Belgium addresses the leave no one behind pledge of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through two strands: a focus on reaching out to those countries farthest behind and a focus on reaching out to those populations that are in a disadvantaged, vulnerable or marginalised situation.

In order to reach those left behind, Belgian development co-operation has a political priority to support least developed countries (LDCs): 12 out of its 14 partner countries are LDCs. It strives to allocate 50% of its official development assistance to the LDCs and fragile states.

Promoting human rights is a core theme of Belgium’s development co-operation. Belgium’s rights-based approach focuses on empowerment and human rights. It mainstreams the rights-based approach in all its interventions by focusing on specific individual rights of groups such as women and children; sexual and reproductive rights; and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. When taking decisions about the choice and the funding of partner governments, Belgium states that it pays particular attention to democratic legitimacy and good governance. It also strives to promote sustainable and inclusive economic development and strategic engagement with the private sector and civil society to achieve its objectives.

Financial flows from Belgium to developing countries

Belgium’s performance against commitments for effective development co-operation
Belgium’s official development assistance

In 2017, Belgium provided USD 2.2 billion in net ODA (preliminary data), which represented 0.45% of gross national income (GNI) and a decrease of 8.2% in real terms from 2016, due to lower in-donor refugee costs and a slight decrease in other bilateral official development assistance (ODA). In 2017, in-donor refugee costs were USD 316 million and represented 14.3% of Belgium’s total net ODA, compared to 16.3% in 2016.

There is a negative outlook for Belgium’s ODA with the 2017 ODA budgeted expected to drop to 0.44% GNI. The government has repeatedly committed to reach the target of 0.7% ODA/GNI; however, significant budget restrictions are in place until 2019. Belgium’s share of untied ODA (excluding administrative costs and in-donor refugee costs) was 95.8% in 2016, compared to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) average of 81.2%. The grant element of total ODA was 99.8% in 2016 and loans amounted to 0.7% of gross ODA.

In 2016, 62.7% of ODA was provided bilaterally. Belgium allocated 37.3% of total ODA as core contributions to multilateral organisations. In addition, it channelled 16.7% of its bilateral ODA for specific projects implemented by multilateral organisations (multi-bi/non-core).

In 2016, 20.4% of bilateral ODA was programmed with partner countries. The share of country programmable aid at 20% in 2016 was low compared with the DAC country average (46.8%). Project-type interventions accounted for 90% of this aid.

In 2016, USD 277.7 million of bilateral ODA was channelled to and through civil society organisations (CSOs). This was equivalent to 18.9% of Belgium’s bilateral ODA, compared with 22.2% in 2015.
Bilateral ODA in 2016 was primarily focused on sub-Saharan Africa, with USD 444 million allocated to this region. The Middle East received USD 93 million in 2016.

Figure 16.6. Share of bilateral ODA by region, 2016, gross disbursements, Belgium

Note: Forty-eight per cent of bilateral ODA allocated was unspecified by region in 2016. This share is not represented on the map.

In 2016, 26.6% of bilateral ODA went to Belgium’s top 10 recipients. Eight of its 14 priority partner countries are among its top 10 recipients. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda are among its top 5 recipients. Belgium’s support to fragile contexts reached USD 464.4 million in 2016 (32% of gross bilateral ODA). Support to fragile contexts consisted mainly of project-type interventions (64%) as well as contributions to pooled funds (32%).

Figure 16.7. Bilateral ODA to top recipients, 2016, gross disbursements, Belgium

In 2016, 27.2% of Belgium’s bilateral ODA was allocated to the LDCs, amounting to USD 401.2 million. This is a decrease from 32.2% in 2015, but remains higher than the 2016 DAC average of 21.9%. The LDCs received the highest share of bilateral ODA in 2016, noting that 48.8% was unallocated by income group.

At 0.13% of GNI in 2016, Belgium’s total ODA to the LDCs is below the UN target of 0.15% of GNI. Belgium intends to allocate 50% of total ODA and 0.20-0.25% GNI to the LDCs and fragile states by 2019.

Figure 16.8. Bilateral ODA by income group, 2010-16, gross disbursements, Belgium
In 2016, 25.7% of bilateral ODA was allocated to social infrastructure and services, for a total of USD 361.4 million. There was a strong focus on health (USD 111.8 million), education (USD 81.5 million), and government and civil society (USD 73 million). Humanitarian aid amounted to USD 239 million. In 2016, Belgium committed USD 2.2 million (0.2% of bilateral allocable aid) to the mobilisation of domestic resources in developing countries. It also committed USD 159.1 million (17.7% of bilateral allocable aid) to promote aid for trade and to improve developing countries’ trade performance and integration into the world economy.

USD 452.3 million of bilateral ODA supported gender equality. In 2016, 51% of Belgium’s bilateral allocable aid had gender equality and women’s empowerment as a principal or significant objective, compared with the DAC country average of 36.5%. This is a significant decrease from 75.9% in 2015. A high share of Belgium’s aid to population, reproductive health and education focuses on gender.

USD 409.2 million of bilateral ODA supported the environment. In 2016, 45.5% of Belgium’s bilateral allocable aid supported the environment and 25.7% (USD 231.4 million) focused particularly on climate change, compared with the respective DAC country averages of 33% and 25.7%.

Note to reader: Annex B provides “Methodological notes on the profiles of Development Assistance Committee members”.

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