

A photograph of a table with a German flag and a US flag on the left, and a glass of water on the right. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a meeting or conference setting.

Toward Stronger Transatlantic Teamwork

Leveraging U.S.-German Coordination for Humanitarian Action

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THE ISSUE

Germany's humanitarian identity is at a formative moment. As a donor, it is increasingly influential, having overtaken the United Kingdom as the second largest bilateral contributor to humanitarian appeals. Yet while Germany's humanitarian policies are sound, its role as a norm setter remains limited by its bureaucratic and civil society framework, which restricts the attention paid to humanitarian issues. Germany's upcoming elections also have the potential to shift the leadership of key ministries and officials overseeing humanitarian aid. Increased collaboration between the United States and Germany on humanitarian issues should receive sustained attention in government dialogues, as well as in humanitarian organizations' outreach and engagement. The U.S. government should prioritize bilateral and multilateral funding with Germany; harmonize policy; promote anticipatory and pooled-funding mechanisms that reduce incidence of humanitarian crises and increase flexible funding; encourage greater interaction between executive and legislative stakeholders and with advocates from German and U.S. civil society organizations; and explore opportunities to uphold norms and support principled humanitarian aid through better donorship.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, UN humanitarian appeals reached their highest total, reflecting the anticipated impacts from protracted armed conflicts, climate emergencies, and the economic and social upheaval generated by Covid-19. The rise in humanitarian appeals coincides with an anticipated shortfall in funding because economic contractions and policy shifts in donor countries have led them to reduce international aid spending.

Germany is an outlier, having affirmatively decided to increase humanitarian funding substantially over the last 10 years, beginning in 2012. By 2016, Germany surpassed the United Kingdom as the second largest bilateral donor to humanitarian assistance. Germany has also exerted influence multilaterally: since the United Kingdom

formally withdrew from the European Union, Germany has played an even more substantial role in influencing the policy and spending priorities of the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations (ECHO).

While Germany has become a key player in funding humanitarian action, structural limitations on government and civil society engagement have, to date, restricted Germany's influence on humanitarian policy and practice.¹ Limited dedicated staffing at the German Federal Foreign Office and the prioritization of "efficient" donorship has led Germany to focus on substantial contributions to larger humanitarian agencies. Germany's domestic humanitarian advocacy is also modest, resulting from a sizeable contingent of dual-mandated nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs), as well as committee structures in the Bundestag that reduce the relevance and audience for humanitarian advocacy.

This brief unpacks Germany's humanitarian assistance modalities, highlights its expressed priorities, and identifies areas for learning and closer collaboration with the United States. Closer U.S.-German cooperation would achieve greater impact and make overall humanitarian action more coherent. Increased collaboration via civil society can help achieve two-way information sharing and humanitarian advocacy, potentially giving Germany's humanitarian priorities a more prominent voice.

GERMANY'S HUMANITARIAN SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

In 2012, the German government released its first Strategy for the Federal Foreign Office for Humanitarian Assistance Abroad.² Drawing on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, this document outlines how the Federal Foreign Office defines, coordinates, and finances humanitarian assistance.³ Renewed in 2019 to adapt to new global humanitarian challenges and increased need, the strategy outlines key challenges and root causes of humanitarian crises, including climate crises, protracted conflict, displacement, and lack of security and protection. Given the growing complexity of the humanitarian ecosystem, the strategy recognizes and reinforces the leading coordination role played by the United Nations.⁴

Since 2012, humanitarian funding has resided within Germany's Federal Foreign Office. Following a substantial restructuring of Germany's development ministries and implementing agencies, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) formed an interagency agreement with the Foreign Office.⁵ The grand coalition agreed to split leadership of cabinet ministries among political parties; currently, the second largest coalition party, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), runs the Foreign Office, while the Christian Social Union (CSU) leads the BMZ. This structure promotes political buy-in for humanitarian and development issues across parties but also lends itself to overlaps in policy and bureaucratic struggles over funding and financing. For example, while the German federal government aims to harmonize the humanitarian funding of the Foreign Office with the development efforts of BMZ, there remain multiple and inconsistent strategies for engagement with Africa—compounded by various strategies and proposals at the European Union—that present challenges to synchronizing their efforts.⁶

