



## From Reactivity to Resilience

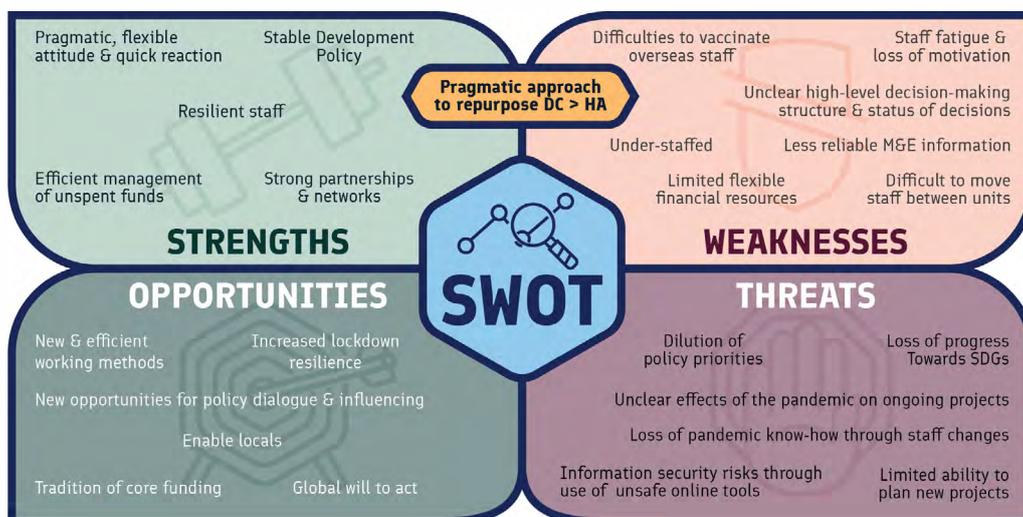
# Assessment of the Response of Finnish Development Policy and Cooperation to the COVID-19 Pandemic – Selected Highlights of the Report

### Why was Finland’s pandemic response in developing countries assessed?

The purpose of the assessment was to learn from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ (MFA) response to the COVID-19 pandemic and thereby enhance its ability to respond and adapt development policy and cooperation and humanitarian assistance in crisis situations. The assessment was to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the management of Finnish development policy and cooperation and humanitarian assistance in view of the COVID-19 response.

The assessment covered both the acute and early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and elements of the longer-term response to build forward. It focused on the period from March 2020 up till the end of 2021.

The focus of the assessment was on the MFA central level as led from the headquarters. It covered Finland’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic with regards to development policy and cooperation and humanitarian assistance. A timeline of actions taken by the MFA’s management was generated as a basis for assessing the relevance, efficiency and coherence of the MFA’s pandemic response.



Summary SWOT analysis concluding the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the MFA’s response to pandemic.

## Response was relevant...

Finland's COVID-19 pandemic response was relevant both with respect to – and beyond – Finland's explicit development policy priorities. While health is not an explicit development policy priority, Finland nevertheless mobilised significant funding for vaccines. **Maintaining Finland's development policy priorities, the MFA mobilised a significant overall response through humanitarian assistance and development cooperation and adjusted policy dialogue, processes, channels, and interventions to strengthen their relevance for partner country needs.**

## ... and quick and flexible...

Within its parameters, the MFA's COVID-19 pandemic response was quick and flexible, while the ongoing work was also maintained.

