

# Strategic Framework 2021–2028

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In Action for Social Justice  
and our Common Home





### **A Prayer to the Creator**

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Lord, Father of our human family,  
you created all human beings equal in dignity:  
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit  
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,  
dialogue, justice and peace.

Move us to create healthier societies  
and a more dignified world,  
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.

May our hearts be open  
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.  
May we recognise the goodness and beauty  
that you have sown in each of us,  
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,  
and shared dreams.

Amen.

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*From the encyclical "Fratelli Tutti" of Pope Francis*

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## Our Identity

Caritas Europa is the network of Caritas organisations in Europe. It is one of the seven regions of Caritas Internationalis, an institution of the Catholic Church, dedicated to serving the poor and promoting charity and justice. As such, we work in communion with Caritas Internationalis, as well as with the other regions, and ensure we coordinate our efforts to fulfil our common mission.

Caritas Europa is a faith-based organisation within civil society and is legally registered as an international non-governmental and not-for-profit organisation under Belgian law. Caritas Europa has 49 member organisations in 46 countries across Europe and is governed by its member organisations through its Regional Conference, which is the highest decision-making body. The Executive Board takes leadership, implementing the decisions of the Regional Conference, providing the strategic direction of Caritas Europa, and supervising the daily running of the organisation. Supported by its working structures, representing the expertise within its membership; the everyday work of Caritas Europa is carried out through its Secretariat in Brussels.

Moved by the Gospel, inspired by the witness of the prophets, the parable of the Good Samaritan, and in communion with people and communities experiencing poverty, Caritas is an authentic expression of the social teachings and diaconia – that is, service – of the Catholic Church.

## Our Vision

“God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters”.<sup>1</sup> Our vision is of a civilisation of love, solidarity and justice, where the dignity of every human being is respected and upheld; where every person can flourish and live in peace and freedom as part of one human family; where there is no exclusion, discrimination, or dehumanising poverty; where the voices of the women, men and children in the most vulnerable situations are listened to; and where Creation, our common home, is safeguarded.

## Our Mission

We have a heartfelt commitment to fighting the injustices which lead to poverty and the exclusion of people in the most marginalised and vulnerable situations. Our mission is to work through coordinated actions within the Caritas Europa network, in communion with Caritas Internationalis and its regions, and through strategic partnerships and cooperation with Church actors, faith-based organisations, civil society, ‘social partners’, European institutions and governments, and people of good will of all faiths, to promote social and environmental justice through inclusion, integration, integral human development and humanitarian response. We aim to contribute together to building a world where the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth is listened to and responded to.

# Our Values

## • Dignity, Equality and Centrality of the Human Person

Caritas Europa believes that we are part of one human family, all made in the image of God, and therefore all in possession of inherent dignity. No person should have his or her freedom or dignity compromised, and the human rights of all women and men must be upheld. The human person should be at the heart of all policies: social, economic, development, humanitarian and environmental. The basic principles of respect for life, the dignity of every human being, social justice and human rights are inextricably linked. Caritas Europa is committed to promoting equal opportunities and responsibilities for all women and men.

## • Preferential Option for the Poor

Caritas Europa combats dehumanising poverty that deprives people of their dignity and promotes the rights of the people in the poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised situations, while working towards their empowerment and sense of self-worth.

## • Solidarity

Caritas Europa is committed to solidarity among all people, but particularly with people experiencing poverty and marginalisation, and sees the world through their eyes. We recognise the interdependence of the human family. The determined contribution

of every person to the common good, for example, through volunteering, supports and fosters community-building. Love, seeking the integral development of every human being and of the entire human family is a gift and a responsibility of every person and community.

## • Subsidiarity, Fraternity and Togetherness

Caritas Europa works in cooperation and dialogue with Church actors, faith-based organisations, civil society, 'social partners' and European institutions and governments in order to better serve people experiencing poverty, exclusion or situations of vulnerability. Caritas organisations in Europe belong to the same global Caritas family. We work together, as a learning network, respecting each member's autonomy, strengthening our unity and sustainability. We remain committed to the principle of subsidiarity, which both requires and promotes grassroots empowerment, participation, partnership as equals, and decentralised decision-making.

### • Professionalism and formation of the heart

Caritas Europa is committed to personal development and professional competence of its governing bodies, staff and volunteers. While professionalism is a fundamental requirement, it is in itself not sufficient. All those working with Caritas need to live and show heartfelt concern, enabling themselves and those with whom they work to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their professional training, the governing bodies, staff and volunteers of Caritas need a 'formation of the heart'.