The 2012 strategy reestablished the Humanitarian Assistance Coordinating Committee (KOA) as the primary coordinating body between the German interagency, German NGOs, and academic institutions. Through quarterly meetings, the committee serves as “a forum for debate on key questions concerning humanitarian aid and is an expert body for exchange between humanitarian organizations and the German Government on these issues.”⁷ The KOA, which meets on an ad hoc basis to address emergency needs, plays an important role in setting priorities for Germany's humanitarian funding. Membership is open to all professional humanitarian agencies that have been active in the field for at least five years.⁸ The KOA is an important communications structure but is criticized for not engaging meaningfully, with some believing that meetings do not foster real debate and that the nature of the relationship between German NGOs and the Foreign Office discourages meaningful critique.⁹

In Germany, foreign assistance is appropriated through the annual federal budget, which the Federal Ministry of Finance compiles and introduces to parliament, both houses of which must pass it before it comes into force. The budget of the Federal Foreign Office currently accounts for 13 percent of Germany's total official development assistance.¹⁰ At the end of 2020, the Federal Foreign Office was allocated 6.3 billion euros (approximately \$7.7 billion), or 1.26 percent of the total federal budget, toward humanitarian aid, crisis prevention and stabilization, cultural relations, and education.¹¹

German law allows for multi-year funding commitments to be reflected in annual budgets to cover long-term commitments for the European Union and other international organizations. It also includes reservations to allow the cabinet to block funds if other contributors do not adhere to their commitments.¹² Oversight of the Federal Cabinet and the BMZ is exercised in various ways, ranging from committee hearings to specific, directed questioning on any issue.¹³ The Federal Foreign Office also commissions independent evaluations of the programs it funds.¹⁴

U.S. COUNTERPARTS

Like Germany, which reformulated and reorganized its internal humanitarian strategy and funding structures, the U.S. government has also restructured its humanitarian funding. In October 2020, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) launched the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance (BHA), which

combined its Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and Office of Food for Peace. This consolidation was intended to reinvigorate an outdated bureaucratic structure that divided food and non-food emergency assistance and give USAID one humanitarian voice. It also sought to streamline humanitarian delivery and mitigate duplication, especially since humanitarian response is increasingly tasked with addressing complex, protracted conflicts.¹⁵ However, U.S. assistance remains split between USAID’s BHA—responsible for addressing emergency needs during complex crises and natural disasters abroad—and the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), which provides assistance to those who have been forcibly displaced by conflict or natural disasters. In practice, USAID remains the primary funding source for the World Food Program (WFP) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)—also providing the bulk of funding to NGOs—while PRM is the lead donor for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Efforts to harmonize U.S. humanitarian funding have spanned administrations, with the USAID reorganization envisioned during the Obama administration and implemented by the Trump administration.¹⁶

In the United States, humanitarian assistance funding is appropriated through the State and Foreign Operations Funding Bill, which provides the budget for the Department of State (equivalent to Germany’s Foreign Office) and USAID. At the end of May, the Department of State and USAID announced their fiscal year 2022 budget request for \$58.5 billion, a 10 percent rise from the previous year, reflecting an increased commitment by the Biden-Harris administration toward humanitarian action.¹⁷ Relative to Germany’s system, congressional bodies have greater oversight of U.S. donor and implementer agencies, leading to difficulties providing additional unearmarked

assistance. Congressional oversight of humanitarian action is split between the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and House Committee on Foreign Affairs, which set policy and guidelines for the agencies, and the Committees on Appropriations, which set funding levels.

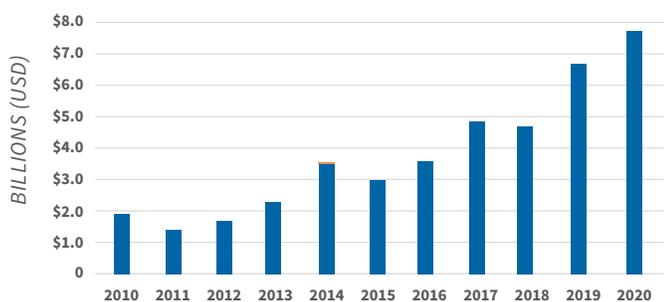
This level of congressional oversight of funding allows elected officials to demonstrate accountability to constituents regarding how foreign aid dollars are being used and ostensibly provides assurances that humanitarian spending is compliant with myriad regulations and requirements. The methodology by which Congress “directs” foreign aid, regionally and programmatically, includes both earmarks and directives that dictate where and for what purpose funding should be spent.¹⁸ The use of these congressional tools can help ensure legislative support for key foreign aid priorities, but it also limits USAID’s operational agility to make its own determinations on spending priorities and processes.

