

# GUIDELINES

Fundamentals and principles of Catholic  
development cooperation in Austria





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# Preface

KOO (the Coordination Office of the Austrian Bishops' Conference for International Development and Mission) and the church organizations active in international development and mission are committed to people in the Global South. They (KOO and organizations within its interest group) use their voice in international development cooperation and the global church to highlight injustices and undesirable developments as well as to address and bring forward alternatives. Guided by the vision of a world in which a "life in abundance" or the "good life" is possible for everyone,<sup>1</sup> we put our work into the service of global justice and safeguarding the integrity of Creation. This includes calling for a structural social-ecological transformation and pushing forward its implementation wherever possible. The courage and strength required for the necessary changes and actions towards solidarity are drawn from our faith and our bond with people worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> The "abundance of life" promised in the Gospel of John (Gospel according to John 10:10) describes the goal horizon that we strive for as Christian-motivated organizations and people. By "life in abundance" we mean a good, self-determined life filled with meaning and joy within sustainable and healing communities and relationships with our fellow human beings and the natural world (see Chapter 2.1). We are aware that this target horizon can never be fully achieved. Suffering and illness, misfortune and failure, even injuries and injustices are part of our existence as imperfect and mortal beings. "Life in abundance" therefore always remains a promise to some

Since the publication of the last KOO guidelines in 1997, global political, economic, and social conditions have changed significantly. Nevertheless, global justice issues addressing access to resources and dignified living remain extremely acute. Therefore, a KOO working group was commissioned to create new guidelines. The text was refined and abridged in a multi-stage process in coordination with organizations of the KOO interest group.

The present guidelines were enacted at the general assembly of KOO interest groups in the Kardinal-König-Haus in Vienna on October 4th, 2023, and enforced by the departmental bishop in charge.

Vienna, October 4, 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by the name 'Werner Freistetter' in a cursive script.

Military Bishop Dr. Werner Freistetter  
*Bishop*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Anja Appel' in a cursive script.

Dr. Anja Appel  
*Head of the KOO*

extent and the pursuit of it is a permanent, unfinishable process. However, we are convinced that this promise must begin in the here and now. The guiding star of an “abundant life” for all calls us to always direct our gaze and our efforts to where this promise is trampled on, questioned and curtailed (see Chapter 3.1). See, for example, the South American concepts of “Buen Vivir” or “Sumak Kawsay” as well as the concept of “Ubuntu” from Southern Africa, which provide important starting points for an interculturally expanded idea of the Christian “life in abundance”.



# 01

## Introduction

### 1.1 Who we are and how we work

KOO is the specialist office of the Austrian Bishops' Conference and represents the interests of all Catholic organizations based in Austria that are active in international development and mission, subject to the supervision of a diocesan bishop, the Austrian Bishops' Conference or the Holy See.<sup>2</sup> The organizations' fields of activity include, among others, development cooperation and/or humanitarian aid as defined by the DAC<sup>3</sup> of the OECD, support for pastoral work outside of Austria, charitable aid in EU countries outside Austria, and domestic development work. Their share of total private funds for development cooperation coming from Austria amounted to more than 40% in 2020 (ÖFSE 2022).<sup>4</sup>


KOO represents the concerns and principles of the Catholic Church on development policy and global church to economic and political leaders and other relevant actors both in Austria and internationally. Although organizations of the Catholic Church share an institutional framework, and a common base of values and principles (see Chapter 3), a wide variety of structures,

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2 The over 3,000 parishes in Austria do not fall within KOO's area of responsibility. They are supported in their development policy commitment by diocesan institutions and organizations from the KOO interest group that operates throughout Austria. KOO maintains a special cooperation with religious communities active in international development and mission. They have the right to vote within KOO committees and the opportunity to participate in working groups, support the annual reporting by providing the organization's data, and cooperate at events.

3 See the list of abbreviations at the end of this document: p.32.

4 ÖFSE (ed.) (2022): Austrian Development Policy 2022. A Just Post-Covid-19 World -Cooperative Policies at a Global Level. Vienna: Südwind-Verlag, p. 110.



approaches and methods can be seen in concrete development policy work. This concerns aspects such as determining the thematic focus, identifying target groups, selecting partner organizations, and embedding within institutional frameworks, as well as allocating the scale of resources. Additionally, it involves prioritization among various operational fields, including educational initiatives, project-based work, and advocacy efforts.

Therefore, KOO facilitates and maintains ongoing coordination and dialogue among the organizations within the interest group, offering an organizational framework for sporadic or long-term collaborative engagements, both in content and structure.

At the international level, KOO is involved in the umbrella organization CIDSE together with other organizations of the Catholic Church from Europe and North America. This network serves strategic, geographical, and political coordination and strengthens advocacy towards multilateral institutions, such as the EU and the UN.

## 1.2 Purpose of the guidelines

These guidelines establish the common direction and principles of all members of the advocacy group and the KOO office for their work nationally and international. This document outlines the fundamental considerations behind international programs and projects, as well as, educational programming and advocacy in Austria:

1. The guidelines serve as an orientation and justification framework for organizations of the KOO interest group and their employees. They are intended to help raise awareness of the foundations of one's work, to ensure its integration into the network of the Austrian Catholic Church, and to continually reposition it in the event of changes.
2. The guidelines help to explain the fundamental principles and orientation of the Catholic Church's Austrian development policy commitments to other actors or to establish references to theological foundations and to apply them into substantive practice.
3. The guidelines can ultimately also serve as a guideline for the diverse development policy activities at the parish level in Austria. In any case, they are a starting point for a dialogue with other

churches and institutions whose aim is to improve common action for a humane future for all people.

### 1.3 Position on post and neo-colonial structures and its power relations

To overcome obstacles while realizing human rights and combating global inequality, systemic inquiry about the structures of power are essential. Human dignity and the diversity of human ways of life were not always respected in the actions of missionary and development policy of the (Catholic) Church and its historical predecessors. This can be linked to the emergence of secular and Christian ecclesial development policy and cooperation intertwined with the history of European colonialism. Throughout this history, representatives of the Catholic Church were directly and indirectly involved in the structural actions and justification of brutal violence and exploitation.

