

# KUNO ANNUAL REPORT



2024

**kuno**

KENNISUITWISSELING OVER  
NOODHULP \ HUMANITARIAN  
KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

# INTRODUCTION

2024 was a demanding year. In terms of humanitarian needs, the ongoing wars in Ukraine, Gaza and the escalation in Sudan caused major human suffering. KUNO brought together its network several times this year to reflect on delivering support in those challenging contexts. KUNO also faced some challenges itself in 2024: the departure of long time KUNO Coordinator Peter Heintze was a big loss. Peter's contribution has been invaluable, and he brought KUNO to where it is now. Also, the financially insecure situation was only resolved at the end of the year. Nonetheless, a lot of work has still happened, and new members joined KUNO's network, particularly knowledge institutes.

Some highlights: KUNO hosted critical events on the shrinking of humanitarian space. Knowledge was shared around how to achieve humanitarian access under the Taliban and other authoritarian regimes, and amidst sanctions in Syria. And closer to home, the field was brought together to reflect on the effects of the November 2023 Dutch parliamentary elections. KUNO will continue to provide an opportunity for its network to have these necessary but sensitive conversations, in a safe space.

The increase in humanitarian challenges coupled with rising needs were centre stage at KUNO's first annual conference, organised together with Clingendael: Humanitarian Action at a Crossroads. This working conference offered space for senior humanitarian professionals to explore potential ways forward on fundamental humanitarian challenges. Dr. Hugo Slim opened the day with a keynote address and numerous roundtables were hosted to facilitate a variety of challenging conversations. This was the first time that professionals working in the Dutch humanitarian field came together at such scale to reflect about their field together. Participants reported back to KUNO that they highly appreciated the conference.

There was continued interest in the training courses. For example, the well-known KUNO summer course – that offers an introduction to the humanitarian field – was well attended and will now also be offered in the winter, due to its success. The Sphere course attracted engaged participants, interested in learning about the framework and how to achieve people-centered humanitarian action.

The end of the year brought a glimmer of hope with the overthrow of the Assad regime in Syria; a KUNO film screening coincided with this event and offered moving accounts of Syrian speakers. The participants and speakers expressed the importance of meeting right then.

We want to thank all the partners for their input into our programming and their invaluable financial support. KUNO would not have been able to develop relevant reflection and learning opportunities without this active support from practitioners, policy makers and academics.

Suying Lai, Chair KUNO  
Corinne Lamain, Coordinator KUNO

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# OVERVIEW

## Priority themes KUNO 2024

In 2023, KUNO established a strategic plan for the years 2024-2027. The multi-year priority themes in that strategy are:



### Migration

with a focus on humanitarian dimensions and implications.

### Climate

with a focus on the implications for humanitarian practice and how humanitarian NGOs could reduce their ecological footprints.

### The way we work

the practical aspects of system innovation (e.g., localisation, the nexus).

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## **Migration, Climate Change and The Way we Work**

Migration and Climate change are both major global challenges that have a strong impact on humanitarian practice. 'The Way We Work' enables KUNO to facilitate critical reflection on themes like 'Local Leadership' or the 'Nexus'. Naturally, these themes cannot be seen separately from each other. For the year 2024, the Steering Group have decided to address a specific topic: the Priority theme for 2024, "Setting (new) boundaries & priorities to humanitarian aid", which links to all of KUNO's priority themes. Setting (new) boundaries & priorities to humanitarian aid.

## **The upcoming years**

In the coming years, the humanitarian sector will be confronted with challenges: needs will grow significantly due to climate change, migration, and geopolitical developments. The financing gap between humanitarian needs and available humanitarian support is already substantial, but it is likely to grow. This will push the humanitarian system as a whole and humanitarians on the ground to their limits. It might put pressure on global solidarity that is fundamental to humanitarian action, especially in an election year in which liberal political parties fear a strong rise of radical right-wing and populist political parties. These challenges have implications for the way we work.



## **Humanitarian Action at a Crossroads**

To work on this specific theme, the intention was to develop a series of meetings, addressing the topic from different angles (historic, ethical, etc). However, after internal discussions and with the advice of people in KUNO's network, a stronger need was felt not to organise separate sessions but to come together with senior professionals in a full-day event. In October, KUNO partnered with the Clingendael Institute to co-host a working conference for CEOs and senior humanitarian professionals: Humanitarian Action at a Crossroads. The pressing nature of the moment required not only deep reflection, but also a renewed and innovative way of thinking. The conference brought together 90 senior-level participants from 17 NGOs, 4 UN agencies, 6 Universities, and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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# LEARNING EVENTS



## **Kiespijn**

At the end of 2023, the Dutch elections brought a significant shift: a new right-leaning parliament emerged, echoing the global rise of populism. This change marked a worrying signal for humanitarian and development organisations. Both the government's rhetoric and public sentiment around foreign aid became notably more critical, revealing a decline in international solidarity. In response, KUNO organised the session 'Kiespijn' in January 2024, fostering constructive dialogue on the potential implications of this political shift. As anticipated, deep cuts to Dutch development aid budgets were announced in November 2024.