HUMANITARIAN AID AS A REFLECTION OF FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS

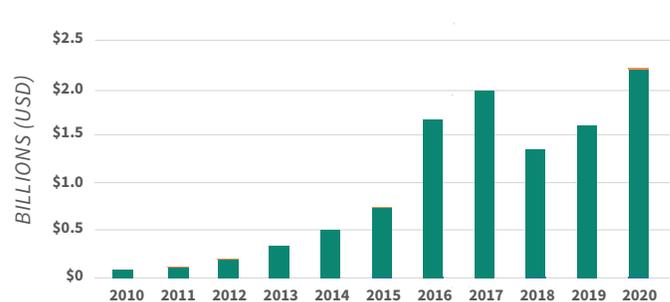
GERMANY’S PRIORITIES

Humanitarian assistance has become an integral part of Germany’s foreign policy and today accounts for one-third of the Foreign Office’s budget.¹⁹ Germany has affirmed its commitment to multilateralism and the international community, including by maintaining a high level of support for assistance programming. Germany’s contributions reflect its broader foreign policy interests, such as the protection of human rights, support for international law and multilateralism, and democracy promotion. The overarching goal for its humanitarian action is to invest in and advocate for efficient methods of funding and aid delivery, using anticipatory funding, new technology, and innovation to reach people in need.

U.S. Humanitarian Funding 2010–2020



German Humanitarian Funding 2010–2020



Source: “Appeals and response plans 2021,” OCHA Financial Tracking Service, https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/overview/2021/donors?order=total_funding&sort=desc.

Over the past 10 years, Germany's contributions to humanitarian assistance appeals and response plans have increased from \$78 million in 2010 to \$2.2 billion in 2020.²⁰ In 2016, Germany surpassed the European Union and the United Kingdom to become the second largest donor to humanitarian aid after the United States. This reflects Germany's overall increase of official development assistance (ODA) as a percentage of its gross national income (GNI), from 0.27 percent to 0.74 percent over the past 20 years.²¹ Notably, in the same period, the United States' ODA as a percentage of GNI—despite it being the largest aggregate donor—has remained relatively low compared to other developed nations.²² Even as Germany has substantially increased its total overseas spending (including humanitarian and development aid), some German civil society organizations have argued it should contribute an even higher share.²³

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Despite the increase in humanitarian funding and diplomatic commitments to aid delivery, oversight structures in the Bundestag betray a prevailing sense that humanitarian aid remains a lower priority. Humanitarian issues are overseen by the Bundestag Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, but one independent analysis determined that nearly 90 percent of the committee's attention is focused on human rights instead.²⁴ Furthermore, budget committees handle allocations, and the higher profile Committee on Foreign Affairs oversees the Foreign Ministry writ large. Pushes to reorganize the committees include ideas to separate out humanitarian issues so their funding can remain as independent as possible. Others suggest integrating humanitarian and migration issues, which would harmonize Germany's humanitarian action with its obligations as a host country for refugees and asylum seekers—but might also further politicize humanitarian aid.

A substantial portion of Germany's increase in humanitarian spending can be directly tied to its contributions in Syria, explicitly resulting from Germany's

experience as a destination for Syrian migrants. At the 2016 UN Conference Supporting Syria and the Region, German chancellor Angela Merkel pledged a massive increase in German spending, including commitments to fund multi-year humanitarian action in Syria and half of WFP's operations.²⁵ Chancellor Merkel explicitly asserted her party's view that failure to fully fund humanitarian responses in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey contributed to migration to Europe, and Germany has continued to prioritize assistance to Syrian refugees in Turkey.²⁶

Germany's focus on the Syrian humanitarian response raises legitimate questions regarding whether its assistance is needs-based. Germany's humanitarian strategy makes key references to core principles of impartiality and neutrality, but advocates question whether the use of humanitarian funding to stem migration is consistent with such values. Strategically, associating humanitarian action with the migration challenge makes sense for Merkel and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). It has mitigated right opposition parties' criticism of foreign aid spending and aligns with Germany's overall foreign policy focus on stability. Furthermore, analysis of funding trends shows that appeals for Syria and neighboring countries remained underfunded (consistent with other crises of similar magnitude), suggesting that Germany's prioritization of the Levant may have prompted other donors to focus contributions elsewhere.²⁷

In addition, in May 2020 the BMZ presented a new development strategy that will reduce Germany's global presence from working in 85 countries to 60.²⁸ While this is a development strategy, not a humanitarian one, the rationale is consistent with Germany's approach to prioritization of specific regions and partners.²⁹ The tactic subjects Germany to criticism about its impartial choice of recipient countries, but Germany's transparency can also help reduce overlap and increase harmonization with other humanitarian actors.