In addition, during Christian forced conversion or the secular “civilization mission,” European beliefs, but also social and economic models and cultural norms, were spread in an authoritarian manner. People were patronized and alienated from their own histories and ways of life. On the other hand, from the very onset of colonialism, there have been church-based or Christian-religious actors who, grounded in their faith, resolutely aligned themselves with the colonized populations. The role of the Catholic Church and the Christian faith in the (post-) colonial context is therefore extremely ambivalent and complex. It covers a broad spectrum, ranging from explicit involvement in colonial control and exploitation to offering charitable and paternalistic aid. This spectrum also includes acts of anti-colonial resistance, and how colonized groups have adaptively embraced and reinterpreted the Christian faith as a form of resistance.

In the course of colonial conquest and rule, far-reaching material and cultural inequalities and power relations arose, many of which still have an impact today. These shape the global social, economic, and political conditions in which Catholic development policy and cooperation operate, as well as their structure and practice. This can be found, for example, in the power inequality



between “donors” and “recipients,” the distribution of decision-making and/or the recognition of knowledge and expertise.

With our development policy commitment to a more just world, we aim to overcome the injustices and heal the wounds caused by colonialism and continue to have an impact on post-colonial conditions. We endeavor to dismantle the global inequalities between the Global North and Global South and the massive social inequalities and exclusions within these regions. We are committed to transcending the racist classification of people and dismantling any separation, hierarchy, and discrimination based on appearance, origin, nationality, religion, or cultural identity. However, an effective and reliable commitment to these goals also requires a continuous decolonization of our ways of working. This means critically dealing, recognizing, and deconstructing the frequently unperceived, colonial-shaped frameworks, thought processes, and behavioural patterns within the power relations in Catholic development policy outlined above in Chapter 3.3.

For all within the Catholic Church, coming to terms with its role within colonial structures is an essential duty. It takes place in processing of one’s historical colonial legacy, as well as, orientating the commitment of the Church to overcoming post- and neo-colonial structures of exploitation through intercultural and -religious initiatives to recognize non-Western forms of community, cosmovisions, belief systems, and practices, as exemplified by the events of the Amazon Synod in 2019.




# 02

## Our Mission: A Life in Abundance for All — References to the Foundations of the Church

As a development policy agency and advocacy group, KOO and its member organizations focus specifically on the socio-political dimensions of the Christian faith. The worldwide presence of church structures and their partner organizations at the local grassroots level creates a clear awareness of the different forms of social hardship and ecological destruction. It offers immediate opportunities for action on the ground. At the same time, we can use the broad supra-regional network of partner organizations and the Global church to act globally as advocates for human rights and safeguarding of Creation. Based on our faith, we are committed to overcoming inequality, exploitation, and oppression as well as getting closer to a „life in abundance“ (Gospel according to John 10:10) promised by Jesus Christ for all people on our planet – “our common home“ (Laudato si‘ 17).

In doing so, we are guided by Catholic Social Teaching. In addition to the fundamental principles of personhood, solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good, our work is guided by clear partisanship for disadvantaged and marginalized people in the sense of the „option for the poor“ (see chapter 3.1), as well as the guideline of environmental sustainability and responsibility towards the totality of creation. The Universal Declaration



of Human Rights and other relevant UN documents<sup>5</sup> form the basis of our work and points of reference, especially for our advocacy work. Our commitment can be grouped into four thematic areas, which are interconnected, which will be explored in this chapter.

## 2.1 Commitment to social justice and self-empowerment

Based on the undeniable dignity of all human beings, social justice is the central element of our commitment to a good and environmentally sustainable life. We believe that the whole of humanity is united in a universal „community“ (Fratelli Tutti 94). The biblical promise of a good and dignified „life in abundance“ is unconditional and indivisible for all human beings. This results in a tenor of solidarity in the sense of „...a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual because we are all responsible for all.“ (Sollicitudo rei socialis 38)

At the same time, we live in a world of massive inequalities and exclusions where large parts of humankind are still denied access to basic goods and conditions for a safe, fulfilled life according to one’s needs and beliefs.

The existence of hunger and deprivation is not an inevitable fate but is based on the systematic unequal distribution of

In the spirit of the Christian faith, we believe that “the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone (...) since God created the world for everyone.” (LS 93)

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5 U.a.: The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation. Towards a Common Understanding Among UN Agencies 2003, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) 1995, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2015, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2019, UN Paris Agreement 2015, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants (UNDROP) 2018, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) 2022

goods.<sup>6</sup> Humankind would be able to feed all its members with the present ecological and technological resources. That is why we are committed to a fair distribution of material and intangible resources at all levels of society. We strive for solidarity-based social and economic structures and social security systems that provide all people with access to the necessary goods and conditions for a good life.

Along with the availability of the necessities of life, this also includes being free from any oppression, possessing the ability and opportunity to shape one's own life, and having a say in community life (see also chapter 3.2). The humanity of a person is at the center and measure of social development, as understood through Catholic Social Teaching "for the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions" (*Gaudium et spes* 3). Pope Francis writes in his encyclical "*Laudato Si*" (2015): "Halfway measures simply delay the inevitable disaster. Put simply, it is a matter of redefining our notion of progress. A technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress." (LS 194) All human beings, in their diversity and uniqueness, are „an “image and likeness of God“ (Book of Genesis 1:27). We believe that humans are unique and destined to live freely in community. Consequently, the „image of God“ can be seen in many faces around us with diverse forms of life, ideas, and desires.

