

Netherlands Red Cross – Self Assessment and Action Planning toward CEA Minimum Commitments

The Netherlands Red Cross carried out a comprehensive self-assessment across its Domestic Department to understand how the Society is progressing towards the Movement-wide CEA commitments. Based on the findings of the self-assessment, an action plan was drawn up setting out how the minimum CEA-actions could be achieved, and CEA institutionalised into standard ways of working.

Introduction

- At the 2019 International Conference of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, the Netherlands Red Cross (NLRC) – along with the entire Movement - signed up to the “Movement-wide Commitments for Community Engagement and Accountability”.
- By signing, all National Societies have agreed to meet the seven commitments.
- In April 2023, NLRC began a self-assessment within its Domestic Department to gain a better understanding of where they stood in their progress towards meeting the commitments, where they were excelling or falling short, and what actions should be prioritised to ensure compliance by the end of 2025.
- This case study summarises the process that was followed for the self-assessment in NLRC, its impact, and resulting actions.

Process of the self-assessment

- In early 2023 conducting a CEA self-assessment was added to the workplan of NLRC’s Domestic Aid department. A small project team consisting of two staff members - a domestic aid advisor and a new aid developer specialising in community engagement - was set up to carry out the self-assessment. The team also worked closely with the manager of NLRC’s Advice, Policy and Strategy team who provided advice and linked the project to the management team of NLRC’s Domestic Aid department.
- The project team started by researching the [IFRC self-assessment tools in the CEA Toolkit](#), and speaking to colleagues in NLRC’s International Aid department and IFRC CEA counterparts in the Europe region. Following this initial research, a project plan was written and presented to the National Society’s Domestic Aid Management Team. This presentation sought to raise awareness of the topic and ensure buy-in and commitment from leadership and their respective team members to take part in the self-assessment.
- The self-assessment itself was set up as follows:
 - Over 2 weeks, the project team (working together as a pair) spoke to 2-3 headquarters-based members from each team in the Domestic Aid Department. The project team also spoke to a variety of colleagues working in branches across a range of positions and contexts, from branch managers to volunteers, and in both urban and rural areas. The team also spoke to the NLRC’s Diversity & Inclusion lead, and the Protection lead, as well as members of the HR and the international departments. In total around 50 people were interviewed for the self-assessment.



- The project team requested managers to identify participants for the interviews, based on their knowledge of who would be most appropriate to engage with us. That they had been identified by their manager to take part was mentioned in the invitations as encouragement to take part, but colleagues were generally quite willing to participate once they understood the purpose and significance of the activity.
- Due to limited time available from staff (typically 1.5 – 2 hours) and volunteers (about half an hour), and the logistical challenges of bringing everybody together at the same time, interviews were scheduled per team and per branch (rather than meeting all together as suggested in the CEA self-assessment tool). This was easier to manage and allowed discussions to quickly go into more depth and focus on the specific issues relevant to each team.
- Each discussion for the self-assessment started with a presentation of what CEA is – the term is quite new in our Domestic department – including some specific examples of how CEA could be relevant to that team. Slides from the basic IFRC CEA introductory training, available on the CEA Hub, were used for this and adjusted to the Dutch context.
- The structure of the self-assessment discussions was based on the IFRC CEA self-assessment tool, and on the minimum actions as defined in the CEA guide.
- Each team was asked:
 - Where are you now concerning the minimum CEA actions that apply to your team? Could you give concrete examples? What is going well, what could be better?
 - What opportunities do you see for strengthening CEA in the coming years in your own team? What would you need to realize this?
 - What risks/ obstacles do you see for strengthening CEA (in the national society as a whole or your own team/department)?
- At the end of each discussion participants were asked to commit to reading the draft self-assessment report & action plan to give feedback, offer suggestions, verify findings and act as genuine co-authors to the report & plan. The goal of this request was to encourage people's involvement and meaningful participation in creating the report & plan, so that all involved could feel the documents had been created in partnership, with their genuine contribution.
- The project team took one week to analyse the results of the self-assessment discussions, and to write the first draft of the report & action plan. There were a couple of reasons for moving so quickly:
 - To make sure the draft was sent to participants as soon as possible, so the topic would still be at the front of their minds.
 - So the first draft was not too perfect. Sending it out while still clearly in the draft phase meant people could see their input was needed and wanted. Circulating only a version which already appeared final could put people off contributing further and would go against the principle of this being a cooperative production. However, the project team did make sure the report was neat and readable with enough 'meat' in it to encourage critical feedback.
- People were asked in advance to set time aside for reviewing the document and given a week to submit their comments. Of those involved in the self-assessment discussions, around half were able to read, feed-back, and "co-write" the report. The main reasons people gave for not feeding back were that their work schedules didn't allow it, or that they were on holiday leave.
- After receiving and consolidating participants' feedback, the project team took another week to refine the report and recommendations. Once the report was compiled, everyone who had submitted feedback was informed how their comments had been incorporated. In a very few cases suggested changes were not adopted, in which case the people who had submitted them were informed why.