U.S. POLICY AND PRACTICE

While Germany's approach has remained relatively consistent over the past 10 years, foreign policy and humanitarian priorities in the United States tend to shift rapidly with changes in the administration. Yet funding has remained relatively consistent, with historically bipartisan support for humanitarian assistance in Congress, and the United States continues to be at the forefront of donor commitments. Although the Trump administration regularly tried to cut foreign aid spending,

Congress largely maintained funding levels.

The Biden-Harris administration has requested a substantial increase in foreign assistance. In this sphere, its key spending priorities—which reflect a meaningful shift from the Trump administration—are to combat climate change, address the root causes of irregular migration, improve resilience and security, and bolster humanitarian assistance.³⁰ The request for increased funding aligns with U.S. intentions to strengthen its humanitarian leadership and maintain its ability to respond to disasters and protracted crises around the globe.

In particular, combating climate change has become a top priority for this administration, which showcased its commitment to multilateralism by rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement in February 2021.³¹ A proposed \$600 million budget for climate change programming will be implemented bilaterally, together with creative policy innovation and practices that promote climate resilience. With 90 percent of disasters now being classified as weather- or climate-related, increased attention and funding toward mitigating climate change over the long term may help reduce the humanitarian impacts of climate-related crises.³²

These priorities accompany the United States' push to revive partnerships and restore previous U.S. commitments to international organizations by funding these institutions and pushing to reform them. It is with this backdrop that a partnership with Germany, a significant humanitarian donor, will be particularly important.³³

The Biden-Harris administration's approach to Central America has parallels to the German approach to Syria. It demonstrated its interest in the Northern Triangle by increasing emergency funding and committing to investing an additional \$4 billion in the region over the course of four years. While much of the Northern Triangle agenda is tied to development financing, the administration's comprehensive strategy specifically aims to reduce irregular migration, inextricably linking humanitarian assistance to pressures on the southern U.S. border.³⁴ As in Germany, tying humanitarian funding to the issue of migration may generate political support for the program, but it does raise similar concerns from advocates regarding whether its approach is truly needs-based and respects core principles of freedom of mobility.

The Biden-Harris administration's approach to Central America has parallels to the German approach to Syria.

POLITICAL CHANGE

Chancellor Merkel will retire after Germany holds its next federal elections in September 2021, and it remains to be seen what the next administration's priorities will be regarding Germany's development and humanitarian spending. Germany's contributions to the Syria crisis are uniquely tied to Merkel's policies regarding hosting Syrian migrants and refugees. Similarly, some point to her close relationship with Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Gerd Müller as a reason the BMZ successfully overcame bureaucratic tensions to increase its own budget as well as spending on humanitarian issues more broadly.

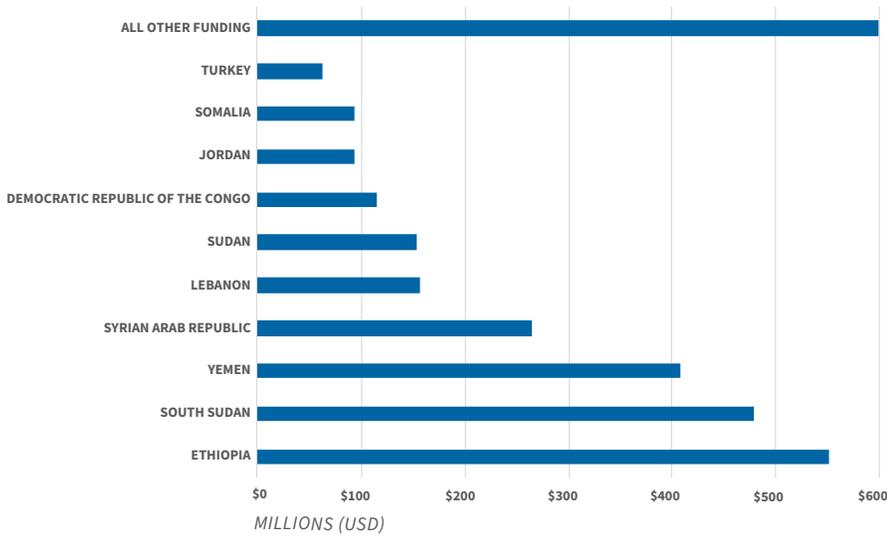
A new German government could therefore have a substantial impact on the future direction of the country's humanitarian spending and strategy. Parties with historically favorable attitudes toward international assistance, such as the German Green Party, are likely to become part of the next government. Regardless of the political outcome, German officials' increased engagement with humanitarian actors and advocates across the political spectrum will help maintain meaningful relationships and ensure understanding of humanitarian action and principles—even as the German political system undergoes substantial change for the first time since Merkel assumed office in 2005.

