

Engaging with local faith actors and communities

Why this toolkit?

A large proportion of EU assistance is operational in countries and regions where religion and faith play a large part in shaping customs, practices and frameworks of well-being. The EU itself has noted:

“ Sometimes religious leaders are the only way to reach out to local communities.

Religion and the EU's external policies: Increasing Engagement, EPRS, pp.8–9

Literacy of the religious dynamics in communities, regions and societies at large is an essential component of identifying dynamics and drivers of social cohesion, or conversely of inequalities and divisions. For example, in **reporting on the response to defeminisation of agriculture in Niger** [▶](#), CARE Denmark agrees that engagement with religious actors is crucial:

“ We support the poor to claim their rights to land, and in a country where religion has a major influence on people's opportunities in life, it would be like running into a dead-end not to involve the religious leaders.

Marianne Haahr, Sahel Programme Coordinator

In responses to Covid-19 and health outbreaks including Ebola and Zika, we can evidence many examples where religious leaders and faith communities play an essential role in helping the broad community to prepare for, respond to, and recover from these shocks.

When faced with a crisis with the urgency of a pandemic, what can staff in EU Delegations or the ECHO field office do to engage with religious leaders and faith communities?

This toolkit aims to help answer that question.





Contents

| | | |
|---|--|-----------|
|  | Defining religious actors | 3 |
|  | Toolkit summary | 4 |
|  | The role of religious leaders and faith communities in emergency response and building resilience | 6 |
|  | Fostering collaboration with religious actors: practical considerations | 9 |
|  | Religious literacy | 12 |
|  | Navigating the challenges of engaging with religious leaders and faith communities | 14 |
|  | Other useful resources | 17 |

Credits

The toolkit was authored by Ruth Watson, ACT Alliance EU, in consortia with Richard McLaverty and Shahin Ashraf MBE of Islamic Relief Worldwide, Silvia Sinibaldi of Caritas Europa and Ruth Faber of EU-CORD.

Thank you to all stakeholders who contributed to the development of the toolkit: all the field and headquarter personnel from member organisations of consortium partners – ACT Alliance EU, Caritas Europa, EU-CORD and Islamic Relief Worldwide. With special thanks also to the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers; the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs; ACT Alliance, the Side by Side Faith Movement for Gender Justice; Open Doors International; CARE International. Your input of cases, contextual analysis and conceptual clarifications and guidance was invaluable for generating detail and greater depth. With this, the toolkit integrates reflections from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America.



Defining religious actors

with a stake in humanitarian and development response and peacebuilding

For the purpose of this toolkit, we apply the following definitions and scoping for the following terms related to religious actors.

Religion

The toolkit is designed to be adaptable for engagement with religious leaders and faith communities of all religions and draws on guidance and experience of faith-based and secular organisations. In line with the EU Charter for Fundamental Rights Articles 10 and 21, the toolkit refers to religion with reference to all religions — both traditional and non-traditional.

Religious leaders

We adopt the inclusive term ‘religious leader’ to refer to an ordained or lay religious leader of any rank at local, national and international levels of formal and non-formal leadership and both women and youth leaders. It also includes those invested with religious leadership in traditional religion, such as elderly leaders and village custodians in communities practising African Traditional Religion.

Faith communities

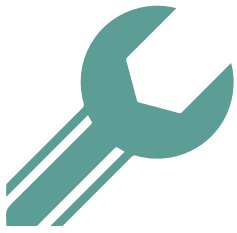
The term ‘faith communities’ refers to formal organisations of persons with common beliefs and commitments, usually with designated leaders.

These may include places of worship and the local, regional and national administrative structures such as councils representing a religious network or interreligious councils. Such councils may also have links to their government ministries, the EU, UN and other international processes, including through their participation in worldwide religious networks and due to their representative bases in national capitals and regional hubs.





