



# KUNO ANNUAL REPORT

2025

**kuno**

KENNISUITWISSELING OVER  
NOODHULP \ HUMANITARIAN  
KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

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# INTRODUCTION

The changes in the global order that unfolded over several decades became markedly visible in 2025. One manifestation was the growing disregard for international humanitarian law and human rights. In addition, funding was cut across many donors or became more explicitly tied to the strategic interests of nation states. At the same time, the number of conflicts increased, as did escalations of violence. Most crises are no longer acute, but protracted, and include deliberate barriers for humanitarian access. These trends had serious consequences for people affected by crises, war, and conflict that continue to bear the brunt of harm and response.

In a year marked by the shrinking humanitarian space, KUNO was able to convene sessions regularly around pressing issues for its members. These sessions were for a large share co-organised with KUNO members or even convened as part of existing events. This demonstrates the commitment of the network to sharing and deepening knowledge, also in times of scarcity. Over 30 gatherings were held covering a broad set of topics and geographic areas. Focus areas ranged from the geopolitical shifts to updates on specific contexts, like DR Congo, Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine, Gaza. Multiple sessions zoomed in on aspects of the shifting global dynamics, for example on the funding shocks, on the breakdown of International Humanitarian Law, on the Humanitarian Reset as proposed by UN OCHA, and on the Gulf States as a renewed interest for collaboration. Also, more specific challenges or approaches were addressed in expert meetings and master classes, such as sanctions in Syria, anticipatory action and cybersecurity.

The year was also marked by the inclusion of new members and strengthened collaborations across the Dutch field and beyond. The ties with the Dutch Relief Alliance were strengthened, for example in the coordination of the annual conference. Also, an agreement was signed for KUNO to be a learning partner for the Humanitarian System Transformation through Local Humanitarian Leadership program, that is coordinated from Oxfam Novib.

Beyond the Netherlands KUNO was also active, in the Humanitarian Thinktank group, that convened a session with donors during the European Humanitarian Forum and with the INGOs and MFA of Spain. Thus, a shimmer of light in otherwise difficult times is the tendency of humanitarian actors to come together instead of withdrawing in competition.

This annual report offers an overview of 2025. It lists the knowledge activities that KUNO hosted along its priority themes. KUNO not only facilitates learning for its members, it is also a learning organisation itself. The report therefore presents insights and dilemmas that were encountered. Finally, an update is given on the network and the organisation. After some years of financial instability, KUNO's funding is secured by its members and by the MFA until the end of 2027. This report showcases that this has opened ample space for humanitarian knowledge exchange to inform practitioners, policymakers and scholars.



# PRIORITY THEMES

## **Knowledge activities**

KUNO's core activity is sharing and deepening knowledge through identifying themes and questions that humanitarian actors are grappling with. The mandate is to facilitate reflection and learning, and specifically does *not* include the facilitation of lobbying and advocacy. The programming of the activities is based on alignment with this mandate and is done systematically, across the priority themes, and in response to the knowledge needs of the network. In addition to highlighting activities along the themes, this section offers the results of a survey conducted across the network.

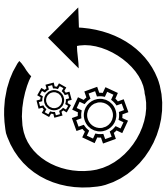
## **Priority themes 2025**

KUNO's Strategic Plan 2024–2027 included three multi-year priority themes: Climate, Migration and "The Way We Work". Due to shifting global dynamics and the realisation that climate and migration, though important topics, did not get programmed much, the themes were redefined under the overarching theme 'The Way We Work':



### **Global and (geo)political dynamics**

Focus on how global, regional and national politics and shifting geopolitical landscapes impact humanitarian action. Includes topics such as increasing authoritarianism, funding shocks, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and humanitarian access.



### **Shifting the system**

Evolving circumstances and emerging challenges have prompted the humanitarian sector to explore critical changes. This includes topics such as localisation, reform agendas, coordination mechanisms, and accountability.



### **Crisis realities**

Delving into specific contexts, crises, and disasters helps humanitarians improve their response. This includes in-depth discussions on operational challenges, best practices, and the complexity of humanitarian action.