### • Peace and Justice

Caritas Europa is determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies that are free from fear and violence. We believe that justice is a precondition for peace and that root causes as well as effects of injustices need to be addressed. The Caritas Europa network is building spaces of encounter, dialogue and reconciliation, and promotes a culture of peace through capacity-building, awareness-raising and advocacy.

### • Integral ecology and care for Creation

For Caritas Europa, the earth and all its resources are entrusted to all humankind. As a basic ethical principle and a responsibility, understanding that the environment, the economy, society, our daily life, the common good and justice between generations are interconnected, Caritas Europa is firmly committed to sustainable development and environmental justice.

# Strategic Orientations, Objectives and Outcomes for the Caritas Europa Network 2021–2028

## Introduction

Based on the *theory of change* on which this Strategic Framework has been developed, the Strategic Orientations defined are the areas for action where change is important to achieve Caritas Europa's overall mission. The objectives and outcomes are intended to enable us to interpret the signs of the time, and to adapt our actions accordingly.

The following elements have been identified by the Caritas Europa network as underpinning the whole Strategic Framework and will therefore be cross-cutting in its implementation:

### 1. Innovation

Innovative approaches will be essential in all our areas of work to enable the Caritas Europa network to fulfil its mission in the years ahead. Innovation is about contributing to the fulfilment of the Caritas Europa mission to bring change by mobilising new people and bringing new ideas, innovative methods, approaches, tools and actions into play. It is about being efficient and ensuring sustainability for us as a network, but first and foremost, about finding sustainable solutions for the people we serve.

### 2. *Laudato Si'*

Promoting inclusive and sustainable development requires caring for the planet, which is our common home. We wish to hear and act on the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, since everything is interlinked and the people we serve are the first victims of climate change and unsustainable policies. We wish to contribute to making *Laudato Si'*<sup>2</sup> "live" through our internal and external actions and policies.

### 3. Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development

The principles of Agenda 2030 are integrated and indivisible, and we will aim to help bring them and the Sustainable Development Goals to fruition in our actions and service for the common good. Eradicating poverty is an indispensable requirement for respecting the dignity of every human being, but also for contributing to sustainable development. We also recognise that equality between women and men, girls and boys, and equal rights and opportunities for all people, are essential to allow for integral human development and sustainability.

### 4. Youth engagement

Caritas Europa firmly believes that young women and men play a crucial role in building a Europe of solidarity and peace. "They are not the future of our peoples, they are the present. With their dreams and their lives they are forging the spirit of Europe."<sup>3</sup> Caritas Europa wishes to further strengthen youth engagement and active participation in all our structures and through all our actions.



# Strategic Orientation 1: Caritas Identity and Practice

Caritas Europa is a network<sup>4</sup> of diverse member organisations which share common core values and a common identity and practice, serving out of love. As part of the universal Church, the Caritas Europa network is firmly rooted in the Catholic Social Teachings and works to promote integral human development.

Listening to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, our actions, positions and communications contribute to the fulfilment of our mission to respond to the needs of people in the most vulnerable situations. The people we serve are heard and empowered.

To grow truly, we must grow together. We promote a culture of encounter and closeness. Together with Christian communities, people of all faiths, and all people of good will, we work towards a civilisation of love where the intrinsic dignity and equality of every human person is upheld and where our common home is protected.

## Strategic Objective 1.1:

**The Caritas Europa network shares a common identity deeply rooted in the Catholic Social Teachings and guided by our common values.**

### Strategic Outcomes by 2028

- 1.1.1. The governing bodies, staff<sup>5</sup> and volunteers of the Caritas Europa network adhere to the Caritas identity, and are properly trained to implement and promote it in their daily work and actions.
- 1.1.2. The Catholic Social Teachings are mainstreamed in all of Caritas Europa's<sup>6</sup> work, and developments of the Church teachings are monitored and integrated.
- 1.1.3. Caritas Europa provides spaces for spiritual enrichment and sharing and promotes the integral human development of its governing bodies, staff and volunteers.
- 1.1.4. Youth engagement is part of Caritas' identity. The Caritas Europa network is a platform by which young people can flourish in their call to serve the people in the most marginalised situations, where their prophetic voice is heard and where they can thrive.

### **Strategic Objective 1.2:**

**The Caritas Europa network builds communion with people experiencing poverty, promotes encounter and creates spaces for true participation.**

#### **Strategic Outcomes by 2028**

- 1.2.1. The Caritas Europa network implements the 'see, judge, act' methodology in its work with the people we serve.
- 1.2.2. The Caritas Europa network supports the empowerment of the people we serve, enabling their participation at all levels.