Social justice in a broad sense therefore goes beyond charitable aid. Although we consider the immediate response to human emergencies in humanitarian aid to be an imperative that cannot be postponed, we strive in the long term to overcome the root causes of poverty and oppression,

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<sup>6</sup> According to Christian doctrine, all human beings have an equal right to the use of the earth's material resources (see box). This „common determination of goods“ and the so-called „social obligation“ of private property (i.e. the subordination of the right to property to the protection of the common good) are central components of Catholic thought. They are already found in the Fathers of the Church and have been reaffirmed and renewed in the course of history in numerous doctrinal documents of the Catholic Church (including *Gaudium et Spes* 69, 71; *Populorum progressio* 22ff.; *Centesimus annus* 43; *Laborem exercens* 13).

and thus also the dependence on external support. As the Second Vatican Council unequivocally states in the decree „Apostolicam actuositatem“, Christian social commitment always remains oriented towards the goal of a society that meets the needs of all people: „First of all, one must satisfy the demands of justice, and one must not offer as a gift of love what is already owed by justice. You must eliminate the causes of the evils, not just the effects. The provision of assistance should be organized in such a way that gradually freed from external dependence, in the long run, the recipients can help themselves.“ (AA 8)

Today, these causes are deeply rooted in globally operative social structures that systematically limit the good life for all. Pope Francis states in his letter „Evangelii Gaudium“ (EG 53): An economy that does not elevate the well-being of the people, but rather growth and profit to its highest goal, and thus systematically „kills“. In a policy that distributes people’s opportunities for participation unequally, the shaping of human coexistence is largely economical. In a culture that devalues, exploits, and oppresses people based on, among other things, social, racial, and gender classifications, human value is subordinate.

According to Christian beliefs, these conditions are neither God’s will nor do they represent an inevitable fate. They are to be understood as „structures of sin“ (SRS 36) for which we as human beings bear responsibility and which we as human beings can also change through collective effort. Therefore, our work pursues the dual goal of immediately alleviating and overcoming existing suffering and at the same time eliminating its structural causes in the long term.

## 2.2 Social-ecological transformation

“Our planet is a gift from God, but we also know how urgently we must act on the unprecedented socio-environmental crisis we are facing.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to justice, socio-ecological transformation is the second pillar of our actions.

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<sup>7</sup> Amazonia. Neue Wege für die Kirche und eine ganzheitliche Ökologie. Schlussdokument der Bischofssynode – Special Assembly for Amazonia, paragraph 63.

The encyclical *Laudato Si'*, published in 2015, represents a milestone in the Church's position on the ecological issue. Pope Francis elaborates a holistic perspective on the structural connection of social and ecological developments and calls for clear partisanship for a comprehensive socially just and ecologically sustainable transformation: „We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.“ (LS 139)

The non-human part of Creation, such as plants, animals, waters, or soils, has an intrinsic God-ordained value and is not per se for the benefit of man (LS 69). Social emergencies and unjust structures worldwide can neither be understood nor solved without putting them in an ecological perspective. Social and ecological crises are interconnected and reinforce each other, as Pope Francis makes clear in his encyclical “*Laudato si'*”: “(...) we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” (LS 49)

Man-made climate change and the rapid loss of biodiversity pose a serious threat to the survival of humanity today: „ The scientific evidence

is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human wellbeing and planetary health. Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity. [...]“ (IPCC 2022)<sup>8</sup>

KOO does everything in its power to lobby with national and international institutions for the implementation of the most important international fundamental decisions.<sup>9</sup> As development policy institutions, we focus in

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<sup>8</sup> IPCC, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*, D.5.3

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 5.

particular on the situation of the countries of the Global South and marginalized social groups and call for a socially just environmental policy. For this reason, the KOO office and its many organizations within its interest group have been focusing on the social dimensions of ecological issues such as climate protection, financing, adaptation, and biodiversity conservation for some time now. We believe that this socio-ecological crisis can only be overcome through a systemic transformation<sup>10</sup> of the economic, political, and cultural foundations of our global coexistence.

We see here not only an urgent need for action, but also the

unique creative potential of Catholic organizations to take action. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that both human and non-human life, as a global community of solidarity within the entirety of Creation, has a future on our planet. The necessary changes require not only a political but also a cultural and spiritual conversion. Our natural environment must no longer be regarded

„Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.“ (LS 139)

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10 The central requirements of a transformation “arise from the boundaries of the Earth system, which force a restructuring of national and global economies within these boundaries in order to avoid irreversible damage to world ecosystems and their impact on humanity: Production, consumption patterns and lifestyles must be changed in such a way that greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to a minimum over the coming decades [...], essential resource shortages [...] are minimized through significant increases in resource efficiency and abrupt changes in the earth system (tipping points) through economic and development strategies, which take into account the Earth system’s guardrails (planetary boundaries), can be avoided.“ WBGU (2011): Hauptgutachten: Welt im Wandel. Gesellschaftsvertrag für eine Große Transformation. Berlin, p. 87. This report emphasizes the importance of the churches for this social transformation, as is Schneiderwind, Uwe (2018) Die Große Transformation: Eine Einführung in die Kunst gesellschaftlichen Wandels. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.

as an exploitable resource. Respect for and consideration for the needs of animals, plants, and ecological cycles must guide our individual behavior as well as the shaping of the social, political, and economic structures of our coexistence. The climate and environmental crisis threaten human life on earth and therefore also threaten a central principle of the Christian faith: the dignity of the human being. It is a „sign of the time“ (GS 4) and the socio-ecological transformation is a place where our faith must prove itself and to give people hope.