# LEARNING EVENTS

## **Global and (geo)political dynamics**

KUNO organised nine knowledge sessions under this theme. In the last two years, geopolitical shifts, slashes in humanitarian budgets, and the changing way of warfare have an unsettling impact on the humanitarian field.

Consequently, the number of people in humanitarian need is growing, and humanitarians are less able to meet these needs. This moved KUNO to bring the field together around specific implications of these larger shifts.

Participants exchanged knowledge, urgent questions and concerns and reflected on what it means for international solidarity and the appropriate support for local actors and affected communities.

Evidence from international organisations, reports, and recent conflicts indicates that respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is decreasing. Violations are becoming more persistent, widespread, and normalised and tolerated by the international community. KUNO has chosen IHL as one of its key themes for 2025 and 2026. In 2025, a training was organised together with the Red Cross NL and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs NL, where the legal advisors from both parties explained the basic fundamentals of IHL, followed by a discussion on IHL in practice in Gaza.

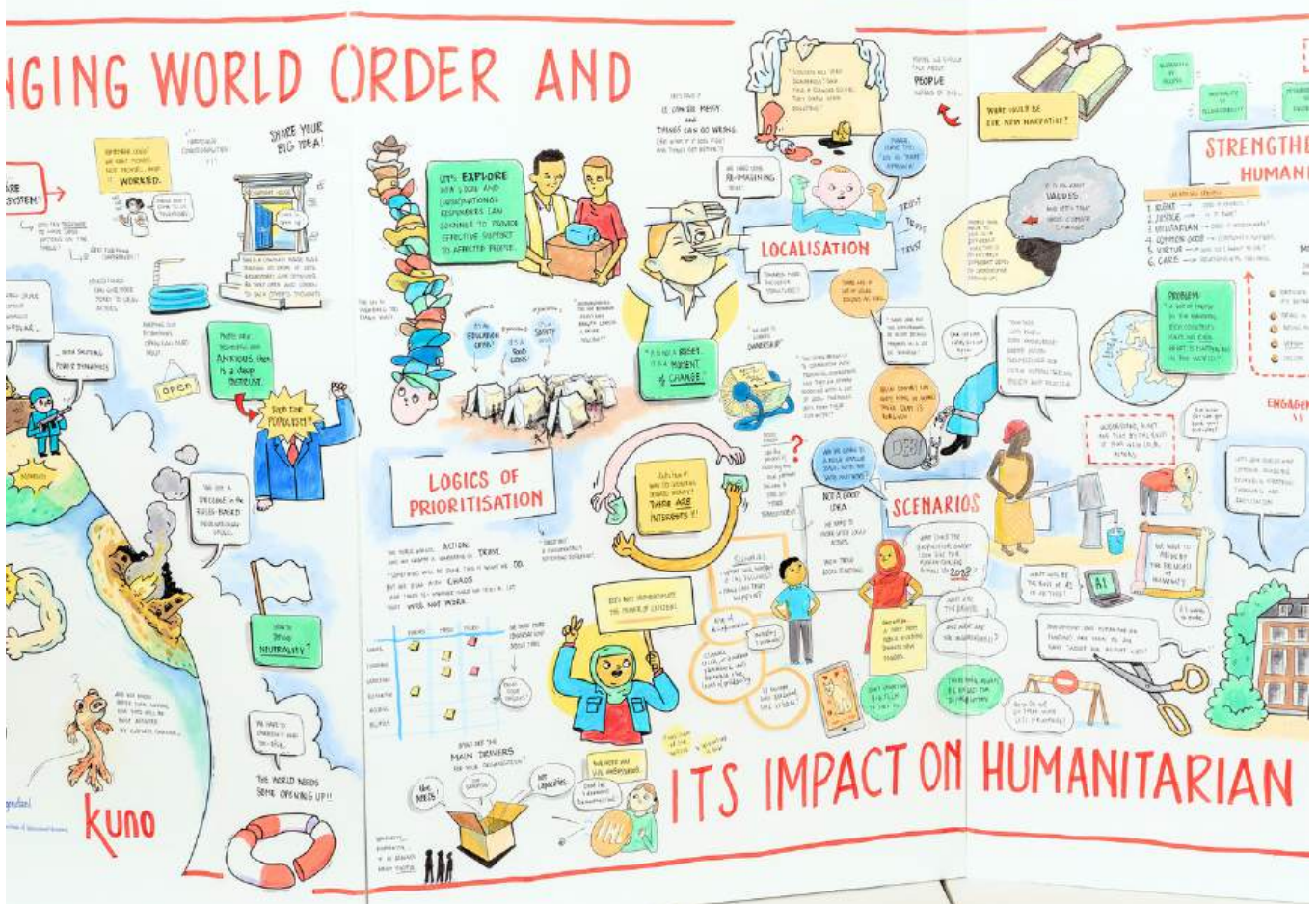
Also, in two working sessions, humanitarian actors identified opportunities for increased collaboration and political pressure points for strengthening IHL. These sessions will continue in 2026.