Faith communities encompass informal groups carrying out development, humanitarian and peace work, who are often linked to local places of worship with some organisational structure within their religious community, but without formal registration as an independent organisation. This may, for example, be local and national disaster response organisations, parish committees, Zakat committees, faith-based hospitals and burial societies.

Faith-based organisations

Faith-based organisations are involved in peacebuilding, development and/or humanitarian activities and to varying degrees are linked with religious organisations, faith communities, civil society organisations and NGOs, and faith ties in relation to the organisational mission, vision and some elements of fundraising.



Toolkit summary

This toolkit is published by **ACT Alliance EU** , **Caritas Europa** , **EU-CORD**  and **Islamic Relief Worldwide**  to give EU decision-makers a concise practical tool to encourage engagement of local religious leaders and faith communities in pandemic response and the post-recovery phase.

A large proportion of EU development and humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding action is operational in countries and regions where faith and belief play a large part in shaping customs, practices and frameworks of well-being. Understanding religious dynamics in these contexts is essential for identifying drivers of social cohesion, or conversely of inequalities and divisions. The dynamics shape the appropriate intervention and support.

Religious actors in times of pandemic: an indispensable contribution

In many contexts, faith communities are first-line responders and on site before, during and after the time of an emergency.

Religious leaders are in direct contact with wider international networks and with the local administration. The deep embeddedness of faith communities and networks builds a relationship based on mutual trust and fosters the leverage of multi-dimensional interventions. Religious leaders — including women and youth leaders — have a meaningful role in building resilience and sharing effective communication, providing psychosocial and spiritual support, promoting inclusion and countering stigma and they enable the adaptation of traditional practices in case this is needed to avert risks.

In the area of inclusion and protection, religious leaders and faith communities are essential actors with strong influence for positive or negative outcomes. Whether drivers of inclusion or exclusion, ensuring support, dialogue and training for these stakeholders is crucial to enhance the protection of vulnerable individuals and counter domestic and gender-based violence.

Fostering the engagement of religious actors

An informed engagement of religious leaders, faith community representatives, faith-based and secular organisations should be included systematically in humanitarian and development programming and the post-Covid19 vision and recovery plan.

The toolkit checklists suggest several concrete actions to implement for more systematic engagements: from facilitating dialogue and convening meetings with diverse religious leaders, faith communities and faith-based organisations and



ensuring their presence at consultations and the decision-making table. It also includes consideration of flexible time frames to ensure time for such encounters and necessary trust building stages.

Advice to the EU and its Delegations includes support for the training and mobilisation activities of religious actors and their role in promoting behaviour change and safe practices. Women and youth of faith communities should specifically be included: supporting existing women committees and youth networks, integration of gender assessment and promotion of youth and women sensitive initiatives are all crucial at this time.

Some essential religious literacy for engagement

A certain 'religious literacy' is essential to engage with faith communities and partners. Existing structures, relationships, knowledge, expectations and assumptions shall be part of this understanding.

Navigating ambiguities and challenges

Navigating ambiguities and challenges on gender inequalities, the risk of proselytisation, political complexities and conflict dynamics are commonly identified obstacles to engagement with religious leaders and faith communities in programming and policy. This section outlines the complexities and offers advice for identifying opportunity in the context of real challenges.

In the context of Covid-19 pandemic, violence and discrimination on the basis of gender has proliferated. The EU and its partners, including FBOs, should engage with religious leaders and faith communities for developing safe spaces and systems for reporting of incidents and follow up.

The role of religious actors as front-line responders is crucial. It is important however to clarify no-go areas in cases of alleged proselytisation mixed with aid. This can be done adopting a fruitful approach based on dialogue.


The Covid-19 response has demonstrated the positive role for defending, maintaining and strengthening the overall civil society space. At the same time, partisan affiliations could pose serious obstacles to humanitarian, development and peace programming and faith communities may be suspicious of the political intentions of donors and INGO partners. It is always important to respect faith leaders when they reject collaboration. EU staff and partners may want to engage with interreligious initiatives and ensure regular engagement with communities.

