

To: All Caritas member organizations
Re: Safeguarding and complaints handling mechanisms

Dear Caritas colleagues,

Through its vision, mission and values, Caritas Internationalis promotes the belief and commitment to a world where every individual's rights and dignity are respected. To ensure that the Caritas Internationalis Confederation is fully accountable to all its constituencies, members adhere to the CI Code of Ethics and staff to the Code of Conduct of their respective organisations. As part of an on-going move to improve accountability towards all those it serves and accompanies, individuals and communities, Caritas Internationalis has undertaken a review of the existing safeguarding policies and procedures in line with the sector's best standards and practices.

I am pleased to share with you the new Caritas Internationalis policies and procedures that assure that our firm commitment to zero tolerance vis a vis sexual exploitation, harassment and fraud is put into action. They have been approved by the Executive Board and the Representative Council in November.

The first two apply to all member organisations. The third one applies to the General Secretariat and can serve as a template for member organisations that need to build one. They are compulsory.

1. Caritas Internationalis Children and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy

Caritas recognizes and supports the right of children and vulnerable adults to protection, regardless of gender, race, culture and dis/ability. Caritas recognizes the power dynamics inherent in working with children and vulnerable adults and the potential for abuse and exploitation by staff of program participants.

Caritas Internationalis prohibits all forms of exploitation and abuse, namely:

- Caritas staff and associates are prohibited from engaging in sexual activity with children (persons under the age of 18, regardless of the age of majority or age of consent locally). Mistaken belief regarding the age of a child is not a defense.
- Caritas staff and associates are prohibited from causing any physical or emotional harm to children or vulnerable adults.
- Caritas staff and associates are prohibited from the exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sex, including sexual favors.

- Caritas staff and associates are prohibited from any form of humiliating, degrading, or exploitative behavior toward children, women, and vulnerable adults.
- Caritas staff and associates are not to use their power or position to withhold assistance or services, or to give preferential treatment.
- Caritas staff and associates are prohibited from using their power or position to request or demand payment, privilege, or any other benefit.
- Caritas staff and associates are prohibited from engaging in trafficking in human beings, in all forms.

In the same spirit, Caritas staff and associates are strongly discouraged to engage in sexual relationships with participants since they are based on inherently unequal power dynamics. Such relationships are contrary to Caritas principles and values and undermine the credibility and integrity of our work.

The Executive Board has decided that this policy applies to all Caritas member organizations staff and associates.

2. Caritas Internationalis Anti-Harassment Policy

Caritas Internationalis is committed to providing a work environment that is professional and free from intimidation, hostility, humiliation, bullying, mobbing or other offenses which might interfere with work performance or the dignity of an individual.

Harassment of any sort - verbal, physical, visual - will not be tolerated. This includes but is not limited to harassment based on race, colour, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, national origin or ancestry, disability, medical condition, marital status, veteran status, or any other protected status defined by law. Harassment of co-workers, counterparts, and beneficiaries are all equally prohibited.

3. Caritas Internationalis Complaints Handling Mechanism- Policy and Procedure

Caritas Internationalis has established for its general secretariat a Complaints Handling Mechanism (CHM) that is user-friendly, safe and accessible, but is also simple, efficient and effective and does not create undue burden.

The aim of the policy and procedure is to:

- encourage all improper, unethical or inappropriate behavior to be identified and challenged at all levels of the organization;

- ensure anyone aware of a wrong-doing is supported in total confidence in reporting matters they suspect may involve anything improper, unethical or inappropriate;
- provide clear procedures for the reporting of such matters;
- manage all disclosures in a timely, consistent and professional manner;
- provide assurance that all disclosures will be taken seriously, treated as confidential and managed without fear of retaliation.

The Complaints Handling policy and procedure cover both safeguarding issues and financial improprieties matters and is applicable to Caritas Internationalis general secretariat staff and associates and staff seconded through Caritas Internationalis mandated support mechanisms. Caritas Internationalis Complaints Handling Mechanism does not replace individual complaints handling mechanisms that member organizations already have in place. It provides an alternative and complementary channel for managing complaints that can be activated in predetermined circumstances and when certain conditions are met. Caritas Internationalis recognizes that the primary responsibility to handle safeguarding complaints remains with member organizations. The Caritas Internationalis Complaints Handling Mechanism can serve as reference for member organizations to tailor their own locally appropriate complaint mechanism.

In addition, we are currently finalizing a MoU with a competent organization that can provide high level expert investigators that member organisations can request when needed. With the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR) we are developing an Inter-Agency Disclosure Scheme to assure greater level of screening of staff during recruitment processes. Soon, Caritas Internationalis will sign the Disclosure Scheme and encourage members to adhere to it.

It is important that you know that we are working in relation with the Commission for the Protection of Minors of the Holy See. Our involvement is an asset to the Church and may be useful to your own Bishops' conference that I invite you to contact to review and if necessary improve the existing policies and mechanisms.

We are also in relation with the Centre for Child Protection of the Gregorian Pontifical University. They provide trainings both through formation programmes in Rome from 3 months to 2 years (licentiate) and through e-learning: see <http://childprotection.unigre.it/e-learning>.

As the Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, it is my responsibility to ensure we have the systems in place to ensure that our work is done with respect and sensitivity to each of our colleagues, partners, and to those we are privileged to serve and work with. I am taking this opportunity to reaffirm the shared responsibility of each of us to ensure we prevent and stamp out sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment from all parts of our



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confederation so that none is subject to such dehumanizing acts, and to challenge any act of fraud or corruption that may put the whole Caritas family at stake.

The Executive Board is asking that the two policies on anti-harassment and on safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults be integrated into your respective policies and implemented in your organization as part of your engagement in the Confederation. It is also asking you to review your complaints handling policy and procedures on the basis of the document adopted by the Representative Council for the General Secretariat, and if you do not have them yet, to use the document as a template to build your own. We are going to recruit a Complaints Handling Officer whose mission will also be to support those who request it in the elaboration or adaptation of a complaints handling mechanism.

Michel Roy

Secretary General