



**A paper on: Diakonie Bundesverband**  
*(The Federal Association of Christian Welfare and Social Work)*

**Prepared for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society**

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## An Introduction to *Diakonie*

### Summary

As an umbrella organisation for the social and welfare work carried out by Protestant church-based welfare providers in Germany, *Diakonie* oversees a wide range of projects and initiatives. This broad scope is rooted in the history of German welfare provision, a history characterised by long-standing cooperation between church groups and the German state. If this amounts to a historical prioritisation of religiously-motivated welfare provision, then *Diakonie* maintains that its core Christian values have been the key to its success in addressing social need, providing a bedrock of compassion that informs the work it carries out. Indeed, the independence, willingness and consistency afforded by this faith-based foundation is what commended the work of church-based organisations to the German state in the aftermath of the Second World War, and it is what continues to inform the day-to-day running of *Diakonie*.

The word 'diakonie' (greek *diakonia*, service or ministration) refers, in Germany, to Christian welfare and social work, and the German organisation *Diakonisches Werk of the Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)*, also known simply as *Diakonie*, is the social service agency of the Protestant Church in Germany. One of the biggest welfare institutions in Germany, and the oldest welfare association assigned to the Protestant Church, it represents the regional services of 20 member churches, as well as the welfare work of other Protestant denominations and approximately 80 specialist organisations working in different fields of social care, health care and education.

Due to Germany's state-church-legislation, independent welfare organisations related to both the Protestant and Catholic churches occupy a special position, a cooperation which has its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the Weimar republic. Following an experience of the National Socialist Regime, policy makers sought to avoid centralisation, and church-based welfare groups offered a solid foundation upon which to build a social state.

Despite legally belonging to church bodies, then, such groups are financially autonomous, since the German Constitution guarantees religious freedom not only to the individual but also to associations and organisations. So any social work carried out by these organisations is approved by law as a way of exercising religion. Through being a member of the umbrella organisation *Diakonie*, therefore, church-related welfare organisations can be legally recognised as a part of the Protestant church, and the right of the state to interfere in their internal affairs is limited.

In this way, *Diakonie* oversees a wide range of activities, some of which include:

- Care for the elderly
- Support for the unemployed
- Youth welfare
- Support of people with disabilities
- Family welfare
- Health care
- Migration issues

### Financing

Financing of the work carried out by *Diakonie* depends on the task at hand; since the services undertaken vary greatly, so do the sources of funding. Adopting a principle of subsidiarity, in line with the Federal Social Security Act, the government allocates the funding of social services to voluntary providers like *Diakonie*, although the entire cost is rarely covered by this method, so donations and Church collections remain a crucial part of the funding of many projects.

#### Membership of *Diakonie* includes:

Over 28,000 independent institutions in Germany

444,000 full time and part time employees

3,500 self-help groups

18,000 member church parishes

400,000 volunteers support German welfare and social work

Overall, the various sources of finance include:

- Donations
- Contributions from members
- Grants from the EKD, so members' subscription fees are covered by the EKD
- Grants from third parties
- Tax-supported government funds
- User fees
- Church resources
- German Social Security Funds
- Proceeds from assets

Certain projects, such as the 'Brot Für die Welt' international outreach initiative, are funded almost entirely through private donations. Similarly, the funding for Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe (Diakonie Disaster Relief) is traditionally made up of 85% donations, with a further 8% contributed from the 'Brot Für die Welt' fund, and the rest supplied by third party contributions and public subsidies. To take two specific examples of funding through donations from 2010, the earthquake in Haiti prompted EUR 16.8

million in public donations, whilst relief work for the flood in Pakistan received EUR 17.6 million. High-profile international disasters such as these tend to encourage especially high rates of giving among the German population.

Other projects rely more heavily on public funds allocated to *Diakonie* by the federal government, for example those involving treating drug or alcohol addicts, or women struggling with pregnancy. Municipalities also contribute towards integration services for handicapped people, as well as services that seek to help those suffering from mental illness or debt. Social Security Funds will often cover those initiatives that seek to help the elderly—for example the provision of intensive care services either in old peoples' homes or at the homes of the elderly themselves—as well as the financing of *Diakonie's* rehabilitation measures. The German Federal Employment office supports *Diakonie* services that seek to assist unemployed people.

Added to this, every member of the Protestant Church in Germany is required to pay a church tax, levied according to members' income and/or salary. The majority of consultancy services and contact points of the *Diakonie* district services are funded by this church tax. Child day care centers also receive supplementary funds, whilst assistance for foreigners and refugees is also funded in this way.