### 2.3 Peace, non-violence, and dialogue

As Catholic organizations, we see humankind in its entirety – across all boundaries and differences of places, languages, religions, cultures, and status – united in a universal community. The peaceful coexistence of this global human family based on human rights is an indispensable part of our goal of a good and fulfilling life for all. Starting from the unconditional and undeniable dignity of every human being, we reject all forms of physical and psychological, individual, collective, or structural violence. This includes not only armed conflicts and other forms of physical violence, but also all actions and mechanisms that oppress people in their basic needs and rights of self-determination and force them under the will of individuals or groups (be it from society or organizations).<sup>11</sup>

Peace is not just the absence of war. It is rather a complex, presuppositional, and multi-layered process that overcomes not only explicit forms and symptoms of violence but also its underlying causes. Peace is the result of an order “actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice.” (GS 78) This order does not mean a state of perfect harmony and concord in which all differences, antagonisms, and conflicts are overcome. Rather, the goal is a pluralistic society in which the diversity and variety of human ways of life, ideas, and practices are not seen as a threat or grievance, but as an enrichment. In this spirit, we strive for a world where people can shape their lives autonomously and without fear, according to their own visions, and

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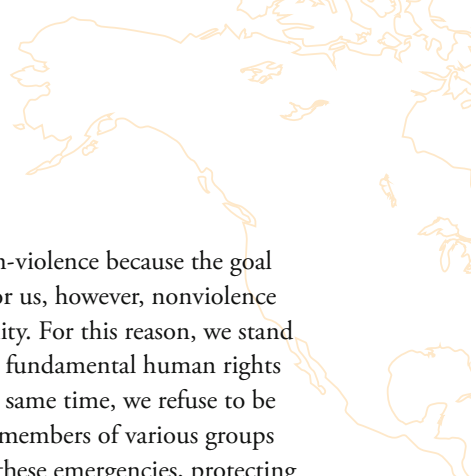
<sup>11</sup> This does not mean the enforcement of democratically determined rules that promote the common good and protect individual fundamental rights from unequal individual interests.



where the personal development of each individual is a necessity for the development of all. Such a society can only be achieved democratically. It is based on a fundamental stance of dialog that acknowledges the person and perspective of the other; it rejects the one-sided assertion of one's position as a means of conflict resolution. In light of persistent armed conflicts and the omnipresence of both structural and personal violence in many regions of our planet, this vision appears today as a distant utopia. At the same time, we believe that people are destined and capable of living together peacefully. We can and must therefore always contribute to actualize this utopia through all our actions.

"Love, then, is more than just a series of benevolent actions. Those actions have their source in a union increasingly directed towards others, considering them of value, worthy, pleasing, and beautiful apart from their physical or moral appearances. Our love for others, for who they are, moves us to seek the best for their lives. Only by cultivating this way of relating to one another will we make possible a social friendship that excludes no one and a fraternity that is open to all." (FT 94)

We build on a broad spectrum of approaches and measures in the spirit of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus, ranging from immediate conflict resolution and humanitarian aid to the establishment of stable structures for lasting peace. We are committed to the realization of human rights, speak out against any acts of war, and, where possible, support non-violent conflict resolution and mediation between parties in conflict. In our projects, we are committed to a culture of peace and diversity and promote interreligious and intercultural understanding and cooperation. Through our advocacy and projects, we promote the empowerment of socially marginalized groups. We strive to overcoming inequalities and power asymmetries that create a breeding ground for violence and make holistic, lasting peace impossible.



We are guided by a standpoint of dialogue and non-violence because the goal of peace cannot be achieved by military actions. For us, however, nonviolence and dialogue do not mean neutrality and impartiality. For this reason, we stand firmly on the side of individuals and groups whose fundamental human rights are curtailed in social and political disputes. At the same time, we refuse to be co-opted by individual-conflicting parties because members of various groups are often endangered in acute violent conflicts. In these emergencies, protecting the lives of those affected and reducing violence is an absolute priority. In the spirit of the “do-no-harm“ principle, we therefore take a non-partisan position in humanitarian aid and try to counteract conflict-promoting divisions („dividers“).<sup>12</sup> Because of the complexity of social conflicts, peace work must always be based on a well-founded analysis of the concrete contexts, causes, and circumstances of the conflict, which must be transformed as a matter of priority through dialogue.

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12 In humanitarian aid, we follow the „Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief“: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-1067.pdf> as well as the Core Humanitarian Standards and Protection Principles of the Sphere Handbook „Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response“: <https://spherestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Sphere-Handbook-2018-EN.pdf>



## 2.4 Living the Global Church

As the Catholic Global Church, we see ourselves as a global community of Catholics in a community of faith, solidarity, learning, and shared journey. Our common faith is the source of our prophetic presence in the world. As a community of solidarity, people and organizations stand up for each other and promote solidarity with all people, regardless of their religious affiliation. As a community of learning, we focus on how we can learn extensively from each other in the face of different contexts and challenges. The dialogue necessary for this is based on the recognition and appreciation of the present diversity of our world (cf. Querida Amazonia 70). The community of shared journey expresses the desire to face the challenges of this path together. Synodality, established by Pope Paul VI and revived by Pope Francis, is like the development community – a strong approach to partnership. Both principles are concerned with equal exchange between the parties involved to find solutions that are supported by all. The strengthening of a synodal Church promotes this participatory element and the importance of listening, self-critical questioning, and openness to other arguments, as well as orientation towards fraternity.

For us, living in the Global Church also means going to the margins, geographically and socially, and reaching out and supporting marginalized groups. It is important to understand these people and the realities of their lives as theological subjects or places to receive impulses for our coexistence worldwide (cf. EG 116). Only then, the current Global Church, and even more so the Church of the future, will be a culturally polycentric Global Church: A Church that enculturates itself in various places and aligns its priorities with this diversity. Currently, the majority of Christians live outside Europe. Their diverse practices are also changing consecrated life in Europe and worldwide.<sup>13</sup> Missionary cooperation also falls within the scope of the universal Church. It is important to distinguish between the theological-conceptual dimension of the term “mission“ and its interpretation in everyday language.

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13 Cf. Die deutschen Bischöfe (2004): *Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche*. . . Bonn, pp. 33f.

