annual humanitarian assistance constituted close to 10% of Finland's total development assistance as per the requirements in the 2019 Policy.

Figure 2: Finland's humanitarian assistance 2016-2021



Source: OECD DAC statistics

However, annual increases in Finnish humanitarian assistance have not kept pace with global humanitarian requirements at global level. This suggests, that if the total amount of humanitarian assistance cannot be increased, then focus needs to be sharper to achieve higher relevance regionally or at country level.

### Finland's humanitarian assistance is relevant to beneficiaries and adapts to their changing needs...

**Finland prioritises humanitarian needs, mostly aligns with strategic priorities, and adapts where necessary.** Finland's assistance was relevant to geographical and beneficiary needs, thanks to a strongly needs-based approach. Finland places a good deal of trust in partners to identify needs – though some internal political pressure did occur also.

The assistance was flexible, and adapted appropriately to needs on the ground, supported by a culture of willingness and flexibility. However, the boundaries on allocating development and humanitarian assistance respectively were not always clear.

### ... but not all results are captured.

**Results generated are valuable for individuals and vulnerable groups but at times fragmented and not captured by results reporting.** Finland's assistance delivered results for affected populations – but the 'pockets of results' reported are fragmented and do not capture the full effectiveness of assistance. Gaps in reporting mean that Finland's achievements (and under-achievements) of its humanitarian assistance are not fully captured.

## Catalysing change

**Most tangible results have been delivered on the provision of basic commodities, services and facilities to civilian groups, and on ensuring the protection of people affected or threatened by a humanitarian crisis.**

**Finland has also played an important role in leading some co-ordination forums.** Some significant normative level results have been delivered on gender equality, disability and humanitarian leadership.

**Finland has prioritised non-discrimination, including gender equality and disability concerns.** Its assistance has helped reduce Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and maternal mortality, enhance access to education for girls/women and improve livelihoods for women. However, Finland has **not dedicated specific effort or drive towards the localization of aid.**

The results in influencing humanitarian agencies and improving the humanitarian system leave room for improvement. One of the conclusions made in the evaluation report is that Finland could make better use of its key strengths that include commitment to internationalism and a positive external reputation that is linked to the above mentioned successes.

## Mismatch between bureaucracy, adaptability and resources

**More nimble administrative procedures would help Finland align its humanitarian assistance more swiftly with emerging needs.** Finland's 'adaptive capacity' is not proactively supported by its aid management systems. The Unit for Humanitarian Assistance often finds itself navigating around, rather than being supported by, internal aid management systems.

**Human resource constraints within the Unit for Humanitarian Assistance particularly pose limitations.** Internally, there is room for stronger co-ordination with development assistance managed by regional units.

## Finland is active at the global level but less visible on the ground

**Finland has a strongly internationalist approach to its humanitarian assistance but its presence is not matched by its visibility, influence and voice.** Finland plays a leading role in some key global humanitarian forums, such as the EU Council working party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA). But at country level, Finland is a relatively low-profile actor.

## Scope for more thorough understanding of and strategic approach to partners

**Finland has scope for a more rigorous understanding of its multilateral partners and a more strategic approach to its CSO partnerships.** Channelling the bulk of its assistance through multilateral agencies is appropriate given Finland's volumes of resources and internal conditions, including human resources. Its provision of at least 30% of its humanitarian assistance as 'unearmarked' or 'softly earmarked' is highly valued by partner agencies. There is room for a more thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of its multilateral partners and a more strategic, and less project-based, approach to CSO partnerships.

## Nexus prioritised but not yet fully reflected on the ground

**Finland prioritises a humanitarian-development-peace 'nexus' approach,** reflected in its flexible application of humanitarian and development assistance. However, the approach is not always reflected in projects on the ground.