STRATEGIES FOR HUMANITARIAN ACTION

FUNDING APPROACHES

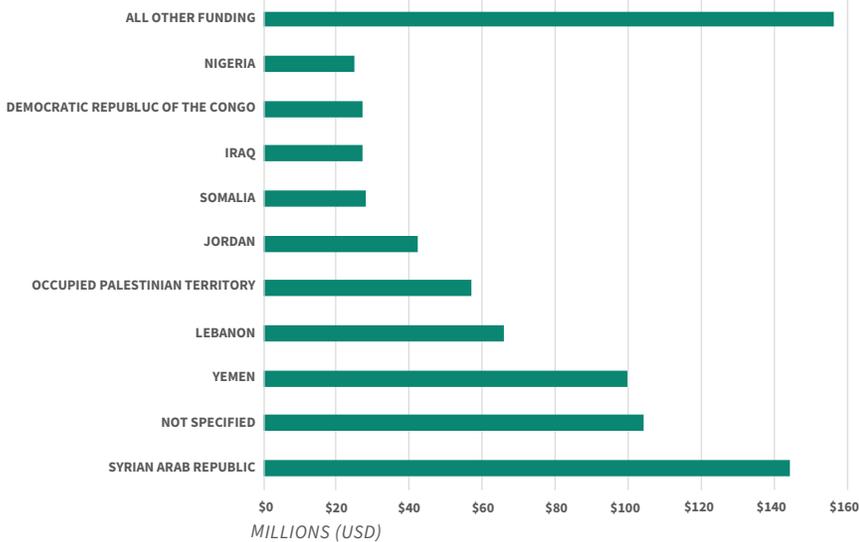
Germany and the United States share regional and thematic funding priorities, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, that offer opportunities for increased collaboration. In 2020, over 65 percent of Germany's humanitarian funding was allocated to crises in the Middle East—primarily in Syria, followed by Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan—while roughly one third of total U.S. contributions went to the Middle East (primarily Syria and Yemen) and another two-fifths went to sub-Saharan African countries (primarily Ethiopia and South

Top Country Recipients 2021: United States



Source: "United States of America, Government of 2021," OCHA Financial Tracking Service, <https://fts.unocha.org/donors/2933/summary/2021>.

Top Country Recipients 2021: Germany



Source: "Germany, Government of 2021," OCHA Financial Tracking Service, <https://fts.unocha.org/donors/4306/summary/2021>.

Sudan).³⁵ In 2021, regional humanitarian priorities include responding to crises in Syria, Yemen, Venezuela, the Northern Triangle, and the Tigray region of Ethiopia.³⁶ In 2020, the German and U.S. governments together contributed over \$9.9 billion to appeals and response plans, comprising 52 percent of all humanitarian spending.³⁷ In addition, the United States and Germany are the leading bilateral donors to international aid agencies. In 2020, Germany was the second largest donor to WFP (behind the United States), the third largest donor (behind the European Union) to UNHCR, and the third largest donor (behind

the United Kingdom) to the ICRC.³⁸ Collectively, Germany's contributions to large UN agencies and the ICRC accounted for nearly 75 percent of its overall contributions. In the United States, private donorship also plays a particularly significant role. Almost 70 percent of private humanitarian aid came from individuals, with the majority of funding going to NGOs rather than to large UN agencies.³⁹ In 2019, the U.S. private sector—including individuals, foundations, corporations, and bequests—gave roughly \$450 billion to charitable organizations, \$29 billion of which was given to ones focused on international affairs.⁴⁰

LOCALIZATION

Germany's humanitarian strategy makes substantial references to the Grand Bargain commitments agreed to at the United Nations' World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, including a pledge to pursue localization. However, Germany's tendency to fund large international organizations challenges this commitment. Funding for local NGOs remains a relatively small component of its foreign aid; by sector, 60 percent of German funding is committed to food security programming, followed by health programming at 10 percent.⁴¹ Germany has tried to address localization and capacity building by incorporating administrative overhead funding for some of its NGO partners, allowing them to focus on operations.⁴²

