MARLUC

CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

International Rescue Committee Signpost AI

IMPLEMENTED 2023 ONWARDS · CHARITIES AND NONPROFITS · GLOBAL · BAND D · CLAIMED ONLY

VERSION 1.0 · PUBLISHED 16 NOVEMBER 2026 · UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026 · FACTS CHECKED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

A humanitarian charity built its own AI agent platform for crisis information services and a WhatsApp mentor for teachers; it reports faster responses and wider reach, and says the jury is still out on impact.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

This is MarLuc's summary and grading of publicly available sources, for information only. It is not investment, legal, financial or professional advice, and should not be relied on for any decision. Readers must validate it against the original sources and, where appropriate, challenge its conclusions.

Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

AI used: Purpose-built generative AI agents and chatbots for crisis information and teacher support; aprendIA integrates OpenAI's ChatGPT.

Implemented: 2023 onwards. Grade: band D, Task support, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Early AI pilots met quality standards about 75% of the time and raised staff productivity by nearly 70%, by the IRC's account; its teacher chatbot reaches over 6,500 teachers in Nigeria

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 4 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

International Rescue Committee (IRC). Humanitarian charity founded in 1933, working in more than 40 countries and in 28 US cities, by its own account. Signpost, founded with Mercy Corps in 2015, runs digital help centres for people affected by conflict, disasters, poverty and violence. Canvas block: 4. Operations and process. Also 3. Customers and proposition, 8. Governance and risk.

Business challenge

The challenge. Demand for Signpost's services grew and staff were flooded with repetitive but urgent questions, such as where to register and what documents are needed, by the IRC's account. Personalised human help drove impact but was hard to scale, while donor funding was shrinking.

How it was addressed. Early pilots used AI to help staff draft replies and sort enquiries, with human review before answers went out. The IRC then built Signpost AI, an agent-building platform designed with support from Google.org, Zendesk and Cisco, to create agents with defined roles, safety rules, knowledge limits and escalation to human staff. It powers SignpostChat, where human moderators are assisted by AI agents, the Alma assistant for newcomers to the US, and aprendIA, a WhatsApp mentor for teachers in crisis areas that, by the IRC's 2025 account, integrates OpenAI's ChatGPT. In Nigeria, aprendIA works with education authorities in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. [1] [2] [3] [4]

Who implemented it

In-house (In-house): International Rescue Committee: designs, tests and runs its own agents on the Signpost AI platform.
Google.org, Zendesk and Cisco (Industry partner): Helped design and supported the Signpost AI platform, by the IRC's account.
OpenAI (Model or cloud provider): ChatGPT is integrated into aprendIA, by the IRC's 2025 account.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T3 API integrations, T7 AI agents. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: OpenAI, Signpost AI, SignpostChat, aprendIA, Alma.

Where it was built in: Agents built on the IRC's Signpost AI platform and delivered through websites, Facebook, WhatsApp and other messaging channels, with escalation to human caseworkers.

What changed

Before: staff and social workers answered questions directly. After: AI agents draft or give answers within set limits, with routes to human caseworkers, and teachers get lesson help through WhatsApp. Measured outcomes for clients and pupils: Not reported. [1] [2] [3] [4]

What it cost

Not reported. Funding and in-kind support came from the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth and data.org challenge, Google.org, Zendesk, Cisco, the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation and Anthropic, by the IRC's account.

What it saved

Not reported in money. By the IRC's account: early pilots raised staff productivity by nearly 70%; SignpostChat improved response times by 99% (2025 account) or could raise response speed by 92% (2026 account). [1] [2] [3] [4]

Governance and control

The IRC says AI does not decide who it serves or what assistance they receive, and a human is accountable for every decision AI supports. Agents are tested before launch, have escalation routes to human staff, and are monitored after deployment, by its account. No independent audit or evaluation is reported.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
The IRC says a human is accountable for every decision AI supports. [2]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
The IRC says every AI project follows its do-no-harm principle and AI does not decide who it serves or what assistance they receive. [2]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
Early pilots needed human review before responses were shared; agents now have defined escalation routes to human staff, by the IRC's account. [1] [3]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
The IRC says every deployment is monitored and evaluated for safety, cost-effectiveness and benefit, including response quality and unintended effects. [1] [3]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Partners named include Google.org, Zendesk, Cisco and Anthropic, and aprendIA integrates ChatGPT; how third-party models are assessed is not reported. [1] [4]

A5 · Agent controls · Claimed
Agents are designed with defined roles, safety protocols, guardrails, workflows and knowledge boundaries, by the IRC's account. [1]

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Staff productivity in early pilots, by the IRC's account.