Throughout 2024, several global and domestic trends shaped the foreign aid landscape. The rise of right-wing governments worldwide coincided with further reductions to already underfunded aid budgets. These cuts came at a time when humanitarian needs were intensifying due to worsening climate and migration crises, placing even greater pressure on aid workers who were expected to do more with less. KUNO responded to these developments with the working conference. In addition, these shaped the annual plan for 2025.

### **Situation in Gaza**

Another defining aspect of 2024 was the ongoing war in Gaza, which created unprecedented challenges for humanitarian actors. They were forced to operate under violent circumstances with severely restricted access to people in need. Humanitarian organisations found themselves navigating a politically charged and morally complex environment while being dependent on actors that are causing the crisis. In response, KUNO hosted three [sessions on Gaza](#), which fed into broader discussions around accountability, neutrality, and international humanitarian law—topics that were further explored at the conference.



### **Series on Syria**

KUNO also addressed other pressing humanitarian issues in 2024. The series on [Syria and the Negative Impact of Sanctions on Humanitarian Aid](#) continued with a second and a third session. These brought together researchers, international and local NGOs to assess the impact of sanctions, anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism regulations, and donors' red lines on the delivery of humanitarian aid.



### **Book presentation, Sphere training and the Summer Course**

Additionally, KUNO provided a platform to highlight new resources, such as reports. For example, the '[Legal Guidebook on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence](#)' by the Mukwege Foundation and the presentation of the book '[Humanitarian Negotiations](#)'. The training offer in 2024 included the [Sphere Training](#) in April (delivered by Sphere) and the KUNO [Summer Course](#) in July (developed by KUNO), which continues to strengthen the capacities of humanitarian professionals.



### **Afghanistan, Sudan and the powerful documentary For Sama**

KUNO continued conversations that started in 2023 about operating in Afghanistan under [Taliban rule](#) (and the effect on female staff) and the deepening humanitarian crisis in [Sudan](#), and more.

Another memorable event was the screening of [For Sama](#), a powerful documentary about life during the war in Syria. In a striking twist of timing, the Assad regime fell just days before the screening, shifting the tone and significance of the post-film discussion.



# TARGETS & RESULTS

## Events

KUNO organised 20 different events, with in total of 619 participants. During 12 meetings, speakers from the Global South had an active role. An average of 8 different member organisations participated in each meeting. Most of the results exceed the targets set (15 to 20 meetings, reaching a total amount of 500 participants).

## Website

The interest in the website increases significantly: the number of average monthly visits rose from 2,180 in 2023 to 5,624 in 2024.

## LinkedIn

The number of followers on the LinkedIn page has grown: from 1,506 followers at the end of 2023 to 2,315 by the end of 2024. That is an increase of 53.7 per cent.

## Newsletter

The mailing list gained five subscribers. This low number is not surprising; these emails are primarily intended for the staff of our partner organisations.



# HIGHLIGHT



## Interviews with humanitarian professionals

A few years ago, KUNO began conducting interviews with humanitarian professionals, both internationally and within the Netherlands. This initiative started after realising that many visitors are eager to learn about the daily realities of humanitarian workers. People are especially interested in hearing personal stories, gaining insights into the experiences of aid workers, and understanding the challenges they face in the field. In addition to meeting this curiosity, the interviews serve to highlight the importance of the work of partners. They offer a platform to showcase their efforts in an accessible and engaging format – easy to read yet rich in perspective.



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# LESSONS & CHALLENGES



## ■ Priority themes

KUNO is diverging from two of the three priority themes set for 2024–2027. This shift is largely driven by the evolving geopolitical and national political landscapes. While migration and climate change are undeniably interconnected with nearly every topic discussed at KUNO, it's important to reflect on where KUNO's unique added value lies.

## ■ Global South

The inclusion of Global South actors in all activities is challenging. For example, for the Sphere training, KUNO works with the same trainer who is not from the Global South.

However, KUNO has the aim to include even more Southern voices and will continue to prioritise this in 2025.



### **Winter Course**

The interest in the summer course was very high. Therefore, after careful consideration, KUNO decided to organise the same training at the beginning of 2025: launching the first winter course.

### **No report**

Due to capacity issues in the team, see more below, KUNO did not succeed to finalise a comprehensive report of the conference in 2024. Other results of the event, such as a video of the keynote speech, were shared via the website.