The theological and magisterial examination of the fundamental mission as a witness to the faith through one's own life has a long history. The orientations and standards of the Second Vatican Council and the magisterial statements of recent decades, all of which reject all forms of lack of freedom in matters of faith,<sup>14</sup> are essential for our work today. In the context of international cooperation, this explicitly includes all „inappropriate methods such as deception and coercion“ and the „exploitation of poverty and hardship“ by „putting pressure on people through material incentives and rewards“. <sup>15</sup> On the contrary, social services must be provided to all those in need, to those in need, regardless of their faith. This service and advocacy for justice for all „are integral to bearing witness to the gospel.“

The painful legacy of forced conversions, religious and cultural re-education, as well as psychological and physical violence is still in the foreground and continues to evoke skepticism and resistance (cf. chapter 1.3). This often leads to a reservation about today's commitment to development policy and the global church. We can only counter this by consistently aligning our programs and projects with the needs of disadvantaged population groups. In addition, KOO and its play an important role in mediating between the Christian mission and substantial development work. „The commitment to human dignity, human development, and integral liberation

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14 Accordingly, the Christian faith manifests itself in many faces, cultural forms, traditions and histories (Ad Gentes 11, EG 116). Mission, therefore, does not aim to impose a particular form of this faith; rather, the diversity of faiths is itself an essential source of evangelization and renewal. Thus, Pope Francis describes „the various peoples into whom the Gospel has been inculturated [as] active collective agents and mediators of evangelization, because each people is the creator of its own culture and the protagonist of its own history. Culture is something dynamic that is constantly being recreated by a people; and each generation transmits to the next a set of attitudes related to the various situations of life, which the latter must revise in the face of its own challenges.“ (EG 122) Mission means a reciprocal learning about the meaning of the Christian faith in the present, nourished by experiences and insights from different contexts and traditions. In fact, „every culture offers values and positive forms that can enrich the way of proclaiming, understanding and living the Gospel“ (Ecclesia in oceania, 16).

15 World Council of Churches/Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue/World Evangelical Alliance (2011): Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World. Paragraphs 6 and 4. The same source applies to the quotation in the next sentence.

is part of the mission of the Church and therefore also determines her mission. For the Gospel is a ‚message of freedom and a liberating force‘ (Libertatis conscientia 43) (Die deutschen Bischöfe 2004)<sup>16</sup>.

We see ourselves as a formative part of a living Global church and are therefore committed to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. Especially in day-to-day work, the cultivation and further development of the culture of dialogue between different churches and religions are fundamental for the implementation of progress. We can only fulfill the above-mentioned function in the implementation of a socio-ecological transformation if we act together with conviction.

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<sup>16</sup> Die deutschen Bischöfe (2004): Allen Völkern Sein Heil. Die Mission der Weltkirche. Bonn, p. 38. The modern understanding of mission, as it was laid down in the Second Vatican Council and most recently developed in the EG, sees the importance of dialogue, encounter, and cultural home as essential here (EG 115ff.).



# 03

## Our principles for creating change

In our commitment to a dignified life for all people, the following principles guide our actions.

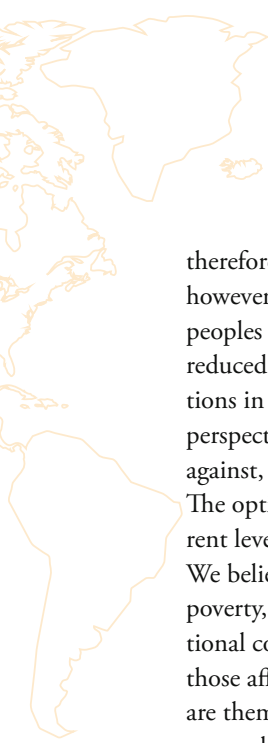
### 3.1 Preferential option for the poor<sup>17</sup>

The “preferential option for the poor”<sup>18</sup> is the guiding principle of our development policy actions, which filters through all areas of work. It has a theological, ethical, political, and epistemological dimension.<sup>19</sup> The intellectual basis for the option for the poor is the general purpose of goods and the biblical promise of a “life in abundance” for all people (cf. Chapter 2).<sup>20</sup> Our commitment is

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17 The “option for the poor” has been present as a basic principle of Christian thought and Catholic social teaching from the beginning (see e.g. *Rerum Novarum* 29, *De Iustitia in Mundo* 20-27). It was essentially conceptualized by the Church in Latin America (Puebla Conference: CELAM 1979, Part IV, Ch. 1.), introduced as a term by John Paul II into the teaching of the universal church (SRS 42) and taken up in several encyclicals (CA 11, LS 158, FT 233-235).

18 The phrase “option for the poor” often leads to misunderstandings and therefore requires some clarification. First, we understand poverty not in a purely material sense, but in a holistic sense that encompasses all dimensions of human life. Poverty exists where the full development of a “life of abundance” is curtailed (see Chapter 2). Secondly, we see the causes of poverty as being primarily rooted in social structures and power relations. We can therefore also speak of an “option for those made poor”. Thirdly, it is not just about charitable support for those affected,



therefore aimed unreservedly at everyone, regardless of creed, gender, or origin; however, simultaneously it is not impartial. Rather, we prioritize the interests of peoples and groups whose right to a good, self-determined life is systematically reduced as elaborated on Chapter 2.1. on promoting social justice. As organizations in the field of development and mission, our starting point is the realities, perspectives, and priorities of marginalized, exploited, oppressed, discriminated against, and otherwise disadvantaged population groups in the Global South. The option for the poor guides all our areas of work and are addressed at different levels: direct support, empowerment, and structural change.

We believe that the earth's goods are intended for all people and that hunger, poverty, and deprivation constitute an unacceptable injustice. In our international cooperation, we are therefore committed to providing direct support to those affected. We do not work "for" but "with" people affected by poverty who are themselves experts in their situation. We believe that a "life in abundance" can and must take many different forms. We therefore focus on local and participatory approaches that empower disadvantaged population groups to determine their own lives and help shape their community.

