



CENTRE FOR
HUMANITARIAN
ACTION

DISCUSSION PAPER

**Germany on its long way
from *payer* to *player* -
international perceptions of
German humanitarian action**

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Germany's development as a top financial donor, and the foundation of German humanitarian policy	4
3. Methodological approach and data basis of the survey	5
4. Current perceptions of German humanitarian action and policy	7
a. Motivation and principled orientation of German humanitarian policy	7
b. Thematic priorities and profile of German humanitarian policy	9
c. Germany's international policy impact in comparison	10
d. Spotlight: Germany's role in the Grand Bargain	12
e. Strategies of German Policy Engagement: Process- versus Policy-Oriented?	13
f. Levels of German humanitarian policy practice: Soft and hard power levels	14
g. Germany's structural and institutional set-up	15
5. Summary and recommendations	17
Bibliography	19
Interviews conducted	22

1. Introduction

The development of few actors in international humanitarian action has been followed with as much interest in recent years as that of the German government. Germany's rapidly growing financial commitment and its rise from an insignificant humanitarian financier to the second-largest donor nation in the world has been followed by international observers with admiration, astonishment, dynamically growing expectations, and many question marks.

At the same time, German humanitarian action and its international role are currently at a ground breaking point on multiple levels: the war in Ukraine has brought the overstretching of the international humanitarian system to a new level, especially, but not only, in financial terms, as illustrated by the global record deficit between humanitarian needs and their coverage in October 2022 of only 40.8% (OCHA FTS, 2022). Germany's financial and normative role as an exemplary donor, as well as the corresponding expectations towards Berlin, have thus been further enhanced. The same applies to Germany's role as a driving force in a humanitarian system in need of reform. A system, whose values and legal foundations are under threat in times of a repeatedly disregarded humanitarian space and international humanitarian law (IHL) in the Ukraine war and far beyond; a system which faces an increasing controversy over the relevance of humanitarian principles, such as the principle of neutrality versus the approach of solidarity; a system resistant to change, for example, concerning locally-led humanitarian action, which fundamentally expands participation and funding of local actors.

These trends of the growing importance of and expectations towards Germany are also reflected in relevant thematic areas. Germany is more involved than ever in the world's most important and inclusive humanitarian reform process, the Grand Bargain (GB), while the Grand Bargain 2.0 threatens to fall short of its goals. In migration and refugee policy, Germany is the only country that is both a leading donor and a leading host nation for refugees and is thus expected to use its credibility to shape debates and agendas on international migration issues (UNHCR, 2022).

At the same time, a gap has emerged within the European Union (EU) in the wake of Brexit and the absence of previously very present-to-dominant British humanitarian policy contributions. These European and global developments have once again increased the focus on Germany's role not only as a *payer* but also as a *player* in international humanitarian action. How comprehensive the latter challenge was for Germany is summed up by a European diplomat interviewed for this paper: „They had to hit the ground running. Germany became almost overnight the biggest European humanitarian donor (...) But if you have money but no policies, you are only a cash machine, while if you have policies but no cash, you are only a think tank.“

Current national context

At the same time, Germany in 2022 has been facing a change of context in the national arena, and possibly a turning point with regard to its humanitarian engagement. On the one hand, the new federal government, which took office in December 2021, had promised to stabilise and expand Germany's humanitarian engagement financially, and to advance reforms for more flexible financing of aid and its local anchoring in crisis areas, for example in the Grand Bargain 2.0 and in the context of an interlinked nexus of humanitarian action, development cooperation, and peacebuilding (HDP) (SPD, Bündnis90/Die Grünen und FDP, 2021). On the other hand, the „Zeitenwende“ (turning point) debate in Germany (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2022; Politikum, 2022; Scholz, 2022) has raised major new questions about a reorientation in terms of foreign, security, economic, and energy policy, but has so far failed to address or prioritise the implications of this turning point for development cooperation and humanitarian action as well as the additional direct and indirect humanitarian challenges posed by the Ukraine war. On the contrary, public discourse in Germany has been turning into a debate driven by fears of inflation and recession and rising issues of a necessary reorientation towards national challenges, propagated not only by right-wing populists but also by decision-makers close to the government in the humanitarian parliamentary sphere (Deutscher Bundestag, 2022; CHA interview).

As a result, the new federal government's budget plans for 2023 showed a reduction of the record humanitarian budget for the first time in years - € 2.7 billion (including so-called extra budget funds) in 2022 to € 2 billion in 2023 - as well as a drastic cut of 28 % in the total budget for 2024 for the responsible German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO), as compared to 2022. These cuts contrasted with the large financial packages of the federal government in the form of special funds, which were set up to modernize the German armed forces (€ 100 billion) and relieve the burden on German citizens and companies (€ 200 billion). Moreover, processes of overarching relevance, such as the development of a National Security Strategy for Germany, have until today lacked focus on issues of international cooperation in the field of development and humanitarian action. In terms of focus and funding, experts expect tension rather than a reciprocal dynamic between Germany's defence and foreign policy „turning point“ versus its development and humanitarian engagement, as the latter issues could now be deprioritised: „With the turning point announced by Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the conditions for the implementation of global goals, such as the foreign policy climate agenda and the 2030 Agenda agreed in the United Nations with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are also deteriorating,“ analyses Brzoska (2022).

For the short term, on the financial side, it has only been the members of the Federal Parliament's Budget Committee who intervened last minute in their final nightly session on the federal budget 2023. The Members of

Parliament prevented a humanitarian budget cut by increasing the budget line from €2 billion back to €2.7 billion. This happened against the backdrop of a higher short-term forecast for the government's tax revenues and higher levels of formally legal public debt – a window of opportunity which might close very soon. Economists forecast that Germany's economy will be hit next year and potentially beyond by a recession while inflation and energy prices might remain at record levels. It remains to be seen if Germany's aid budget will face cuts very soon, while global humanitarian needs will most likely keep growing.

The possible end of Germany's steady growth as a *payer* raises the question of the right priorities in the use of its resources and Berlin's humanitarian strategy as a *player* all the more urgently. At the same time, Germany's strategy and engagement in the field of humanitarian policies and reforms as a *player* has remained rather non-transparent for international observers, and the growing expectations unfulfilled, at least until some years ago: „When you came to Berlin five years ago, there was not much to discuss,“ Jan Egeland, NRC Secretary General and former UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, sums up in retrospect¹.

Germany is also facing crucial decisions in this policy dimension: The *Federal Foreign Office's current strategy for humanitarian assistance abroad 2019-2023* is coming to an end. A new strategy process will begin in early 2023, and Germany's own aspirations and self-perception in humanitarian action are now clearly stated: „Germany is no longer just a *payer*, but also a *player*“ is how the Commissioner for Humanitarian Assistance at the Federal Foreign Office, Susanne Fries-Gaier, summarizes the Federal Government's latest four-year report² (Auswärtiges Amt, 2019).

But to what extent can Germany fulfil these nationally- and internationally-heightened expectations towards its humanitarian role today? There is a research deficit here, which this discussion paper would like to address as an element of CHA research work on the topic. At the same time, this transformation takes place against the backdrop of many years of relatively limited and nationally-isolated German humanitarian policy debate and culture within the public and civil society sphere. Therefore, an analysis of the international perception and perspectives on German humanitarian action and its specific characteristics, potentials, strengths, and weaknesses are all the more relevant and central to this paper and could indicate in which way the profile and strategy of German humanitarian policies might need to progress within German foreign policy. This paper, therefore, aims to answer these questions in particular:

Questions

- What are the international perceptions and expectations of the motives of the German humanitarian engagement, and their balance between a value orientation and an interest orientation?
- What potential for German humanitarian engagement can be derived from it, and to what extent has the Federal Government as an actor made use of this potential so far?
- Has Germany developed a profile as a *player* in humanitarian action over the past ten years that matches its financial commitment as a *payer*? And, if so, in which thematic areas or processes? Where do international stakeholders see German engagement as lacking, and what are the causes of the identified weaknesses?
- How do international stakeholders perceive Germany's institutional setup as a humanitarian actor? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these structures? How do the administrative, structural, and personnel conditions affect the role that the German government plays in the humanitarian system and the interplay between financial and policy engagement?

For a well-founded analysis of these questions, CHA first presents this discussion paper, which shares the preliminary working results of the project. In a second step, the findings will be supplemented with further interviews for a broader diversity of perspectives as part of a study planned for early 2023 and backed up by feedback on this paper and further triangulation of the findings.

2. Germany's development as a top financial donor, and the foundation of German humanitarian policy

Germany's rise as a humanitarian actor is primarily financial. As Figure 1 shows, the increase in funding has taken place primarily in the past ten years, especially after 2015 and the rising number of Syrians fleeing to Europe and Germany. Prior to that, Germany's funding was between €50-100 million per year. With its funding volume, which amounted to around €2.57 billion in 2021, Germany has become the second-largest donor for humanitarian action. It provides around 10% of global funding for humanitarian crises (Development Initiatives, 2022). This unprecedented development is embedded in recent cuts in the humanitarian budget in the United Kingdom (UK) (around 30%) and a widespread stagnation of funding from other donor states, while the humanitarian system has to deliver for more and more people in need (Development Initiatives, 2022). The Foreign Office,

1 The Grand Bargain 2.0 and new dynamics for humanitarian reform. CHA Event recording., 2021

2 Rekorde, Rückschläge, Reformen - Wo steht die deutsche humanitäre Hilfe? CHA Event recording., 2022

which is responsible for humanitarian action, does not implement aid projects itself but instead funds partner organisations such as Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, UN organisations, and humanitarian non-governmental organisations (NGOs). An analysis of the financial distribution according to partner organisations shows that an increasing share is allocated via UN agencies (2021: 77% UN, 13% NGOs and 10% Red Cross/Red Crescent) (Auswärtiges Amt, 2022a).