– Growth of aprendIA from a small pilot to over 6,500 teachers in Nigeria, by the IRC's account.

DID NOT

– Early pilots met quality standards about 75% of the time and needed human review before answers could be shared safely, by the IRC's account.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the agents improve outcomes for clients and pupils; the IRC says the jury is still out for its current programmes.

– Cost per person helped compared with human-only services.

– Accuracy of agent answers once they respond directly to users.

Timeline

2015 Signpost founded by the IRC and Mercy Corps as a digital help service for people in crisis [3]

Mar 2025 IRC describes AI-powered SignpostChat, the Signpost AI Prototyping Lab and aprendIA pilots in Nigeria, Bangladesh and the Democratic Republic of Congo [4]

Mar 2026 IRC publishes lessons: early pilots needed human review; Signpost AI agents piloted in eight countries; aprendIA reaches 4,700 teachers [1]

Apr 2026 Signpost director describes purpose-built agents with escalation to human staff [3]

Nov 2026 IRC reports over 20 AI projects and aprendIA live with over 6,500 teachers in Nigeria [2]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: C. Grade: D, Task support. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Task support.

Task support (Level 1, band D), claimed as process change (band C). Agents help moderators and teachers; the IRC has not yet published measured outcomes.

Graded D, claimed C. Staff answering crisis questions and teachers planning lessons get AI help, and the IRC reports productivity and speed gains. It says its programmes are still being evaluated, so a redesigned process with measured results is not yet shown.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The IRC treats each agent like a job description, with a defined role, limits and an escalation route, and kept human review while quality sat near 75%. That is a transferable pattern for any organisation answering high-stakes questions at volume. The gap is evidence of outcomes, which the IRC itself says is still open.

1. Keep human review until answer quality is measured and stable.
2. Define each agent's role, limits and escalation route before launch.
3. Publish failures and outcome measures alongside reach figures.

Evidence

Score 1 of 4. Self-reported: all figures come from the IRC's own publications, including an op-ed by its Signpost director.

Evaluation method. Self-reported organisational figures: pilot quality and productivity measures; no independent evaluation published.

Sources disagree. The IRC's 2025 release says SignpostChat improved response times by 99%; its November 2026 article says an early pilot suggests a 92% increase in response speed. Signpost's reach is given as nearly 20 countries (2025), roughly 30 countries (March 2026) and 20 countries (November 2026). The initial aprendIA cohort in Nigeria is given as around 400 (IRC, March 2026) and roughly 500 (Rest of World op-ed, April 2026).

Status. Ongoing: the IRC plans to scale aprendIA nationally in Nigeria in 2027, by its November 2026 account.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/irc-signpost-ai-agents

[1] International Rescue Committee: From Promise to Practice: How We're Scaling AI for Humanitarian Good (March 2026)
https://www.rescue.org/irc-responsible-ai-humanitarian-sector

[2] International Rescue Committee: How the IRC is using AI to reach more people in crisis (November 2026)
https://www.rescue.org/article/how-irc-using-ai-reach-more-people-crisis

[3] Rest of World: Humanitarian aid turns to AI as crises outpace capacity, by the IRC's Signpost director (April 2026)
https://restofworld.org/2026/irc-signpost-humanitarian-ai-refugee-assistance/

[4] International Rescue Committee: IRC named one of Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies of 2025
https://www.rescue.org/press-release/international-rescue-committee-named-one-fast-companys-most-innovative-companies-2025

International Rescue Committee (IRC) website: https://www.rescue.org

Version 1.0 · Published 16 November 2026 · Updated 16 November 2026 · Facts checked against sources 16 November 2026 · Downloaded 26 November 2026. This PDF may be out of date: the latest version, and a way to report an error or a better source, is at https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/irc-signpost-ai-agents

VERSION HISTORY

v1.0 16 November 2026 First published