### **Partners**

Plan Nederland and the Red Cross have resigned from their membership of KUNO due to a mismatch with their focus areas and due to budget cuts. KUNO will remain in close contact as they continue to be relevant partners in the field.

### **Limited evaluation**

In 2024, KUNO did not do a survey to evaluate activities as data had been collected the years prior and 2024 was a singular funding year. Evaluations will be done 2025 – 2027 again. KUNO counted participants and KUNO member organisations at meetings, and always verbally asked for feedback after meetings. For 2025, KUNO started capturing feedback in a document as 'stories of change'.

### **Collaboration knowledge partners**

Knowledge institute members do not pay a financial membership contribution but pay in-kind. The experience is that KUNO has to reach out to some of its knowledge members and come up with ways to collaborate. KUNO will make use of the existing initiatives of academic partners to showcase best practices to others.

## Team

For many years, KUNO's operations were heavily reliant on a single coordinator, a part-time communication officer and an intern. While this brought consistency, it also made the platform vulnerable. Should the coordinator step down, the continuity of the platform would be at risk. Recognising this fragility, KUNO took steps in early 2024 to strengthen its internal capacity. A junior policy officer was hired to support programme development, resulting in a more stable and resilient team structure.

This organisational vulnerability was again tested in 2024 when the long-standing coordinator, after seven years of dedicated leadership, decided to step down. Because KUNO had not secured funds yet for the coming years (only at the end of the year), the lead agent could not recruit a new coordinator right away. An interim coordinator was appointed to ensure continuity.

Unfortunately, due to unforeseen health issues, the interim coordinator had to step back from most responsibilities and could only provide sporadic, advisory support to the team. This again showed the fragility of KUNO's financial means. During this challenging period, the remaining team members— the policy officer, the communications officer, and an intern—stepped up and took on the majority of the work and maintained KUNO's activities, to the possible extent, and presence throughout those months.

# ORGANISATION

## Members & donor(s)

In 2024, INGOS and a UN agency are members of KUNO: CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Dorcas, Kerk in Actie, MSF Netherlands, Oxfam Novib, Save the Children Netherlands, Stichting Vluchteling, Terre des Hommes Nederland, Unicef, Red Cross and NL and ZOA. KUNO started developing the new membership of INSO at the end of 2024, which was completed in 2025. In 2024, KUNO has seven knowledge institutes as members: the Institute Clingendael, Expertise Centre Humanitarian Communication, International Institute of Social Studies (Erasmus University), University of Twente, Van Hall Larenstein University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and Wageningen University & Research. KUNO started conversations with Leiden University, the University of Amsterdam, and Radboud University and completed their membership in 2025.

The Dutch MFA supported KUNO generously and contributed 51% of KUNO's budget; 42% of the budget was contributed by the NGO members, and 7% was sourced from income through assignments and sponsorship.

KUNO became 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. Since KUNO was already doing this in the Netherlands, KUNO got the chance to join this Inter-Observatory Network. KUNO will, in this way, be connected with a broad spectrum of humanitarian actors, enriching the network and expertise in the sector. KUNO can collaborate on specific topics and also provide support to the network with our network and activities.

## **Lead Agent & Steering Group**

The lead agent of the consortium is Stichting Vluchteling, which manages the finances and is the formal employer of the staff.

KUNO has a Steering Group of members (unpaid) from different fields of the humanitarian sector (practitioners, policy makers, academics).

In 2024, the Steering Group consisted of:

- Suying Lai, chair (Oxfam)
- Prof. Kees Boersma/Eva van Roekel (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)
- Ton Huijzer (consultant)
- Janna de Jong/Arthur Molenaar (Save the Children)
- Reintje van Haeringen (CARE)
- Rolf Wijnstra (Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

The Steering Group gathered four times during 2024. In addition, there was a General Assembly in January and an extra one in September.

## **Staff**

The KUNO staff in 2024 consisted of coordinator Peter Heintze (until September 2024), communication advisor Marianne Sijtsma (part-time), policy officer Julia Golterman, and an intern to support both. The KUNO interns in 2024 were: Nathasja U-A-Sai and Emma Oosterink. As of September 2025, Ton Huijzer stepped out of the Steering Group and fulfilled the role of interim coordinator as of September 2024 until March 2025. KUNO has working places four times a week at Stichting Vluchteling and one day at HSC (every Wednesday).





# COLOPHON

## **Text and editing**

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## **Project management**

Marianne van Elst-Sijtsma

## **Phototaphy**

Care  
Cordaid  
Dorcas  
MSF  
UNICEF  
Stichting Vluchteling  
Qawal Ilyas  
ZOA

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