

## Guided by humanitarian principles

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**Caritas Luxembourg's work with refugees, IDPs and migrants in Colombia, Lebanon and Luxembourg offers some examples of the ways in which a faith-based organisation may be advantaged or disadvantaged by its faith basis and how it needs to adhere to humanitarian standards.**

Caritas Luxembourg is a member of the international network of Caritas Internationalis and inspired by Catholic Social Teaching. The organisation regards itself as non-discriminatory, committed to international humanitarian principles and respectful of culture and custom. The collaboration between Caritas Luxembourg and its main donor, the Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, is based on the understanding that Caritas Luxembourg and its partner organisations around the world are professional, not-for-profit organisations respecting humanitarian standards and norms and will not use human or financial resources for proselytism of any kind. Caritas Luxembourg's partners contractually commit to respect humanitarian principles and standards, and Caritas Luxembourg invests considerable efforts in monitoring its partners' performance in all different fields.

Caritas Luxembourg works in Lebanon and Colombia with and through national Caritas groups and other local partners, which helps anchor it in the local context. Its partner Caritas Lebanon provided assistance to thousands of people during the civil war, regardless of their religion, and its current support for Syrian refugees confirms this disinterested organisational position.

The fact that Caritas is linked to a religion can sometimes play to its advantage. In Lebanon, migrant domestic workers seldom have permission to leave their place of employment. However, in a country which is deeply religious, employers will often make an exception for their employees to practise their religion. Many mistreated migrant domestic workers therefore gain access to Caritas through pastoral services, a mechanism

less readily available to organisations having no confessional background.

In Colombia, the Colombian Bishops' Conference has been involved in negotiating and mediating peace processes in many roles, from observer to mediator, while always emphasising the importance of dialogue and reconciliation and addressing the socio-economic inequalities inherent to the conflict. The Church has also been able to build a certain level of trust with the different parties of the armed conflict, and this privileged position has repeatedly been used for facilitating dialogue between the parties, getting access to victims and preventing further violence.

To address the potentially negative aspects of Caritas' roots in Catholicism, the organisation has made a tremendous effort over the years to demonstrate its professionalism first and foremost by putting into practice its mission statement that "our help reaches out to all people worldwide, regardless of their religion, sex, birth, views, allegiance, age, language or other status". In Lebanon, evidence suggests that due to its professionalism, and the inclusion of Muslims as well as Christians among its staff and volunteers, people associate the name Caritas with assistance rather than with religion.

Caritas Luxembourg supports hundreds of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in Luxembourg itself, some of whom specifically seek the assistance of Caritas Luxembourg as a Catholic organisation. The incoming population is of mixed religious background and obviously has a variety of expectations of and experiences with faith-based organisations which might

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colour their vision of Caritas. Staff are aware that some migrants might avoid approaching Caritas for assistance due to an unfounded fear that beneficiary selection may be based upon confessional criteria, and reassure migrants that they will under no circumstances be selected or rejected on the basis of their religion. Information about Caritas Luxembourg's services is distributed not only through faith-specific networks but through professional communications networks, partner organisations, and government and police services. The temporary residence for asylum seekers in Luxembourg managed by Caritas is

deliberately designed as a multi-cultural space, where proselytism is not accepted.

Spirituality and religious belief provide the fundamental inspiration, reference point and motivation of faith-based organisations, which have many comparative advantages when working with migrants but which must practise a zero-tolerance policy regarding proselytism and discrimination, and must at no time compromise humanitarian principles.

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