Dorcas
Initial Audit – Summary Report - 2025/06/11

1. General information

1.1 Organisation

Type	Mandates	Verified
☒ International ☐ National ☐ Membership/Network ☒ Direct Assistance ☐ Federated ☒ With partners	☒ Humanitarian ☒ Development ☒ Advocacy	☒ Humanitarian ☒ Development ☐ Advocacy
Legal registration	Dorcas is registered as a foundation (stichting) under Dutch law - number 41236410 in the Trade Register.	
Head Office location	Almere, the Netherlands	
Total number of organisation staff	428	

1.2 Audit team

Lead auditor	Joanne O'Flannagan
Second auditor	Johnny O'Regan
Third auditor	
Observer	
Expert	
Witness / other participants	

1.3 Scope of the audit

CHS:2014 Verification Scheme	Certification
Audit Cycle	First cycle
Type of audit	Initial Audit
Scope of audit	The audit covers the whole organisation including the International Office (IO) in Almere, the Netherlands and Country Offices (CO), as well as all development and humanitarian programming implemented globally, both directly and with partners. The audit does not cover Dorcas' shops in the Netherlands or its advocacy work.
Focus of the audit	This is an Initial Audit (Certification); Dorcas previously underwent an Initial Audit (Independent Verification) in 2022. The organisation decided to transition to the Certification scheme after implementing a CHS improvement project in response to the previous audit findings, developing an Improvement Plan and undertaking actions to respond to the recorded weaknesses and observations. This audit will focus on the overall performance of Dorcas against the CHS paying particular attention to areas of weakness identified in the previous audit.

1.4 Sampling*

Sampling unit	Country Programme
Total number of Country Programme sites included in the sampling	13

Total number of sites for onsite visit	1
Total number of sites for remote assessment	3

Sampling Unit Selection	
Random Sampling — onsite/remote	**Purposive Sampling — onsite/remote**
Egypt – not selected	Ukraine - onsite
Syria – not selected	Ethiopia - remote
Yemen – remote	
Tanzania – remote (document review only)	

Any other sampling considerations: Egypt was purposively replaced with Ethiopia as this is a larger programme combining both humanitarian and development programmes, including direct implementation and partner implementation. Given recent events, Syria was purposively replaced with Ukraine as the context is highly unpredictable and trying to plan an audit would be unnecessarily burdensome for staff and partners involved in the Syria programme.
Sampling risks identified: There are no sampling risks identified. The audit team has full confidence in the findings and conclusions of this audit based on the sample as outlined above.

*It is important to note that the audit findings are based on a sample of an organisation's activities, programmes, and documentation, as well as direct observation. Findings are analysed to determine an organisation's systematic approach and application of all aspects of the CHS across different contexts and ways of working.

2. Activities undertaken by the audit team

2.1 Opening Meeting

Date	2025/02/12	**Number of participants**	17
Location	Almere, Netherlands	**Any substantive issues arising**	None

2.2 Locations Assessed

Locations	Dates	Onsite or remote
Almere, Netherlands – International Office	2025/02/12-13	Onsite
Yemen – Country Office	2025/03/19	Remote
Ethiopia – Country Office	2025/03/20	Remote
Ukraine – Country Office	2025/03/24-28	Onsite

2.3 Interviews

Level / Position of interviewees	Number of interviewees		Onsite or remote
	Female	**Male**	
International Office (IO)			
Management	2	4	Onsite
Staff	12	6	Onsite

Supervisory Board	1	1	Remote
Country Offices (CO)			
Management	6	10	Onsite/Remote
Staff	12	7	Onsite/Remote
Partner staff	4	4	Onsite/Remote
Others			
Total number of interviewees	**37**	**32**	**69**

