

Working in the name of God: Faith – Based organisations and poverty alleviation in Flanders

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Two related observations lie at the basis of this paper: on the one hand, welfare state institutions (WSIs) experience difficulties to cater for the needs of people not entitled to social support in the rights-based and territorial logic of the nation state. On the other hand, those who slip through the net are increasingly observed to find support through Faith-Based organisations (FBOs). Within social work research the social role of FBOs remains largely unexplored. Our research project on solidarity and religion in Flanders aims to address this research gap. The overall objective of the project is to co-create complementary forms of social support across faith-based organisations and secular welfare state institutions. In this paper, we aim to provide insight into the field of FBOs and the extent to which they take up a role as welfare actors in the field of poverty alleviation. The analytical framework of the paper is based on a scoping review, followed by document analyses and interviews with representatives from both FBOs and WSIs. The findings point to the challenge of defining FBOs and operationalising this definition for research purposes. Moreover, they support the observation that many Faith-Based organisations serve the most vulnerable people who are often not reached by welfare state institutions. Besides offering material support such as food pantry, clothes, medical aid, a place to sleep, Faith-Based organisations often give moral, religious or spiritual support and try to work on community cohesion and community based social change.