In conflict contexts, the role of religious actors is often forgotten despite their significant influence and this has happened also during the Covid-19 crisis. In order to actively engage with potential peacemakers, the EU and its partners should consider a mapping of the role religion has in any specific conflict, the identification and engagement with existing positive actions of religious leaders in peacebuilding actions, conflict analysis and prevention and the assessment and listening of multiple voices representatives of both majority and minority religious groups.



The role of religious leaders and faith communities in emergency response and building resilience

Building on a long history


Religious leaders and faith communities have a long history of engaging in disaster relief and providing humanitarian assistance alongside FBOs as well as provision of hospitals, healthcare, education and care for the elderly. The range of contributions are far-reaching and vary in nature according to the context. In many contexts, there is often highest trust in **and even expectation**  of support and response by local leadership and members or the national formalised structures; religious leaders can reach local communities and/or wide networks and structures.

The Covid-19 crisis put a light on the wide range of contributions, including and beyond medical and material, which should be considered for ongoing and future response.

Building resilience and effective communication

Faith communities have a privileged role to play in building resilience locally. They are not only first-line responders but, in many cases, they have been there before, during and will be there after the Covid-19 response, developing early warning systems, prevention and building of community inclusion, cohesion and resilience. In addition, a holistic and people-centred framework for resilience should capture the sense of belonging, identity and spiritual wellbeing which cuts across programming sectors.

Case

Community interfaith peacemaking and humanitarian work prior to the Covid-19 crisis in Gombé state, Northern Nigeria, led by religious leaders enabled quick mobilisation for the dissemination of correct information, the coordination of solidarity initiatives such as financial and material assistance to the most vulnerable and adaptation of religious gatherings and practices (**OMNIA Leadership 2020** .

Mental health and spiritual support

Across religious traditions, religious leaders and faith communities have developed messaging of courage, hope and to address stress and anxiety. The deep embeddedness of faith communities and networks builds the relationships of trust and theological teaching can address psychosocial and spiritual needs.



Cases

Tzu Chi > and **The Buddhist Review Tricycle** > networks

Worldwide, Buddhist networks have been disseminating Dharma Talks to address mental and spiritual distress during the Covid-19 crisis in tandem with work to provide extensive food assistance.

Psychological support to the people living in the North Aegean islands in times of Covid-19

Caritas Hellas > has been providing remote psychosocial support to the local population and to the migrants stranded in the islands during Covid-19 pandemic. Isolation, fear, the lack of basic hygiene conditions and livelihoods and the loss of temporary or informal jobs increases the need for support, to be delivered with the appropriate cultural sensitivity and language skills.

Consistent communication is also key in times of crisis and especially in case of public health emergencies which require the adoption of specific and clear behaviours by all individuals. The messaging of religious leaders has been both in tension with medical advice in the Covid-19 crisis, although for the most part a driving force for community mobilisation. Their role disseminating correct information and countering uninformed theological teaching, promoting responsible behaviour, mobilising communities and shaping values, including in remote areas is therefore crucial.

Case

Radio messaging in South Sudan

At the beginning of April 2020 there was no confirmed case of Covid-19 in South Sudan. Still, because travelling from impacted areas was not banned, yet, Caritas South Sudan decided to increase information sharing about the virus as much as possible. Updates were prepared regularly following the information shared by the WHO and in partnership with the local Catholic Health Department. These updates were shared in forms of sensitization and awareness-raising in the seven dioceses of the country and via radio talk shows through the Catholic Radio Network.

Inclusion and countering stigma

As highlighted during the Ebola response, religious actors are central to addressing taboos related to victims and survivors of the epidemic and to ensure non-discriminatory and unbiased information and health provision — ensuring inclusion for people of minority religions, of women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups (**Keeping the Faith: the role of Faith Leaders in the Ebola Response** >).