We believe that unjust economic, political, and social structures reveal themselves in the life conditions of disadvantaged as the "signs of the time" (GS 4) (see Chapter 2.2 on the climate and environmental crisis). In our advocacy and educational programs, we are committed to making the voices and perspectives of these groups heard and visible. We strive to learn from them and their experiences, taking a stand for their interests in conflicts. In doing so, we endeavor to contribute to the lasting eradication of the structural causes of poverty, exclusion, and oppression as well as to promote a socio-ecological transformation

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but about overcoming the very structures that make them "poor" and push them to the margins. Fourthly, we understand those directly affected as central actors in this double process of individual liberation and social change, which is why, in addition to the "option for the poor", we can also speak of commitment with and alongside the "poor". See Kraus, Magdalena Andrea/Scalet, Jonathan (2021): Christlicher Glaube als Quelle gesellschaftskritischer Diskurse und befreiender Praxis. In: *Journal for Development Policy* 37(3), pp. 11f.

19 Curran, Charles E. (2002): *Catholic Social Teaching 1891 – Present. A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis*. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, p. 183.

20 See Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2006): *Kompodium der Soziallehre der Kirche*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, paragraphs 182-184/p. 144-146.

of our global social system in the interests of the disadvantaged majority of the population.

### 3.2 Holistic and environmental Focus

We pursue a holistic vision of human development and oppose its reduction to solely economic and technocratic aspects. The vision of “life in abundance” is not limited solely to material prosperity, but rather it encompasses all dimensions of human life. “True development must be comprehensive, it must consider each person and the whole person” (Populorum progressio 14). Development cooperation of the (Catholic) Church has always been about ensuring a dignified existence for people. The most important pillars of measures reflect the needs of people, including education and health, food security, economic equity, community building, human rights, empowerment and self-determination, and the spiritual dimension (PP 14).

Most programs and project are combined to take into account the connections and interactions between these different pillars. Achieving a life of dignity for all requires a view of the individual, as well as of their role in a community, a society, and as a part of the natural world around them.

Safeguarding livelihoods worldwide is dependent on the stabilization of the climate and the preservation of biodiversity. Due to the urgency of ecological transformation, appropriate measures must be considered on an ongoing basis institutionally and in all activities, including in international programs and project work (mainstreaming). In Austria and Europe, we support efforts to significantly reduce environmentally harmful economic and lifestyle practices and climate-damaging emissions following the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Development policy education and advocacy that reflects environmental destruction and climate change in a global context and addresses climate justice plays an important role. In international cooperation (humanitarian aid and development cooperation), the environmental impacts of this work must always be monitored and negative environmental impacts must be eradicated or reduced as much as possible through a ‘Do-no-harm’ approach. Environmental impact assessments must be carried out in advance for large-scale or ecologically vulnerable projects – also in cases, where the authority does not




make this mandatory. Wherever possible, programs and projects should actively include measures and strengthen existing measures that contribute to environmental and climate protection, promote ecological diversity and sustainability, and improve the resilience of the population to the effects of environmental destruction and climate change.

In international cooperation, in the spirit of a holistic perspective on environmentalism, it is particularly important to ensure a high level of participation by affected peoples and communities. It is paramount to prioritize solutions that include as many perspectives and aspects as possible in project considerations. Such solutions should respect, building up, and strengthen local ecosystems.

### 3.3 Partnership and dialogue

All cooperation aims to improve the living conditions of people and communities worldwide in the long term. This requires different strategies in different places – from local projects to work on globally effective structures – but it must always be based on the needs and perspectives of those affected. Self-determination and local anchoring are central pillars of our idea of social justice and therefore our development policy commitment. In this sense, in our project work, we particularly promote initiatives that were developed in a participatory manner and empower marginalized social groups to independently shape their lives and their communities. We must not act as implementing organizations, but to support initiatives that come from communities and partner organizations that are designed and implemented locally. Long-term partner relationships that gain professional depth through regular dialogue are of particular importance.

We work with ecclesiastic organizations and other civil society actors. We are aware that these relationships are based on deeply rooted global inequalities and dependencies that make equal cooperation difficult (see Chapter 1.3). We therefore actively work against structural hierarchies – between the Global North and South, between donors and recipients. We continuously reflect on our perspectives and behavioral patterns towards project partners, we attach particular importance to our partners' perspectives and look for ways to increasingly transfer decision-making authority to them. We do not see cooperation as an act of charitable benevolence, but rather as a shared commitment to



overcome historical and structurally reproduced inequalities as stated on our duty towards justice as in Chapters 2.1. and 3.1.

In addition to working on projects rooted in empowerment that enable people to put forward their concerns and ideas themselves, we also focus on advocacy in Austria and Europe. Building on the expertise and realities of our partner organizations, we oppose global structures that disempower.

### 3.4 Human rights-based approach

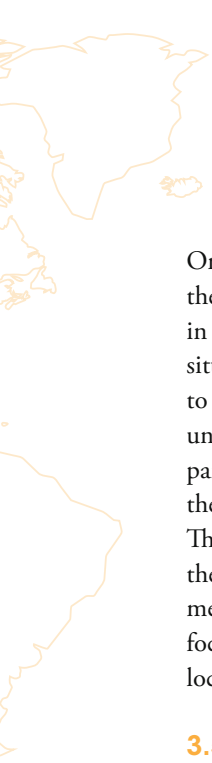
Development often does not occur without social and political conflicts. Our global society is characterized by economic and political systems and an “imperial mode of living” (Brand/Wissen 2017)<sup>21</sup> in which people structurally live at the expense of others. The right to life and the dignity of the human being is inviolable; restricting these rights can never be considered a legitimate interest. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights heralded a new era in 1945 in which the international community committed itself to ensuring a life of dignity and prosperity for all. The enforcement of universally applicable rights for all people should ensure the “foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world”. Since the 1990s, the United Nations has pursued a mainstreaming approach to human rights in all its activities and programs, which in 2003 resulted in a common basic understanding of the human rights-based approach (HRBA)<sup>22</sup> in development cooperation. On the one hand, we understand this to mean the realization of human rights, meaning activities should directly contribute to the implementation of one or more human rights.<sup>23</sup>

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21 Brand, Ulrich/Wissen, Markus (2017): Imperiale Lebensweise. Zur Ausbeutung von Mensch und Natur im globalen Kapitalismus. München: oekom.

