

The COVID-19 pandemic is giving rise to a lot of uncertainty and many questions. Below are the most frequently asked questions that the Ministry has received from non-governmental organisations over the last few days.

1. Where can I request assistance for Dutch staff members abroad?

For general information on travel, go to www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl.

For consular assistance, Dutch citizens can call +31 247 247 247. Calls are answered round the clock, seven days a week.

2. How can Dutch organisations provide emergency aid in the context of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in vulnerable regions abroad?

The Netherlands provides emergency aid exclusively via the professional humanitarian organisations of the United Nations, the Red Cross and the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), to ensure the coordinated distribution of aid to where needs are greatest and to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy and delay.

3. Will additional development funds become available to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic?

For the time being, additional funding to combat the COVID-19 pandemic will have to be found within the existing budgetary frameworks. The intention is to provide a substantial contribution. Existing budgetary scope will be used mostly to scale up the programmes of multilateral organisations.

4. Can contract partners of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shift the focus of existing grants towards combating COVID-19 and its consequences?

It is understandable that the pandemic is delaying the implementation of existing programmes by our partners, while the need for action in the face of the COVID-19 emergency is increasing. A number of grant recipients want to use part of their current grant budget to combat COVID-19 and mitigate its repercussions. Given the urgency of the situation, an accelerated procedure has been developed within the available legal scope. Grant recipients will be able to submit a brief proposal for activities in the framework of the COVID-19 pandemic. A quick appraisal will take place.

In the assessment of new grant applications, the following factors will be considered among others: 1) synergy with the activities of other (I)NGOs, WHO, governments etc. (to avoid fragmentation); 2) the extent to which the proposal falls within the applicant's expertise, capacity and objectives; 3) whether the application is aligned with ongoing initiatives within the local context, is time-bound and achievable; and 4) whether there are opportunities to act quickly and scale up activities, and the ability to achieve results. Attention to gender and vulnerable groups of course remains important. Innovative ways of working are appreciated.

In the event of a positive appraisal, a new grant agreement will be drafted.

Please get in touch with your regular contact at the Ministry to discuss how to deal with delays or adjustments to programmes and whether a request to focus on COVID-19-related activities satisfies the above conditions.

This grant scheme starts on 8 April and will remain open for applications for 4 weeks. Applications that are received later will not be considered.

Additional indirect costs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic relating to grant-funded activities (such as extra travel costs) can in first instance be financed from the budget line 'contingencies'.

5. Can reporting and other obligations be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

As a rule, grant recipients must continue to comply with the obligations tied to the grant, including narrative and financial reports, evaluations and auditor's reports. However, the COVID-19 pandemic will in all likelihood prevent many grant activities continuing as planned. Timely accountability may also be compromised. Therefore, after being notified of such issues by the grant recipient, the Ministry will discuss a solution with them. The Ministry will seek to adopt a flexible approach.

Grant recipients are requested to comply with the standard reporting obligations and to report to the grant provider on time. In consultation, a suitable solution may be sought. This also applies to evaluations that are difficult or impossible to carry out at this time.

6. Will the scheduling of current calls for grant proposals be compromised by the coronavirus pandemic?

For the time being, assessment procedures are still on schedule. Applicants will be informed if adjustments to the schedule become necessary. If the pandemic persists, it is not inconceivable that parts of the process will have to take place online.

7. Can employers in the development cooperation sector make use of the Temporary Emergency Scheme for Job Retention (*Tijdelijke Noodmaatregel Overbrugging voor Behoud van Werkgelegenheid*)?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has received confirmation from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment that development cooperation organisations established in the Netherlands are eligible for this temporary measure, provided the necessary conditions are met. Employers can apply to the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV).

8. What can the Ministry, embassies included, do to help in countries where the space for civil society is compromised due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The Ministry, including the Dutch embassies, remains alert to violations of fundamental rights, despite a large number of missions being scaled down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry also keeps informed about human rights violations through international networks and partners. Several international players have called for strict compliance with international human rights standards in the fight against this pandemic. The Netherlands supports these calls wholeheartedly. Whenever possible, the Netherlands will draw attention to disproportionate measures being taken, and their adverse impact on civil society. This will be done multilaterally, together with like-minded countries and our international partners.

Among other things, the Netherlands will emphasise that measures should be temporary. They must be reversed once the situation has improved. If non-governmental organisations have any specific concerns, they are encouraged to contact the embassy. The same applies in the case of concerns about the treatment and/or rights of workers in value chains. The Ministry will in any event seek to continue the dialogue with non-governmental organisations when it comes to the protection of human rights and civic space, including the protection of journalists.

9. Will the Netherlands also work with other donors with a view to coordination and flexibility, e.g. in an EU context?

Consultations are taking place at various levels, including within the EU, on how the international community can best support developing countries in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Netherlands recognises the need to take on responsibility for this vital endeavour and is committed to it, especially when it comes to the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in the poorest regions.