Adapting traditional practices to avert risk

Where conflicts at a community and national level are expected to rise as a result of a shortage of jobs, food and social protection, there are risks of higher conflict and discriminatory practices. Local faith-based organisations and religious leaders have been instrumental in awareness building, peace programming and trust building (see **Learning Report: DCA and partners' experiences working in the Covid-19 response** [▶](#)).

And it is crucial to engage religious leaders in efforts to address Covid-19 related hate speech, as per the recently launched **UN Guidance Note** [▶](#) which highlights a concern over severe implications if messaging around the pandemic is propagated by political leaders, public officials or religious leaders themselves to spread hate or incite violence.

Aware that circumstances may vary very quickly in each context, in case global or national measures entail changes to traditional religious practices — be it in relation to worship, for specific celebrations or any kind of gathering — to avert risk of disaster, the participation of trusted community leaders contributes to finding credible alternative approaches that are tailored to the social norms and cultural practices of the local context.

Case

Building on lessons learned from the Ebola crisis (reporting by **NGOs** [▶](#) and **ODI Report March 2020** [▶](#)), Islamic Relief Worldwide has worked with communities that have been hard hit by Covid-19, addressing the practice of washing bodies of the deceased before burial, a challenge both across Europe and in developing countries. **A set of guidelines** [▶](#) has been produced for Islamic male and female leaders to address burial practices as well as guidance for Ramadan and gatherings.

Working in the **MENA region** [▶](#), Islamic Relief Worldwide has also analysed the immediate and long-term potential impacts of Covid-19 including identifying key emerging trends that would affect humanitarian programming. This information aims to help guide best practices and provides lessons from the field for a wider audience.

Protection & countering gender-based violence


WHO guidelines for faith leaders and communities articulate the role of religious leaders in protection from “championing attention to and inclusion of vulnerable populations to creating supportive environments; advocating for their rights and access to diagnosis, treatment and vaccines; sharing evidence-based accurate information; and publicly standing against statements and acts that encourage violence and human rights violations against people”.

Specifically, **UN CEDAW and Religions for Peace** [▶](#) underlined the importance of support to women and girls disproportionately affected by informal and formal job losses and providing mental and spiritual support to men and women in lockdown. Domestic violence cases have spiked because of isolations and the cut of community support networks. Religious leaders and faith communities should be trained to ensure reporting of cases and to address cultures of silence in favour of empowerment, compassion and protection.