## An Overview of *Diakonie*

### What is *Diakonie*?

The meaning of the word 'diakonie' could perhaps be summarised as 'Christian social and welfare work', but this is only part of the picture. The predecessors of today's Christian welfare organisations were indeed committed to providing care and support to those people on the margins of society, but they had another aim: to bring the gospel to them, to tell them about Jesus Christ.

Their faith in Jesus found expression through their actions, and this remains the basis for all work carried out by *Diakonie* today. The organisation understands that faith in Jesus and practiced charity belong together, and therefore seeks to support Christian welfare organisations nationwide who are committed to serving those in need, and aiming to reverse the causes that brought about these situations.

As already highlighted, in Germany there is a deliberate partnership between the welfare state and independent welfare organisations; in this way, it is unique throughout Europe. *Diakonie* takes over social tasks entrusted to it by the state, but as an independent body, making it an essential watchdog of both the government and society.

## History - The origins of *Diakonie* in Germany

Organised Christian social and welfare work in Germany began in 1848, when theologian Johann Hinrich Wichern responded to spiritual and material poverty in Hamburg by drafting the programme for *Inner Mission (Innere Mission)*.

This move represented the gathering together of a number of related examples of social action carried out by Christian organisations in the early nineteenth century. Wichern had for a long time been sensitive to the particular needs at the heart of contemporary German society, needs created, in part, by broad societal changes that had resulted in much of the responsibility for social action being placed on the shoulders of small communities. Christians across the country had acted variously in answer to these demands—responding to an increase in street children, for example, they established a number of rescue homes for young people. It was in line with these initiatives that Wichern founded his Rauhe Haus in 1833.

The Rauhe Haus was a form of rescue home run according to family principles, and it offered an alternative model of care for disadvantaged young people in Germany, one that contrasted greatly to the contemporary penal system. In response to the troubled life histories of the children admitted to the homes, Wichern was able to offer the radical response: 'My child, you are forgiven!' Children were admitted at the age of 11/12 and discharged at 16, having been equipped with an education and key skills, as well as a sense of responsibility towards their community.

It was initiatives such as this, then, that eventually came under the banner of *Inner Mission*; when this central committee for Christian welfare work was established, Christian groups were strategically positioned throughout Germany to run institutions, schools and welfare organisations. *Inner Mission* continued in this manner throughout the first half of the twentieth century, before later seeking to consolidate its structure to include other like-minded initiatives emerging throughout the country.

An important opportunity for such a consolidation came about when *Inner Mission* realised that its vision for Christ-inspired social action was shared by the relief group *Hilfswerk of the EKD*—an organisation established, after the end of World War II, to attract foreign aid and promote ecumenical contacts in fighting famine, supporting refugees and overcoming unemployment. In 1975, *Innere Mission* and *Hilfswerk* united to become *Diakonisches Werk der EKD (Diakonie)*.

In addition, 1959 had seen German Protestant Churches begin the 'Brot für die Welt' (Bread for the World) project to support needy people in developing countries. Later, this project became a permanent institution and was integrated into *Diakonisches Werk of the EKD*. Since 1959, there have been special Christmastime collections for

the work of in *EKD* and other member church parishes. Along with social and welfare work in Germany, *Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe* (*Diakonie Disaster Relief*) and 'Brot für die Welt' combine emergency aid with activities to fight poverty and exclusion both within and outside of Germany and Europe.

*Diakonie* was originally based in Stuttgart, but has now transferred to Berlin. In 1992, its Brussels Office was established to represent the organisation to the European Union institutions. It is located inside the *EKD* building facing the Berlaymont headquarters of the European Commission.

### Similar organisations in Germany

*Diakonie* represents the social and welfare arm of the Protestant Church in Germany, gathering together under one banner all Protestant-led welfare initiatives, but what about those headed up by the Catholic Church, other faith groups or even secular initiatives?

There are a number of groups throughout Germany that play a similar role to *Diakonie*, but have their roots in other religious traditions or schools of thought.

The Catholic social and welfare umbrella organisation, for example, is known as *Caritas*, and together with *Diakonie* it accounts for 50 to 60% of all social services and institutions in Germany—a fact that reflects Germany's aforementioned high regard for faith-inspired social work.

Jewish initiatives are gathered under a similar organisational structure to those inspired by Christian principles; the corresponding Jewish umbrella organisation is called *Zentralwohlfahrtsstelle der Juden in Deutschland*. Jewish communities in large cities serve as meeting places for all ages—they take care of the elderly and organise both kindergartens and primary schools for Jewish education.