The second KUNO conference gathered the Dutch humanitarian field to reflect on the changing world order and its implications for humanitarian action. Key themes at the conference were: Localisation, International Humanitarian Law, The logics of prioritisation, and Scenarios for humanitarian futures. Participants and the keynote speakers included governmental representatives, practitioners from local and international NGOs and UN agencies, and academics.

The keynote conversation and breakout centred around reimagining aid, concluding that shifting the power and trust to local actors is possible, but not under the current system. There is a need for more solidarity as a countermeasure to power politics. Accountability is an underpinning value that is often neglected.

*“Humanitarian action should be recentered on people, not just principles, by reframing around humanity, equality, and solidarity.”*

More about the conference can be read in [the report](#).



Four lunch meetings were organised leading up to the conference. They explored the collapse of the liberal world order, the global funding shocks and the effect the humanitarian system; as well as the engaging with non-traditional (Gulf) donors, and priorities for local leadership. Speakers gave provocative perspectives, for example about the scope of humanitarian aid: “the core purpose of humanitarian action is to address vital, life-saving needs”, thereby questioning the effectiveness of the nexus, while also engaging with participants on what best serves the needs of the

affected people:

*"Talking with affected populations shows that they need livelihood support rather than, for example, plastic sheets".*

Participants also learned about less traditional donors, namely the Gulf states. *"Partnership [with the Gulf states] should not be framed merely as a funding mechanism, but as a broader, collaborative relationship on topics such as sharing expertise and networks, or gaining access in certain difficult contexts."*

In March 2025, new emergency relief coordinator Tom Fletcher launched the Humanitarian Reset. A few months in after this announcement, what KUNO observed was anything but clarity about what is happening in practice with this Reset and organised an expert meeting about the Reset and the implications on the Dutch humanitarian sector.

As the meeting showed,

*"whether the Reset can deliver depends on political courage, new funding models, and a genuine rebalancing of power toward local actors. It also means being clear about the sector's limitations: what can still be done, and where responsible exits must be planned."*



On a more specific matter, KUNO continued its focus on the effect of targeted financial sanctions on humanitarian action in Syria, and organised, together with partner Human Security Collective, another expert meeting on this in June. Different from other KUNO meetings, representatives of various banks in the Netherlands were also present in this meeting and could engage with the other participants of NGOs and government officials. Although the banks expressed a willingness to assist as much as possible, risk-aversion regarding transactions with sanctioned countries remains a significant barrier, compounded by the complexities surrounding humanitarian exemptions. Despite these challenges, the meeting encouraged participants to explore potential solutions, such as the need for greater clarity and transparency from all stakeholders.



A new topic for KUNO was the interaction between humanitarian action and peacekeeping missions. KUNO organised a humanitarian panel during a symposium on the future of UN peacekeeping.

The interaction offers many opportunities in access and protection. Still, conflicting mandates, and the lack of inclusive decision-making and sudden withdrawals of missions bear risks for the NGOs and their work to support communities. KUNO will continue with this topic in 2026.



## Shifting the system

By engaging with leading experts in three interactive sessions, KUNO supported the deepening of understanding of how the system operates. Reflections on its limitations were also identified. Most of the events were organised in collaboration with KUNO's partners.