2.4 Consultations with communities

Type of group and location	Number of interviewees		Onsite or remote
	Female	**Male**	
Group discussion – project participants, Uzhhorod, Ukraine	5	3	Onsite
Group discussion – project participants, Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine	6	2	Remote
Group discussion – project participants, Uzhhorod, Ukraine	10	0	Onsite
Group discussion – project participants, Mukachevo, Ukraine	10	0	Onsite
Group Discussion – project participants, Uzhhorod, Ukraine	9	1	Onsite
Group Discussion – project participants, Uzhhorod, Ukraine	8	1	Onsite
Group Discussion – project participants, Uzhhorod, Ukraine	7	2	Onsite
Group Discussion – project participants, Uzhhorod, Ukraine	12	0	Onsite
Total number of participants	**67**	**9**	**76**

2.5 Closing Meeting

Date	2025/04/03	**Number of participants**	6
Location	Remote	**Any substantive issues arising**	None

3. Background information on the organisation

3.1 General information	Stichting Dorcas Aid International (Dorcas) is a Christian, international, development and humanitarian aid organisation founded in 1980 by Dutch entrepreneur Dirk-Jan Groot. His inspiration to start the organisation came from a foundation that supported Eastern Europeans who were persecuted for their religious beliefs during the Cold War. The organisation has deep Christian values and describes its work as being rooted in its faith and commitment to Jesus Christ.
	The organisation started its programming in Eastern Europe and expanded its activities to Africa in the 1990s. Today it is operational in 15 countries in both Eastern Europe and Africa as well as the Middle East. Africa is its largest operational region and Dorcas' three largest country operations are Ukraine, South Sudan, and Syria. Through a three-level approach, which consist of working with people, communities and societies, Dorcas works to improve

the resilience and livelihoods of vulnerable people living with poverty, social exclusion, armed conflict, and natural disasters.

In addition to its international operating presence, Dorcas has offices to mobilise resources in the Netherlands and in the United States. In the Netherlands, Dorcas receives support and contributions from volunteers, partner organisations (POs), churches, private and public donors, and its staff. In the United States, it is certified under the name Dorcas Aid America (DAA) as a 501(c)3 non-profit organisation and uses its presence in the United States to specifically attract donors and engage in partnerships that will help fund development projects.

Dorcas' Strategy 2022-2025 has identified five strategic ambitions to deliver on desired impact so that people and communities flourish:

1.   Focus on People who are marginalised
2.   Develop Coherent and Community-based programmes
3.   Increase the Scale and Effectiveness of our Work
4.   Mobilise Resources and Engage Communities
5.   Become an Agile Catalyst and ConnActor

At the current time, Dorcas funds operations in 13 countries. In its 2023 Annual Report, the organisation indicated it employed 428 staff across its International and 14 Country Offices and worked with 73 partners. Since the report's publication, the organisation has closed its Country Office in Mozambique. In the Netherlands the organisation operates 44 shops and is supported by more than 3,000 volunteers. Dorcas has a significant number of individual donors, around 75,000, and engages with more than 4,000 churches both in the Netherlands and globally. Total income for 2023 was reported at €34.2 million, including more than €10 million generated from individual, private donors and around €13.5 million Euro in the form of government funding.

Dorcas underwent an Independent Verification Initial Audit in 2022. Weaknesses identified during that audit are relevant to this audit insofar as they provide insights into Dorcas' progress regarding assurance of the CHS over time. However, it is not within the scope of this Certification Initial Audit to specifically assess whether those weaknesses have been addressed. Where progress has been made this is noted in the Annex Report.