### **Strategic Objective 1.3:**

**The Caritas Europa network has clear and coherent communications, aiming to promote human dignity and ensuring that the voice of the people we serve is heard.**

#### **Strategic Outcomes by 2028**

- 1.3.1. The Caritas Europa network has a clear visual identity and coherent branding, which is recognised and valued by the relevant external actors.
- 1.3.2. Caritas Europa communications reach the target audience, contributing to positive impacts for the people we serve.

## Strategic Orientation 2: Integral Human Development and Humanitarian Response

The Caritas Europa network supports people living in the most vulnerable situations at all times and globally. We strive to contribute to a global development that upholds the innate dignity of the human being in all spheres of life and that consistently promotes the care of the common good. In the knowledge that a systemic change is the only way to overcome poverty and inequalities, we consider the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in a holistic and coherent way.

In the event of conflicts, public health crises and natural disasters – often triggered by the adverse effects of climate change – Caritas organisations are immediately mobilised to bring relief to those left furthest behind, thanks to their professionalism and preparedness.

In situations of extreme poverty in poor countries worldwide, Caritas strives to sow seeds of hope and facilitate good practices and peer exchanges, and to build up communities of practice. Rooted in the local societies we serve, Caritas organisations contribute to the building of resilient communities, both within Europe and in partner countries.

### Strategic Objective 2.1:

**The Caritas Europa network adopts an integrated approach from disaster preparedness to sustainable development.**

#### Strategic Outcomes by 2028

- 2.1.1. The Caritas Europa network improves our humanitarian preparedness and response capacities.
- 2.1.2. The Caritas Europa network gives an effective, coordinated and visible response to humanitarian crises in Europe.
- 2.1.3. The Caritas Europa network fosters an integrated approach between humanitarian crises and long-term development programmes in Europe and globally.

## Strategic Objective 2.2:

The Caritas Europa network fosters integral human development in programmes in Europe and globally.

### Strategic Outcomes by 2028

- 2.2.1. The Caritas Europa network promotes sustainable development programmes aimed at combating poverty and inequalities, including via an innovative approach to the human-centred economy and taking into consideration the medium- and long-term impact of the global pandemic.
- 2.2.2. The Caritas Europa network facilitates and strengthens the planning and implementation of sustainable programmes, focusing on care for Creation, inspired by *Laudato Si'* and framed by the UN Agenda 2030 in light of the impact that climate change has had on people living in vulnerable situations globally.

## Strategic Orientation 3: Inclusive and Just Policies

If we really want to promote those whom we assist and to overcome the “culture of indifference”, we must involve them in our advocacy work and make them agents of their own empowerment. Participation is essential and only with the involvement of everyone – even those so often underestimated and left behind – can we jointly propose more inclusive, non-discriminatory and just policies to guide decision-makers, influence legislation, and address the spiritual void permeating today’s technocratic society, which has led to ecological and social catastrophes, and moreover, to a crisis of values. This is evidenced daily, for instance, by our efforts to eradicate the scourge of poverty, to ensure equal access and peaceful co-existence, to promote integral human development, to intervene to offer protection to those in need or who are risking their lives, or even dying, at sea, or to ensure ecological justice and safety from conflict or violence. In order to play a part in achieving the 2030 Agenda, we prioritise, in our lobbying and advocacy, those actions in the most vulnerable situations and affected by the consequences stemming from the crisis of values and the culture of indifference. We promote social cohesion in Europe between North and South, East and West. The Caritas Europa network, together with those we serve, thus collaborate, create spaces of encounter, and carry out advocacy actions that bring systemic change to ensure that people, our common home, and the common good, are at the centre of the European Union’s (EU), Council of Europe’s and their members’ policies in all policy areas.

### Strategic Objective 3.1:

**The Caritas Europa network influences social and economic policies to eradicate poverty, end social exclusion and revamp Europe’s socio-economic system, ensuring greater equality, participation and just outcomes.**

#### Strategic Outcomes by 2028

- 3.1.1. In response to the social and ecological crisis identified in *Laudato Si’* and *Fratelli Tutti*<sup>7</sup> and the deepening consequences of the global pandemic, the Caritas Europa network collaborates with strategic partners and contributes to revamping the economic, social and ecological system, placing the human person at the centre and prioritising those furthest behind.
- 3.1.2. The Caritas Europa network contributes to achieving equality and social justice by guaranteeing appropriate social policies and measures in the fields of social protection and family policies in Europe.
- 3.1.3. The Caritas Europa network contributes to creating and fostering a more human-centred economy and inclusive labour market.
- 3.1.4. Through strengthened partnerships and joint advocacy actions, the Caritas Europa network gains considerable recognition for its work serving people in vulnerable situations and for its advocacy on related EU funding instruments.
- 3.1.5. The Caritas Europa network promotes dignified elderly care, responding to the challenges facing Europe’s ageing society, whilst also advocating for greater recognition of care workers via Caritas’ fair care mobility and migration.