In May, KUNO and Leiden University organised a symposium about cybersecurity and humanitarian organisations. Practitioners, and in specific some professionals from IT departments in NGOs and UN agencies, convened to share and produce knowledge on cyber risks in organisations and how to address them. Participants also contributed to an ongoing research project of Leiden University. Data collection was thus one of the aims of the symposium, a nice example of the added value of bringing together academics and practitioners, all contributing their specific kind of knowledge. Participants also went through a cyber crisis simulation, which contributed to learning.

In November, Twente University, ISS, The Red Cross NL and KUNO organised a well-attended and positively received Masterclass on Anticipatory Action (AA). A typical topic for the network to learn more about. Anticipation is a critical aspect of humanitarian action but is often overlooked due to funding priorities. Presentations were given on the theoretical foundation, including its position within disaster risk reduction schemes, as well as on how triggers are identified and monitored. NGOs presented their AA approaches and participants took part in workshops on risks and dilemmas, localisation, technical matters and how to break silos across anticipatory frameworks. Participants were appreciative and called for the masterclass to become an annual event, which KUNO will indeed pursue.

Lastly, together with the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA), a workshop on community preparedness was organised. It explored what community preparedness means and how humanitarian professionals can help strengthen it in contexts with the prevalence of acute crises. The session had the highest attendance of all KUNO sessions in total, with participation from many DRA local partners and the Netherlands-based actors. Feedback from one of the participants:

*"The session reinforced the importance of shifting from a risk-centric mindset to a capacity-focused approach in disaster and resilience planning. By recognizing and investing in local strengths, whether human, institutional, or infrastructural, we empower communities to lead their own preparedness and recovery. This not only builds resilience but fosters ownership, sustainability, and dignity in the face of adversity."*

While Sudan has been ravaged by war for almost three years, mutual aid remains at the heart of Sudan's humanitarian response. At one of KUNO's meetings on the ERRs in Sudan, donors and INGOs were motivated to avert from usual way of working and informed on how to directly support the community-led mutual aid initiatives:

*"If there is one lesson to be learned from Sudan's ERR experience, it is this: Ask local responders for their solutions and see where INGOs and donors might be able to play a role to help them solve the issues they bring to the table."*

### Story of Change

The session led Cordaid to also finance ERRs. As a Cordaid representative stated: *"KUNO's event on ERRs provided Cordaid with the information and contacts to explore financing ERRs. It explained clearly how ERRs work and how funding can be channelled through an intermediate organisation."* A few months after the event, Cordaid indeed started supporting ERRs.



## **Crisis realities**

KUNO organised seven events on specific crises. These meetings are appreciated, it allows those that take part in responses to gather, make sense and discuss what the humanitarian needs are, the ongoing operational challenges, and emerging opportunities. The choice of subject is dependent on the needs of the KUNO network, and responds to upheavals of humanitarian crisis in countries, or are sometimes crises that have faded from attention in the international community. KUNO addressed the humanitarian crises and response in Syria, Ukraine, eastern DRC (with two meetings), Gaza, Sudan (two meetings), and the Rohingya crisis. All meetings were attended by diaspora from those contexts, with especially a strong, in-person participation of Congolese in the DRC meetings. The round table on the humanitarian situation in Syria was timely in a relatively positive sense, since the group (consisting of more than 50 people) discussed moving humanitarian action forward after the Fall of the Assad regime. KUNO, together with the Sudan Platform in the Netherlands, organised a round table shortly after the fall of El Fasher under Chatham House Rule to exchange on the disastrous humanitarian situation after the RSF launched a genocidal campaign of brutal violence in the takeover of the city. While very limited information was available, the stakeholders and experts in the meeting exchanged information on the situation about what is needed for humanitarian action, and political solutions.

In collaboration with the Humanity Hub, KUNO organised a film screening in October. KUNO members were not necessarily the target audience, but it was aimed at bringing attention and understanding from the public to the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean Sea. The panel was completed by having someone share his personal story of his refugee journey across the sea.