The rise in contributions was also accompanied by the development of the first humanitarian strategy, which was published in 2012. It brought together all areas of humanitarian action – emergency aid, transitional aid, and disaster preparedness – strategically for the first time. In addition, the strategy formulated the basic principles of German humanitarian action, such as the partnership approach, topic-specific guidelines, and the claim to contribute to the shaping and further development of the humanitarian system in forums and initiatives. Furthermore, the Federal Government informs the German Bundestag about its humanitarian engagement in a regular four-year report, which is usually discussed in a hearing at the relevant parliamentary committee. Formally, this setup is largely the same nowadays. Reporting continues to take place every four years only despite the rapid changes in the sector and the increasing importance of overlapping crises for German foreign policy overall. The last report by the German government placed thematic emphasis on the Grand Bargain, anticipatory action, protection of humanitarian space, displacement, gender, and Covid-19 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2022a). The strategy was revised in 2018 and republished for the period 2019-2023 with a focus on humanitarian access, innovation, and forgotten crises.

Unlike the United Kingdom and France, the Federal Republic of Germany does not have a long tradition of humanitarian action as a policy field. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that policy debates on for example cash assistance or the cluster system have mostly been driven from the Anglophone arena. At the civil society level, this is also reflected in the limited and sometimes isolated policy exchange among German non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Quack, 2016). The rather subordinate position in the humanitarian system is contrasted with Germany's more substantial role in development policy discourses, as well as the number of institutions active in development cooperation.

Meanwhile, German actors have limited access to policy analysis and research on humanitarian action from German-speaking countries, unlike France or the UK, where established expertise from think tanks such as Groupe URD (founded in 1993) or the Humanitarian Policy Group (founded in the 1970s) is available for research and advice for donors and aid organisations. Few studies and researches deal specifically with German humanitarian action, its actors, or its policy issues beyond advocacy contexts (Weingärtner et al. 2011; Weingärtner and Otto,

2013; Garavoglia, 2015; Quack, 2016). Quack (2016) conducted a pilot study on German actors, their capabilities, and the political weight of humanitarian action in Germany. He concluded that German actors have a strong project and fundraising orientation. A first CHA analysis in 2019 also concluded that the German government still lacks strategic capacity and effectiveness in the field of humanitarian policies (Südhoff and Hövelmann, 2019).

Looking at the system today, the context for Germany's role in the humanitarian system has changed rapidly over the last three years. Brexit, a devaluation of multilateral institutions under the Trump administration in the US, and further increasing needs due to protracted conflict contexts and the Covid-19 pandemic also require adapted humanitarian policies. In addition to the provision of financial resources, humanitarian action in Germany has evolved as part of Germany's „foreign policy with means“ and has been considered, for example, in the presidencies of the UN Security Council in 2019-2020, the EU Council in 2020, and the G7 Presidency in 2021, as an aspect of Germany's respective thematic priorities.

Against this background, how do international actors view German humanitarian action, its potential, its strengths, and its weaknesses? What lessons can be derived from these perspectives for the further development of its structures, priorities, and new strategy?

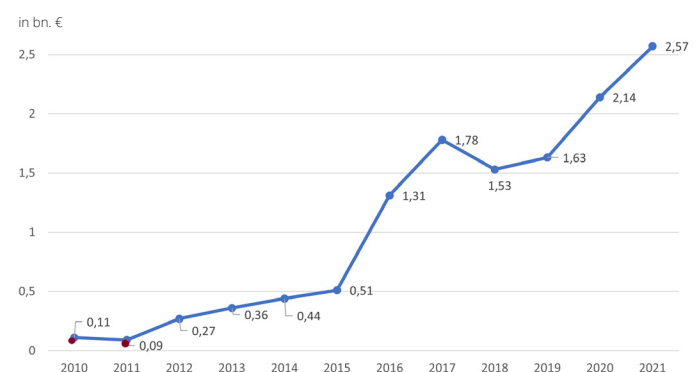


Figure 1: Humanitarian aid provided by the Federal Foreign Office 2010-2021. Source: Federal Government reports on German humanitarian assistance abroad 2010-2013; 2014-2017; 2018-2021.

3. Methodological approach and data basis of the survey

Methodologically, the discussion paper is based on two pillars in particular: firstly, a survey of around 200 humanitarian practitioners, and secondly, 37 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with experts from donor governments, UN organisations, international and local non-governmental organisations, and international think tanks. In addition to the primarily qualitative data collection, the analysis of relevant policy documents was the subject of the methodological approach. Theoretically, the discussion paper takes its orientation from other

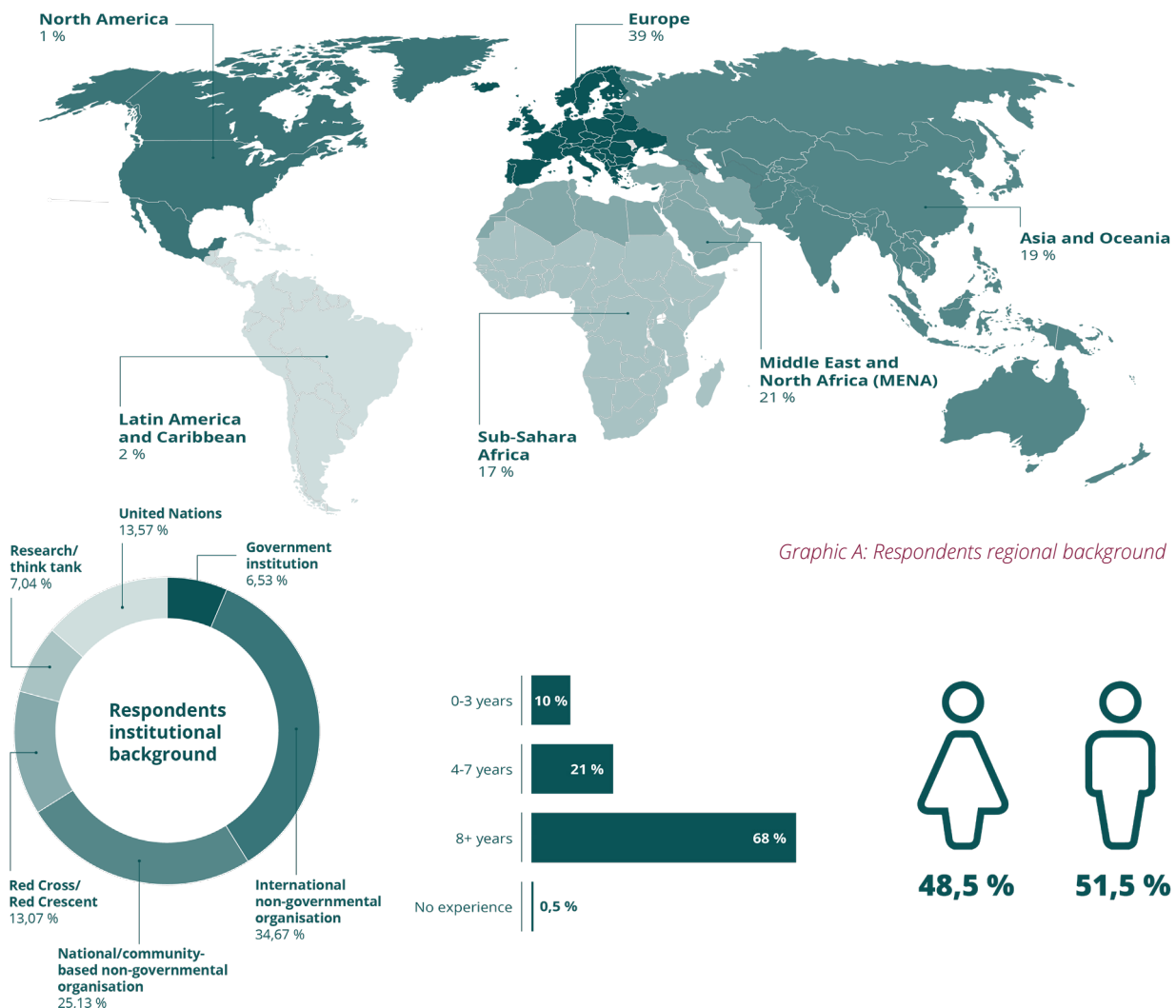
analyses of Germany's foreign policy strategy capability as well as the social science study of perception (Brockmeier, 2020; Schlie, 2020; Witt, 2020; Angenendt, 2021; Kloke-Lesch, 2021). A detailed outline of the methods and theoretical approach will be included within the framework of the planned study.

A survey was conducted to collect international perceptions of German humanitarian engagement. A total of 203 participants (N=203) from 52 countries took part in the survey. The regional focus was on the largest humanitarian crisis contexts and their neighbouring countries (Iraq, Niger, Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Somalia, Syria, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Nigeria, Jordan, South Sudan, and Sudan). This resulted in a regional distribution of respondents with a focus on Asia (19%), the Middle East and North Africa (20%), and Sub-Saharan Africa (17%) and explains the low number of participants from North, Central, and South America. 39% of the respondents stated that they work in Europe. Two-thirds of the participants in the survey were from abroad and one-third were from within Germany. As shown in Graphic B, the institutional background of

respondents is also diverse, with responses from the United Nations; Red Cross and Red Crescent; international, national, and regional non-governmental organisations; and research institutions. However, around 41% of the respondents work for civil society organisations, which may skew the results. An attempt was made to counteract this distribution during data collection by increasing the proportion of staff from other institutions. However, due to the sample size, no weightings could be applied when calculating the results.