### Strategic Objective 3.2:

The Caritas Europa network influences migration, asylum and integration policies and increases visibility on the urgency to respect human rights, human dignity and the integral human development of people and their families on the move.

#### Strategic Outcomes by 2028

- 3.2.1. The Caritas Europa network contributes to ensuring safer and legal pathways to Europe, and the protection of the rights and human dignity of destitute, impoverished, exploited, and/or trafficked migrants, paying special attention to the vulnerability of children, in line with Fratelli Tutti.
- 3.2.2. The Caritas Europa network advocates for European countries to respond to the needs and rights of displaced people migrating to and in Europe and putting the person at the centre of migration and asylum policies.
- 3.2.3. The Caritas Europa network advocates that European and local societies implement welcoming, sustainable integration policies and inclusive measures for refugees and migrants.
- 3.2.4. The Caritas Europa network strengthens the link between migration and development policies and contributes to changing the negative rhetoric about migrants and migration by raising awareness about the drivers of forced migration.

### Strategic Objective 3.3:

The Caritas Europa network advocates for an integral and consistent approach to humanitarian and long-term international development policies.

#### Strategic Outcomes by 2028

- 3.3.1. The Caritas Europa network advocates for European development policies, having at the core the fight against poverty, inequalities, and global injustice, and contributes to integral human development in light of *Laudato Si'*.
- 3.3.2. The Caritas Europa network advocates for a more integrated understanding and consideration of the connections between humanitarian crises, resilience, and sustainable development.
- 3.3.3. The Caritas Europa network advocates for European policies aimed at recognising, strengthening and empowering local players and communities.
- 3.3.4. The Caritas Europa network advocates for principled and needs-based humanitarian policies and timely and adequate funding to support Caritas' humanitarian response in Europe and worldwide.

## Strategic Orientation 4: Professional Competencies and Sustainable Funding

Whilst heartfelt concern defines us, in order to fulfil our mission, the Caritas Europa network recognises the need to be professional as an organisation. Accountability, transparency, integrity, good governance, effective management, participatory programming and innovation are important aspects of being professional and allow for the sustainability of the organisation, thus enabling the network to continue the work in the service of people in situations of vulnerability and marginalisation. Caritas Europa facilitates training within member organisations across the network. The Caritas Europa network, in solidarity with each other and supported by the Secretariat, remains financially sustainable. Strong member organisations make a strong network. As part of the Church, the Caritas Europa network can only be legitimate and sustainable with the clear mandate of the ecclesiastical authority; the work of the member organisations at grassroots and parish level will be thereby fostered and strengthened. Moreover, as a network of civil society organisations, we build relationships, establish dialogue and cooperation with other organisations and with governmental and intergovernmental institutions. Caritas Europa, as a region of the Caritas Internationalis confederation, fully supports the implementation of the priorities of Caritas Internationalis and shares good practices with Caritas Internationalis and with the other regions.

### Strategic Objective 4.1:

**The Caritas Europa network has strengthened its capacities, allowing for more efficiency in pursuing our mission.**

#### Strategic Outcomes by 2028

- 4.1.1. The Caritas Europa network is strengthened, thanks to capacity-building opportunities and the exchanging of good practices and tools.
- 4.1.2. The Caritas Europa network is compliant with the Caritas Internationalis Management Standards.
- 4.1.3. The Caritas Europa network has policies and procedures relating to the safeguarding of minors and vulnerable adults in place, which are known and implemented by all governing bodies, staff and volunteers.
- 4.1.4. Caritas Europa is a learning network, inspired by new tools and good practices; it fosters innovative solutions in our work aimed at supporting people in situations of vulnerability or marginalisation.



**Strategic Objective 4.2:**  
**The Caritas Europa network is financially sustainable.**

**Strategic Outcomes by 2028**

- 4.2.1. The Caritas Europa network proactively engages in dialogue with funding institutions relevant to our respective fields of work.
- 4.2.2. The Caritas Europa network has access to, and benefits from, adequate public and private funding.
- 4.2.3. Caritas Europa develops and implements its fundraising strategy, in respect of its ethical charter, aimed at diversifying funding sources.
- 4.2.4. The Caritas Europa network is encouraged and supported by the local church in line with the teachings of Pope Francis and of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*<sup>8</sup> and the *Motu Proprio Intima Ecclesiae natura*,<sup>9</sup> among others.