3.2 Governance and management structure	The highest authority in Dorcas is the six-member Supervisory Board (SB), which formally meets four times a year. The Supervisory Board focuses on strategic and annual planning, achievement of strategic objectives and overall budget outturn. There are two sub-committees comprised of members of the SB: the Audit sub-Committee considers finances in greater detail while the Selection & Remuneration Committee provides advice on the recruitment, selection and appointment of board candidates, and the reappointment of members. The Supervisory Board appoints the Executive Board (EB) members and oversees the work of the EB, which consists of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Chief Operations Officer (COO) and is the highest level of management.
	The Executive Board oversees the work of the fundraising departments Engagement & Fundraising, Shops & Textiles and Partnerships, and a number of support functions: Programme and Knowledge Support, Finance, Human Resource Management (HRM), Corporate Positioning, Executive Board Support, Information Technology, and Quality Management. Each Country Office is a locally registered branch of Dorcas. Country Directors in three regions (Eastern Europe, The Middle East and Africa) report to the Executive Board which manages them with the support of the Programme and Knowledge Support Unit. The International Management Team (IMT), which meets monthly, consists of the Executive Board, a representation of Dutch managers, and three rotating Country Directors (representing all Country Offices). The International Council meets twice per year in person and is comprised of the IMT and all Country Directors. It manages and delegates authority and decisions to the IMT.

Organisation Chart
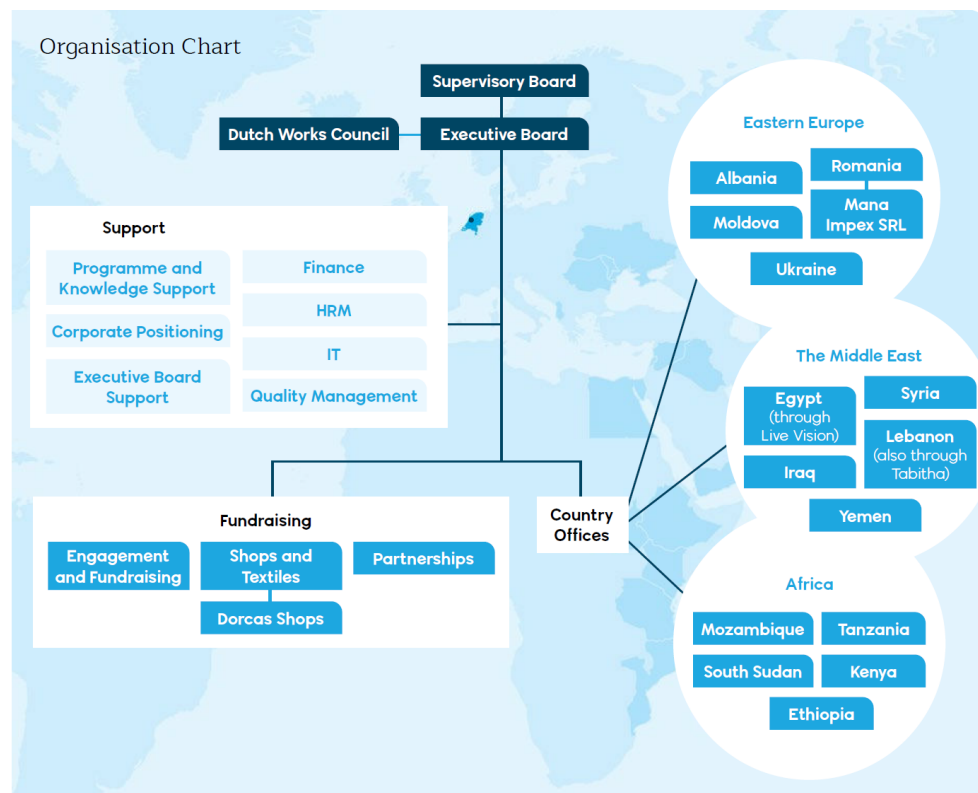
3.3 Work with partner organisations

Dorcas works with a wide range of partners and has, in its current Strategic Plan (2022-25), increased its focus on localisation and partnership, committing to respecting and strengthening the leadership of local authorities and the capacity of local civil society in humanitarian action and development, with the aim to better address the needs of affected populations. Dorcas aims to direct greater efforts towards local resource and partnership development over the current strategic period recognising the opportunity to enhance available capacity and resources to achieve greater impact.

Dorcas' Policy Guideline for Partnering, Localisation and Capacity provides a strategic framework for partnership, localisation and capacity and establishes principles and values to guide implementation. An implementation guide and associated tools are provided to support COs including for due diligence and capacity assessment (CASA), and this guidance and the associated tools are in use across all Country Offices.