22 UN (2003): The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation. Towards a Common Understanding Among UN Agencies. [https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/6959-The\\_Human\\_Rights\\_Based\\_Approach\\_to\\_Development\\_Cooperation\\_Towards\\_a\\_Common\\_Understanding\\_among\\_UN.pdf](https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/6959-The_Human_Rights_Based_Approach_to_Development_Cooperation_Towards_a_Common_Understanding_among_UN.pdf)

23 UNSDG (2019): United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Internal Guidance. <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/UN%20Cooperation%20Framework%20Internal%20Guidance%20--%201%20June%202022.pdf>



On the other hand, the human rights standards and principles derived from them serve as a guideline<sup>24</sup> for all development cooperation and programming in all sectors and process phases (starting with the assessment of the legal situation of the legal entities, program planning, goals, and strategies through to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation). These principles include universality and inalienability, indivisibility, non-discrimination and equality, participation and inclusion, accountability, and the rule of law. Furthermore, they depend on each other and are linked to one another.

This requires “good programming practices” that include, among other things, the following elements: recognition of people as key actors in their development and not as passive recipients of aid, participation as a method and goal, focus on disadvantaged and excluded groups, reduction of inequalities, and local ownership.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.5 Gender equality

Discrimination and exclusion based on gender identity are some of the central factors worldwide today that prevent many people from living a self-determined and fulfilling life. These forms of oppression cross regions, cultures, religions, and classes and, as a systemic phenomenon, affect all areas of life for everyone<sup>26</sup>:

- Unequal distribution of wealth and material prosperity
- Unequal pay and social recognition of work through the distribution of unpaid work
- Restrictions due to gender role models and limited participation in the household, family, and society

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24 The Universal Human Rights Index is a tool designed to facilitate access to human rights recommendations issued by the United Nations human rights mechanisms: <https://uhri.ohchr.org/en/>

25 UN (2003): The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation. Towards a Common Understanding Among UN Agencies. See footnote 22.

26 UN Women's regular reports provide current assessments of the status and development of gender-based disadvantages worldwide, which provide a central empirical basis for the strategic direction and further development of our work: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women>

- Unequal access to education and public, political, economic visibility and participation
- Violations of physical integrity through gender-based and sexualized violence and restrictions on self-determination over one's own body

Overcoming gender-based discrimination is therefore a central goal of our development policy commitment.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the direct support and promotion of the affected groups, this goal is interlinked with all areas of our work. Economic inequality, environmental destruction, and gender injustice are often closely linked. Consequently, all activities to combat poverty and support ecological transformation must always give thought to the achievement of gender equality as a whole. The approach of gender mainstreaming was shaped at the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, which is still essential for our work today. It aims to systematically consider the different effects on the life situations and interests of women and men – but also people with other gender identities – in all social and political guidelines. This needs to be implemented within both our organizations and as part of our development policy activities. Long-term strategic and transformative elements to strengthen gender equality should also increasingly be developed and integrated into all areas of work. Ultimately, the structural causes of gender-based discrimination can only be overcome as a part of a holistic social-ecological transformation as outlined in Chapter 2.2.

Particular attention should be paid to the different forms and mechanisms of gender-based discrimination. This takes on different forms depending on social positioning and socio-cultural context and often overlaps with other forms of discrimination, for example, due to ethnicity, social position, age, or

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<sup>27</sup> The essential basis for us is the UN “Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW) from 1979 (<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>), which “Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action” from 1995 (<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>) and the Sustainable Development Goal 5 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls from 2015.”

impairment. These multiple forms of oppression reinforce gender-based discrimination. The specific objectives and strategies for gender equality vary accordingly. Our guiding principle is the development and self-determination of all people within the framework of equal, democratic communities, as well as the “preferential option for the poor”<sup>28</sup> and disadvantaged. In this sense, our efforts must always be based on the perspectives and priorities of those affected locally.

### **3.6 Transparency, professionalism, and effectiveness**

Effective and coherent development policy action demands professionalism, transparency, and continuous review and enhancement of our own work. Our commitment to a fairer world is based on analyzing the causes of global inequalities and exclusions as well as the levers and obstacles to social change. From this, we develop multidimensional strategies that contribute to a sustainable fight against poverty and inequality on various levels, such as projects, education, and advocacy. In implementation, we rely on qualified personnel, professional tools and standards, as well as a sound understanding of the respective context of action. In addition to professional expertise and formal qualifications, we also strive to support a diversity of life experiences and perspectives. This means we consider the active involvement of marginalized social groups to be essential for high-quality practice in line with the aforementioned basics and principles.

As a development policy agency and network of the Catholic Church, we must hold ourselves accountable to disadvantaged people in the Global South, donors, institutional donors, and other allies working for more just world. In the spirit of effective and responsible work, we therefore strive for the greatest possible coherence between our ethical principles and objectives and our strategies and actions. To this end, we are committed to implementing the highest ethical and professional standards in all our areas of work, financial management, and within our organizations.

We follow several guidelines and regulations within our work (e.g. fundraising and implementation, programs and projects, corruption prevention, and/or safeguarding of vulnerable groups). They are supported by evaluations

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<sup>28</sup> See chapter 3.1.