A total of approximately 660 humanitarian experts were contacted directly. In addition, invitations to participate were sent out through other channels and via the snow-ball principle. The response rate for those contacted directly was 24%, i.e. on average, one in four respondents took part in the survey. It should be emphasized that due to the sample size, the survey cannot be considered representative, but must be read as indicative. The data collection took place between 19 May and 4 July 2022 and was conducted using Survey Monkey as a self-administered online survey. The subsequent data analysis was carried out using pivot tables in Excel, as the sample size

Respondents Background



Graphic B: Respondents institutional background

Graphic C: Respondents work experience

Graphic D: Respondents gender

did not allow for correlation or regression analysis. The 37 qualitative interviews with international experts took place as semi-structured, guided discussions in the summer and autumn of 2022, including 14 interviews with government representatives, five with UN representatives, eight international and local NGO representatives, five with EU representatives, two RCRC representatives, and two academics. The regional distribution of the interviewees was divided between Beirut, Berlin, Bern, Brussels, The Hague, Geneva, London, New York, Oslo, Stockholm, and Washington, DC, and was thus largely limited to the Global North.

Limitations

As this discussion paper presents the first working results, the findings from interviews and the survey are only initially analysed in the context of further literature and triangulated with other data sources.

It should also be noted that due to the different global distribution of the participants in the interviews and the survey, it is possible to compare the quantitative and qualitative results, but not to correlate them. Also, the data sources used mainly represent the perceptions and statements of people living in the Global North or West, which, however, only represent one perspective on German engagement.

In addition, the interviews and survey were primarily conducted with experts from the humanitarian ecosystem. This means that only the perceptions of people from the sector itself were examined. Neighbouring areas such as perspectives from development cooperation and stabilisation or peace interventions and other perspectives such as those of journalists or the private sector were hardly considered.

4. Current perceptions of German humanitarian action and policy

Introduction

The following chapter presents the results of the quantitative and qualitative surveys on international perceptions, which from the external perspective of humanitarian experts are of great importance for the potential, impact, and future of German humanitarian action. The surveys' focuses were broken down into (a) the motives and values that underlie German humanitarian action and influence its potential and Germany's standing; (b) the thematic fields associated with Germany as an actor and its respective thematic strategic capacity; (c) Germany's ranking as a *player* among the top donor nations. In Section (d), the aforementioned aspects are examined in the context of a case study based on Germany's engagement in the Grand Bargain 2.0 process in order to illuminate the results in the context of two categories of analysis. Section (e) addresses the question of Germany's *process* vs. *policy* orientation, and Section (f) differentiates Germany's engagement and its perception of the levels of Germany's *hard power* vs.

its *soft power*. Finally, the structural and administrative specifics of German humanitarian action are outlined and the international perception of its strengths and weaknesses are shared (g).

a. Motivation and principled orientation of German humanitarian policy

The German government claims to be a humanitarian actor with a clear orientation towards humanitarian principles and to allocate its funding according to needs only (Auswärtiges Amt, 2019). Value orientation is emphasised in Germany's humanitarian strategy and friction with an interest orientation is negated (Auswärtiges Amt, 2019, 2022a). The question is of great relevance in light of an internationally threatened humanitarian space and a declining prioritisation of humanitarian principles and values seen even in the capitals of Western donor nations (Worley, 2020). Germany's credibility as a representative of humanitarian values is also correlated to its own humanitarian actions. However, the consistent principle orientation of Germany's engagement as well as its foreign, security, and migration policy coherence has been questioned by German stakeholders in the past (Südhoff and Hövelmann, 2019; Westphal, 2020). International assessments of the motives and principles of German humanitarian action, on the other hand, have not been systematically assessed to date. The results of the current CHA surveys appear even more relevant against this backdrop, especially as they illustrate a difference in national and international perceptions.

As the survey data show, more than half of the respondents agree with the statement that Germany is an honest broker, i.e. a value- and principle-oriented donor in humanitarian action with the corresponding credibility as a mediator and facilitator. If one takes the category „somewhat agree,” it is even 80% of the respondents (Figure 2). If respondents are divided into those who work in Germany and those who work abroad, the picture is even more positive for the latter. A majority of 60% of participants based abroad agree that Germany is an honest broker, while only 5% disagree with the statement (Figure 3).

In the survey, this sentiment was tested by asking what drives Germany's aid allocation (Figure 4). There were six possible answers, with three questions suggesting a more altruistic approach and three suggesting a more interest-driven approach. Here, too, a large majority of 70% of the respondents stated that they tended to allocate funds for altruistic motives (strengthening the multilateral system, long-term benefits from overcoming humanitarian crises, etc.), while 30% tended to see transaction-related reasons. One in five respondents saw geopolitical or migration policy considerations as the main reason for allocating funds.

However, survey respondents indicated in their answers that no clear singular motive can be identified, but rather that German aid allocations are, in their

view, a mixture of several motives. Figure 5 shows that respondents, who are based in Germany, chose geopolitical and migration policy considerations as the most frequent response option, followed by the category 'strengthening the multilateral system.' Respondents who were less familiar with the German context were more likely to see the benefits that follow from dealing with humanitarian crises as the primary motivation.

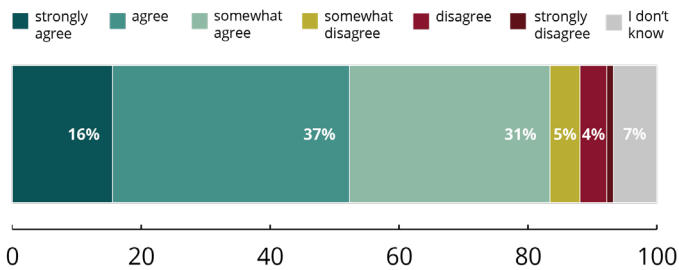


Figure 2: Is Germany an honest broker in humanitarian affairs?

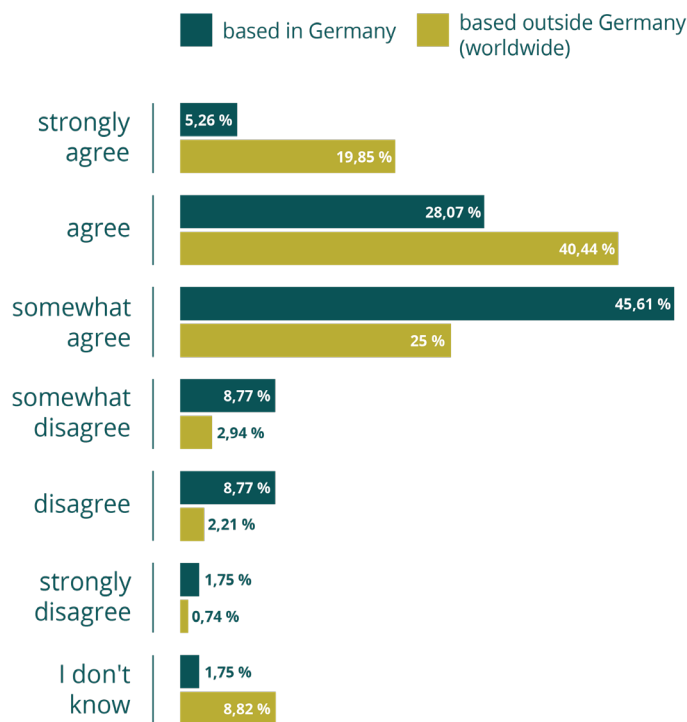


Figure 3: Is Germany an honest broker in humanitarian affairs?
(Based on the location of the respondent)

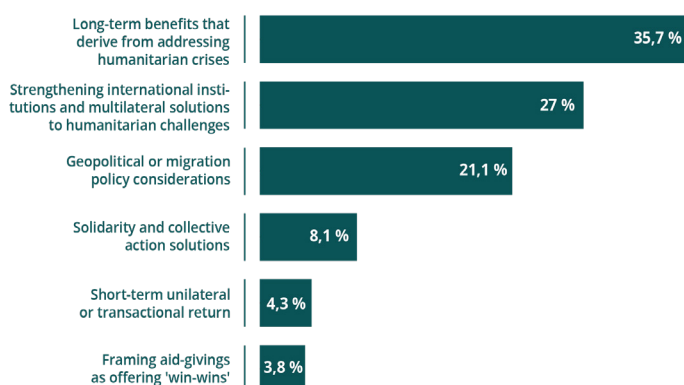


Figure 4: What drives Germany's aid spending primarily?

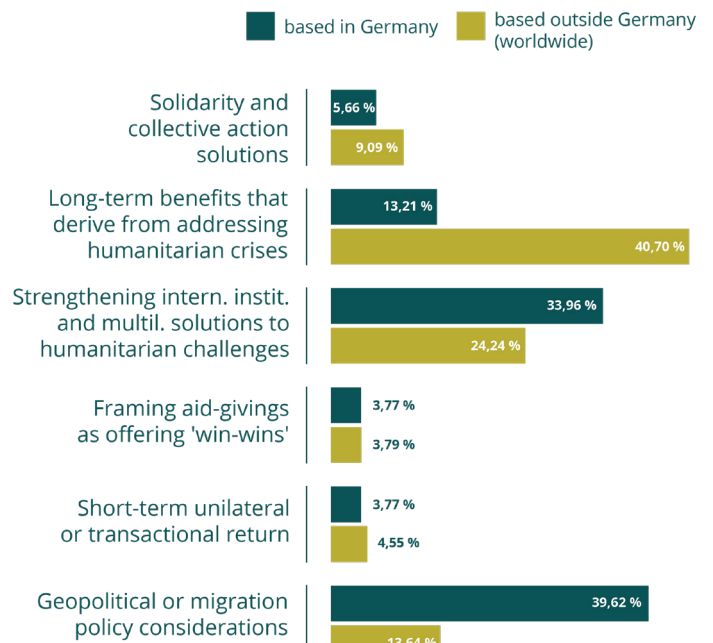


Figure 5: What drives Germany's aid spending primarily?
(Based on the location of the respondent)

The quantitative results of the CHA survey are confirmed by a broad consensus in the context of the interviews conducted. This was reflected also in open-ended questions about what interviewees see as the most essential characteristic of German humanitarian action. By far the most mentioned answer among the 37 interviewees was a perceived orientation of German aid towards the four humanitarian principles (humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence). The majority of interviewees agreed with the statement that Germany is a very principled and value-oriented donor.