Project Partnership Agreements establish the legal framework when Dorcas works with other organisations to jointly deliver relief and development projects and clarifies parties' roles and responsibilities including with regard to accountability to affected people (complaint handling, CoC, PSEAH, prevention of fraud and corruption, etc.).

According to its 2023 Annual Report, Dorcas had 73 partners across its COs, accounting for 22% of project expenditure. Partners represent a wide range of civil society including churches, national and international NGOs and CBOs.

4. Overall performance of the organisation

4.1 Internal quality assurance and risk

Dorcas' quality assurance and risk management systems are well developed, including financial management and control environment and mechanisms, risk management framework and outworking of that framework. A legal advisor at the International Office (IO) ensures compliance with Dutch legal framework. Risk management happens at global and country level, considering strategic, governance, financial, operational, compliance,

management mechanisms	programmatic, and HR risks. The Audit Committee reviews financial risks and reports on them to the Supervisory Board, which reviews all other risks, including their probability, impact, mitigating measures, and improvement actions.

Financial management and control is checked through both internal and external audits and ongoing financial reviews, including onsite visits to Country Offices and to partners with reviews of financial controls and spot checks of compliance. Financial procedures, including procurement procedures, are well embedded.

Dorcas' policy framework is generally strong; its Integrity Framework defines prevention, detection and response to integrity-related risks and issues arising; Integrity Focal Points support its roll out at IO and country programmes. However, risks of negative effects (including risks of SEAH) are not systematically identified and acted upon across all projects.

Dorcas' Quality management system includes a range of structures, processes and policies and the Quality Framework describes a range of standards to which the organisation works. Quality scans at IO and country level measure adherence to the Quality Framework, including Admin and Liaison, IT and communications, Finance, HR, projects and Governance and Organisation. Gaps identified in quality scans result in action plans. |
| **4.2 Level of application of the CHS** | Dorcas's board and management demonstrate a clear commitment to the CHS and its application. A CHS Independent Verification Initial Audit in 2022 raised one Major CAR (8.4) and 18 Minor CARs. In response to the audit findings, the organisation established a CHS improvement project (2022-23) based on the results of a root cause analysis of the identified weaknesses and developed a detailed Improvement Plan. As a result of the focussed efforts, overseen by management, and targeted to address the most significant weaknesses, Dorcas demonstrates good performance in its application of the standard and shows ongoing commitment to continuing to improve performance as demonstrated in the organisation's current Annual Plan.

A particular focus has been on embedding quality management into existing systems and processes at the CO level; this resonates with Dorcas' existing conformity to the QMS standard ISO 9001:2015 certification. Two key cornerstones of Dorcas' way of working are Dorcas' Integrity Framework and Inclusion Manual which affirm the organisation's commitment to principled, safe and inclusive approaches and which are well known and internalised by staff at all levels. Communities confirm that Dorcas and partner staff are respectful, professional and considerate of marginalised and vulnerable groups. However, while Dorcas has an overarching policy framework for integrity and inclusion, including commitments to PSEAH and Child Safeguarding, the organisation does not articulate clear guidance for the prevention of negative effects in programme planning, design and implementation, particularly in relation to risks of SEAH. Dorcas' PSEA policy is integrated into its Integrity Framework, Code of Conduct and Feedback and Complaints Mechanism, however, there is limited guidance on how overarching commitments to PSEA are applied in practice through procedural guidance.

While Dorcas staff endeavour to ensure that projects are based on community participation and feedback, the organisation does not systematically consult communities on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes. Further, efforts to ensure communities are fully aware of Dorcas' Code of Conduct and PSEAH commitments are not yet systematically effective, and Dorcas does not monitor whether this information has been provided to communities or whether this information is well known and understood. The low level of sensitive complaints that Dorcas has received over the past two years suggests that systems for welcoming and receiving complaints are not yet fully effective.

