

Enabel's crucial role in Belgium's Comprehensive Approach

The Comprehensive Approach, a guiding principle for a more coherent and effective foreign policy, applies to all federal departments that contribute to achieving the objectives of said policy. Enabel, the Belgian development agency, is an instrument of foreign policy and contributes fully to the implementation of this approach.

Introduction

For the European Union (EU), the Comprehensive Approach is “**To combine, in a coherent and consistent manner, policies and tools ranging from diplomacy, security and defence to finance, trade, development and human rights, as well as justice and migration [...]** The comprehensive approach is both a general working method and a set of concrete measures and processes to improve how the EU, based on a common strategic vision and drawing on its wide array of existing tools and instruments, collectively can **develop, embed and deliver more coherent and more effective policies, working practices, actions and results.** Its fundamental principles are relevant for the broad spectrum of EU external action.” (Council of the European Union, 2014)

The strategy of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs (FPS FA) approved by the Council of Ministers on 20 July 2017 states that the Comprehensive Approach aims to “**increasing the coherence and effectiveness of our foreign policy**” (FPS FA, 2017). This strategy goes further than the (diplomacy, defence and development) 3D approach and stipulates that the departments concerned by this approach will firstly be those whose activities to a large extent are abroad.

The **Comprehensive Approach Task Force** provided for in the strategy has not yet been convened.

Enabel, the Belgian development agency, **is a key partner of the federal State** in international cooperation and, **within the framework of coherent Belgian foreign policy, acts as a Belgian expertise hub. Enabel plays an active role in the implementation of the Comprehensive Approach** as defined by the federal State. The partnerships with other actors, including Belgian international cooperation actors, are strengthened with a view to generating stronger synergy and complementarity while fostering Belgian expertise (Enabel Management Contract, 2023). “Enabel can conduct public service duties at the request of the Federal Public Service and other Belgian federal public services and instances.” (Enabel Law, 2017).

The aim of this note is to define Enabel's “active role” in implementing the Belgian state's Comprehensive Approach strategy.

Relevance of the Comprehensive Approach

The Comprehensive Approach is a means of strengthening Belgian foreign policy in the broadest sense and increasing its **coherence** to achieve the 2030 Agenda. This approach aims to develop **coordination, complementarity and synergies** between different departments and areas of expertise in order to **increase the impact of external actions.**

The Comprehensive Approach is a **multi-dimensional response to complex situations and multiple crises.** It varies according to the context. Each of the actors involved remains firmly anchored in its own mandate, principles of action and values.

For the FPS FA's Comprehensive Approach strategy, **the protection of Belgian interests and values is central** (FPS FA, 2017). However, a Comprehensive Approach must be based on “**commonly recognised strategic objectives**” or “jointly identified interests and values” (ibid.).



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In 2021, Belgium adopted a **national security strategy** “which reflects the government's views of the threats and risks affecting Belgium's vital interests and **proposes an integrated policy** to tackle them head on, and rather than passively ‘undergo’ the threats, to anticipate them and create opportunities. (...) Our vision of security is not only aimed at defending interests but also associated with values centred on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.” (National Security Council, 2021).

The Comprehensive Approach is **not limited to the foreign policy institutions of diplomacy, defence and development (3D). It is a guiding principle for all federal departments that contribute to achieving foreign policy objectives.**

The Comprehensive Approach is closely linked to the European strategy for mobilising public sector expertise in international cooperation, in particular via TAIEX (Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument) and twinnings (Council of the European Union, 2021).

Enabel's positioning

Enabel is the Belgian development agency and is **an instrument of Belgium's foreign policy**. It is therefore firmly embedded in the government's Comprehensive Approach strategy, of which it is the **operational arm**.

More specifically:

Enabel is a key partner of the government in implementing its international cooperation policy. As a global actor, the agency plays an active role in integrating the various Belgian instruments;

Enabel is a hub of Belgian public expertise and has framework cooperation agreements with several dozen Belgian public bodies to mobilise and foster their expertise from a peer-to-peer perspective;

Enabel facilitates and strengthens the international commitment of Belgian public bodies and fosters their expertise, even facilitating their access to European funding. The agency is working with the Belgian Federal Police to strengthen technical security expertise in partner countries, particularly in the Sahel region and Central Africa. Enabel facilitated the involvement of the Institute for Radioelements (FPS Economy) in a project to set up a radiological monitoring system for Morocco and of the High Council of Justice in a twinning project with the Superior Council of the Judiciary in Morocco.