# DILEMMAS & INSIGHTS



In its knowledge activities KUNO aims to contribute to increased understanding on all sorts of humanitarian issues. In each of the activities, dilemmas are encountered around the policy and practice of humanitarian action. And each activity contributes to insights on the topic at hand, which are presented in the reporting that can be found on the website.

KUNO also encounters dilemmas in its functioning as a knowledge platform across a network of practitioners, policymakers of all sorts, governmental agencies and academics. Throughout the work towards its mission, KUNO encounters dilemmas and comes to insights on how to organise the network and contribute to learning.

In this section, dilemmas and insights are presented within the programming of knowledge activities and at the organisational level.



## **Programming knowledge activities**

### **Dilemmas**

#### **Quick response versus longer outlooks**

The major global and geopolitical events of 2025 required shifts in agenda setting and swiftly adapting the programming to these events. This worked well, generally. Yet it also meant that there was less space for setting a longer-term agenda, with attention to some of the more structural issues or neglected crises.

#### **Localisation talk vs action**

Localisation remains one of the key concerns and agendas for humanitarian action. In any conversation on localisation, it is vital for KUNO to have speakers from local organisations represented. However, the barriers to localisation and the proposed solutions are well known with most actors involved. It is therefore difficult to ask local partners to speak about those issues yet again, without this being followed through. Or as said by a speaker from NEAR in one of the events: *"local and civil society have spoken enough about localisation, it is now time for those with decision power and funds to listen and implement"*. KUNO will therefore not facilitate more generic conversations about localisation anymore.

#### **Closed or open doors**

Some values guide KUNO's programming, amongst which a first is the need to facilitate a safe space for difficult conversations. To achieve this, KUNO aims to ensure Chatham House rule during sensitive sessions. Another important value is to involve experts, including from humanitarian contexts. For environmental considerations and lack of budget, speakers and participants from the Global Majority join online in sessions. This causes issues for enforcing Chatham House rule.

## ***Insights***

### **Agenda and events co-organised with members**

The remarkably high number of KUNO events in 2025 was also made possible by members coming to KUNO with suggestions for events or requests to KUNO to collaborate on events organised by members. These came particularly from the knowledge institutes, some of which had joined KUNO in 2025. Not only does this allow a higher number of events to be organised within existing capacity, but it also means that topics are placed on the agenda that otherwise may not have been. For example, Leiden University does research on cybersecurity amongst humanitarian organisations and hosted a symposium, co-organised with KUNO. Wageningen University invited KUNO to host a panel with NGO's during their event on the future of UN peacekeeping missions.

### **High interest in sharing in times of uncertainty**

2025 saw much turbulence in (geo)politics that had and has a severe impact on humanitarian crises, as well as the budgets to respond. For KUNO, there was much work to do to facilitate exchange and the deepening of knowledge, to make sense of the major events that were unfolding. This led to the highest number of events organised in one year. KUNO has organised 31 events, meaning that apart from the summer period, an event has taken place almost every week on average. It is worth noting that in a time of reduced funding and increasing pressure on humanitarians, the KUNO network demonstrates the need to come together. Rather than withdrawing to islands, the Dutch humanitarian field chose to meet and collaborate to share and deepen knowledge. There thus seems to be a need to collaborate more than in competition.





## **Organisational Dilemmas**

### **Network composition**

The members of KUNO are rather clearly delineated: humanitarian or dual-mandate INGOs with an office in the Netherlands and knowledge institutes with departments focusing on humanitarian matters. Debates on links between humanitarian action and other fields, for example through the triple nexus, have been around for long. The question re-emerged whether the network should be broadened to better reflect these debates and include a wider range of stakeholders. The implication would be that the network loses its sharp focus on humanitarian professionals and that programming would be broader, less specific.

### **Security stakeholders**

In an era of rising defence investments and increasing numbers of conflicts, debates around the interrelations between peace, security and humanitarian action have gained increasing attention. This is and will continue to be reflected in KUNO's programming. This has also raised question on whether peace/security stakeholders should be included in the network. This is, however, sensitive for organisations conducting principled humanitarian action. It was decided that dialogue is always needed and that military and security actors can be engaged with in specific sessions, but that they will not become formal members of the network. Some actors that are fulfilling intermediary roles between humanitarian and defence could be closer involved.

