

Executive Summary

Principled Payer, but Purposeful Player?

International perceptions of German humanitarian action and their implications for Germany's strategic capacities

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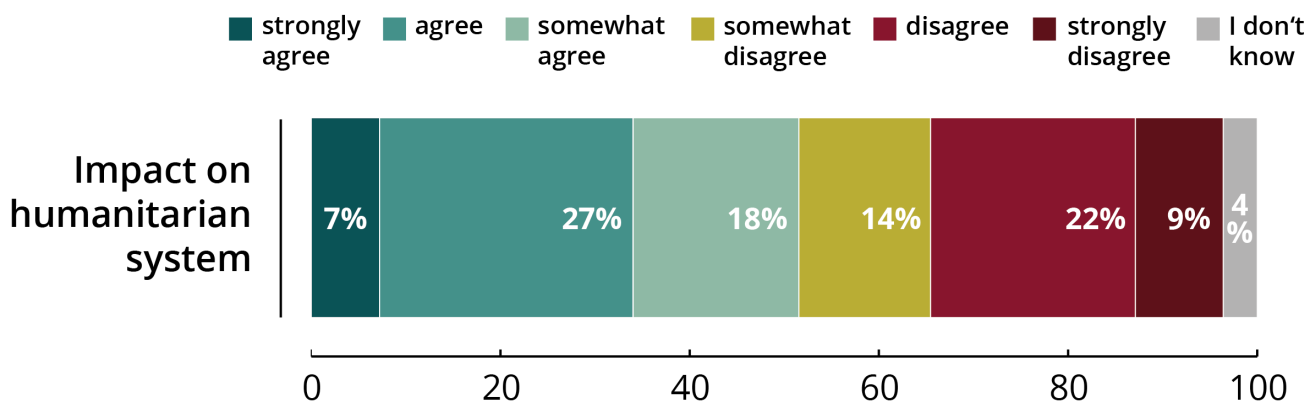
To what extent can Germany fulfil its expectations as the second-largest donor?

Germany's rise to the position of the second-largest humanitarian donor has garnered significant attention both at home and abroad. With its increased financial commitment, Germany is also expected to shape the humanitarian system, transitioning from a payer to a player in an underfunded humanitarian system in dire need of reform.

Germany's humanitarian engagement must be integrated into the "turning point" ("Zeitenwende") of its

foreign policy. However, this debate has yet to address or prioritise the implications of this turning point for development cooperation and humanitarian action. Even in broader foreign policy processes, such as the development of the first national security strategy, little attention has been paid to development and humanitarian policy.

The proposed budget for 2024 includes drastic cuts from the 2023 budget, dropping from €2.7 billion to €1.7 billion. This reduction raises pressing questions about setting priorities and strategic goals. The forthcoming strategy for humanitarian assistance abroad 2024-2027 can lay the foundation for addressing these issues.



Is Germany's role as the second largest humanitarian donor reflected in its impact on the humanitarian system?

Data source: Survey by CHA, summer 2022

Key Findings

Against the backdrop of Germany's emergence as the second-largest donor, this research paper examines the international perceptions of German humanitarian engagement, centred on motives and interests, as well as its potential and impact.

When investigating the motives, values and interests driving German humanitarian action, interviewees and survey respondents view Germany as an honest broker

that operates in a principled and credible manner. This perception is more favourable among international stakeholders than among those based in Germany. An analysis of German humanitarian funding allocations confirms that the country predominantly funds based on needs and principles. This coherence and credibility offer substantial potential for Germany to shape and reform the humanitarian system in response to acknowledged reform necessities.

However, according to international stakeholders, Germany's potential remains underutilised, particularly concerning the policies and priorities it chooses to pursue. Here, the issue of anticipatory action serves as a positive example of how humanitarian issues are strategically set and introduced in various forums. However, beyond this, there is a strategic deficit in the ongoing advancement of humanitarian policy issues through various bodies and multilateral processes. Germany has yet to address the full spectrum of humanitarian issues like other leading state donors, nor has it delved into selected priorities in necessary depth, as practised by numerous mid-sized donors.

There is a strategic deficit in advancing policy issues internationally.

This perception is accompanied by a sense of disparity between Germany's financial commitment on one hand and its policy power and policy impact on the other. However, this imbalance

has diminished in recent years as Germany has assumed a more permanent role in shaping humanitarian policy issues through international processes like the Grand Bargain, as well as its leadership and presidency of multilateral forums. Yet, in these contexts, Germany is often seen more as a moderator than an agenda-setter. Further development is hampered by Germany's structural setup and administrative resources, such as its comparatively limited human resources for humanitarian action and personnel rotation.

The analysis of German humanitarian policy engagement reveals two distinct patterns of action. Germany's consultative and cooperative approach is well-regarded by international stakeholders, setting it apart from other leading donors that tend to be more agenda-driven. However, there is also untapped potential in the area of soft power approaches to informally advance issues beyond financial hard power.

Methods in brief

The results are derived from a literature and document analysis, an international survey and expert interviews. Approximately 200 individuals from 52 countries participated in the survey. The findings were further qualified through 37 semi-structured interviews with government representatives, UN representatives, international and local NGO representatives, RCRC representatives, and scholars.

Key Considerations

The following recommendations stem from the perceptions and analyses:

- Germany is not yet positioned to address all humanitarian topics with the same depth as other top donors. A prioritisation aimed at **sharpening the profile** and increasing its shaping influence could significantly increase Germany's strategic capacity. Investments should also focus on **communicating** these priorities internally and externally, between Berlin and the missions abroad.
- Building on its established presence and recognised ability to moderate international policy processes, Germany could transition from a process orientation to a **policy orientation**, focusing on what should be achieved in relevant forums.
- Strategic prioritisation should be accompanied by substantial improvements in **data availability** on funded programs and sectors, as well as increased **digitisation and transparency**.
- Significant **investments in personnel**, along with their qualifications and seniority, are urgently needed. **Limiting staff rotation**, following the example of other donors, would be beneficial.
- In pursuit of Germany's aspiration to play an active role in shaping and reforming the international humanitarian system, the country should actively collaborate with partners to develop a **vision** for making the international humanitarian system "fit for purpose", as well as more transparent, local, and sustainable.

Paper

Find the full paper in English or German as well as Executive Summaries in German and French on the CHA website: <https://www.chaberlin.org/en/publications/principled-payer-but-purposeful-player-2/>

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