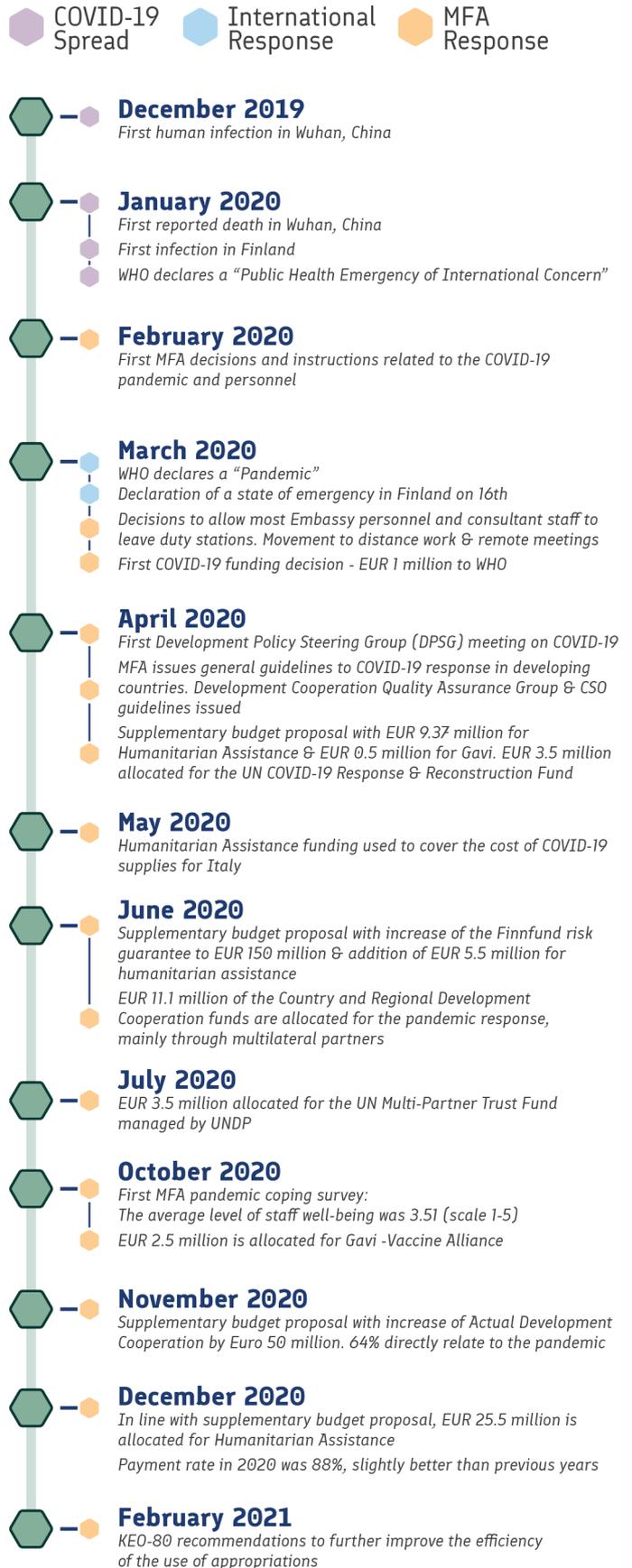
The response owes a large debt to the **motivated, devoted and at times overburdened staff**. The resulting increased workload and the pandemic strained managers and staff in embassies and in Helsinki, **but the organization could not fully secure the safety and well-being of all staff despite efforts made**. The MFA makes limited use of systematic mechanisms to assess each staff member's particular situation and extend support measures, as well mechanisms to swiftly move staff from units with lesser workload as a result of the pandemic-type situations to those where the workload has increased.

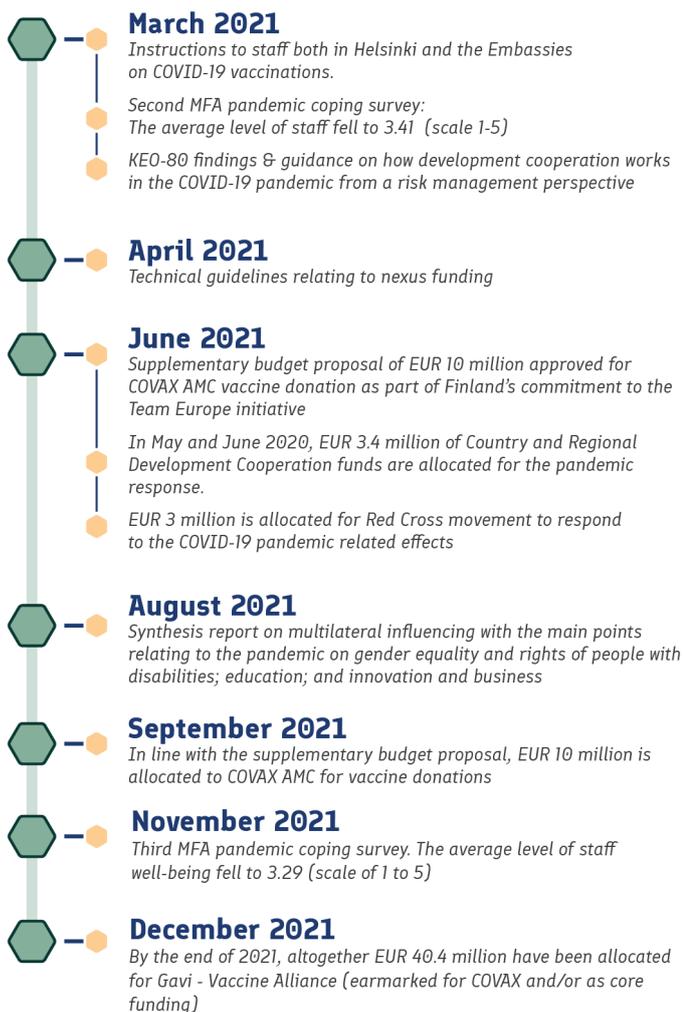
The pandemic also offered several opportunities: **it sped up reform processes and introduced new working modalities worth preserving and developing further.**