By contrast, a substantial part of USAID's humanitarian funding goes directly to NGOs, albeit through smaller grants and with a higher level of oversight and management. Long-standing relationships between U.S.-based and other operational NGOs ensure that BHA can move funding quickly to trusted partners during emergencies. While this system and process allow USAID to respond swiftly, existing compliance and regulatory processes inhibit its ability to achieve more meaningful localization, and humanitarian voices continue to call for reforming and adapting processes to align with the United States' Grand Bargain commitments.⁴³

MULTI-YEAR FUNDING

While Germany successfully uses multi-year funding to lower operational costs, hold preventative programming, and smooth transitions to development practices, the U.S. government lags in this area—particularly due to funding structures dictated by congressional authorization and appropriations restrictions. The United States can embrace Germany’s experience in using multi-year funding to implement and evaluate impactful programs for trusted partners. Germany increased the share of total humanitarian contributions that receive multi-year funding from 25 percent to 64 percent. Germany—along with Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Denmark—was among the top-five multi-year donors to UNHCR in 2019.⁴⁴ Other top recipients of German multi-year funding include WFP, ICRC, UNICEF, and the International Organization for Migration.⁴⁵ Even if bureaucratic or technical restrictions impede the United States from contributing the same level of multi-year funding, it can learn from Germany’s experience with conducting monitoring and evaluation and impact assessments, which U.S. humanitarian agencies can study as they continue to explore alternative funding models consistent with Grand Bargain commitments.

FLEXIBLE FUNDING

The Grand Bargain also calls for at least 30 percent of humanitarian funding to be flexible or unearmarked. In previous years, Germany highly earmarked its contributions to humanitarian agencies. For example, in 2017, it earmarked 98 percent of its contributions to WFP and UNHCR. Even as Germany’s contributions rose substantially from 2012 to 2017, flexible funding stayed relatively constant. In 2018, Germany self-reported as having only 6 percent of its funding unearmarked, coming in last of the major donors.⁴⁶

This has changed rapidly. In 2019, UNHCR reported that Germany and the United States both increased their shares of unearmarked or softly earmarked funds to 20 percent of their total contribution.⁴⁷ And according to Germany’s self-report on Grand Bargain commitments, it surpassed the threshold in 2020, making 37 percent of its funding unearmarked.⁴⁸ Germany indicated these contributions—particularly to the Global Humanitarian Response Plan—were primarily due to the overwhelming emergency needs from the Covid-19 pandemic.

CBPFs AND CERF

One method to increase the share of flexible funding has been to contribute to Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPFs). In 2020, Germany was the largest donor to pooled funding, spending almost 200 million euros worldwide, reasoning that this is one of the most effective methods to deliver aid in crises.⁴⁹ Germany also contributed over 125 million euros to the United Nations’ Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), to which it has committed an additional 150 million euros over the next three years.⁵⁰ However, while Germany has increased such funding, it has yet to reach its own goal of directing 15 percent of its humanitarian support toward pooled funds.

Germany’s preference for UN agencies and the CERF/CBPF structures is likely rooted in an ideological desire for efficiency, as well as a practical reality of having limited staff to oversee humanitarian funding within the Foreign Office. While humanitarian spending accounts for a substantial portion of the Foreign Office budget, there are only about 60 German officials overseeing that funding, with minimal presence overseas. The ministry’s limited humanitarian capacity, particularly at its embassies abroad, means decisionmaking is centralized in Berlin, there are few opportunities to monitor and evaluate programming overseas, and Germany has restricted ability to engage in humanitarian dialogue and advocacy on the ground. Because Germany is a substantial humanitarian donor, peer donors and humanitarian agencies should continue to engage with Germany’s foreign service officers to identify and offer opportunities for education, training, and sensitization to core humanitarian issues and principles.

An ongoing debate in Berlin surrounds whether the Foreign Office should dedicate a quota of funding to German and country-based NGOs. However, German NGOs do not necessarily have the capacity to handle large contributions, as some U.S. or UK counterparts do.⁵¹ Germany seemingly prefers funding large organizations—such as UN agencies—that have economies of scale, which reinforces existing power structures. However, this also applies to the cash-based programming Germany increasingly prefers. By engaging with trusted and established partners, German officials believe they can achieve substantial impact with limited oversight.

By contrast, U.S. contributions to the CERF and CBPFs remain limited, mostly owing to the regulatory and compliance processes in place. However, its commitments are slowly increasing, presenting an opportunity for U.S. oversight processes to evaluate existing contributions and incorporate best practices from Germany’s experience.