### **Engaging politicians**

With global and geopolitical dynamics having increasing influence there is much pressure on humanitarian systems to adapt and reform. In these volatile times there may be greater need for information and instruction of actors that are part of the Dutch politics. Important is that this does align with KUNO's mandate, that does not include lobby and advocacy. KUNO has in the past offered a Masterclass with an introduction to humanitarian matters to newly installed parliamentarians. This will likely be repeated, with continuous emphasis on it being about education and not influence.

## ***Insights***

### **Knowledge co-creation**

Three knowledge institutes joined as member, altering the ratio of INGOs and knowledge institutes, now 12 to 10. This changed network composition brings new opportunities for knowledge co-creation across scholars and practitioners.

This was demonstrated through various events that were initiated or co-hosted by the knowledge institutes, in which KUNO was asked to co-host, for example the symposium on cybersecurity (Leiden University), the HSC conference, the conference on peacekeeping missions (WUR) and the Masterclass on Anticipatory Action (Twente University, ISS, VU and Red Cross). There are also continued opportunities to further this co-creation, for example by exploring joint grants.

## ***Highlights***

### **KUNO on tour**

The KUNO team conducted a 'roadshow' amongst the INGO members, to meet with the humanitarian teams, beyond the contact persons. This served for acquaintances with a wider group of people within organisations, so that they are better informed on KUNO, help set the agenda, and KUNO is more familiar with the network. This 'KUNO on tour' round will become a bi-annual habit.

### **Collaborations**

None of KUNO's efforts are possible without collaboration with members and partners, several of which deserve to be highlighted. Some were longer standing collaborations: it was a pleasure to organise the annual KUNO conference again with Clingendael, and the Humanitarian Studies Centre. The distinct profiles of each helped strengthen the topics, and Clingendael skillfully contributed with a scenario-development trajectory. The collaboration with the Humanitarian Studies Centre (at ISS) at their annual conference is becoming a strong tradition.



Some new and promising collaborations were also established or reconfirmed:

A collaboration was established with the Humanitarian System Transformation through Local Humanitarian Leadership programme, managed at Oxfam Novib. KUNO will offer its platform role to the important findings that will emerge and are documented. The collaboration will contribute to state-of-the-art learning on localisation being offered to the wider field.

KUNO is part of the growing network of Humanitarian Observatories. This offers a wealth of expertise and knowledge through the self-organised humanitarian spaces from across 16 contexts working on research, policy and advocacy. In October, the Observatories met in Istanbul, where rich exchanges were held on key humanitarian issues in different contexts, for example, on the [Humanitarian Reset](#).

The collaboration with the Dutch Relief Alliance (DRA) was strengthened in various ways: KUNO's annual conference and the DRA Learning Week were aligned to allow country coordinators to join the conference. During that week, a joint session was organised on action in Gaza. A longer-term collaboration has been set up with the DRA Quality team, leading to the well-received joint event on Community Preparedness.

The increasing attention for the links between defence investments, peace, and humanitarian action has resulted in a new collaboration with CIVIC. They have offered key input to the sessions on peace missions and IHL.

Even though the Netherlands Red Cross had to step down as a member for financial reasons, collaboration throughout the year has been close. KUNO and the NL Red Cross teamed up in three sessions on IHL, as well as in the Master Class on Anticipatory Action. It is key that there is close involvement, due to the unique position of the Red Cross in the (Dutch) humanitarian system.

# COMMUNICATIONS

## **Targets and results 2025**

KUNO has always made reports of sessions, so that conversations are documented, and the website serves as an archive. Since late 2025, professional reporters, in text and in illustration, have been involved in sessions that are on major topics that are not too time-bound. This results in more journalistic reports with strong imagery, which makes it easier to communicate across KUNO's channels. In addition, the annual plans and reports are professionalised in their layout and are now used to communicate results to the network.

## **Website**

The average number of tracked monthly visitors in 2024 was approximately 2,391. In 2025, this adjusted average was significantly higher, around 3,497 visitors per month.