Islamic social work is accounted for slightly differently, since, in the German state, Islam is not organised as a public corporation. The central associations are the *Zentralrat der Muslime* (Central Council of Muslims), the *Islamrat* (Islam Advice Council) and the *Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion* (DITIB; Turkish-Islamic Union of the Institute for Religion). Islam-inspired social work is not as widely publicised in Germany as Christian-led projects, and has to do with such things as providing support for immigrants arriving in the country. Muslims also have to give a portion of their earnings as a *Zakât* to poor people that they know, and mosque communities offer a range of social, health and educational support—it is worth noting that, within Islamic culture, every mosque is responsible for both Muslim religious and

social belonging. Muslim welfare-providing networks include the *Türkisch-Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion* and, on a national level, both the *Muslimischer Sozialbund e.V. – Cenanze Vafki* (Muslim Social Federation – Cenanze Vafki) and *Kauf und Hilfe* (Purchase and Help), an institution of the international *Muslimen helfen e.V.* (Muslims Help).

Two significant secular umbrella organisations are the ‘“workers” movements’, or *Arbeiterwohlfahrt*, the German equivalent of the *Red Cross*, and the *Deutscher Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband* (DPWV), the German equality welfare organisation, which is the umbrella organisation for all ideologically independent welfare organisations.

Such organisations are not the focus of this paper, but they illustrate the diversity of approaches to social work within Germany. As already mentioned, it is the Christian initiatives that carry out the majority of social and welfare roles. These organisations are highly sensitive to the diverse religious landscape in Germany, however, and are keen to explore connections with other religious groups; several discussion papers have been released on this topic, such as “Clarity and Good Neighbourhood. Christians and Muslims in Germany” (2006).

### **Work carried out by *Diakonie* in Germany today**

Along with other voluntary welfare organisations in Germany, *Diakonie* contributes to the welfare state, ensuring that every citizen in need is granted help under the state’s duty to support public services.

The *Diakonisches Werk of the EKD* represents:

- The common interests of social and welfare organisations throughout Germany
- The interest of the people for whom it exists

It communicates these interests to:

- The Parliament and Government of the Federal Republic of Germany
- National and International organisations, such as the European Union
- The general public

It does this through contributing to federal legislation, and encouraging the cooperation of its affiliated organisations and members, offering them services and acting as an advocate for people in need.

In Germany, it is active in the following areas:

## Disabled provision

*Diakonie* oversees a great number of services for the benefit of disabled people, both young and old. It takes a holistic approach, recognising the importance not only of therapeutic help but also of psychological and social development. Services include schemes to help disabled adults into employment, such as ‘sheltered’ workshops, as well as vocational training and integration projects. *Diakonie* also runs 39 facilities for the early detection of disability, so as to enable parents and carers to adapt to the needs of their disabled child from an early age. Counselling is available, as well as nursery schemes that aim to provide disabled children with key skills for later life.

## Children and young people

Recognising that young people are the future, *Diakonie* offers many activities and programmes for children and adolescents, beginning with kindergarten, day care services and parent-child facilities, and then extending to youth outreach and social work. The goal is to ensure that young people are given equal opportunities, so *Diakonie* seeks to tackle child poverty at its roots, addressing current inadequate processes of poverty identification and providing reliable and compassionate childcare.

## Support for single-parent families and women

For single parents faced with difficult personal and financial situations, *Diakonie* offers a wide range of support; advice and counselling, occasional financial assistance and opportunities for holidays via a holiday home scheme are just some of the resources available. Where problems extend to cases of domestic abuse, *Diakonie* oversees a number of women’s shelters and children’s homes, which also provide a vital link to further assistance for women faced with homelessness, drug addiction and mental illness. *Diakonie* offers pregnancy advice, too, as well as mother-and-child facilities for girls and women giving birth in difficult circumstances. Finally, help is extended to victims of human trafficking via counselling, exit and survival aid, pastoral care and legal assistance.

## For the elderly

*Diakonie* is committed to helping people enter old age with dignity, whilst also opening the door to the possibility of having new and active experiences in retirement. As such, whilst *Diakonie* is actively involved in the provision of home care and outpatient facilities—operating a number of *Diakonie* ‘stations’, ambulance services and residential homes—it also offers the means for elderly people to retain or improve their independence. Help is offered with shopping, for example, and retirees can be given the means to continue work on a voluntary basis, or even widen their horizons through travel.

