

At Home in the World

Diversity and Internationalization at the Diakonie

A concept developed by the regional office of Diakonisches Werk Württemberg

Preamble

Mobility, migration and displacement are global mega trends. The lives of many people and their families have become trans- and international.

Threatened by wars, violence, environmental destruction, poverty or oppression, people set out in search of a life in safety and dignity. In a globalized world, people increasingly strive for new professional perspectives and being able to receive an education and further qualification. In many countries, these developments are driven by global networks, exchange programs and labor shortages.

Refugees and migrants are particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged in this respect. Many of the services offered by the Diakonie are linked to the topic of migration. They are directed at people who are, for example, affected by human trafficking, sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, residence issues, poverty and homelessness, discrimination and racism.

1. Theological Aspects – What We Build On

The God of Israel is the God of all humanity

The Christian faith situates itself on a global horizon, and that from the very beginning of Christianity. Already in the Old Testament, which plays a central role in the people of Israel being chosen, it is beyond question that the God of Israel is the God of all humanity. This is also evident in the accounts of creation, in the stories of the progenitor Abraham, whom Jews, Christians and Muslims positively refer to, as well as in numerous eschatological images of hope, such as the image of all nations on pilgrimage to Mount Zion (Isaiah 25:6 ff).

God's love of humankind is visible in Jesus – Jesus' action of love and reconciliation across borders

The global perspective permeates the entire Bible: the child in the manger is adored by wise men from the Orient (Matthew 2), becomes a fugitive himself because of political persecution, and following his resurrection as Christ at the end of the Gospel, he sends his disciples to all peoples (Matthew 28:19). In the stories of the evangelists, Jesus continuously transcends national and religious boundaries, as for instance in his encounter with the woman from Samaria (John 4) or in the commandment to love one's enemies (Matthew 5:43 ff). With his self-statements such as "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), Jesus also underscores his universal claim. Against this background, nationalistic thinking is incompatible with Christianity. Rather, the reconciliatory work of Jesus has taken on a universal meaning (2 Corinthians 5:19), setting us free while at the same time calling on us to take responsibility for making God's love visible in the world.

Christians are united in faith and baptism, like the limbs of one and the same body

Already a first generation of Christians dealt with the question what a coexistence of Christians of different nations can be based on. Thus, questions of whether the message of Jesus was also directed at non-Jews, whether a Jewish origin implied a "better" Christian, and whether non-Jews first had to adopt traditions of Jewish culture, ultimately led to basic theological decisions that continue to shape Christianity today: faith emerges by the grace of God and does not require any prior cultural adaptation (Acts 15). Baptism abolishes the divisive nature of national or religious origin, class and gender (Galatians 3:28). Christians all over the world are bound together as members of one and the same body (1 Corinthians 12:12 ff).

The commandment to love one's neighbor is not limited to Christians or to the immediate social surroundings, but calls for affectionate attention towards all human beings

While Christians are united in a special way, as the image of one and the same body in 1 Corinthians 12 indicates, the call to treat others as fellow human beings is valid for all.

The parable of the Good Samaritan – a key text of the Diakonie – applies the concept of the neighbor to those able to help. The Judeo-Christian commandment to love one's neighbor does not call for preferential treatment of one's immediate social environment – such as one's own family, neighborhood, ethnicity or country – but for loving attention to all those who "fall at one's feet" – regardless of their nationality or religious affiliation. To this day, this is what makes Diakonie so credible and compelling.

2. Ambition and Incentive – What We Are Committed To

Human dignity is at the center of diaconal activity. In accordance with its self-image, the Diakonie reaches out to all people, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, skin color or nationality. Its national and international services are always geared towards people's circumstances and needs. Service for people means to accompany and empower people. The Diakonie observes and listens, it perceives the structural framework and helps to shape it.

We help shape an open society

Worldwide migration movements, Europeanization and globalization contribute significantly to a multiplication of lifestyles, cultural imprints and religious convictions. The Diakonisches Werk Württemberg is committed to ensuring equal opportunities, social and humane coexistence, a living democracy so that all people can participate. It opposes all forms of xenophobia, racism and discrimination and does not tolerate right-wing populism, right-wing extremism and nationalism.

We are committed to life in One World

It is the task of the Diakonie and the church to shape global social change and promote sustainable, inclusive and just development worldwide. Together with partner organizations from other churches and countries, we assume responsibility for fostering social justice, protecting human rights, ensuring the integrity of creation and sustainability, and preserving peace. In doing so, we always also see ourselves as learners.

We promote internationality and diversity

The Diakonisches Werk Württemberg looks beyond borders, both in theory and in practice, cooperating with church-based diaconal and civil society initiatives and organizations

throughout the world. In international cooperation, the Diakonie Württemberg sees both opportunities and challenges for all involved, especially for directly or indirectly involved employees. Promoting diversity-conscious work in the regional office and in member institutions of the Diakonie is an important and long-term task. The Guidelines and Recommendations for intercultural orientation in the association serve as a basis for this.¹

We enable encounters and opportunities for exchange

Through international encounters and exchange, the Diakonie Württemberg promotes peace, mutual understanding, international professional development of diaconal work as well as joint learning and the broadening of perspectives.