HARMONIZED REPORTING

One success of the German emphasis on efficient humanitarian action has been the development of the 8+3 template for harmonized humanitarian reporting, reducing the burden on implementing agencies.⁵² The German government, along with the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (a coalition organization of European NGOs) and the Global Public Policy Institute (a German think tank), have been convening a workshop since the launch of the Grand Bargain in 2016 to develop a standard template for reporting on humanitarian projects. While many leading donors have tested the pilot project, the United States has not yet adopted it, presenting an additional opportunity to learn from Germany's experience.

ANTICIPATORY FUNDING

Another promising way to make humanitarian funding more efficient is through anticipatory funding. In 2019, UN under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs Mark Lowcock outlined the impetus for financing in advance of crisis and identified innovative solutions being developed.⁵³ Anticipatory funding has been cited as one of the “cornerstones” of Germany's humanitarian strategy, as it goes beyond reactionary action to mitigate some of the root causes or stressors before a disaster.⁵⁴ This includes taking steps to address the impact of climate change, develop early warning systems, and invest in better preparedness.⁵⁵ Technological advances have helped deliver more targeted aid and contributed to better overall aid mechanisms. Germany has supported innovation and technology by a variety of organizations in the humanitarian space, with projects ranging from solar-powered refugee camps in Djibouti to using satellite imagery and maps to accurately assess crisis regions.⁵⁶ The BMZ is already a contributor to the World Bank's Global Risk Financing Facility (GRIF) climate insurance scheme, and the Foreign Office is a key financier of the ICRC's Anticipation Hub, a platform for developing and mainstreaming best practices on anticipatory humanitarian action.⁵⁷

Although the United States lags in anticipatory funding, “greening” humanitarian action through climate-related innovations and approaches is a key area for potential collaboration between the United States and Germany. President Biden has made climate action a priority across the federal government, notably convening the Leaders' Summit on Climate in April 2021. For U.S. humanitarian agencies, this means incorporating

mitigation and adaptation strategies throughout humanitarian programming, with USAID—which already integrates climate considerations into a broad swath of programming—to launch a new strategy at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26).⁵⁸ Given the outsized impact of U.S. funding and action, continuing to work with and learn from leading peer donors such as Germany can help ensure maximum impact.

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FRAGILITY STRATEGIES AND PREVENTION

Both the United States and Germany aim to use humanitarian assistance as one piece of a broader strategy to mitigate fragility and promote stability.⁵⁹ Recognizing the interplay between humanitarian action and early recovery, the German Foreign Office oversees not just humanitarian assistance but also crisis prevention, stabilization, and post-conflict reconstruction.⁶⁰ This approach is consistent with the Global Fragility Act of 2019, which outlines a U.S. strategy to prevent conflict and promote long-term stability.⁶¹ This bipartisan legislation envisions \$1.15 billion in spending over the next five years, including for a Prevention and Stabilization Fund, and the development of customized fragility strategies for identified priority countries.⁶² This is an area where the United States and Germany desperately need to harmonize their efforts, given their outsized financial contributions and political capacity to push partners to pursue similar methods and approaches.

BURDEN SHARING

As Germany has increased its own contributions toward humanitarian action, it has also called for increased burden sharing by other wealthy states. Former minister of state Niels Annen called for both China and Gulf states to make contributions, expressing the need to expand the donor base and bring in “non-traditional” donors.⁶³ Notably, Germany aims for these donors to not only increase their

funding but also ensure it is consistent with humanitarian principles, an extension of the multilateralism Germany advocated during its tenure on the UN Security Council from 2019 to 2020.

Given both countries' goals of driving global humanitarian action, Germany and the United States could play a constructive role in generating dialogue and discussion to ensure effective coordination of humanitarian relief within existing multilateral frameworks. This will be particularly important when it comes to engaging China and other nontraditional donor states, as increased humanitarian funding by a more diverse set of participants will create a greater need for engagement and coordination.

GROWING THE VOICE

Protecting humanitarian space was one of Germany's top priorities at the UN Security Council. It launched a humanitarian call for action and devoted its first day of its council presidency to Arria-formula discussions on international humanitarian law and the protection of medical workers in armed conflict.⁶⁴ Germany's efforts in this regard are consistent with positions of many peer donor countries and reflect a desire to position itself as a broker in complex political and security crises with humanitarian dimensions. Germany sees itself as free of the political baggage carried by France and the United Kingdom, which maintain complicated relations with their former territories in the Middle East and North Africa. Germany prefers to focus on its potential to contribute to funding and policy in the humanitarian sector, as well as to play a meaningful role in protecting humanitarian space in contexts where access is restricted.