Interviewees related this adherence to principles and corresponding credibility both to Germany's thematic commitment, such as humanitarian access issues and the protection of humanitarian workers in the context of policy engagement during its membership in the UN Security Council (2020/2021), as well as to the allocation of German humanitarian funds in a needs-based way. Germany's strong engagement in the migration context in 2015 and the following years for Syrian refugees was also named in numerous interviews as a relevant factor for Germany's credibility and value orientation in humanitarian issues, while about one in five participants in the survey today saw migration issues as a primary motivation of Berlin's aid spending. „2015 has been a watershed moment,” says one donor representative. „Germany is a top 2 donor and a top 5 refugee hosting country - this is a unique mix and moral stance, but it is not yet making much out of it,” says a UN representative.

Moreover, for many interviewees, especially from the field of practitioners and implementing organisations, Germany's value orientation was also reflected in a culture of listening and a willingness to learn without agenda or ideology. This was also seen and appreciated in clear contrast to other large donor nations.

The international perception of Germany's motives and the value orientation of its humanitarian engagement is thus significantly more positive than the respective national debates in the past about, for example, a lamented structural mixing of Germany's humanitarian engagement with security and stabilization policy interests in regions such as the Sahel, or migration policy versus needs-oriented aspects in the financing of refugee-relevant contexts (Westphal, 2020; Meissler, 2021; Steinke, 2021; von Pilar, 2022). The current results of the CHA survey among respondents based in Germany also revealed a clear difference to international stakeholders, as described.

Irrespective of the question of which standards and criteria underlie the respective judgements, the more positive international perception results in a great potential for Germany as a credible and at least financially-powerful broker for principle-oriented humanitarian action that is changing dynamically and capable of reform. This potential and the expectation of a German role in this direction as a leading *player* were also mentioned in numerous interviews. „There are some expectations to fill. There is since Brexit now more space for Germany and others, and Germany has also a special role due to its limited colonial past and being less economically, politically influenced than, for example, France“, says one diplomat. „Germany has the potential to provide the leadership in ensuring in the European landscape the humanitarian space, and a European project on humanitarian affairs,“ a donor representative seconds.

b. Thematic priorities and profile of German humanitarian policy

Germany's credibility as a value-oriented and principle-oriented donor („honest broker“) is internationally associated with great potential of the *player Germany* to move humanitarian issues and to initiate crucial reforms in the sector. The extent to which Germany is already exploiting this potential from the perspective of international stakeholders will first be analysed with a view to central thematic areas of humanitarian action based on the question of whether Germany is perceived as a humanitarian actor for a clear thematic profile.

In the survey, participants were asked in which of seven thematic sectors German public actors are particularly present (Figure 6). A quarter of the respondents in the survey see food security and water and sanitation (WASH) as key thematic priorities. Health care and humanitarian protection follow in third and fourth place. There are overlaps here with the central thematic areas set in the humanitarian strategy (see Chapter 2). At the same time, the survey does not reveal a clear focus for which thematic areas Germany is committed. This assessment does not change when only respondents abroad are filtered or they are clustered by region.

A similar picture emerges for policy issues (Figure 7). Here, the survey asked for a total of ten areas in which German engagement is perceived as particularly influen-

tial. Prevention and anticipatory action was considered the most influential German policy area (16% of respondents), closely followed by efforts to improve networking between humanitarian action, development, and peace (triple nexus). When it comes to other policy issues such as promoting localisation, quality financing, or cash assistance, no clear picture emerges as to where respondents see a focus of the German engagement.

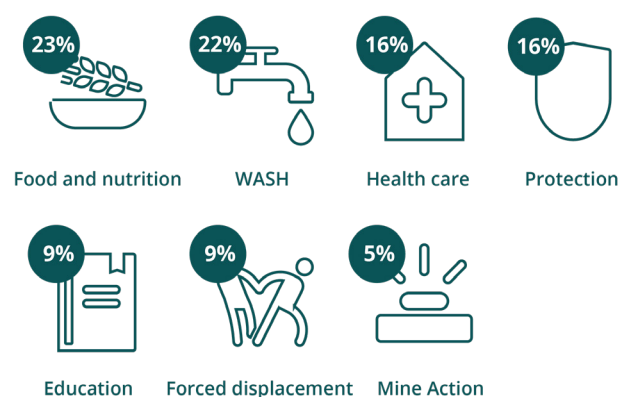


Figure 6: In which thematic areas is Germany particularly present?

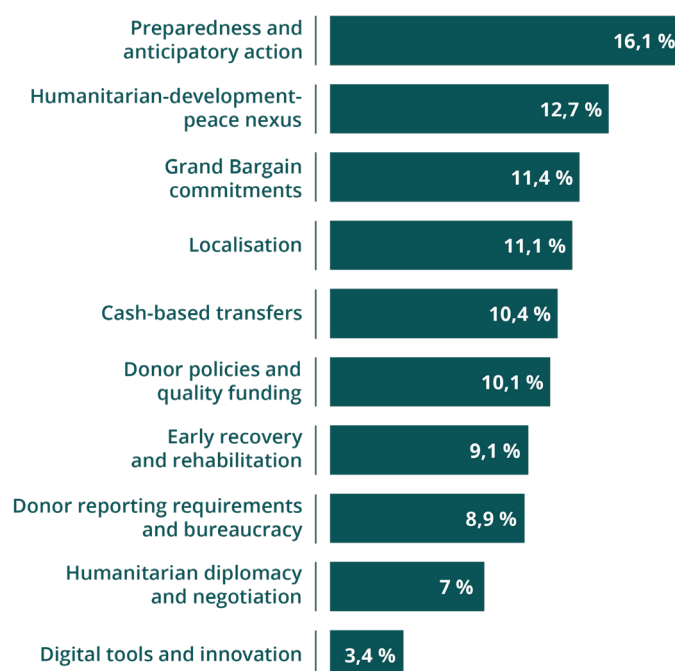


Figure 7: In which policy areas have German public actors been particularly influential?

The diverse picture that emerged from the quantitative survey is also reflected in most parts of the interviews. This can be seen in the open-ended question that asked respondents to name a particular characteristic of German humanitarian action. „It is noticeable that Germany does not seem to have a real thematic profile,“ said one donor representative about this shortcoming, which was also seen in other interviews. Smaller European donors, like Sweden, Norway, Switzerland, or the Netherlands,

are also more successful in being associated with a thematic profile and topics such as quality funding, gender-based violence, or mental health, confirms an embassy representative in Geneva.

However, the perception differs in the vast majority of interviews when specifically asked about the leading topic for Germany as a *policy player* or when specific topics were asked in closed questions. Within this framework, a clear priority perception and association of Germany with the issue of anticipatory action emerges from around 2021, with more than half of respondents citing it as Germany's top issue.

The interviews also revealed a relatively uniform picture regarding other policy topics, in that the weighting of the topics only differed regionally depending on the location of the respondents. In European capitals, Germany was also associated with the topic of multi-year funding and the Grand Bargain, and marginally also with the topics of humanitarian access and international humanitarian law. At the UN Hub in New York, the focus of the feedback was more on the latter topic, which was taken up in particular in the context of Germany's membership of the UN Security Council (2019-2020) by the German UN Mission and the Security Council Presidency coordinated with France with the *Humanitarian Call to Action* (Germany and France, 2019).

In the German Humanitarian Strategy 2019-2023, the German government prioritised three topics: humanitarian access and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), innovation in humanitarian action, and „forgotten crises“. However, even when asked directly, almost no respondent connected Germany with the topic of innovation, with the exception that anticipatory action was framed as an innovation. In addition, no interviewee was able to confirm a German profile or involvement in the field of „forgotten crises“ when asked directly.

The limited perception of these thematic priorities by the international community coincides with judgements about Germany's limited capacity to develop a thematic strategy. When asked about Germany's ability to advance a humanitarian policy issue internationally in a similar way to the traditional top donors (the USA, the EU Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid, DG ECHO, and the UK), this ability was largely denied. „It appears that there is not yet really a connecting of the dots,“ says a donor representative in New York, for instance.

At the same time, one relevant exception should be noted: Numerous Western donor representatives explicitly highlighted the issue of anticipatory action as a very strategically and professionally advanced priority. During Germany's successive EU Council and G7 Presidencies, the joint international conference on the topic with the UN Emergency Relief Coordination Office (OCHA) and in numerous informal bodies and discussion forums, this focus was well-prepared and far-sightedly addressed by Germany in numerous forums and placed at a high level

on the international agenda. „On anticipatory action, we felt very well represented by the Germans, also in all crucial forums like the G7 format. A lot happened there, this was really well done,“ a donor representative concludes.

From an international perspective, Germany's recent thematic priority on anticipatory action came close to a *role model* of how Germany should play and move issues in the future. Moreover, this confirms the self-assessment of the German government, which itself names this as a leading priority theme in its most recent four-year report, while the report hardly addresses the original priority themes of the German humanitarian strategy, innovation, and forgotten crises. Accordingly, it should be noted that no interviewee was able to name a second topic that Germany had moved as strategically and effectively as anticipatory action in recent years.

This also applied to the topic of humanitarian access and IHL, which was also mentioned in some cases. Diplomats based in New York confirm that they perceived it as an important issue in the UN Security Council with the *Humanitarian Call for Action*. However, after this period „there was no follow-up process“ and „no strategy behind it was discernible“ has been criticized while the humanitarian director of a top donor nation could not recall the *Humanitarian Call for Action* in a conversation. Similar assessments were shared on the issue of gender and gender-based violence, which was a focus during Security Council membership. „It then has been an issue, but there was no follow up“, criticised a UN representative. Also in programmatic terms, the focus did not lead to any significant funding, for example, for local women-led organisations by Germany or Grand Bargain actors (Milasiute, 2021).

„Germany has not yet either the width nor the depth. They cannot yet deal with all key topics, and they have not yet the depth to move some topics,“ summarises a senior donor representative.

c. Germany's international policy impact in comparison

The quantitative and qualitative surveys on Germany's relative *policy impact* were aimed at two key questions in particular: To what extent do respondents see an appropriate balance between Germany's financial humanitarian commitment and its power and willingness to shape policy? And how would they rank Germany's relative policy-making power in comparison with other top donors?

The survey results provide an answer to the questions that rather show that there is still room for improvement. For example, one-third of respondents estimate that Germany's role as the second-largest donor is also reflected in a correspondingly influential design of the humanitarian system. Likewise, one-third of the survey participants disagree with this statement - a more critical result compared to the other survey values (Figure 8).

If one divides the answers according to professional proximity to the German context, Figure 9 shows that it is primarily those with good knowledge of Germany as a donor who do not yet see the policy impact to an appropriate degree. Participants with a lower level of professional proximity rated Germany's role much more positively.

To compare these responses in the context of other donors, the survey also asked about the policy influence of the ten largest humanitarian donor countries (according to the DI Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2021). Figure 10 shows how many respondents rate each donor as „very influential“. Like the interviews, the survey makes clear that the USA (USAID), the European institutions (DG ECHO), and the UK (FCDO) are perceived as particularly influential on *policy issues*. Germany takes fourth place, followed by Norway and Sweden.

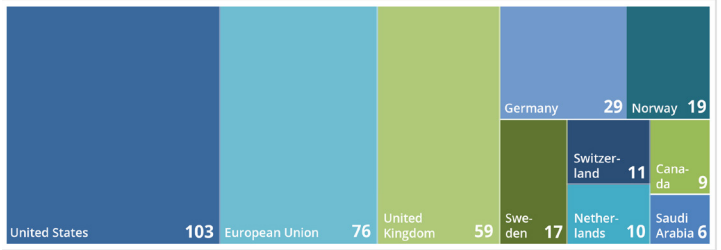


Figure 10: How influential do you perceive the following donors in shaping humanitarian policy? (based on „very influential“ answers)

The survey results show that participants with relatively good knowledge of German humanitarian action are much more critical of its policy impact. This is confirmed even more strongly in the findings of the interviews, most of which were conducted with experts on German policy approaches. The vast majority of interviewees answered the question negatively as to whether Germany had already achieved an appropriate balance between financial relevance as a payer and formative relevance as a *player*. They saw further great potential for development here, as well as the need for German leadership and commitment. „Its massive budget is not really acknowledged,“ and „the financial weight doesn't yet match the policy weight,“ says an INGO representative at the UN Hub in Geneva.

At the same time, there was a consensus among all interviewees who have been following Germany's development for several years that the role of the German government has changed, especially in recent years. It is important to recognise the clear rise of a policy actor that was insignificant for a long time, which today is not yet comprehensively involved, but far more so, and plays a positive and beneficial role for the humanitarian system as a reform- and value-oriented actor. A commitment that most respondents would like to see expanded: „We want more Germany,“ is how one UN representative summarises this development.

According to the survey results, the vast majority of respondents see a continuing gradation in the policy area between the former top three donors (USA, DG ECHO, UK) and Germany and thus Berlin's new role as a top two donor nation since 2016 not yet reflected (OCHA FTS, 2016). In parallel to broader debates on foreign policy, Germany is sometimes seen here as a kind of „middle power“ in the current humanitarian environment, part of a kind of second policy league. The assessments of the extent to which Germany is a leading, subordinate, or equal player in this league were at the same time regionally diverse. Numerous interviewees saw Germany as a similarly influential *player* to Sweden or Switzerland, followed by *players* such as the Netherlands, Norway, and Canada. Others saw Berlin as clearly leading this group, while several interviewees at the UN Hub in New York, for example, considered Sweden to be a much more relevant *player*.

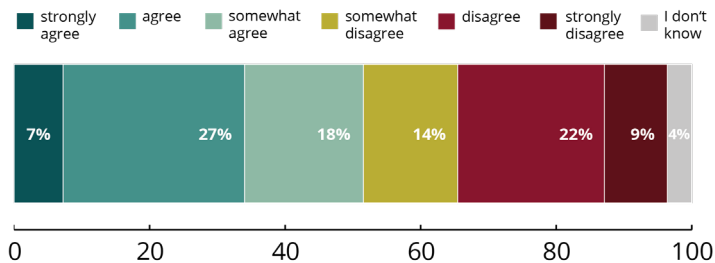


Figure 8: Is Germany's role as second largest humanitarian donor reflected in its impact in the humanitarian system?

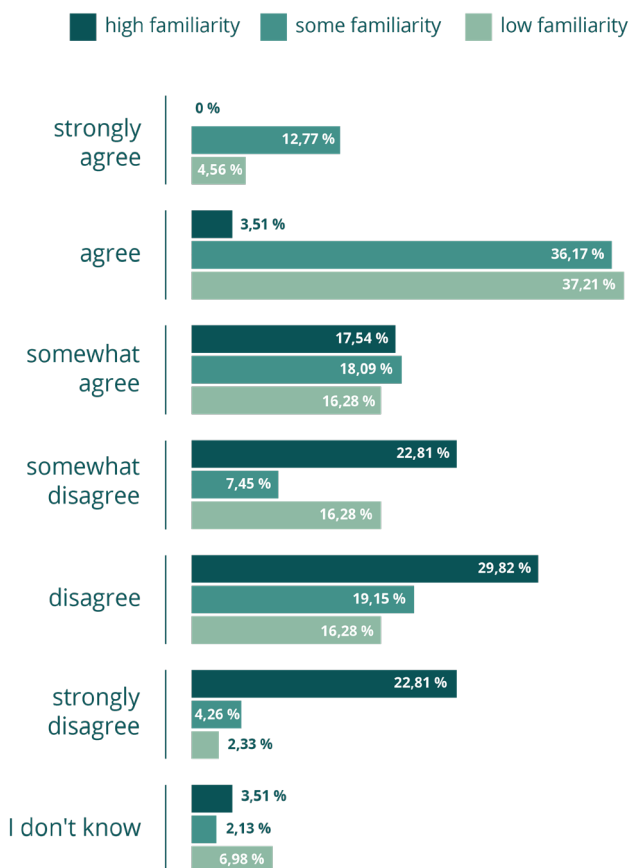


Figure 9: Is Germany's role as the second largest donor reflected in the humanitarian system? (based on familiarity of German context).

However, there was a very broad consensus among the respondents that European actors in particular, such as Sweden, Switzerland, and Norway, succeed in achieving a clearly disproportionate influence as humanitarian donors as compared to their financial commitment. Meanwhile, Germany continues to be attributed a disproportionately low relevance as a player compared to its importance as a *payer* (see also Chapter 3h).

d. Spotlight: Germany's role in the Grand Bargain

Germany's role in the Grand Bargain symbolises the challenging path from *payer* to *player*. Germany has been a signatory to the Grand Bargain since its initiation in 2016. In the process from 2016 to 2021, Germany launched selective initiatives and reform projects, but their impact had rarely gone beyond pilot projects and achieved only limited structural changes (Südhoff and Milasiute, 2021). Since the summer of 2021, the German Foreign Office has been a constituent of the state donors in the facilitation group and is thus in a central position to help shape humanitarian policy. It is apparent that the German representation promotes the process and actively helps to shape it, but does not set its own emphasis on changing the humanitarian system (Hövelmann, 2022).

The Grand Bargain is one of the most comprehensive reform processes in the history of humanitarian action. Since the first 'Grand Bargain' was concluded between donor states and aid organisations in Istanbul in 2016, a lot of work has gone into key areas such as quality funding, coordination, and localisation. After the Grand Bargain's self-imposed target horizon ended in 2021, many saw value in its continuation. This time, for two years, 64 signatories agreed to a follow-up process called Grand Bargain 2.0 with the aim of promoting localisation and increasing multi-year and unearmarked funding.

Germany's role in the humanitarian system at the beginning of the 2.0 process is in particular in financial terms different than in the first iteration in 2016. One interviewee from a think tank surmised that Germany would probably not have been asked to join the steering group in 2016. Nevertheless, it took „a certain amount of arm-twisting,” according to the same think tank representative, for Germany to consider the constituency representation in the facilitation group alongside DG ECHO. In addition, Berlin required six months to reach a final decision after the UK indicated its withdrawal in the summer of 2021 – a lot of time in a process of only 24 months.

Internationally, the commitment to the cause is being recognised. Both in interviews and the survey, Germany's engagement in the Grand Bargain was perceived very positively. As the graph of policy issues shows, the Grand Bargain was named in third place for *policy processes* in which Germany is particularly present. Interviews revealed a perceptible shift in Germany's visibility as a humanitarian actor. For instance, one respondent from an INGO network stated that „Germany is very visible compared to Italy, France, and Spain”.

For the Federal Foreign Office, there is a double obligation to promote the Grand Bargain, since both the *Humanitarian Strategy 2019-2023* and the coalition agreement of the traffic light coalition government of 2021-2025 mention the objectives of the reform treaty as a priority (SPD, Bündnis90/Die Grünen und FDP, 2021). At the same time, it is not clear where Germany sets its focus in the two fundamental priorities - localisation and quality funding. One interviewee who closely follows the process said: „I'm not sure what policies they are pursuing and where their priorities are”. As Figure 11 shows only about one-quarter of respondents perceive Germany as a driver of reform processes, while a good 40 % only partially agree with this statement. 16 % of the survey participants see no major initiative for reform projects from the top donor.

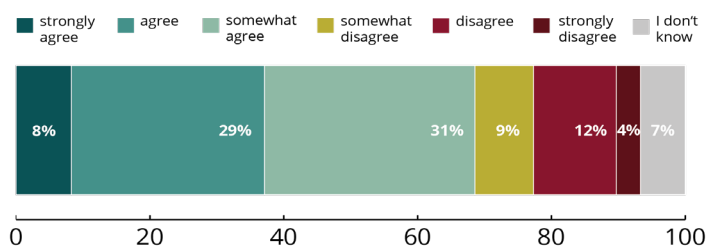


Figure 11: Is Germany a leader in humanitarian reform processes?

At the beginning of the 2.0 process, the Federal Foreign Office decided, according to a donor representative interviewee, not to get involved in the caucuses in addition to the facilitation group for capacity reasons. However, the area of work on the harmonisation of reporting obligations, which was continued from the last process and which Germany led together with the International Council of Voluntary Organisations (ICVA), was no longer addressed beyond advocacy efforts around the 8+3 reporting format to simplify various donor reporting requirements (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2022). Adjustments to the reporting of programme-based funding, which Germany is piloting with various NGOs, or more dialogue on *risk sharing* along the implementation chain would have maintained political momentum and usability in the future in this context. In the meantime, almost half of the Grand Bargain signatories are using the reporting format at least partially. (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2022). However, the GFFO seems rather reluctant to use its weight of being a top donor to move this, even though the usefulness of the template has been proven and, for most signatories, it is political will rather than practical hurdles that prevent them from using the format for their project partners (Metcalf-Hough et al., 2022, p. 89).

At the same time, it is regrettable that Germany did not take a central leadership role within the two basic priorities of the Grand Bargain 2.0 (quality funding and localisation). Due to its pioneering role, in multi-year financing, for example, quality funding would be an obvi-

ous priority. However, Germany was not represented in the relevant caucus. Instead, representatives of the Federal Foreign Office were committed to the intermediary caucus, although previous funding practice does not suggest an ambitious localisation agenda. Here, Germany came to the caucus to replace another actor only, but then stayed until the end. Participants in the committee unanimously report that the discussions were tough, so the outcome document also contains largely soft commitments.

The „homework“ formulated by Germany itself for the further course of the Grand Bargain 2.0 also remains vague and rather normative. Berlin commits to providing more funds for intermediary organisations when these are passed on to local partners, and that population groups affected by crises should have more of a say in proposals and reports, without these targets being concretised (GB Secretariat, 2022). The commitment to the Grand Bargain 2.0 and its caucuses is thus somewhat at odds with the approach to the development of the 8+3 template during the first iteration, which was seen as „strategic and efficient,“ according to an interview think tank representative.

As in other areas, the limited personnel capacities for strategic work and international political processes are a bottleneck for more policy engagement. Especially when central positions are vacant, this quickly leads to overloading or de-prioritisation of individual portfolios. In this context, the anchoring of the Grand Bargain in the coalition agreement could be a weighty instrument and argument to ensure that the monitoring of international humanitarian policy processes in the GFFO is appropriately staffed. But clarity about Germany's role and priorities would also allow existing capacities to be used in the best possible way. One interviewee suggests: „Germany cannot sustain the same level of leadership as the United Kingdom with this little staff, but it can strategically utilise other resources to make sure that all this money is spent wisely“.

As the home stretch of the Grand Bargain 2.0 comes into view, it is helpful that Germany has positioned itself as a clear advocate for continuing the process in one way or another. In a multi-stakeholder approach, interest is not the same among all actors to continue the labour-intensive discussions. It is all the more important that Berlin sees the value in a dialogue process whose unique characteristic compared to previous formats is to bring donor states, civil society, the UN, and local actors to the same table.

e. Strategies of German Policy Engagement: Process-versus Policy-Oriented?

The Grand Bargain 2.0 is an example of how Germany is now represented in central bodies that negotiate and shape humanitarian policy issues. In some cases, Berlin has been able to assert itself in competition with other donors. German representatives are also active

in various UN supervisory bodies such as UNHCR, IOM, WFP, and UNICEF, and their commitment is praised as very professional. However, there is also criticism that it is less oriented toward strategic issues and sometimes the focus is more on formal processes and micro-management. „Sometimes it seems more about rules to be followed and if 50€ have been spent the right way,“ summarised one donor representative.

Interviewees who are involved in bodies such as the EU coordination group Working Party Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) or the Grand Bargain Facilitation Group report that German representatives are always very well prepared, very professional and committed, and have the institutional backing. Also, despite their size, diplomatic missions are described as having a consultative approach to international policy processes, in which there is openness to other perspectives, especially those of smaller donors. This raises the question of whether such a process moderating role is crucial for the reliability and stability of the system in an international structure that is strongly determined by agenda-driving actors such as the USA, the UK, the EU, and, partly, France (see Chapter 4d). One representative of a European donor government saw this as uniquely enabling Germany to moderate and promote international humanitarian *policy processes*. „It is also important to have a large actor that can credibly play such a role in a non-biased way so that the processes work.“

However, the examples of European coordination and the Grand Bargain also show that a good balance must be found between process control and agenda setting. In the COHAFA Forum, as well as in the course of the EU Council Presidency, Brussels-based interviewees lamented the fact that Germany lacks leadership and orientation at crucial points in its very consultative approach. The same applies to the Grand Bargain: At Berlin's invitation, a retreat of the Facilitation Group took place in May 2021 to develop a work programme. Here, Germany's commitment to take on an intensive facilitation role was honoured, while on content of what should be acted upon in the facilitation group, it took a back seat (interview INGO representative). This means that moments are missed when policy orientation and leadership would have been necessary. The approach of non-partisan facilitation versus more obvious issue-setting leads to the perception that processes are placed above policies: „For the Germans, it seems to be all about processes, but which policies shall be moved in these?“ asked an NGO representative in the interview. It was emphasised in interviews that at the end of a process, the approach could be more decisive: „In Berlin, there is a tendency to think things through very carefully first. However, one can dare to say: we have been working on this for six years, this is how we do it now,“ (interview donor representative).

The analyses suggest that a middle way in the international humanitarian system could be a helpful role for Germany, where, on the one hand, process consistency

and trust in international coordination mechanisms are promoted but, on the other hand, a rigorous prioritisation process offers more clarity to all hierarchical levels where the GFFO sets priorities and goals in these processes. This prioritisation should be as result-oriented as possible in determining where and how issues should be moved. „The Germans could do better at senior level. I don't get the feeling they decide on that level what they strategically want to achieve with partners, and where they want to head to,“ says a UN representative about Germany's lack of prioritisation of policies over processes.

f. Levels of German humanitarian policy practice

Influence can materialise in very different ways, and this is even more true in the field of diplomacy. In the context of this analysis, a distinction should be made between the use of *hard power* instruments and *soft power* instruments, which during the interviews proved to be helpful criteria for analysing and differentiating Germany's influence and the respective instruments at these levels (see box for the definition of *soft* vs. *hard power*).

Definition soft vs hard power

According to Nye (2004), *soft power* in this context is understood as the ability of an actor to win others over or to persuade them to make a decision in their own interest without using coercive measures. *Soft power* is based on the persuasive and attractive power of the actors, which lends them credibility in the eyes of others. The instruments of *soft power* include means such as the dialogue-oriented use of diplomacy, the promotion of one's own values and political structures (public diplomacy) as well as long-term investment in the stability of inter-state or international relations (e.g. through development cooperation), which is possible in various policy areas.

Soft power thus stands in contrast to *hard power* as the traditional forms of military, economic and financial power with the help of which pressure can be exerted on third parties. Stanley R. Sloan and Heiko Borchert argue that the two types of power should be understood as complementary. In their view, *soft power* and *hard power* politics and the respective resources are most effective when used in combination. *Soft power* can help legitimise *hard power* (Voss-Wittig, 2006).

In the international perception, Germany's *hard power* in the humanitarian field is undisputed. Berlin's large financial commitment, which has made it the second-largest donor internationally as well as a top donor to numerous international humanitarian organisations and non-governmental organisations, represents a financial *hard power* potential that is not available to any other actor today apart from the USA and DG ECHO. This development goes hand in hand with the fact that Germany is now more prominently represented in the

relevant humanitarian bodies and international forums as well as UN management levels and supervisory bodies and has a much greater presence than in the past. In addition, Germany's economic strength and political power go hand in hand with relevant structural leadership roles and memberships, such as the G7 presidency, most recently in 2015 and 2022, its substantial influence in the role of the EU Council presidency, and recurring memberships in the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member.

Germany's financial *hard power* also led to its recent membership in an informal Top 4 donor group together with the USA, DG ECHO, and the UK. A representative of this group said in an interview that Germany was invited to join the previous top three group not so much for *soft power* reasons such as competence or know-how, but because of its financial *hard power*: „We simply wanted to have them on the table, as they are the top two donor.“

In the perception of international stakeholders, however, Germany's potential *hard power* has only materialised to a limited extent in the humanitarian field. „Germany has so much financial power, it is hard to understand why they don't use it more,“ one UN representative criticised Berlin for not doing more agenda-setting. The interviewees cited two main reasons to explain this difference to other top donors: First, the lack of strategic priorities that would be pursued in all fields and forums of German *hard power* – with the exception of the topic of anticipatory action described in chapter (d), which was consistently advanced in all relevant structures and financially supported. „You have to come via topics here (...), so you need to be very prioritised like others do,“ says a UN representative in New York.

Secondly, interviewees perceive German reticence, sometimes also a „false modesty,“ as an obstacle on the way to using the existing *hard power*. Many of the interviewees identified this as a communicative reticence, on the one hand praising Germany's willingness to listen and learn, but on the other hand, missing the fact that Germany then takes on the leadership role at decisive points in the further course of processes and brings them to a conclusion. „They are rather the silent force,“ says a donor representative from New York. „You could see the difference, for example, looking at the French approach to running its EU Council presidency, and the German one,“ a Brussels donor representative highlights. „France basically came with a set agenda and said that's the way forward.“

France's approach of a relatively small financial humanitarian commitment, which does not prevent Paris from being very self-confident on humanitarian policy issues, was criticised by several interviewees. At the same time, interviewees stated that Germany often threatened to lapse into the other extreme and was too unwilling to take a position even in the course of processes and after consultations had taken place. „Germany typically facilitates exchanges, while if no agreement can be reached, its

conclusion is that no decision can be taken rather than leading and guiding into a direction," summarised one European diplomat. „Germany is becoming a bit more confident on the international arena (...) but they could weigh in their political weight to move things [while Germans were not so comfortable] speaking up and putting their foot down," says an NGO network representative.

Berlin's perceived lack of will to use its *hard power* strategically is combined with a perceived weakness that many interviewees summed up as follows: „The *soft power* is not there yet," says one NGO network representative. Another INGO representative adds, „What I haven't seen at all from the Germans is the use of *soft power*, and that despite the financial power, I don't see any constructive *soft power* either."

Characteristics of German engagement that were mentioned by interviewees in this context as detrimental to increased *soft power* were a pronounced „formal focus" on the respective forms and forums of joint policy exchange. The very professional and committed appearance in committees, as described, contrasts with a rather weaker commitment in informal contexts and on informal occasions. „I almost never get an invitation to the German mission, coordination is non-existent," says the representative of a top donor, „while, for example, Sweden is a very reliable partner. We pick up the phone anytime, and Sweden and the EU convene a lot of stuff." Another diplomat draws a direct comparison to Sweden's *soft power*: „Sweden is surely often engaged and often on a high level, while there is surely still space for bridge building, networking, etc on the German side."

A Geneva diplomat had similar experiences: „It comes as a surprise that somehow I have not met with the Germans over lunch or coffee in the past years." In almost all the contexts interviewed, *wining and dining*, which is widespread in diplomacy for the informal promotion of one's own concerns, was not considered to be very pronounced in the German humanitarian environment.

Other donor representatives also indicated a limited willingness to participate in joint donor trips to crisis contexts, where close relationships can develop among colleagues over several days and strategic cooperation can be initiated. „We believe it is important to go on these missions although we do have humanitarian staff in the embassies", comments one donor representative, „that's why I wonder why the Germans are never joining".

Visibility was another aspect that interviewees cited as a lack of prioritisation of soft power aspects on the German side. „Here in New York it is all about visibility, but Germany does not yet play that game, so it would be good to be much more vocal," said one UN representative. Another donor representative also identified a structural problem, as Germany too often submits to a joint statement by the EU delegation in the context of the New York UN Hub in order to highlight the joint EU approach, instead of taking the initiative itself. This leads

to a conflict of objectives, as Germany's role and commitment are not visible in many contexts, while its own statements and positions could continuously underpin Germany's standing analogously to the practice of other EU states such as Sweden and the Netherlands.

Germany is also perceived as having limited activity in informal coordination groups, such as the approximately 150 thematic „Group of Friends" forums in New York, for example, in which donors coordinate informally. The same applies to coordination roles in relevant processes, such as the „omnibus resolution" on humanitarian issues within the framework of the annual UN General Assembly, which Sweden takes on and thus informally gains considerable soft power and visibility according to the assessment of several interviewees. This is also reflected in the respective consultation processes in Geneva, which take place from the Scandinavian side. „I have asked myself why we are always in the lead on this," confirms a Scandinavian representative, „but I heard other states including Germany never asked to play a role in this." A UN representative adds, „If the Germans are the pen holder, they do a great job (...) But I can't really name an area where they do this right now."

In New York, some interlocutors even saw *soft power* approaches as more relevant than *hard power* factors, such as a current seat on the UN Security Council. According to a UN representative, „it can be even useful not to be part of the Security Council as here is all so political. But for that work, it would be good to join forces with the like-minded, like the Scandinavians do. The Scandinavians are much more proactive on this coordination of actors and approaches."

g. Germany's structural and institutional set-up

As the interviews indicated, structural and institutional aspects play a major role in assessing perceptions of German public humanitarian actors and their influence. This concerns both intra-institutional structures within the GFFO and its missions as well as inter-institutional structures (*on the structure and distribution of tasks in German humanitarian action, see box*). „You have so many different agencies and I'm completely lost who is who, who is which ministry, what is the GIZ part, etc," says an experienced humanitarian director of a Western European donor country. There was a broad consensus among the interviewees on the following points, regardless of the location and background of the interviewee:

- German structures and procedures often appear very complex and non-transparent to external partners and are sometimes an obstacle to intensive exchange and cooperation. „The German setup is not concise due to this fracturing of expertise at the mission; there is some structure missing below the ambassador level. At all other embassies, I have one counterpart to deal with, while at the German [embassy] there are four different ones," criticizes a donor representative in New York. At the same time, intransparency can combine with conflicting competences and very

different approaches and policies depending on the German actors involved, as several interviewees noted: „Structures are sometimes undermining the coherence of much welcomed humanitarian policies, for example, Germany's support against counter-terrorism sanctions. But if you talk at the same time with their bank KfW, they appear like a Trojan horse in the German house,” complains a UN representative.

- In Germany, frequent staff changes are a major obstacle to building trust and personal relationships as well as longer-term cooperation. Especially at the higher working level, which beyond the regular rotation is also affected by reshuffles in the wake of political changes of power, such as the 2021/2022 federal elections. „This work is very personal, if you don't build ties and trust, this won't work here,” says a New York embassy representative. „If you leave after three years, it is not worth posting somebody here.” Another donor representative complains about recent staff changes at the highest level: „It is a problem if you deal with three different director generals within a year.”
- The limited humanitarian experience of the staff was also mentioned several times as a reason for the following perception of the strengths and weaknesses of German policy contributions: In almost all interviews, there was a consensus that, on the one hand, Germany is always very well prepared and contributes well-founded and structured statements to the relevant forums and bodies with a very professional appearance. On the other hand, it was repeatedly mentioned that beyond prepared statements, German counterparts rarely show the necessary speaking ability and flexibility to further engage in evolving questions and debates within the framework of a process and to drive them forward. „German diplomats are not coming with a specific expertise to weigh in on big debates,” indicates one diplomat. This widely cited weakness was linked to a potential lack of experience, more hierarchical structures and reporting lines, and a culture that seems to require constant reassurance on all points with headquarters. „German colleagues are very reserved in these more open debates, and much more sitting on the fence than others,” notes a European counterpart. The same applies to the external structures, where a UN representative states: „German embassy staff is always a 'reporter' to Berlin, they are rarely actively shaping the discussion, and the conversation is driven by the trilateral of US, EU, and UK.”

Interviewees at the UN Hubs in New York and Geneva, in particular, were similarly reticent about exchanges on humanitarian crisis contexts and German expertise. „UK and US for example have a real impact in informal set-

tings, probably much helped by their missions abroad. They are very well connecting the dots”, a donor representative in Geneva states. A clear difference in competence against the background of Germany's centralised structure, as a UN representative seconds: „If donors have no way of filtering the intel they get from agencies, they are easy to confuse and easy to convince. A fundamental structural problem, as Christoph Heusgen, the former German UN ambassador in New York, admits: „German embassies are relatively small, especially in countries where the biggest humanitarian crises are raging”³.

- Several interviewees saw a clear connection between German staff rotation and a lack of knowledge management and institutional memory as a basis for medium-term cooperation and *policy processes*. This also applied to high-level processes that Germany had initially initiated at great expense, for example, during its EU Council Presidency. „How do you ensure a continued process and progress on the topics moved during an EU Council presidency when shortly after no counterpart on the German side is anymore in place?” asked a donor representative from Brussels. Stakeholders in New York also saw limited continuity on the German side since its membership of the UN Security Council was a problem. A lack of knowledge management is also a recurring complaint in confidential discussions with representatives of German civil society concerning the GFFO.

Structures of German humanitarian action

Humanitarian action in Germany is the responsibility of Department S (Crisis Prevention, Stabilisation, Post-Conflict Rehabilitation and Humanitarian Aid) at the Federal Foreign Office, which was founded 2015 (Auswärtiges Amt, 2018). The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is responsible for German development cooperation, so-called „structure-building transitional aid” and peace-building measures, whose implementing partner for technical cooperation is in turn the formally private Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The international arm of the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) is responsible for international financial cooperation, while there is no implementing agency for humanitarian action along the lines of GIZ or the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), nor are there any decentralised structures in crisis regions. The Federal Ministry of the Interior is responsible for humanitarian related areas such as national migration policies and refugee issues in Germany.

3 In an expert discussion of the Green party Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen „The way to a National Security Strategy”, 11.10.2022.

The decentralised structures of donors such as the USA, the UK, or DG ECHO (which employs over 400 staff in the missions abroad alone) do not exist in the German humanitarian context. In the German embassies worldwide, there is no full-time position of a seconded or locally recruited GFFO staff member (Deutscher Bundestag, 2020). The lack of decentralisation of humanitarian competencies in the German system is a mirror image of the structure of the German diplomatic service as a whole, which combines all decision-making competencies in Berlin and is considered to have little permeability, as the former Minister of State Annen admitted on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Federal Foreign Office: „How can we better involve our missions abroad in the decisions here in Berlin at headquarters?“ Annen asked, conceding that, in 2020, an in-house culture of „team spirit instead of authoritarianism, collegiality instead of knowledge of domination and feminism instead of patriarchy,“ had yet to be created (Auswärtiges Amt, 2020).