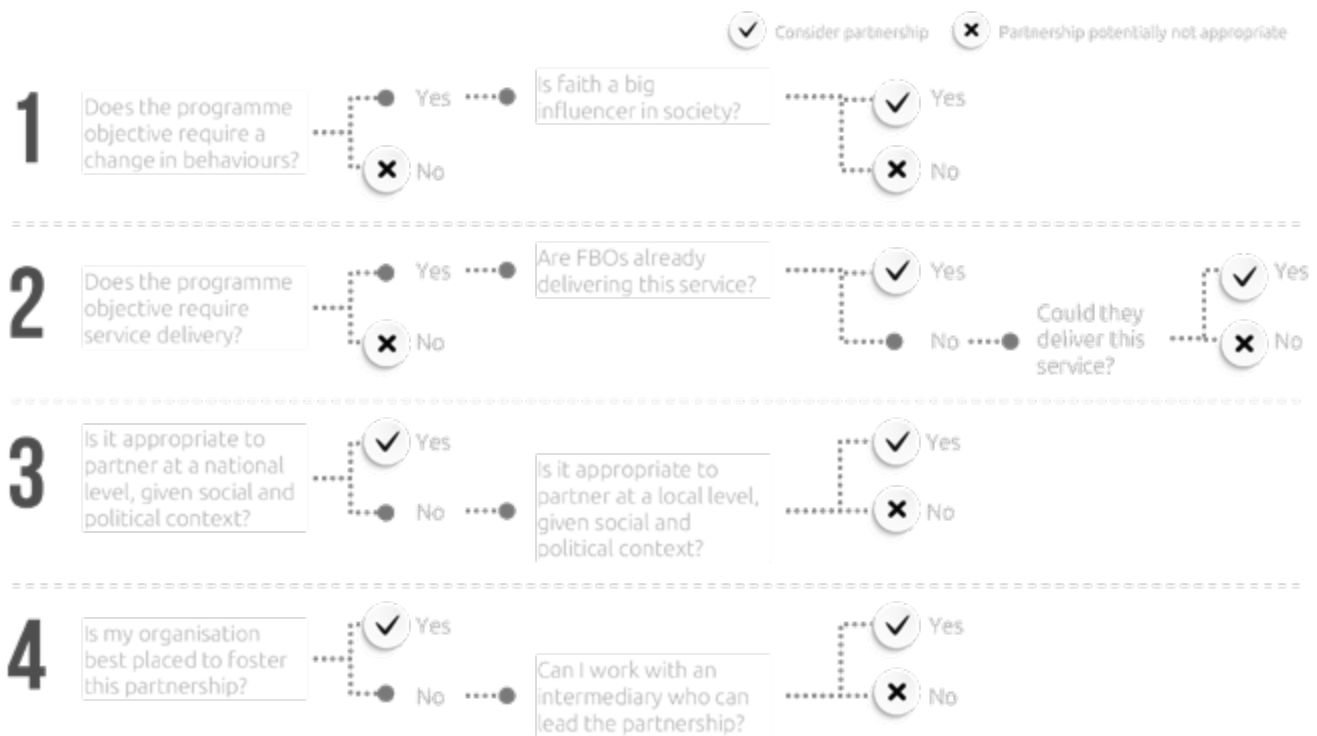


Fostering collaborations with religious actors: practical considerations

Initial considerations for when to engage

Having established the roles and contributions above, the framework below developed by the **Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities**  establishes useful initial questions for policy makers to decide on the suitability of partnership and collaboration with religious leaders and faith communities. The JLI framework focuses on behaviour change and service delivery as two areas where faith-communities could bring specific added value.

For the EU, extending the partnership with faith actors beyond dialogue and consultation is directed by the Financial Regulation and the legislative requirements of the funding instruments at its disposal. The EU, at the level of the Delegation or ECHO field office can however influence project design through the articulation of programming documents; project guidelines/calls for proposal — including use of third-party support; humanitarian implementation plans (HIPs) etc.



Framework for deciding on effective moment for partnerships with faith groups: **Joint Learning Initiative 2015**

Considerations on how to foster engagement

How to identify appropriate partnerships

Identifying the appropriate level(s) of religious leadership for initial dialogue and collaboration should be a regular mapping exercise as part of generalised review on the status of civil society in a given country or region.

- In some contexts with weak social cohesion, it is wise to identify the faith actors and respective religious leadership at national or regional level — such as the local bishop or imam, priest, female religious leader, Council of Churches or interreligious and intra-religious representative body who can then bridge contact with community leaders.
- In cases where there are deep divisions between regions and communities, or religious groups are networked, initial engagement may be best pursued at the level of local leadership or individuals or with those free to safely engage based outside the country.
- Ensure that representation is balanced and reflection of different faith communities, age, men and women.
- Respect the ability of religious leaders and faith communities to turn down partnerships.

Existing country mappings of religion and development, peace & humanitarian contexts provided in the links section are worthwhile referencing.

Convening and coordinating

Convening formal advisory groupings of faith-based organisations, secular organisations, religious leaders and faith community representatives has been central to the **World Health Organisation** > and **UNICEF** > responses to Covid-19. Establishing the relations and knowledge of the faith context is invaluable despite the time required to convene and build necessary levels of trust. How and when this is done has to be contextualised to the country situation and the programming context. That said, apart from sudden emergencies, it should be possible for humanitarian, development and peace programming to include systematic plans to integrate and systematise engagement.