## ... yet results need to be monitored and later fully assessed.

The MFA needs to closely monitor the results emerging from the pandemic-era development cooperation and the (future) building back better and greener efforts. A full assessment of relevance in terms of the results associated with the pandemic response can only be conducted once those results have materialised. The same applies to other donors' responses.

## Timeline: COVID-19 Response





*Timeline of the MFA's main management actions concerning development policy and cooperation and humanitarian assistance.*

## Coherence was ensured both by relying on long-term strengths and adding new elements

The MFA's response to the pandemic was built on its strengths in policy dialogue and influencing, partnerships with multilateral organisations and coordination with like-minded countries. A new element, **Team Europe**, offered means for increased coherence and communication. Coordination and collaboration within the Finnish government resulted in mixed results.

## Integrate crisis response in development policy

The assessment recommends to **make crisis response an explicit element of Finland's development policies** so as to secure a clear mandate for a crisis response by development policy and cooperation in future crises too.

## Efficient management needs clear decision-making structures and information sharing

For efficient management of crisis response, the assessment recommends to **formalise the decision-making and enforcing powers of the Development Policy Steering Committee** – especially during crisis response and for matters requiring inter-departmental execution; but to **maintain the current approach of taking and operationalising portfolio-level decisions by the relevant units** – within their respective mandates – also in providing crisis response; as well as to **strengthen information sharing on decisions made**.

## Managing the risks by using multiple channels of delivery works well

In risk management and supporting operations and planning during crises, the assessment recommends to **rely on multi-bi as a means of delivery, and on other channels of delivery, carefully transferring authority and responsibility towards local stakeholders**. It is also recommended to **make tangible plans for building back better and greener**. To achieve building back better and greener, the planning and revising the development cooperation interventions should make use of the existing parameters, including the most relevant in development policy aggregate indicators. This also cor-

responds with the Nordic development ministers' pledge made in the beginning of the pandemic. Furthermore, the assessment recommends to **quickly develop a specific crisis risk assessment template and apply it to all ongoing and planned projects** as soon as the first parameters of the crisis are known.

### Knowledge gap should be bridged later

As for knowledge management in crises, the assessment recommends the MFA to **focus on obtaining information on the impact of the pandemic** on implementation and results of ongoing work **and on influencing** the multilateral, CSO and other partners to do the same.

### Enhancing staff resilience during crises

The assessment recommends the MFA to influence the relevant authorities and legislation, rules and regulations, as well as budget processes that restrict the MFA from discharging its full duties as an employer in the areas of staff health and safety. Furthermore, it is recommended

to strengthen crisis resilience of MFA's human resources by more flexibly adapting staff workloads and shifting capacities.

### How the assessment was done?

The assessment followed two tracks of inquiry. The first was **descriptive** (how has Finland responded?), and the second was **evaluative** (how relevant, efficient and coherent was the response?). The MFA's activities related to the COVID-19 pandemic were analysed along six dimensions: 1) Financial response, 2) Policy dialogue response, 3) Policies and procedures, 4) Risk management, 5) Knowledge management, and 6) Staff.

The assessment was based on interviews with MFA staff, analysis of pandemic-related financial decisions, timelines for each of the above six dimensions, a summary MFA response timeline, five focused case examples, and a dimension-by-dimension and summary Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities (SWOT) analysis.



Ministry for Foreign  
Affairs of Finland

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