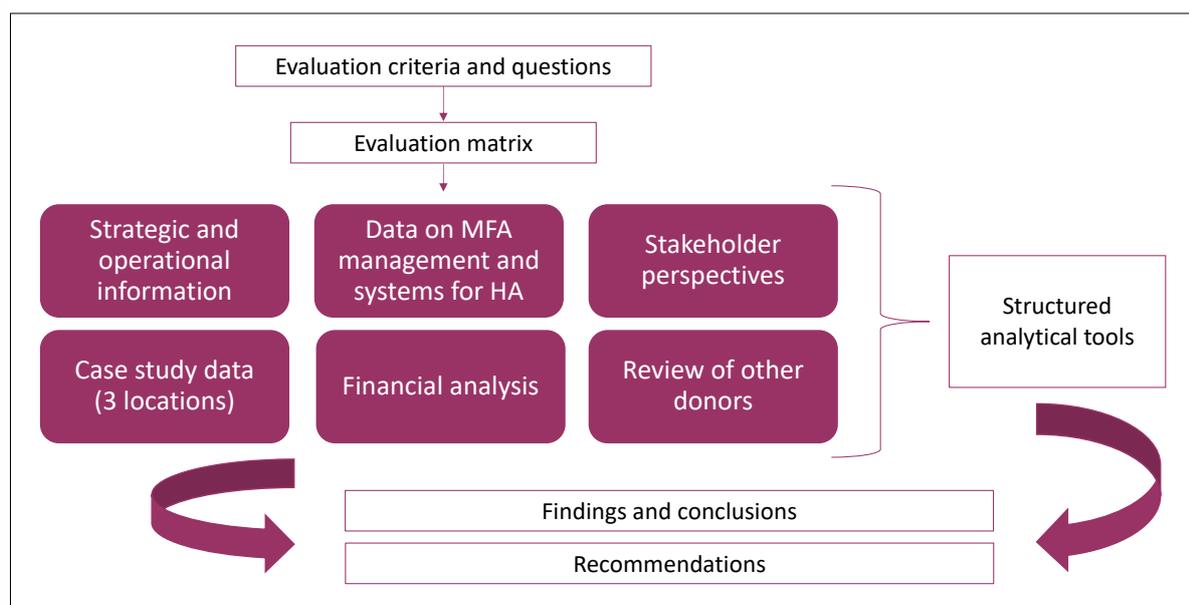
**More proactive and strategic internal collaboration will help clarify the purposes and use of humanitarian vs development funding.** The separation between the 'needs based' approach of humanitarian assistance and the 'rights-based' ethos of development assistance are not always well understood by MFA staff. More explicit definition will help ensure that humanitarian and development assistance are appropriately deployed.

## What improvements can Finland make?

The evaluation proposes eight recommendations for MFA to consider.

1. **Streamline allocations** to a more limited number of multilateral agencies.
2. **Adopt a more strategic approach to CSO engagement** in humanitarian assistance.
3. Under the framework of the nexus approach – and in the light of new guidance issuing – adopt a collective approach with regional desk officers to **setting country priorities for assistance**.
4. **Define and promulgate thematic priorities** for humanitarian assistance, reviewed on a bi-annual basis.
5. Continue contributions to the Central Emergency Response Fund but **add the Country Based Pooled Funds**.
6. **Translate the Humanitarian Policy into English**, publicise and update it.
7. **Develop a streamlined results framework** for the Humanitarian Policy.
8. Develop and operationalise a clear **humanitarian influencing strategy**.

## Evaluation design and methodology in a nutshell



**6** 'evidence streams' were applied through a sequential approach, building the evidence base through progressively deeper analysis as the evaluation proceeded (see figure above)

Qualitative desk analysis of **30** humanitarian assistance interventions, case study work was conducted by **3** regionally based team members, with support from the international team of **4** experts.

A total of **121** stakeholders were interviewed: **38** at the MFA in Helsinki, **9** in Finnish Embassies and **74** with partners and stakeholders around the world.



Ministry for Foreign  
Affairs of Finland

For the full report, see [MFA's website](#).