- Facilitate dialogue in formal and informal meetings with the aims of:
 - Articulating the values of each organisation.
 - Establishing common ground and areas of mutual interest.
 - Explicitly agreeing expectations and limitations of the dialogue and any subsequent opportunities for partnership.
- Enabling peer-to-peer learning at local, national, regional and global level is often key to finding innovative solutions to challenges that religious leaders and faith communities engaged with humanitarian, development and peacebuilding struggle with when operating alone.
- Include religious leaders and faith communities at the outset to be involved in co-creating the post-pandemic vision and recovery plan, to ensure



governments deliver effective health care at community level for people who are poor and marginalised.

- Establish flexible time frames to account for the time to build trust.
- Where the response is led at the national government level, facilitate and advocate for improved coordination mechanisms between governmental ministries, religious leaders and faith communities in development, peace and humanitarian response.
- In international coordination and governance fora — such as cluster governance structures — EU representatives should contribute to ensuring the inclusion of religious leaders and local faith-based organisations as members of the decision-making tables.

Considerations for programming

- **Communications:** Leverage the trust in and reach of faith actors, by enabling faith leaders to speak on different media platforms (TV, radio).
- **Funding:** Ensure that faith communities' actions are resourced and included in wider intervention strategies and proposals from design through to delivery.
- **Training:** Support safe training and mobilisation for service provision and changes to behaviour and practices such as safe practice for collective rituals, including burials if needed.

Women

- Ensure that women leaders and members of faith communities are included in consultations and engagement from design and delivery. In some cases, this will mean engaging with the formal religious hierarchy and in others with informal groups.
- Support faith communities in the creation of formalised women's committees and structures to address violations, or to engage those already established.
- Support faith actors to integrate a gender assessment to understand the impact of Covid-19 on women and girls, including economic impact, and how to address it effectively.
- Identify and seek to support religiously-linked advocacy initiatives in favour of women's empowerment.

Youth

- Youth sensitive initiatives hold great potential for involving youth in humanitarian, development and peace activities in a way which values religiously, ethnically and culturally diverse contexts.
 - For example, the recently-launched **EU-funded ALLY project**  — Amplifying Leadership of Local Youth in Preventing Violent Extremism in South Asia — engages youth leaders and existing youth networks and movement to address diverse factors of violence.



Religious literacy

Religious literacy includes a minimum level of understanding the foundational beliefs, history, practices and contemporary manifestations of the religions of countries of operation. This enables actors to express their own worldview plausibly to others and for humanitarian, development and peace agencies to engage with communities and partners through framing which corresponds to frameworks of understanding and existing structures.

It also requires the ability to discern how religious traditions and practices have arisen out of and been shaped by particular social and cultural contexts:

“ Agencies should also know that, in some cases, practices that appear to be core to a religious faith are in fact cultural practices that have not been derived from religion but are nonetheless handed down over generations. These beliefs and customs form the fabric of society and guide people’s behaviour.

(Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities 2015, p.17)

Recognising this does not remove complexity yet provides the basis for dialogue and exchange on justifications provided on a religious basis which in fact result from cultural rules and norms in contradiction to sacred texts. It can also help to identify religious narratives which can be adopted for positive behaviour change. The following questions provide reflections for religious literacy.

Understanding relationships

- What kinds of relationships are already established among religious leaders, faith communities and our team; and with implementing partners of EU projects? (Are they, for example, informal engagements, systematic or ad-hoc inclusion in formal decision-making and governance fora, inclusion programming and project design discussions, or community monitoring and evaluation?)
- How well are different religious groups organised: for religious practice, and humanitarian, development response and peacebuilding?
- What values and concerns do different groups have in common?
- Over which issues in the community have different faith community actors worked together to make improvements?
- What kinds of conflicts or struggles currently exist among those groups and actors? What cultural, social and historical events set the stage for the



current conflict?

- How well are conflicts between faith communities openly recognised and talked about?

