

International Church Projects Without Corruption

Position Paper of the German Catholic “Conference on International Church Affairs”

(Adopted by the German Catholic “Conference on International Church Affairs”

on October 15, 2025)

0. Introduction

In the self-image of church actors, common religious beliefs and shared values form the foundation of cooperation. Virtues such as honesty, integrity, and a focus on the common good are among the foundations of Christian moral teaching and social ethics. Pope Francis has repeatedly warned urgently of the sin of corruption and its consequences. His successor, Pope Leo XIV, also sent a strong signal against corruption shortly after his election.¹

We understand corruption to mean the abuse of power for personal gain. This includes bribery, corruptibility, accepting advantages, and granting advantages. Corruption occurs in various forms in all societies.

Corruption particularly harms the poorest, who are the focus of the international project work of the church at the level of dioceses, relief organizations, and religious orders. It exacerbates existing inequality and hinders development and peace. Combating corruption contributes to the proper functioning of a community and economic development. It is therefore our duty to curb corruption as much as possible. There must not be allowed any room for corruption within the international project work of the church.

The position paper of the Conference on International Church Affairs establishes a **common, binding framework** for combating corruption. However, regarding the measures and instruments to be applied to prevent corruption, organization-specific concepts are required, considering the diverse structures and possibilities of the respective institutions ([arch]diocese, relief organization, religious order). Many of our institutions have already implemented such concepts in the form of mission statements and guidelines.

1. Corruption risks in the context of international missionary and humanitarian projects

Corruption jeopardizes the appropriate use of donations and funding, which is relied upon by target groups, donors, and contributors. It undermines mutual trust and damages the credibility of all involved. It damages the reputation and integrity not only of those affected, but also of other Church institutions and the Church itself.

Neglecting to prevent corruption or failing to address cases of corruption could lead to a loss of reputation for a relief organization, which would be accompanied by a decline in donations. When transferring public funds high standards of due diligence obligations are required. In case of missing evidence that funds have been used for their intended purpose or in the case of proven misuse of funds, the German relief organization is liable to public donors in all cases, regardless

¹ On June 15, 2025, Leo XIV beatified Floribert Bwana Chui. The Congolese customs officer had been murdered because of his faith and his incorruptibility.

of whether the damage was caused within the aid organization itself or at the partner organization abroad.

2. Fighting corruption as a joint task with our partners

We want to engage in a cooperative process and **dialogue** with our partners to understand and curb the disastrous effects of corruption. This corresponds to the core idea of partnership-based international Church project cooperation, as the global Church is a community of learning, prayer, and solidarity. The fight against corruption must be a **common and binding concern** to demonstrate and enhance a counterculture to corruption.

Being part of the global Church means being connected with other local churches. Our relief and mission work is characterized by personal relationships and dialogue with our project partners. Based on our fundamental values of solidarity and subsidiarity, we therefore want to realize and continuously improve the prevention of corruption in a joint effort with our partners. Our aim regarding international Church project work is **to harmonize solidarity-based cooperation “on an equal footing” with resolute anti-corruption measures**. Our partners should be encouraged to fulfill their own responsibility to prevent corruption.

In doing so, we make it clear that – regardless of the person and their position – **the same standards and rules apply everywhere**, to ourselves to the same extent as to our partners in the South and in Eastern Europe, to secular partners as well as to church partners, to project staff as well as to bishops.

Proof of use, project contracts, controls, and other measures that are subject to sanctions serve to fulfill legal and regulatory requirements. Their purpose is also to prevent moral misconduct from the outset. They should not be interpreted as resulting from mistrust of our project partners.

3. Formal measures and raising awareness

The partnership-based relationship and the solidarity practiced within the global church makes cooperation particularly valuable and effective. However, it must not lead to formal preventive measures being neglected.

Combating corruption requires measures **at various levels**. At a **governance level**, it involves a regulatory framework and the implementation of standards and appropriate control instruments. Legal regulations backed by sanctions have a preventive effect.

We consider the following to be indispensable for the responsible implementation of projects: effective financial management, application of the dual control principle, financial transfers only to the bank accounts of a legal entity², the submission of a comprehensive financing plan covering the entire project (not just the part for which funding is requested)³, and the timely and complete documentation of the use of project funds. These measures are supported by an internal control system and an effective supervisory structure.

² This does not apply in cases where individual persons are supported, as is the case with scholarships.

³ This does not necessarily apply to sub-projects that are functional independently.

If there is valid suspicion of corruption, the respective institution ([arch]diocese, relief organization, religious order) has the right to terminate the cooperation at any time and to initiate legal proceedings for prosecution and recovery of funds.

Beyond legal and structural measures, it is important to focus on **raising awareness, teaching moral and social ethics principles**, and imparting knowledge. Employees in our institutions and our project partners must understand the complex links between corruption and poverty, instability, and conflict, as well as the conditions under which corruption thrives.

Schools, universities, training centers, workshops, and conferences can serve as **learning venues** for teaching about these interdependencies and combating corruption. Campaigns in which well-known, trustworthy individuals champion the cause are particularly effective. Media channels that are accessible to a wide audience should be utilized. Conscience is formed through catechesis, further adult education measures and sermons. It is important that they take virtues related to the common good and civic virtues into account.

Fighting corruption involves increased personnel and financial costs, which must be considered during project planning.

Unfortunately, there are many ways to gain personal advantage by evading regulations. Despite all precautions, there remains a residual risk of corruption. We must remain aware of this.

Conclusion: Only with a clear position can the Church influence society and contribute to a long-term cultural change that removes the mental breeding ground for the evil of corruption. This position means that our institutions must implement all preventive and control measures available to them. Both **awareness-raising and transparent regulations are necessary** to ensure that formal commitments to combating corruption in guidelines and contracts do not merely remain formal declarations, but that the inner motivation of all those involved in the global church's project work to behave with integrity is strengthened.

To assist in the implementation of such measures, the “Communicare.social” platform and the website “weltkirche.de” provide tools for raising awareness, legal measures, and control instruments, including model contracts, webinars, videos, and information material from Transparency International Germany. The 'Communicare.social' platform also serves as a forum for those engaged in the church's international relief and mission cooperation to exchange ideas on issues relating to the fight against corruption in global church project work.

Registrations should be sent to 'weltkirche.migration@dbk.de'.