## **LinkedIn**

The number of followers on LinkedIn increased from 2,315 followers in 2024 to 3,242 in 2025, an increase of 40 per cent.

## **Mailing list**

The mailing list serves for invitations to KUNO sessions and for the newsletter. It has 630 subscribers; it rose by 8 followers. This low number is not surprising; these emails are primarily intended for the staff of our partner organisations



# ORGANISATION

## Members

KUNO's members are part of the General Assembly, which has decision-making power. They contribute through financial or in-kind contributions. Members benefit by setting KUNO's agenda, attending trainings for lower fees, and some sessions are for members only. A General Assembly meeting was held in March.

The members are:

- 12 NGOs: CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Dorcas, Kerk in Actie, MSF Netherlands, Oxfam Novib, Save the Children Netherlands, Stichting Vluchteling, Terre des Hommes Nederland, UNICEF, ZOA and INSO (member since 2025).
- 10 knowledge institutes: Expertise Centre Humanitarian Communication, International Institute of Social Studies (Erasmus University), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Wageningen University & Research, Twente University, Van Hall Larenstein, University of Applied Sciences, Leiden University, University of Amsterdam, Radboud University, Clingendael Institute (the latter three since 2025).

The Dutch MFA supports KUNO and is a member of the Steering Group.

## International Networks

KUNO is a Humanitarian Observatory. These are organised spaces in different places around the globe, representing multiple humanitarian actors that discuss a variety of humanitarian governance topics. Supported by the Hague Humanitarian Studies Centre, these networks of actors observe trends and processes in humanitarian governance and propose changes when needed.

KUNO is part of the European Network of Humanitarian Thinktanks (HuT). It is composed of the Centre for Humanitarian Action - CHA, Here Geneva, the Humanitarian Policy Group - HPG, IECAH, KUNO & Groupe URD. Its objective is to jointly improve humanitarian policies and practices in response to a crisis. The HuT hosted a donor coordination meeting at the European Humanitarian Forum in

Brussels in April. The meeting facilitated conversation around response to the major fundings hocks and on how to strengthen donor coordination. The Dutch MFA accepted the invitation to the meeting.

### **Steering Group**

The Steering Group consists of members (unpaid) from different fields of the humanitarian sector (practitioners, government, academics). In 2025, two knowledge institutions were added to the Steering Group for an improved balance between practitioner members and knowledge institute members.

In 2025, the Steering Group consisted of:

- Suying Lai, chair (Oxfam)
- Arthur Molenaar/ Janna de Jong/Nathalie Veenman (Save the Children)
- Reintje van Haeringen/Jojanneke Spoor (CARE)
- Rolf Wijnstra (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)
- Kees Boersma (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
- Leela Koenig (Institute Clingendael)
- Eefje Hendriks/Alberto Martinetti (Twente University)

The Steering Group gathered five times during 2025.

### **Staff**

The KUNO team consists of:

- Coordinator Corinne Lamain (since March, 0.8 FTE)
- Knowledge broker Julia Golterman (0.9 FTE)
- Communication advisor Marianne van Elst - Sijtsma (0.2 FTE)
- An intern each semester (0.8 FTE). The KUNO interns in 2025 were: Marjon Botha (Utrecht University) and Mariëlle Kemp (van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences).

Ton Huijzer fulfilled the role of Interim Coordinator until March 2025.

### **Lead agent**

Stichting Vluchteling functions as lead agent, managing finances and as the formal employer of the staff.





# COLOPHON

## **Text and editing**

Corinne Lamain  
Julia Golterman  
Marianne van Elst-Sijtsma

## **Photography**

Mohammed Abdulmajid, CARE  
Arie Kievit, Caritas Jerusalem, Eric Tshamala,  
Cordaid  
Safi Erneste  
Ante Bussmann, Andrii Ovod, Georg Gassauer,  
Manon Massiat, MSF  
Oxfam  
Save the Children  
Lieuwe Siebe de Jong, ZOA

## **Illustrations**

Sophie Struijk & wandverslag.nl

## **KUNO platform**

Laan van Nieuw Oost-Indië 131  
Den Haag kuno@kuno-  
platform.nl www.kuno-  
platform.nl