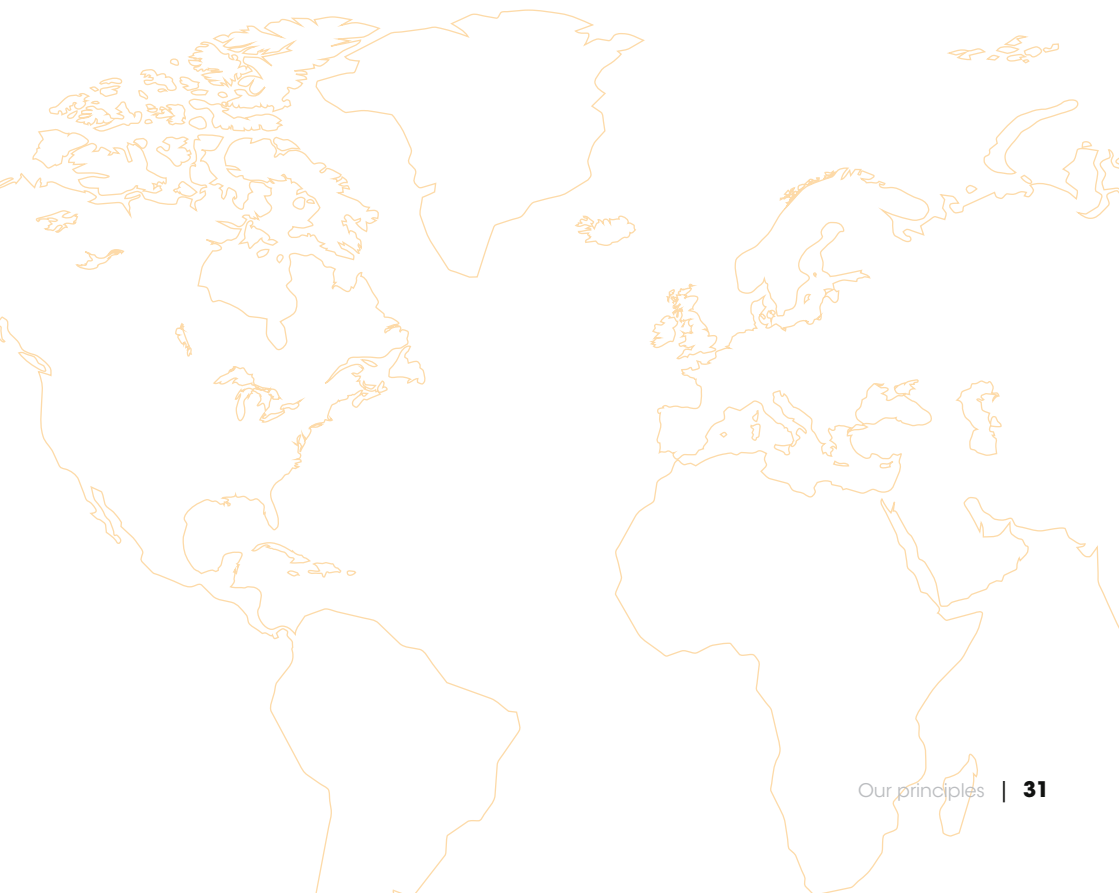
and continuously developed. As a network of the Catholic Church, KOO and organizations within its interest group are, firstly, bound to canon law and the regulations of the Austrian Bishops' Conference; secondly, we develop our specific guidelines for international development. Thirdly, we commit ourselves to external standards, such as those of the Austrian donation quality seal (OSGS) and the CONCORD 'Code of Conduct on Images and Messages.'<sup>29</sup> We work in financial controlling and project auditing with independent partner organizations in the Global South.

These binding regulations and evaluation tools ensure transparency and traceability in our work and the use of financial resources, as well as establish best practices in high-risk sectors. The aim is to prevent malpractices and to secure a coherent, ethically responsible, and efficient development policy practice.



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<sup>29</sup> All regulations currently valid for KOO interest group organizations can be found at [www.koo.at](http://www.koo.at).



# List of abbreviations

**CELAM:** Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño (Latin American and Caribbean Episcopal Council)

**CONCORD:** European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation

**CIDSE:** Coopération internationale pour le développement et la solidarité (International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity)

**DAC:** OECD Development Assistance Committee

**HRBA:** Human Rights-Based Approach

**IPCC:** Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

**KOO:** Koordinierungsstelle der Österreichischen Bischofskonferenz für internationale Entwicklung und Mission (Coordination Office of the Austrian Bishop's Conference)

**OECD:** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**OSGS:** Österreichisches Spendengütesiegel (Austrian donation quality seal)

**ÖFSE:** Österreichische Forschungstiftung für Internationale Entwicklung (Austrian Research Foundation for International Development)

**WBGU:** Wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Bundesregierung Globale Umweltveränderungen, Deutschland (Scientific Advisory Board of the Federal Government on Global Environmental Change, Germany)



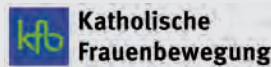
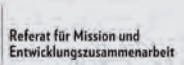


### **Official letters from the Catholic Church**

- AA:** Apostolicum actuositatem. On the Apostolate of the Laity, 1965
- AG:** Ad gentes. On the Missionary Activity of the Church, 1965
- CA:** Centesimus annus. On the 100th anniversary of Rerum Novarum, 1991
- EG:** Evangelii gaudium. On the proclamation of the Gospel in today's world, 2013
- EO:** Ecclesia in oceania, 2001
- FT:** Fratelli tutti. On fraternity and social friendship, 2020
- GS:** Gaudium et spes. On the Church in the modern world, 1965
- IM:** De iustitia in mundo. On justice in the world, 1971
- LC:** Liberatis conscientia. Instruction on Christian freedom and liberation, 1986
- LE:** Laborem exercens. On human labor on the 90th anniversary of the encyclical „Rerum novarum”, 1981
- LS:** Laudato si'. On care for our common home, 2015
- PP:** Populorum progressio. On the development of peoples, 1967
- QA:** Querida Amazonia, 2020
- RN:** Rerum novarum. On capital and labor, 1891
- SRS:** Sollicitudo rei socialis. The concern about social issues. 20th anniversary of Populorum progressio, 1987



## Members of the KOO interest group:



Partnerschaft für  
globale Gesundheit