- The final report included:
 - An introduction to CEA and the Movement-wide minimum commitments.
 - Results of the self-assessment categorized against the seven minimum commitments.
 - An overview of lessons learned from case studies and the IFRC international context.
 - An overview of risks identified by participants and possible control measures.
 - Overall advice and recommendations, in the form of an action plan to strengthen CEA from 2023 – 2025 based on the self-assessment, case studies, and risk assessment.

Lessons learned

- The self-assessment process has been useful in more ways than expected. The self-assessment conversations created a lot of awareness and enthusiasm for CEA amongst participants, which they took with them to their respective teams. In the weeks after the assessment, the project team was approached many times to participate in sessions with other teams, to inspire and to stimulate action. Following the self-assessment process, a lot of teams started to recognise the role of CEA and took the initiative to start integrating CEA in their own areas of work.
- Starting the conversation about CEA with different teams highlighted that these initial discussions, while extremely useful, really are just a beginning. There is a need for more in-depth engagement with teams on this, and on an ongoing basis, as we seek to integrate and adopt the CEA minimum standards. Bringing teams together to discuss ways forward with a cross-discipline perspective - as recommended in the IFRC CEA self-assessment tool – would also be extremely helpful. There are a lot of co-dependencies in terms of time and capacity when it comes to starting CEA activities. Teams – at headquarters and branches - need to decide together what their priorities will be in the coming years; this cannot be done in isolation. Nevertheless, the project team found that starting with the 1.5-hour discussions generated momentum and buy-in to invest more time in the topic at a later date.
- There is a big difference in how far developed different teams are in their thinking about community engagement and accountability, and their attitudes towards it. This means an individually tailored approach will be required to find the best ways to support the strengthening of CEA in each team.
- There are also increasing differences in the types of support NLRC offers and how these programmes are delivered, meaning CEA approaches also need to be tailored to each programme.

Results of the self-assessment

The NLRC-specific results of the self-assessment are not the focus of this case study, however, to better introduce and explain next steps, a brief overview is probably helpful:

- Without necessarily always using the term 'CEA', NLRC has adopted actions towards meeting all seven of the Movement-wide commitments in their Domestic work. Examples of this include:
 - The participation of “experts by experience” in the development of activities by the ‘Migration & Restoring Family Links’ team
 - NLRC’s support to the development of a refugee advocacy Voices Network
 - Co-design sessions adopted for the development of food and digital-aid programmes
 - The establishment of feedback mechanisms in many programmes

- Despite these positives, NLRC does not yet fully live up to the CEA minimum commitments. There is a need to further develop, consolidate, and systematise actions in the domestic department – such as context-analysis and feedback mechanisms. Specifically, the assessment shows the need for CEA to be further institutionalized, instead being tied to specific programmes or projects that could end, resulting in the loss of CEA tools, processes, and expertise.
- Changes in the way NLRC works domestically, providing longer-term rather than solely emergency support - requiring closer relationships and deeper engagement with the people and communities the Society serves - has also underlined the need for greater and more systematic community engagement.
- There is a need to develop in-house expertise and capacity, and to set aside time and budget for this.

Next steps & recommendations for strengthening CEA

NLRC has committed to strengthening CEA as a way of working over the next two years. Based on the self-assessment process, case studies, and recommendations from the IFRC, the following actions have been prioritised for 2023:

- **Support internal awareness of CEA and leadership buy-in**, through CEA trainings, identification of CEA focal point in Management Team, and sharing progress with NLRC's Senior Management Team.
- **Allocate CEA roles and responsibilities**, including the appointment of several CEA champions with clear objectives to drive institutionalization, as well as the identification of CEA ambassadors throughout the organization to further promote CEA.
- **Begin formally integrating CEA into NLRC ways of working**. A CEA strategy and activities will be added to the NLRC Objectives, Goals, Strategies and Measures (OGSM) plan running until 2026. As part of this, process-flows, Standard Operating Procedures, templates etc. will be developed to systematize CEA as an approach within the National Society.
- **Strengthen, consolidate, and systematize existing NLRC feedback mechanisms**. An advisor from the Planning Monitoring Evaluating and Reporting (PMER) team will be appointed as project leader to review and analyze existing feedback mechanisms and plan how these can be standardized and consolidated into a single overarching mechanism, a task which will require broad engagement with and support from colleagues across the organization.

In the third quarter of 2023, NLRC will organize meetings with representatives from all domestic departments and branches to determine priority actions for 2024 and 2025 and ensure the allocation of adequate budget and personnel. These meetings will also feed into the creation of a joint CEA plan for NLRC's domestic work as a whole, where teams support each other to strengthen their approaches to CEA. Examples for potential activities coming out of this could be:

- The adoption of regular focus groups as a standard activity for all programmes.
- Specific work to identify, develop and promote best practices for community engagement in NLRC.
- The adoption of CEA both as a key priority within NLRC's organizational strategy, and as the guiding approach to developing the strategy itself.

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