Assessing the level of knowledge, any common expectations and assumptions

- Knowledge of the characteristics, experiences, beliefs, values, and norms of the religious leaders and faith community(ies) of interest.
- Understanding of cultural elements, values and practices which interrelate with religious values and framing.
- Appreciation of the limits and extent of existing knowledge, and a commitment to learn about other religious values and views of development and humanitarian frameworks.
- Awareness of how cultural and religious background and experiences have shaped your views.

Section adapted by authors from the **Enhancing Cultural Competence** toolkit



Navigating the challenges of engaging with religious leaders and faith communities

In many contexts, religious actors have highly complex yet important roles, which can be positive and complementary to development, humanitarian response and peacebuilding or, conversely, a negative impediment. The following are some of the common challenges and practical suggestions for addressing common challenges and complexities in engaging with religious actors.

How to navigate engagement with faith leaders and actors where their teaching and actions may deepen gender inequalities and foster patriarchal structures

Patriarchal and authoritarian structures and views are a real challenge in many religious worldviews; yet the values and beliefs of religious actors are also often aligned with international goals. This is a particularly important consideration in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic where violence and discrimination on the basis of gender has proliferated (see **CARE International brief on the gendered implications** [➤](#)).

Several factors can be considered to foster collaboration:

- Engaging at a policy level with religious actors — including women, youth and minorities — faith-based organisations (FBOs) and secular organisations experienced in collaborating with faith communities for the advancement of gender equality and countering discriminatory theological teaching. This includes areas such as **transformative masculinity programmes** [➤](#), **empowerment of young women leaders** (see **CEDAW recommendations** [➤](#)).
- As discussed in the ‘Religious Literacy’ section it is important in many contexts to identify the often entangled religious dynamics and cultural norms shaping attitudes and practices related to gender. To do so, policymakers can promote religious literacy internally and among partners, and ensure collaborations are representative of denominations and networks. In addition, it is important to support inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue and collaborations involving representatives of majority and minority religions. (On inter-faith dialogue, see **Gender, Faith and Covid-19 joint statement** [➤](#), p.3.)
- Religious leaders and local faith communities aligned with goals of equality and sustainability should be supported by the EU and its partners to deliver training to peers and communities.
- The EU and its partners can encourage development of safe spaces and for reporting of GBV incidents and developing systems for follow up.




Proselytising and coercion

While the work of religious actors as first responders and in development and peace can promote all of the above-mentioned positive roles, capacities may be limited and service delivery unequal and/or uneven — whether intentional or circumstantial (see, for example, **complexities of faith actors humanitarian response in Myanmar**). This is especially important in contexts of discrimination against groups, often minorities.


Policymakers may find difficulties navigating how to engage with faith actors who combine humanitarian assistance with proselytism among vulnerable populations and youth, for example. A fruitful approach is to ensure a well-informed and systematic approach to engagement, beginning through a first stage dialogue to clearly establish the boundaries of partnership and interactions, common ground and no-go areas.

Fostering inter-faith and inter-religious dialogue and collaborations provide fruitful in-roads in contexts where religious tensions and coercion impact on social cohesion, humanitarian assistance and development outcomes. Those involved in the consortia for such initiatives should include women and youth networks and those representative of minority groups to ensure the dialogue and collaboration remains rooted in the needs and realities of communities and regions.


See the **FABO Effective Partnerships for Religion & Development training**  for further advice, and the EU-funded consortia SEA-AIR for transferable recommendations from the FoRB sector.

Political complexities

It must be recognised that relations between religious leaders, faith communities and various levels of the state are dynamic and constantly evolving — with positive and negative implications for partnership and interaction by policymakers.

On the one hand, the Covid-19 response has clearly demonstrated the positive role for defending and maintaining civil society space which should be supported and strengthened (see **examples from Kenya and Zimbabwe** ). On the other, partisan affiliations can pose serious obstacles to programming outcomes.