Enabel facilitates multidimensional/multiactor thinking and dialogue to increase synergy and complementarity in response to multidimensional crises. For example, the agency organised a round table of Belgian

players involved in green hydrogen to gauge the interest in a coordinated commitment at Walvis Bay in Namibia. Enabel also organised a Comprehensive Approach round table in Benin with the aim of fostering synergy and complementarity between Belgian actors involved in this partner country;

Enabel provides its expertise to contribute to the coherence of foreign policy. The development agency was involved in drawing up the Sahel strategic note and involved various Belgian actors in formulating programmes in a Team Belgium approach.

The Comprehensive Approach can also be applied to actions that Enabel implements for the European Union. This is an opportunity to **promote Belgian expertise within the framework of European priorities and to work at a “Team Belgium within Team Europe”**. Enabel is a **lever** for Belgium's political priorities in International Partnerships initiatives (INTPA) and helps to strengthen the position of Belgium and the EU abroad.

The Comprehensive Approach also matches with Enabel's **Beyond Aid** strategy, which aims to anchor its actions beyond North-South development aid and in a partnership among equals, based on shared interests, to tackle common global challenges.

While the Comprehensive Approach does not target any specific geographical area, **Enabel focuses on Africa and more recently on Ukraine.**

Belgium's action reflects the privileged partnership between Europe and Africa. As a result, Enabel wants to play a catalytic role in the **Global Gateways** (European Commission, 2021) and foster and mobilise Belgian expertise, as with the MAV+ project (Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies in Africa), the Digital Hub for Development (D4D) and the strategic corridors.

As a pillar-assessed entity (an operator with the capacity to implement European projects under indirect management), Enabel can **facilitate access for Belgian public institutions to international cooperation projects** financed by the EU or other donors. Enabel can be the implementing agent for public entities other than the FPS FA and is not limited to cooperation partner countries in doing so. Enabel, for instance, implements cocoa projects in Côte d'Ivoire.

In line with its 2030 Strategy and the Federal Parliament's resolution of 20 February 2021 aimed at strengthening the partnership between Development Cooperation and Defence as part of a Comprehensive Approach, Enabel supports and engages in **3DLO** (Law and order/rule of law (ROL)) projects with FA, Defence and Justice in fragile contexts where the security, development and diplomacy dimensions are relevant and complementary.

Recommendations

To strengthen Enabel's position as an instrument of Belgium's foreign policy and as an implementing actor of the Comprehensive Approach, the following actions will be undertaken:

1. Develop a **common understanding** and strengthen **internal support** (Enabel, Board of Directors, FPS FA, DGD, Minister) to the importance and relevance of the Comprehensive Approach, in particular by **identifying 2 or 3 flagship projects**.
2. Activate the **Joint Enabel–FPS consultation committee** and Enabel's role in implementing and following up the Comprehensive Approach.
3. **Identify and prioritise a few countries/regions** where several Belgian public services are present and where Enabel can play a driving and proactive role, in synergy and complementarity with the diplomatic post, to develop and strengthen the Comprehensive Approach. In these countries, actors and synergy opportunities/ complementarity will be mapped and synergy opportunities will be identified (e.g.: DRC, Benin, Morocco).
4. Identify the **themes in which Enabel can play a role** in the Comprehensive Approach.
5. Call for an **update of the FPS FA's Comprehensive Approach Strategy Note**, adapted to take account of recent geopolitical developments, and for the activation of the Comprehensive Approach Task Force with Enabel as a member.
6. Develop and strengthen the strategy, systems and tools for the **mobilisation of public expertise** in the context of international cooperation actions in line with the Conclusions of the Council of the EU of 19 November 2021 and position Enabel as the Belgian agency for using and mobilising public expertise.
7. Develop and strengthen **Enabel's positioning on the Comprehensive Approach at Belgian level**:
 - At FA, particularly via the Comprehensive Approach Task Force, Enabel should be systematically integrated into interdepartmental meetings (Central Africa, Sahel, Ukraine, PolMil (police & military) etc.), which are means for operationalising the Comprehensive Approach;
 - vis-à-vis Embassies in their duty to facilitate and integrate Belgian expertise in support to the heads of post.
8. Strengthen Enabel's potential and role in **mobilising European funding** in line with Belgian strategic priorities.
9. **Advocate for integrated country, regional and thematic frameworks**, defined through FA, for its main partner countries, which would frame the involvement of the various actors and instruments of Belgium's international policy.
10. Develop and strengthen partnerships with the various actors involved, giving priority to:
 - **Foreign Affairs** and more specifically the Directorate-General for Bilateral Affairs (DGB) and the Directorate-General for Multilateral Affairs and Globalisation (DGM) to enable Enabel to contribute to the Comprehensive Approach;
 - **Strategic FPSs** in the Comprehensive Approach such as Defence, FPS Finance, FPS Social Security, FPS Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, the Belgian Food Agency, the Port of Antwerp-Bruges, the Belgian Integrated Police, etc. Enabel will update the 2020 list of strategic FPSs with which to strengthen the partnership.

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