While Dorcas demonstrates commitment to climate action, the organisation does not systematically measure the impact of resource usage on the environment and has not clearly articulated how it plans to deliver on its ambition to be carbon neutral by 2030.

This audit:
- Opens six Minor CARs (3.6; 3.7; 4.1; 5.1; 5.6; 9.4)
- Notes 13 observations. |

4.3 Organisational performance against each CHS Commitment

Strong points and areas for improvement	Average score*
Commitment 1: Humanitarian assistance is appropriate and relevant	3
Dorcas' assistance is appropriate and relevant to context and needs and it has a strong focus on reaching the most vulnerable. It has strong policy platform and processes, such as the Inclusion Manual, Project Cycle Management, Programme Guide and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy Framework. Staff familiarity with and use of these facilitate good context analysis and design of programmes according to needs and vulnerabilities. It collects disaggregated data to take account of sex, age and ability/disability. However, the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) is not systematically incorporated into assessments of needs/risks/vulnerabilities. There is solid evidence of Dorcas' adaptive management capacity, and of adapting projects according to changing circumstances and needs.	
Feedback from communities: Programmes are very relevant to needs; Dorcas is an impartial organisation and programmes meet humanitarian principles.	
Commitment 2: Humanitarian response is effective and timely	2.7
Dorcas has the organisational capacity to deliver programmes, and it thinks through entry to and exit from country programmes in terms of capacity to deliver as well as meeting needs. Dorcas takes community safety seriously which would be improved with greater focus on PSEAH. It provides timely assistance and plans and assesses programmes in line with technical standards and good practice. Dorcas's framework measurement encourages systematic monitoring across a range of relevant metrics and though it measures activities and outputs rigorously, outcome level indicators are not always sufficiently specific for measurement to be meaningful.	
Feedback from communities: Dorcas provides timely assistance; referrals to other sources of support is highly appreciated and staff are technically knowledgeable.	
Commitment 3: Humanitarian response strengthens local capacities and avoids negative effects	2.4
Dorcas endeavours to safeguard communities from harm and abuse and the organisation assesses risks through a range of mechanisms. However, guidance and processes do not yet fully support the identification of potential/actual negative effects to allow Dorcas to recognise and act on these in a systematic way. Dorcas is committed to promoting resilience and early recovery, including through the prioritisation of cash, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergencies (MHPSS) and labour market skills support. This is evidenced across projects which are designed to promote increased resilience and recovery at individual and community levels. The organisation proactively works to strengthen local capacities working closely with statutory, civil society and voluntary resources and structures. Dorcas has a comprehensive framework for data protection and staff are clear on policy requirements and how to implement these in practice.	
Feedback from communities: Communities feel empowered and more resilient as a result of Dorcas' support. Communities confirm informed consent is sought for data sharing and that they are informed on data protection rights including the right to withdraw consent.	
Commitment 4: Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback	2.6

Dorcas has an open culture of communication and is committed to transparency. This is demonstrated through policy commitments and practice, and external communications are ethical and respectful and represent communities in a dignified way.

Dorcas has guidance in place for sharing information with communities, however, there is no clear minimum standard for information sharing requirements with communities. Staff demonstrate an understanding of the expectation to inform communities about Dorcas, about planned project activities and about feedback and complaint mechanisms although there is less clear understanding regarding the requirements for the provision of information on the Code of Conduct and on commitments to PSEAH. In general, Dorcas makes systematic efforts to provide appropriate and contextualised information for communities, although this is not always true regarding information on PSEAH commitments. Dorcas makes significant efforts to ensure feedback and complaint mechanisms are known and that feedback is gathered from a broad and representative range of project participants.

Feedback from communities:
Communities indicate that information is not systematically provided to them on the principles and values that Dorcas upholds, and that Dorcas has a Code of Conduct that describes how they can expect staff to behave when working with them. Communities do consider that communication is appropriately and respectfully provided by Dorcas and partner staff.