Productive entry points in such scenarios include:

- Respect the ability of leaders and communities to say no to collaboration.
- Ongoing mapping and engagement with communities through dialogue can help to build a clear picture of the challenges and entry points.
- When appropriate, engaging with interreligious initiatives which can help to move beyond partisanship by ensuring representation of different voices and contexts.
- In highly complex and/or fragile and conflict settings where initial engagements are difficult, the EU- and UNDP-funded **Insider Mediators framework**  provides a useful basis. This entails engaging with



individuals, within or outside of faith communities with legitimacy and influence in communities and can assist in building constructive relationships with outside actors. In many contexts, religious and traditional institutions are deeply embedded and facilitate intra- and inter-group peacemaking processes or **facilitate the involvement of neutral outsider mediators** [▶](#) where they lack sufficient credibility among conflicting parties.

Conflict dynamics

The Covid-19 crisis demonstrates that religion matters, as both a source of peacebuilding and unity, and conversely of tension in conflict contexts and should be considered in conflict analysis in tandem with socio-economic, political and psychological factors. The role of religious actors in pursuit of peace is often forgotten or excluded despite their significant moral, political and social influence which can make them effective peacemakers.

Entry points to manage the nuanced role of religion and religious actors include:

- Mapping the role that religion has in any specific conflict: religion may be one important factor but it is necessary to trace how this intersects with other factors. In some contexts, the Covid-19 crisis deepened issues related to religion which intersected with land rights, food and economic insecurity and the rise of violent extremism.
- Identifying and engaging with existing positive actions of religious leaders such as contribution to peacebuilding efforts and conflict analysis and prevention.
- The role religious leaders may have in the conflict landscape can fuel or support peace. Many religious leaders are by default closer to a certain group of rights holders. Proactive discussions and measures to clarify boundaries and address perceived or real bias are key.
- Considering the impartiality of religious leaders one supports, recognising that a religious leader may represent just one of many denominations or networks. Practical ways include:
 - Ensuring multiple voices representative of both majority and minority religious groups, of different denominations and traditions and levels of hierarchy are taken into account.
 - Assessments may be made ahead of collaborations with religious leaders and faith communities. There are many toolkits with straightforward frameworks to do so: **Religion in Conflict and Peacebuilding** [▶](#) by the United States Institute of Peace with frameworks for mapping and developing case study analysis; **The Faith-Based Toolkit for Working in Conflict** [▶](#) developed by Islamic Relief Worldwide; and the **Integrated Conflict Prevention and Resilience Handbook** [▶](#) of the Start Network with a useful framework for participatory vulnerability and capacity assessment.

Adapted by authors from the DanChurchAid and ACT Alliance **Literature Review on the intersections between faith, humanitarian response, development, and peace; and the CREID learning briefing for interventions in fragile contexts with transferable learnings from the FoRB sector.**



Other useful resources

Joint Learning Initiative on Faith & Local Communities resource repository on Faith and Covid ➤.

Religion & Development interactive training course ➤ for competency in building effective multilateral partnerships among secular and faith actors.

Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs: **Country mappings for religion and development** ➤.

The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers members' **Guidance and Resources for Covid-19** ➤.

The UN Environment Programme resource repository **Faith in the Frontline with Covid-19** ➤.

International guidelines for engaging with faith actors

- UNDP: <https://bit.ly/2r0PpN2> ➤
- UNFPA: <https://bit.ly/2sIRGgf> ➤
- UNICEF: <https://uni.cf/2DDICLT> ➤
- WHO: <https://bit.ly/382AcLR> ➤
- World Bank: <https://bit.ly/2P7IGKd> ➤, <https://bit.ly/361Gutb> ➤

For questions and comment please contact the authors via:

ACT Alliance EU
<https://actalliance.eu>

Islamic Relief Worldwide
<https://www.islamic-relief.org>

EU-CORD
<https://www.eu-cord.org>

Caritas Europa
<https://www.caritas.eu>

Published July 2020

The authors permit open and unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the source is credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated.