



On Risks and Side Effects

Why Germany Should Keep up its Commitment to Global Health

Daniela Braun, Martina Kaiser, Olaf Wientzek

- › Over the course of the past ten years, Germany has demonstrated international leadership in global health through its political and financial commitment as well as through the political leadership of the Federal Chancellor and several Federal Ministers of Health.
- › Maintaining this leadership is central to the pursuit of global health goals and is also in Germany's own interest. This should be done through a partnership approach – involving countries of the Global South and all relevant international organisations.
- › The fight against health crises must be conceived and shaped as an integral part of foreign and security policy. Expertise in the field of global health would also have to be integrated into a national security council from the outset.
- › Germany should maintain its strong engagement in international global health organisations (especially in WHO), pushing for ambitious reforms.
- › One of the priorities should be to strengthen the holistic “One Health Approach” at national and international levels.

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Introduction: Germany's Leadership in Global Health

Germany's commitment to improving health worldwide has increased significantly since 2013. In addition to political leadership – for example in the context of the G20 and G7 presidencies – the German government has increased its financial contributions and is the largest contributor to the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020/21. Moreover, the German government's political support for WHO and its leadership proved crucial to its credibility and ability to act in the Corona pandemic in the face of the fierce attacks, especially from Washington. This commitment was in large part due to the Chancellor's personal involvement. It was, for example, Angela Merkel who initiated the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well-being for All (GAP) in 2018, together with Norway and Ghana, and is described by observers as a "Leader in Global Health". Germany's strong role in global health should be continued and expanded, not least considering that the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated unequivocally that health threats – no matter where they arise in the world – can have a massive impact on health care in Germany.

Since 2013, Germany's commitment to global health has significantly increased.

1. From "Latecomer" to "Leader"

As opposed to the USA or the UK, Germany does not belong to the players who have traditionally been strong advocates in the area of global health. Only since around 2013, with the development of the German government's first strategy for global health, the commitment in this field has grown continuously and an increased strategic engagement with global health issues has taken place. This became particularly clear when Germany held the presidency of the G7 in 2014/15 and the G20 in 2017 and placed global health at the top of the agenda. For the first time, in May 2017, the health ministers of the G20 countries met in Berlin at the invitation of then Health Minister Hermann Gröhe, a pattern which was carried on by subsequent G20 presidencies. During the 2014/15 Ebola epidemic in West Africa, Germany also became significantly involved in the fight against the infectious disease.² The German government supported the worst affected countries with humanitarian aid as well as with airlift capacities of the German Armed Forces and invested in research into diagnosis and treatment options. Moreover, as a sign of the high priority that the Federal Government attached to combating the disease, Germany appointed the diplomat Walter Lindner as Ebola Special Representative. Since 2018, the German Bundestag has established a subcommittee on global health, giving the issue higher priority and visibility in the parliamentary landscape. Last year, the German government also published a new strategy for global health. Additionally, Germany's leadership role in global health has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, the German government was a driver in several important initiatives to combat the crisis. These include support for the main international tool to fight

The German Government has placed global health high up on the agenda during its G7 and G20 presidencies in 2014/2015 and in 2017.

Since 2018, the German Bundestag has established a subcommittee on global health.

the crisis, the ACT Accelerator, and the mechanism for international distribution of vaccines, Covax. Furthermore, the WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence, funded by the German government, was opened in Berlin in September.

2. Factors for Germany's "New" Strong Role in Global Health

Germany's strong advocacy for improving health worldwide is fuelled by several factors. On the one hand, it is closely related to fundamental changes in the international order and an overall more active foreign policy role for Germany. A multilaterally oriented foreign policy and strong roots in international organisations shape and promote Berlin's engagement in global health. The fact that the liberal multilateral order has come under considerable pressure from various trends such as global power shifts, the rise of protectionism, as well as re-nationalisation and de-globalisation tendencies and the strengthening of authoritarian states, has led to an increased commitment by Germany to preserve this order. For example, in recent years, the German government has become much more involved in WHO, both politically and financially, especially when the agency was confronted with the attacks of the US administration under Donald Trump and the threatened withdrawal of its largest donor at the time.

Another reason is the political leadership that the German government under Chancellor Angela Merkel has assumed in the field of global health. The Chancellor's personal commitment and interest in global health issues, as described earlier, have been repeatedly evident. During the 2015 Munich Security Conference, long before the Covid-19 pandemic, she described the Ebola epidemic in West Africa as one of the key challenges for the international community. Health Ministers Hermann Gröhe and Jens Spahn have also made the international dimension of health issues a focus of their work and demonstrated political leadership in this field by prominently supporting and promoting important initiatives.

In addition, Germany – and especially Berlin – has recently become an important and vibrant location for many governmental and non-governmental actors in global health. To better connect the multitude of actors, in 2019 the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG) founded the Global Health Hub. Major private foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, have also opened their own offices in Berlin. Every year, the World Health Summit conference brings together thousands of participants from politics, business, science, and civil society to discuss global health issues in Berlin. Also noteworthy is the strong participation of economic actors (including associations) and industry. The German Health Alliance (GHA) brings together over 110 different actors with an international focus from business, industry, civil society, and research. In addition, with the Robert Koch Institute, the Paul Ehrlich Institute, the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine and the Charité, Germany has internationally acclaimed biomedical institutions and has become an important research location for global health. For example, the world's first diagnostic test for the Sars-CoV-2 virus was developed by a team of researchers led by Prof. Christian Drosten at the Charité Berlin. With rising export figures, the German health industry is also playing an increasingly important role internationally, a development which similarly strengthens Germany's commitment to global health.³

Berlin's foreign policy is centred around multilateralism, which promotes and guides its engagement in global health.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel demonstrated important political leadership in the area of global health.

3. Germany's Priorities in Global Health Policy

Germany's goals in the policy field of global health are anchored in the strategy entitled "Responsibility – Innovation – Partnership: Shaping Global Health Together", which was adopted by the Federal Cabinet on 7 October 2020 by replacing the first global health concept from 2013.

In 2020, Germany adopted a sustainable new global health strategy.

In its new strategy, the Federal Government defines the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 and its health-related sustainability goals as "action-guiding" and as a guideline for Germany's political engagement in global health.⁴ This reflects the awareness that health challenges cannot be considered in isolation from other social factors as well as ecological and economic aspects of sustainable development, but rather that these are closely interrelated and must be considered together. The role that global health plays in achieving numerous other sustainability goals is also expressed in the German Sustainability Strategy. In the revised version of 10 March 2021, Germany has set a new goal by 2030 which includes a substantial increase in its financial contribution to global pandemic prevention and response compared to 2019.⁵

In view of the increasingly evident interactions between human health and environmental factors, the Federal Government advocates in its Global Health Strategy a holistic approach to strengthening global health. By respecting the One Health Concept,⁶ this approach takes into consideration the influence of environmental and climate changes on human health. Health risks caused or aggravated by environmental factors, such as climate change and loss of biodiversity are to be identified and reduced by promoting intersectoral cooperation, for example with the agricultural sector.

Germany advocates for a holistic One-Health approach to strengthening global health.

Although the One Health approach is not new, it has received a significant boost in Germany's global health policy in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has adjusted its priorities in global health over the past year and strengthened its commitment to One Health both at the technical and institutional levels.⁷ At the international level, Germany, together with France, is supporting the establishment of a new, multidisciplinary expert panel for One Health – the One Health High-Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP) – as part of the joint Alliance for Multilateralism.⁸

Further priority goals of Germany's global health policy include strengthening health systems worldwide, expanding research and innovation for global health, and protecting against transnational health threats through multilateral cooperation. Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the relevance of these priority topics: without strong health systems, the local occurrence of pathogenic germs against which there are no therapeutic options yet can quickly become a global health threat. Without investments and interdisciplinary cooperation in research, vital medicines and vaccines, among other things, are lacking.

One of the key priorities of Germany's global health policy is the strengthening of health systems.

Accordingly, further development of the global health architecture remains a core priority for Germany in the new Strategy. Germany is committed to strengthening multilateral organisations such as WHO and is one of the largest financial donors not only to WHO, but also to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM), the Gavi Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). To achieve its goals, the Federal Government exerts its political influence in relevant multilateral bodies such as the WHO Executive Board or in WHO working groups and works to promote partnership-based cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels.

4. Reasons for a Continuation of Engagement

Germany's engagement in global health is essential for the survival of newly launched initiatives and approaches, and at the same time for maintaining the momentum for reform in the wake of the Covid-19 crisis. To scale back Germany's engagement would be a setback for the pursuit of global health goals and the sustainability agenda.

Beyond altruistic reasons, the engagement of Germany and German actors is also in their own interest: The Covid-19 pandemic has shown in all clarity that health threats, no matter where they arise in the world, can have a massive impact on health care in Germany. Apart from the high health and societal costs, epidemics bring high economic and social costs, which have a particularly negative impact on supply chains and trade. Especially for an export-oriented economy like Germany, this entails considerable costs. A continuously strong financial commitment to global health is considerably less expensive than the multiple costs that would arise if Germany were to scale back its commitment.

The focus on the security policy dimension of global health cooperation should be significantly strengthened: It is not only since the drastic consequences of the Corona pandemic that we have realised how health crises can also endanger security and stability in many ways. As a matter of fact, already in January 2000, the UN Security Council hosted the first meeting on the impact that an infectious disease – at that time the dramatic consequences of HIV/AIDS – would have on peace and security. In the 2016 White Paper – the central strategic document – Germany identified pandemics and epidemics as one of ten crucial security challenges and explicitly emphasised the connection between health crises and security. Nevertheless, so it seemed in recent years, the realisation that health, security, and stability are interconnected across borders was not taken seriously. Although the topic has played a role for several years, for example at the renowned Munich Security Conference, it has so far been met with little interest in the foreign and security policy community and is still mostly regarded as a “soft” niche topic.⁹

Moreover, Germany also has an interest in continuing its global engagement for reputational reasons: Unlike in many other foreign policy fields, Germany is a world leader in terms of reputation and influence. Its role as a model and leader – while at the same time making justifiable use of resources – has considerably strengthened Germany's standing and international reputation in recent years, not least in the eyes of the multilateral forums in Geneva. Global health will remain one of the leading global issues even after the end of the pandemic, and it is therefore in Germany's interest not to lose this acquired “reputation credit” in the coming decades if it was to scale down its commitment.

In view of its global role, Germany also has a responsibility to play a proactive role. Despite criticism of isolated decisions (such as its stance on the TRIPS waiver – the suspension of intellectual property rights for vaccines and medicines against Covid-19), Germany is fundamentally seen as a role model and pioneer in global health. A weakening of its financial, political, and ideological commitment would have a devastating signaling effect on other international actors. On the one hand, this role model is exemplary: As already described, Germany is one of those countries that have begun to develop a holistic approach to tackling global health risks. The approach considers development policy, environmental policy, foreign policy, foreign trade, and security policy aspects. Actors from different fields (various ministries, parliamentarians, civil society, research, industry) are brought together. This could serve as a model for other countries. Beyond its active role in the global fight against Covid-19, Germany belongs to those countries that have already recognised long-term challenges, such as antimicrobial resistance, and decisively supports international initiatives

Germany's continued engagement in global health is critical for the viability of newly launched initiatives and strategies.

Pandemics endanger national and global security and stability in many ways.

Germany is recognised as a role model and leader in the field of global health.

to combat them. Reducing Germany's commitment would result in the loss of a driver for a holistic approach to addressing global health challenges.

Financially, too, Germany is an indispensable international player in global health. Both WHO and other global health organisations, initiatives and actors would be massively impaired in their ability to operate following a decrease in Germany's commitment.

In the WHO context, Germany stands for a partnership approach more than the global heavyweights USA and China. For important projects, it tries to put forward initiatives within the EU framework or at least together with other countries. In view of the strong polarisation between China and the USA, a strong role for Germany and the EU and a partnership approach is even more important, especially with regards to the strengthening of multilateral fora. The GAP, which Germany co-initiated, has the same thrust, as it aims to increase effective cooperation between different GAP agencies and other partner organisations.

In light of the strong polarisation between China and the USA, Germany's support for WHO is all the more important.

Finally, Germany is a key driver for WHO reform and strengthened global health architecture. Especially in the coming months and next year, maintaining the momentum for reform is crucial to learn and act on lessons from the Corona pandemic (including through a possible pandemic treaty, reform of the International Health Regulations). A German withdrawal from multilateral structures such as WHO as well as a change in priorities after Covid-19 could create space for other actors (such as China) to set their own political agenda.

5. Policy Recommendations: How Can Germany Continue to Strengthen Global Health?

Design health protection as an integral part of foreign and security policy

- ▶ **Integrate global health expertise into foreign and security policy formats and decision-making structures:** Combating health problems and crises must finally be conceived and shaped as an integral part of foreign and security policy. This involves increasingly integrating global health expertise into foreign and security policy formats and decision-making structures. This also applies to the introduction of a national security council, in which global health expertise would have to be integrated from the very beginning. Like the US National Security Council, Germany should consider incorporating experts in the field of disease prevention and biological hazards into this body.
- ▶ **Commitment to the health and security nexus in international organisations:** As part of its engagement in international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN), Germany should work to ensure that health crises are recognised as security policy problems and turn words into deeds. In the EU, too, Germany as an influential member state can ensure that the interconnection between health, security, and stability is not forgotten.
- ▶ **Pandemic prevention as part of foreign and security policy training:** So far, foreign and security policy education at universities and other educational institutions hardly addresses health crises. To train the next generation of foreign and security policy experts regarding the possible implications of health crises for stability and security and to develop and expand expertise in this area, curricula and syllabuses at foreign policy educational institutions should address health topics in the future.

Germany should integrate its global health expertise into foreign and security policy formats and decision-making structures.

German engagement in global health in multilateral organisations

- › **Support and reform of the World Health Organisation:** Germany should continue to support WHO both politically and financially. This means, on the one hand, that it should continue to be regarded as the central platform of international health cooperation – and thus that demands for new additional bodies should be viewed with caution. On the other hand, Germany should maintain its strong financial commitment to WHO. Germany should continue to press for a general increase in assessed contributions by the member states, in order to ensure a permanently solid financial foundation for WHO – the continued commitment to the WHO working group on “Sustainable Financing” is of vital importance here. Overall, Germany should advocate for WHO reforms that secure its political and financial independence as well as strengthen its actual core tasks (its normative role).
- › **Promote global health policy in the social market economy in multilateral formats:** Germany can develop an alternative narrative against the often market-sceptic approach advocated in parts of the global health community through its successful inclusion of different actors and by taking into account guiding principles of the social market economy. For example, Germany should continue to advocate for adequate respect of intellectual property rights for vaccines. However, at the same time – together with research and business actors – it should push ahead with considerations on how a more equitable distribution of vaccines and medicines can succeed in the future. This includes strengthening the robustness of existing supply chains and ultimately exploring proposals such as an investment and trade agreement for vaccines.¹⁰
- › **Strategic human resources policy:** Compared to its high political and financial commitment, the representation of German actors in international organisations with a focus on global health still has room for improvement. Therefore, continued financial support for mid- and senior-level positions, as successfully done by other countries, should not be taboo.

Germany should continue to support WHO both politically and financially.