3. Cooperation - What Guides Us

Principles of cooperation in our work with partner organizations around the world

The respect of human rights is a self-evident basis of any cooperation.

The quality of international cooperation is inter alia based on stable, medium- to long-term partnerships with reliable local contacts.

Our cooperation with international partner organizations is guided by the principle of equality. From the very beginning of the cooperation, we jointly develop goals and content to where all parties are involved in relevant decisions. Structures, framework conditions and financing are handled in a transparent manner. Against this backdrop, all partners involved should be able to regard the respective commitment and benefits appropriate and fair.

A vital part of the work in partnership are regular personal meetings, ecumenical study trips as well as the joint celebrations of church services in order to intensify the cooperation.

For the selection of partner organizations, it is important to us that they share the Christian self-image of the Diakonie and, if possible, have a relationship with our member institutions.

The partnership is continuously flanked by the critical reflection of post- and neocolonial structures and stakeholders being able to better understand "white" privileges and structural asymmetries (see "Critical Whiteness") through the cooperation.

In our partnerships we aim to conduct a culturally sensitive exchange about value systems, norms, faith practices and interreligious issues as well as to critically examine socially established practices such as violence against children and women, persecution of ethnic groups, racism, and homophobia.

Similarities and differences are respected and, if necessary, limits to cooperation pointed out.

Principles of cooperation at the regional office

The departments at the regional office are in regular exchange about international cooperative activities. This exchange can also serve as a platform for professional development or for the creation of synergies.

Departments involved in international activities will have sufficient resources to be able to comply with the above-mentioned principles. This also includes further education and training

¹ [Diakonisches Werk Württemberg \(Hg.\), Interkulturelle Orientierung als diakonische Qualität. Leitlinien und Handlungsempfehlungen für die Einrichtungen und Dienste der Diakonie in Württemberg, 2010.](#)

for staff members to strengthen competencies necessary for international work. Full-time and part-time employees or volunteers, who have been abroad or in Germany within the framework of diaconal projects, shall be employed as multipliers or mentors in their respective home countries upon their return. Necessary training will be provided for this purpose.

International activities of the regional office will gradually be linked with projects implemented by member institutions. Appropriate forms of work and exchange platforms will be set up.

Partner organizations outside Germany are informed about the range of international activities carried out by the Diakonie Württemberg.

4. Regional Office - What We Offer

The regional office actively supports its members with respect to internationalization, in particular by providing and reviewing information, providing education and training, offering facility-related advice and support, and implementing projects.

International Cooperation

The regional office

- supports the development and maintenance of international partnerships between diaconal institutions and international partner organizations and works towards a contractually agreed upon mode of operation, which contributes to the promotion of sustainable professional exchange of staff, commitment and friendship.
- is aligned with the trans- and international living conditions of people and uses international networks for tailored counseling services (especially in the areas of exploitation, human trafficking, training/employment).
- works closely with international partner organizations in sending or hosting volunteers as part of the volunteer service.

International Solidarity

The regional office

- sets an example for a social Europe and global solidarity.
- supports, together with local partner organizations, the elderly and poor, people with disabilities, refugees and minorities, as well as other persons disadvantageously affected in Eastern Europe through the campaign "Hoffnung für Osteuropa" (Hope for Eastern Europe).
- is committed to global justice, empowerment of the poor, promotion of peace and the integrity of creation through the campaign "Brot für die Welt" (Bread for the World).
- works towards raising awareness and implementing the Diakonie Charter "For a Social Europe" together with Diakonisches Werk Baden within the framework of the Europe Competence Center in cooperation with the European Office of Diakonie Deutschland in Brussels.

Political Representation

The regional office

- promotes and calls for the inclusion of international dimensions in social policy issues and challenges.
- represents the interests of diaconal organizations in relation to

international issues and activities vis-à-vis state government and policies.

Recruitment, International Workforce

The regional office

- advocates legal labor migration and develops concepts for its implementation in areas of social work (especially in the areas of home economics and care).
- supports diaconal institutions and their employees by integrating people with migration and refugee experiences into day-to-day working life as co-workers.
- supports diaconal institutions in conducting intercultural outreach in terms of organizational development and personnel policy.

Intercultural Orientation / Education

The regional office

- provides opportunities for transnational learning through exchange activities within the framework of volunteer services by sending volunteers abroad or hosting foreign volunteers in Germany.
- develops additional formats of transnational learning for employees and target groups that contribute to strengthening intercultural competencies.
- promotes the intercultural orientation of diaconal institutions and services and the intercultural competence of employees.

Migration and Inclusion

The regional office

- advocates for the rights and integration of people with migration or refugee experience and supports full-time, part-time and voluntary workers with specialist advice, specialist events and training opportunities
- develops and accompanies inclusion-promoting projects and community-oriented work in neighborhoods (in cooperation with church congregations, districts, municipalities and counties).
- decidedly opposes exclusion and is committed to an open society and equal participation of all people.

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