In terms of quantitative personnel resources, the Federal Foreign Office has had to cope with a large increase in its humanitarian units in recent years, which at the same time could not even begin to keep pace with the increase in its humanitarian funds. In 2011, the GFFO only allocated humanitarian funds of € 90 million (German Federal Foreign Office 2021) with „a handful of desk officers“, as one former staff member described it.⁴

In 2022, three humanitarian units with a total of 66 positions (including part-time positions) were created in the Federal Foreign Office, of which, according to the Federal Foreign Office, about 5 % were unfilled in autumn 2022. In addition, the newly created Federal Office for Foreign Affairs (Bundesamt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten) has nine desk officers. The humanitarian units were

programmatically (Unit (S09) and in the policy field (S07 & S08) responsible for a record 2022 budget of € 3.2 billion. A total of 75 posts, i.e. 0.61 % of the total staff (12,346 employees - source: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aamt/auswdienst/mitarbeiter-node>) were thus responsible for around 40% of the total budget (€ 8.05 billion) of the Federal Foreign Office. In terms of staff, the German diplomatic service also applies a consistent rotation principle that provides for a change of post for all staff every three years. In order to strengthen in-house expertise, the humanitarian units increasingly rely on external appointments. But these contracts are usually limited to two years and do not offer any opportunities for promotion within the institution.

In-house calculations of the Federal Foreign Office also shed light on how much lower the humanitarian staffing ratio is in relation to the humanitarian funds to be implemented in comparison with other leading donor nations (see table). Statistics on this must also be seen in relation to funding modalities. For example, Germany allocates the majority of its funds in large grants to UN agencies and pooled-funding pots.

On the other hand, this practice also applies to other donors, such as Sweden, and can only explain part of the drastic differences in proportional staffing levels, when Sweden employs three times as much staff per Euro/US dollar spent as Germany, the USA four times as much and DG ECHO nine times more staff (Deutscher Bundestag 2020). In 2022, the disparity between the aforementioned actors is also likely to have increased drastically, as Germany will implement a budget of € 3.2 billion with 75 employees. The staff-funding ratio in Berlin has thus worsened from € 27.9 million per employee in 2020 to € 42.7 million in 2022.

Humanitarian Assistance	Overall funding (rounded) in million euro 2020	Number of staff	Funding per staff (rounded) in million Euro
Germany	2.137	76,5	27,9
Sweden	405,9	45	9,0
USA	4.972	750	6,6
United Kingdom	1.762	150	11,7
EU Commission (DG ECHO)	1.823	600	3,0

Table 1: Comparison of funding per staff at GFFO with other humanitarian donor states in 2020. Source: Deutscher Bundestag 2020.

4 The GFFO did not have data available on the number of humanitarian staff in 2011.

5. Summary and recommendations

Against the backdrop of Germany's involvement as a top 2 donor, this discussion paper is dedicated to analysing international perceptions of German humanitarian engagement in the areas of motives and interests, potentials, and impact.

When analysing the **motives, values, and interests** of German humanitarian action, those interviewed and surveyed attribute to Germany a function as an honest broker who represents humanitarian action in a principled and credible manner. This image is more positive among international stakeholders than among those based in Germany. This perception suggests great potential for an influential role in the change and reform of the humanitarian system in light of recent challenges.

However, it is clear that the **potential** is not being appropriately exploited, especially when it comes to the question of which themes and priorities Germany is pursuing. Here, the issue of anticipatory action is a positive example of how strategic topics are set and introduced in various forums. Beyond this, however, there is a strategic deficit in the continuous advancement of humanitarian policy issues through various bodies and processes, as Germany has so far neither addressed the entire range of humanitarian issues nor selected priority areas in the necessary depth.

This picture is also accompanied by a perceived imbalance between Germany's financial commitment on the one hand and its policy power and **policy impact** on the other. However, this imbalance has been decreasing in recent years since Germany has been playing a greater role in shaping humanitarian policy issues through international processes such as the Grand Bargain or its lead and presidency of multilateral forums.

However, the **structural setup and administrative resources** are major obstacles to these developments, such as the comparatively very limited human resources for humanitarian action in quantity terms, which come along with limited expertise in quality terms due to short staff rotation periods. In addition, German personnel compete in policy debates with other donor governments that are often far better equipped and have more thematic expertise and humanitarian policy tradition. Moreover, the weak external structure in decentralized crisis contexts and embassies due to a strong Berlin-based staff and decision-making focus is perceived as a major deficit in this area.

Two patterns of action can be identified from the analysis of German humanitarian policy engagement. Germany's **consultative and cooperative approach** is appreciated by international stakeholders and contrasts with other, much more agenda-driven leading donors. Nevertheless, the examples of the Grand Bargain 2.0 or the German EU-Presidency show that the approach of

non-partisan facilitation, as opposed to more straightforward issue-setting, leads to the perception that processes are placed above policies. In addition, despite, or because of, its financial influence, there is much untapped **potential** for German diplomats **in the area of soft power** to advance issues with partners. Here, the GFFO has recently launched relevant initiatives at the Berlin level, including a first-ever in-depth consultation with the US government in Berlin and a meeting between German and Scandinavian representatives (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland) in the autumn of 2022.

Recommendations for action

The following preliminary **recommendations** for action for the German government on its further path from humanitarian *payer* to *player* emerge from the interviews with international stakeholders:

- As long as Germany is not in a position to address all humanitarian issues in the same width as the other top 4 donors, greater depth regarding prioritised issues, modelled on the successful example of anticipatory action, could significantly increase Germany's strategic capacity. Here, clear prioritisation in the sense of sharpening the profile and policy effectiveness would be important and advisable. Investments should be made in communicating these focal areas and priorities both internally and externally.
- With a more strategic, thematic prioritisation, Germany could succeed in taking the next step following its established presence and recognised ability to steer and moderate processes, and move from this *process orientation* to a *policy orientation* centred on what Germany wants to achieve in the relevant forums. Here, a more developed balance of which of these processes should be used to the end of developing reform-oriented policies would be helpful.
- In order to benefit from the knowledge and capacities of other actors, a closer and more strategic cooperation would make sense, which would go beyond a mere exchange of information and has been neglected by the German side (as well as other actors) so far. Here, Germany would have a lot of potential to fill a gap and would also have a unique position among the top donors as a perceived „honest broker“ to promote such cooperation due to its credibility and financial *hard power*.
- More strategic cooperation with specific partners with complementary capacities would be an approach that could be pursued much more. For example, the potential of a closer collaboration with DG ECHO has been raised several times, as there would be options for Germany with its limited human resources to collaborate with ECHO more strategically and make use of its capacities and decentralised structures to identify and work on joint *policy issues*.

- Irrespective of the question of more strategic partnerships, investments in significantly more staff as well as their qualifications and seniority appear to be urgently required. Limiting or restricting staff rotation would also be crucial measures, following Canada's quantitative model, for example (a core set of humanitarian staff is not in rotation), or the Swiss rotation model in thematically-related areas only, if the former Department for International Development (DfID) model of full staff continuity is not a realistic option.
- A cultural change that could reflect an end to Germany's traditional „foreign policy restraint“ since World War II in the humanitarian sphere would be needed. This would mean a) less reluctance to use Germany's financial *hard power* where necessary to advance reform, and b) a clearer profile and more leadership through visibility and *soft power* skills, which would define a new balance between a highly

valued culture of listening and restraint as well as leadership on strategic priorities where appropriate.

- Centralised decision-making structures should be made more flexible and de-bureaucratized to diplomatically use the full scope of all hierarchical levels and locations and to empower all employees to better participate in result-oriented prioritisation processes and strategic goal setting.
- In view of its own ambition to play an active, central role in shaping and reforming the international humanitarian system, Germany should make progress regarding its strategic policy approaches, with the aim to use its financial and political influence in a targeted manner to overcome central weaknesses of the humanitarian system's status quo and to initiate reform-oriented change within and outside its established structures and processes.

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Interviews conducted

Function	Online or personal Interview	Month/Year
UN representative	Personal	Jul 22
EU representative	Personal	Sep 22
EU representative	Personal	Sep 22
EU representative	Personal	Sep 22
Donor representative	Personal	Jul 22
NGO representative	Online	Sep 22
UN representative	Personal	Jul 22
Red Cross/Red Crescent representative	Personal	Sep 22
Donor representative	Online	Sep 22
NGO network representative	Online	Sep 22
NGO network representative	Online	Sep 22
NGO representative	Personal	Jul 22
Donor representative	Personal	Jul 22
Donor representative	Online	Sep 22
UN representative	Online	Sep 22
UN representative	Personal	Jul 22
Think Tank representative	Online	Jun 22
Think Tank representative	Personal	Jul 22
NGO network representative	Personal	Sep 22
NGO network representative	Online	Sep 22
EU representative	Personal	Sep 22
NGO representative	Personal	Sep 22
NGO representative	Personal	Sep 22
Donor representative	Online	Aug 22
Donor representative	Personal	Sep 22
Donor representative	Personal	Sep 22
Donor representative	Personal	Sep 22
UN representative	Online	Aug 22
EU representative	Personal	Sep 22
Red Cross/Red Crescent representative	Personal	Sep 22
Donor representative	Online	Oct 22
Donor representative	Personal	Sep 22
Donor representative	Personal	Jul 22
Donor representative	Online	Oct 22
Donor representative	Personal	Sep 22
Donor representative	Personal	Oct 22