Acting in partnership in the field of global health

- › **Strengthen partnership with the Global South,** including through close involvement in WHO reform and pandemic prevention, by strengthening the resilience of national health systems. This includes goal-oriented discussion on improving future access to medicines, diagnostics, and therapeutics – while respecting market-based incentives and mechanisms. At the same time, such a dialogue should be pursued not only at the executive level, but also with representatives of business, science, and civil society.
- › **Further strengthen parliamentary work on global health worldwide:** Members of the Bundestag can play an important role in promoting the urgency of challenges (resilience of national health systems, communication with the population) to parliamentarians of other countries.

The German government should strengthen its partnership with the Global South.

Expanding the One Health approach as a contribution to strengthening global health

- › **Reduce the risk of health threats via the One Health approach:** The One Health approach can contribute to reducing the pandemic risk of zoonotic diseases and other health threats such as antimicrobial resistance (AMR), and to strengthening health resilience globally. At the same time, this holistic approach addresses other global challenges such as the loss of ecosystems and biodiversity or climate change.

Germany should aim to reduce the risks of health threats, including pandemics, via a One-Health approach.

- **Promote policy coherence to implement One Health:** As an influential actor in global health, Germany should use its position to further advance the One Health approach both in, with and by Germany. At the national level, the German government should contribute to the implementation of the approach by promoting the cooperation of all ministries relevant to the topic, such as the Federal Ministry of Health (BMG), the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU), the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (BMEL), the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), among others, in the spirit of policy coherence and the Health in All Policies principle. Established formats and structures such as the State Secretaries' Committee on Sustainable Development could serve as a model for a regular, inter-ministerial exchange format on the topic of One Health.
- **Expand partnership-based cooperation in the field of One Health:** Internationally, Germany should advocate in its bilateral and multilateral cooperation for a stronger anchoring of the One Health approach in global health policy and support institutions that contribute to the implementation of the approach. This includes multilateral organisations relevant to the topic of One Health, such as the WHO, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), as well as initiatives such as the One Health High-Level Expert Panel (OHHLEP) and regional organisations such as the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. In addition, Germany should use its political weight to further develop the One Health approach together with partners and to sensitise political leaders and civil society to the health risks posed by zoonoses and AMR.

Germany should expand its partnership-based cooperation in the field of One Health.

Conclusion

In the past decade, Germany has become one of the most important global players in global health for several reasons. In the fight against the Covid-19 crisis and in the efforts to learn the right lessons from it, this was and is of existential importance. But even beyond Covid-19, Germany should not scale back its multifaceted engagement and leadership, otherwise there will be significant risks and side effects – for the global community as well as for Germany's own interests. As the past decade has shown, not only the executive, but also parliamentarians, representatives of business, science and civil society all have crucial roles to play.

Germany should not scale back its multifaceted engagement and leadership in global health.

Examples from other countries have shown in the past how quickly one can go from being a pioneer to a follower in this policy area. For Germany to continue and increase its engagement, to pursue a holistic approach, and to act in partnership within the EU framework and beyond are the best antidote.

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 - 6 The One Health approach, first articulated in the Manhattan Principles in 2004, is based on the idea that human, animal and environmental health are closely interrelated. Accordingly, when seeking solutions to human health challenges, their impact on animal and environmental health – and vice versa – must also be considered.
 - 7 The priorities of German development cooperation in the area of One Health were summarised in January 2020 in the strategy paper *Initiative theme "One Health" in development cooperation*. Cf. https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/57858/876d851df750e91f490abf711db44719/OneHealth%20Strategiepapier_NEU_v2_barrierefrei.pdf (last accessed 10.10.2021). The reform concept "BMZ 2030" presented in April 2020 also includes the topics of global health and One Health. Cf. BMZ 2030 reform concept. https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/24906/edf8e-270745a32c82fe40aa42edc3ec6/sMaterialie510_BMZ2030_Reformkonzept.pdf (last accessed 10.10.2021). At the institutional level, the BMZ has created a sub-division "Global Health, Pandemic Prevention, One Health", in which the measures relating to One Health are to be bundled and coordinated.
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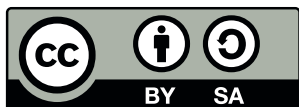
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