### **For the sick**

*Diakonie* recognises that disease and illness are a part of life—a reminder that nobody is perfect or complete. It remains committed to providing help for those affected by illness, whether directly or indirectly, and works closely with the Protestant Hospital Association (which is a part of the Social Service Association of the EKD), as well as hospice services. Addiction and its attendant problems also impact the lives of many; *Diakonie* seeks to help those affected through the provision of information and education, prevention, screening, counselling, treatment, professional participation and self-help services. For those whose lives are altered by mental illness, *Diakonie* oversees a range of services—including counselling, out-patient services and vocational training—whilst also working hard to reduce the taboo that still surrounds the issue.

### **Nursing**

The population is getting older, which, although a positive development in many ways, will increase the demand for nursing in the coming years. In connection to their work with the elderly, therefore, *Diakonie* are looking to ensure that those in need of care are able to receive it as soon as possible. Nursing homes and out-patient services work to supply much-needed beds and treatment for those who cannot support themselves, whilst initiatives like the Family Care Leave Act are welcomed and promoted for giving new freedom to family members, currently in full-time employment, who would like to be looking after an elderly relative.

### **Personal and financial difficulties**

People find themselves in difficulties, both personal and financial, for a variety of reasons, and *Diakonie* represents a large number of trained counsellors committed to helping individuals reach solutions. Help can come in written form, via 'Pastoral letters', as well as through telephone counselling and more traditional formats. It is geared particularly towards those struggling to find employment, and perhaps facing social exclusion as a result, as well as for individuals experiencing other financial difficulties. Debt advice will often play a key part, but aid is also extended to people who have found themselves homeless, acknowledging that homelessness can occur for a wide variety of reasons and take many different forms. Although these services are available to anybody who requires them, *Diakonie* recognises that ex-offenders are a particularly vulnerable group; as such, it oversees support tailored directly to them and their families, helping them become reintegrated into society.

### **Immigrants, emigrants and refugees**

*Diakonie* wants to be there to help individuals who have decided to settle in Germany, either to begin a new life for themselves and their families, or to escape dangerous

circumstances in their home country—in the latter case, this means seeking to improve the legal and social conditions currently available for refugees, which, in Germany, can be quite restrictive. *Diakonie* wishes for all immigrants and refugees to find a place within German society, becoming integrated into and active in their new communities. Then there are Germans looking for advice about emigrating, either permanently or for a limited time, and who would like to work abroad. A wide variety of information is available for people in these diverse situations.

### **Mission work**

*Diakonie* believes that mission work remains a fundamental aim of the church, and it compliments the organisation's belief in the provision of social and welfare support. The *Association of Missionary Services* brings together a number of organisations and groups with an active interest in missionary work, and provides tools for community building and Bible-related initiatives. *Diakonie* also oversees city missions, a movement that stems from Johann Hinrich Wichern's initial outreach in Hamburg. The continued aim of City missions is to respond to social and spiritual distress, demonstrating the love of Jesus and spreading the gospel through word and deed.

### **International work**

*Diakonie* seeks to work closely with other areas of the European Union, recognising shared goals regarding health, welfare and social work, and taking advantage of the ease of communication within the EU. Retirement homes, hospitals and nursing homes run by the *Diakonie* have emerged in southern Europe, for example.

In 1996, European Protestant churches and other non-profit organisations came together to form *Eurodiakonia*, a central organisation which encourages the exchange of ecumenical knowledge between its members and participates in social policy debate at European level. It works to form links with other European social and welfare organisations.

With the fundraising campaign, 'Hope for Eastern Europe' in 1994, Protestant churches responded to the social upheaval in Central and Eastern Europe.

The ecumenical program 'Churches Help Churches' supported Protestant minorities in Europe, Orthodox churches, and churches and their congregations overseas in the fulfilment of its evangelising mission.

The 'Brot für die Welt' project began in 1959, and all Protestant countries are involved; the funding for the project is provided primarily through donations. Its aim is to help people help themselves, to improve the living conditions of poor and disadvantaged people in developing countries.

Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe provides short-term assistance in instances of natural disaster through the provision of food, tents, blankets, clothes etc. on site. Aid can also be offered in the medium term, through the provision of seeds and tools. Funding is primarily through donations, but also by the Federal Government and the European Union. Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe also collaborates with other organisations.

*Diakonie* also provides one- and two-year scholarship programmes at German universities for foreign students.

The International Society for Mobile Youth Work coordinates initiatives and organisations that offer support for street children in both industrialised and developing countries.

For further information on the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society, please contact FaithAction, the secretariat for the group.

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