**Strategic Objective 4.3:**  
**Equal opportunities are promoted, and youth engagement is embedded, in the Caritas Europa network.**

**Strategic Outcomes by 2028**

- 4.3.1. Youth engagement staff and volunteers within the Caritas Europa network have increased their skills and competencies.
- 4.3.2. The Caritas Europa network increasingly offers attractive opportunities for young women and men to engage within Caritas.
- 4.3.3. Women and men have equal opportunities for being involved in decision-making and the strategic and operational processes of Caritas Europa, and strategies to promote youth representation at all levels are implemented within the Caritas Europa network.

## A note on process

It was the wish of the Caritas Europa Regional Conference, meeting in Rome in May 2019, that the process leading to the adoption of this new Caritas Europa Strategic Framework 2021-2028 should be as inclusive as possible, ensuring the involvement at various stages of the process of all Member Organisations and relevant working structures of the confederation. It was also recognised that true involvement requires time. This Strategic Framework was therefore developed over one and a half years and we are grateful to everyone who contributed to its preparation.

The following main steps were undertaken:

- The Caritas Europa Secretariat had an initial discussion about the forthcoming strategic framework at their team retreat in June 2019. They then discussed the current work of Caritas Europa in the light of the priorities in the Caritas Internationalis Strategy, as the Regional Conference had expressed their wish for consistency between the two frameworks. The key questions for consideration related to what we, as CE, already do regarding the different strategic orientations of the Caritas Internationalis Strategic Framework, and what the challenges and weaknesses were in relation to that. They also discussed what Caritas Europa could do better to increase our impact on our stakeholders and, ultimately, on the people that we serve.
- The Caritas Europa Action Groups and Task Forces were all consulted in autumn 2019; their responses to a series of questions allowed us to learn about the experience of Member Organisation representatives who work on the practical implementation of the current CE work programme. They expressed their views in their specific areas of responsibility relating to current successes, challenges, suggested priority-settings and how CE can contribute to the change that we wish to achieve for the people we serve.
- Discussions were held with the other Regions of Caritas Internationalis to ensure that our respective strategies create synergies for delivering on our common mission as a confederation.
- An online consultation was launched, to which Member Organisations could contribute, in October/November 2019. Based on the Theory of Change, it looked at both the past (domains of interest, appreciation of support, visibility and appreciation of past activities) and the future (challenges ahead, need for support and desired focus).
- A Steering Group was established for the purposes of the Strategic Planning Process. The group analysed the outcomes of the aforementioned consultations and provided some initial guidance to the Caritas Executive Board. Following a discussion within the Board, the Caritas Europa Senior Management Team prepared draft strategic orientations/"domains for change" for the Caritas Europa Strategic Framework, which was then further developed by the Steering Group and sent to the Member Organisations for a second round of consultations; it was also presented at the Regional Conference 2020.
- Following feedback from the network, and with guidance from the Steering Group and the Executive Board, the Caritas Europa Secretariat prepared the draft Strategic Orientations for the Strategic Framework. A final round of consultation with members, as well as with Caritas Internationalis, took place in the autumn of 2020. Following their input, the final strategy was prepared and endorsed by the Executive Board.
- The Caritas Europa Strategic Framework 2021-2028 was adopted on the 4th of January 2021.

The process was supported by an External Consultant, Corina Dhaene, to whom we express our gratitude.

## End notes:

1. [Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together](#), Abu Dhabi (4 February 2019): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4-5 February 2019, p. 6.
2. [Laudato si' \(24 May 2015\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#)
3. Pope Francis, on the occasion of receiving the Charlemagne Prize in 2016.
4. For the purposes of these strategic orientations, objectives and outcomes, when referring to the Caritas Europa network, we mean the member organisations acting together, supported by the Caritas Europa Secretariat and the governing bodies. The specific activities and sharing of responsibilities between these actors will be further explained in the annual work programmes.
5. "Staff" refers here to all employees, interns and, when relevant, consultants.
6. For the purposes of these strategic orientations, objectives and outcomes, when referring to Caritas Europa solely, we mean the Caritas Europa Secretariat and the governing bodies. The specific activities and sharing of responsibilities between these actors will be further explained in the annual work programmes.
7. [Laudato si' \(24 May 2015\) | Francis \(vatican.va\)](#)
8. [Deus caritas est \(December 25, 2005\) | BENEDICT XVI \(vatican.va\)](#)
9. [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_motu-proprio\\_20121111\\_caritas.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu-proprio_20121111_caritas.html)

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