Commitment 5: Complaints are welcomed and addressed	2

Dorcas has established an organisational culture in which complaints are taken seriously, and acted upon according to defined policies and processes, however, the organisation has not provided staff, with responsibility for overseeing complaint investigations, with relevant training. Staff and partners demonstrate a clear commitment to welcoming, accepting and following up on complaints, however, the scope of issues that complaint handling mechanisms can address is not always clearly communicated. A Feedback and Complaints Policy and Procedures is in place and Feedback and Complaint Mechanisms (FCMs) are established at CO level. However, Dorcas does not generally consult communities and people affected by crisis on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes. Further, Dorcas does not systematically ensure that communities and people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of staff, including organisational commitments made on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

Feedback from communities:
Communities confirm they are aware of the available mechanisms to provide feedback and raise concerns to Dorcas and express confidence in Dorcas' ability to safely handle a complaint. Communities are not always aware of Dorcas' commitments to PSEAH.

Commitment 6: Humanitarian response is coordinated and complementary	3

Dorcas is committed to coordination and complementarity with other actors, endeavours to ensure that its projects do not duplicate the work of others, and that they are coordinated with national and local authorities and other organisations through relevant coordination forums and close engagement with local authorities. The commitment to working in close collaboration with others, to equitable partnerships and to the localisation agenda are captured in a range of policies, strategies and guidelines. Partners affirm that they feel valued, respected and equal in their relationship with Dorcas.

Feedback from communities:
Communities perceive good levels of complementarity between Dorcas and other actors and appreciate information sharing by Dorcas due to its coordination networks about alternative options for services and support.

Commitment 7: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve	2.7

Staff find learning guidance user friendly and useful and learning guidance is well rolled out across the organisation. Programmes build on lessons learnt from previous programmes and Dorcas generally learns well from monitoring and evaluation exercises but to a lesser extent from complaints. Dorcas has a strong commitment to sharing learning,

particularly internally, with partners and the wider humanitarian community but less systematically with communities. Staff are generally happy with mechanisms for sharing learning.

Feedback from communities:
Community members value learning opportunities provided by Dorcas and partners.

Commitment 8: Staff are supported to do their job effectively, and are treated fairly and equitably	2.8

Dorcas has the staff capacity and competence to meet commitments and staff clearly have a strong identity with Dorcas' mission, vision and values. Country programmes are cohesive and professional, and staff feel that Dorcas is a fair and equitable employer that takes security and well-being seriously. Although the Code of Conduct is in place and personnel are familiar with it in general, staff are not adequately oriented on Dorcas' PSEAH commitments and although job descriptions and feedback processes are in place staff are not always very familiar with their job descriptions.

Feedback from communities:
Staff are competent, professional, empathetic, respectful but communities are not fully clear on rules for staff behaviour.

Commitment 9: Resources are managed and used responsibly for their intended purpose	2.7

Dorcas has a strong policy base on resource usage and management, is financially stable and diversified. It uses resources efficiently and for their intended purpose and monitors usage through financial reviews, budget variance analysis and internal audit programme. Its environmental policy and tools meet the requirement but their application and measurement, though improving, is uneven.

Feedback from communities:
Communities noted no inefficiencies or corruption.

* Note: Average scores are a sum of the scores per commitment divided by the number of indicators in each Commitment, except when one of the indicators of a commitment scores 0 or if several scores of 1 on the indicators of a Commitment lead to the issuance of a major non-conformity/weakness at the level of the Commitment (in these two cases the overall score for the Commitment is 0).

5. Summary of non-conformities

Corrective Action Request (CAR)	Type	Status	Resolution timeframe
2025-3.6: Dorcas does not systematically identify and act upon negative effects in all areas of this requirement.	Minor	New	By 2028 (Renewal Audit)
2025-3.7: Dorcas does not have an effective strategy or guidance in place to prevent programmes having negative effects, particularly in relation to risks of SEAH against people and communities affected by crisis.	Minor	New	By 2028 (Renewal Audit)
2025-4.1: Dorcas does not systematically provide information to communities about the organisation, the principles it adheres to, how it expects its staff to behave, the programmes it is implementing and what they intend to deliver.	Minor	New	By 2028 (Renewal Audit)
2025-5.1: Dorcas does not systematically consult with communities on the design, implementation and monitoring of complaints-handling processes.	Minor	New	By 2028 (Renewal Audit)

2025-5.6: Dorcas does not systematically ensure that communities and people affected by crisis are fully aware of the expected behaviour of staff, including organisational commitments made on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.	Minor	New	By 2028 (Renewal Audit)
2025-9.4: Dorcas does not systematically measure the impact of resource usage on the environment.	Minor	New	By 2028 (Renewal Audit)
Total Number of open CARs	6		

6. Lead auditor recommendation

CERTIFICATION In our opinion, Dorcas conforms with the requirements of the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability. We recommend certification.

Name and signature of lead auditor:	**Date and place:**
Joanne O'Flannagan	23rd April 2025 Belfast, Northern Ireland

7. HQAI decision

Final decision on certification:	☒ Issued ☐ Refused
Start date of the certification cycle: 2025/06/11 Next audit before 2026/06/11	
Name and signature of HQAI Executive Director: Désirée Walter	**Date and place:** Geneva, 11 June 2025

8. Acknowledgement of the report by the organisation

Space reserved for the organisation

Any reservations regarding the audit findings and/or any remarks regarding the behaviour of the HQAI audit team: *If yes, please give details:*	☐ Yes ☑ No
Acknowledgement and Acceptance of Findings: I acknowledge and understand the findings of the audit	☑ Yes ☐ No
I accept the findings of the audit	☑ Yes ☐ No
Name and signature of the organisation's representative: Agnes Kroese CEO	**Date and place:** Almere, 16 June 2026

Appeal

In case of disagreement with the quality assurance decision, the organisation can appeal to HQAI within 14 workdays after being informed of the decision.

HQAI will transmit the case to the Chair of the Advisory and Complaint Board who will confirm that the basis for the appeal meets the appeals process requirements. The Chair will then constitute an appeal panel made of at least two experts who have no conflict of interest in the case in question. The panel will strive to come to a decision within 45 workdays.

The details of the Appeals Procedure can be found in document PRO049 – Appeals Procedure.

Annex 1: Explanation of the scoring scale*

Scores	Meaning: for all verification scheme options	Technical meaning for all independent verification and certification audits
0	Your organisation does not work towards applying the CHS commitment.	**Score 0:** indicates a weakness that is so significant that the organisation is unable to meet the commitment. This leads to: • **Independent verification:** major weakness. • **Certification:** major non-conformity, leading to a major corrective action request (CAR) – No certificate can be issue or immediate suspension of certificate.
1	Your organisation is making efforts towards applying this requirement, but these are not systematic.	**Score 1:** indicates a weakness that does not immediately compromise the integrity of the commitment but requires to be corrected to ensure the organisation can continuously deliver against it. This leads to: • **Independent verification**: minor weakness • **Certification:** minor non-conformity, leading to a minor corrective action request (CAR).
2	Your organisation is making systematic efforts towards applying this requirement, but certain key points are still not addressed.	**Score 2:** indicates an issue that deserves attention but does not currently compromise the conformity with the requirement. This leads to: • **Independent verification and certification:** observation.
3	Your organisation conforms to this requirement, and organisational systems ensure that it is met throughout the organisation and over time – the requirement is fulfilled.	**Score 3:** indicates full conformity with the requirement. This leads to: • **Independent verification and certification:** conformity.
4	Your organisation's work goes beyond the intent of this requirement and demonstrates innovation. It is applied in an exemplary way across the organisation and organisational systems ensure high quality is maintained across the organisation and over time.	**Score 4:** indicates an exemplary performance in the application of the requirement.

* Scoring Scale from the CHSA Verification Scheme 2020