Humanitarian issues and considerations have historically played a marginal role in German public discourse. However, the global health impacts of the pandemic and ongoing challenges facing migrants and refugees in Europe due to crises in the Middle East and North Africa have elevated humanitarian issues in recent years. Through their umbrella coalition, VENRO, multi-mandate German NGOs prioritize development-related agendas, with only one VENRO committee out of fifteen exclusively focused on humanitarian matters. German officials have something of a tacit agreement with citizenry to spend heavily but with limited public discussion. While this has served the humanitarian community well, Germany's NGOs could play an even more prominent role in both global humanitarian diplomacy and making the humanitarian sector's approaches more efficient. To do so, humanitarian

advocates in Germany and abroad should consider engaging more directly and regularly with the Foreign Office and its embassies—as well as with German civil society partners—to ensure key messages are received and understood and that the Foreign Office is held to account. To that end, the founding of the Centre for Humanitarian Action (CHA) in Berlin is a positive development. Established in partnership between the German branch of Doctors Without Borders, Diakonie Deutschland, and Caritas Internationalis, CHA has carried out a series of reviews of Germany's humanitarian action.

U.S.-based NGOs and others could engage with VENRO and CHA to help ensure even greater levels of support and encouragement for Germany's action. U.S.-based NGOs have a long-standing relationship with the United States government; civil society organizations have helped shape foreign assistance strategies and priorities and kept political space open, including during difficult political periods. Expanding the dialogue between U.S. and German civil society actors on humanitarian action can both ensure sustained political support within Germany for humanitarian assistance and promote coherent, mutually beneficial engagement between the United States and Germany on policy and funding priorities.

CONCLUSION

As part of its engagement with Germany, the United States should build upon its long-standing history of strategic dialogue with the European Union on humanitarian issues to inform current spending and policy decisions.⁶⁵ Germany and the United States, the two largest donors to humanitarian assistance, have core strategies that focus on preventing fragility in order to reduce future humanitarian burdens. As such, humanitarian issues should be seen as essential to future U.S.-Germany strategic dialogues. Although these issues inherently face domestic political challenges around funding and priorities, preventing and responding to humanitarian emergencies is of significant interest to both countries, which will need to cooperate closely if they are to achieve these shared goals.

By all accounts, the U.S.-Germany humanitarian dialogue is already strong, with regular engagement and communication. Continued collaboration on shared priorities, including on climate action and anticipatory funding, will reduce overlap and ensure efficient outcomes. The United States and Germany share an interest in maintaining a strong and effective multilateral system and in increasing the donor base. Close cooperation on

integrating new donors can help encourage adherence to humanitarian principles and heighten their understanding of existing structures, thus avoiding duplication or compromising best practices.

Furthermore, the United States stands to gain from understanding Germany's use of multi-year and flexible funding and its oversight of contributions to the CERF and CBPFs. Regarding management and oversight of humanitarian action, the U.S. model can offer lessons for Germany on maintaining robust and field-based internal expertise on humanitarian issues. Incorporating humanitarian action into ongoing strategic dialogues between governments and increasing humanitarian actors' direct engagement with the German government can help contribute to better humanitarian outcomes both now and in the future.

To leverage their bilateral ties to support increased humanitarian action in line with Grand Bargain commitments, the United States and Germany should:

- 1. Include humanitarian action and stability in strategic dialogues.** The United States and Germany have multiple strategic dialogues on priority issues of national interest.⁶⁶ Urgent humanitarian issues and funding methods should be incorporated into ongoing high-level meetings.
- 2. Launch a joint initiative on new donorship and burden sharing.** Germany and the United States share an interest in engaging new donors to contribute to humanitarian action. Together, they should launch new initiatives to help new donors navigate complex political relationships, bringing them into the humanitarian sector, and promote principled humanitarian donorship. To this end, Germany and the United States should decouple political interests related to migration flows and allocate humanitarian funding based on need alone.
- 3. Explore joint training and learning opportunities.** As Germany grows its in-house expertise on humanitarian action within the Foreign Office, both governments should explore joint training and

learning opportunities, including with humanitarian partners, at the embassy level and in Washington and Berlin.

- 4. Increase engagement between the U.S.-based humanitarian community and Berlin.** Government-to-government relations are not enough. While Germany's capacity for domestic humanitarian advocacy and analysis is increasing, humanitarian NGOs should increase their engagement with the Foreign Office (both at the embassy level and in Berlin) and the German parliament to contribute to the German government's understanding and analysis of priority humanitarian issues.
- 5. Focus on the role of anticipatory and pooled funding mechanisms.** The United States should learn from Germany's efforts to mitigate humanitarian need through greater anticipatory and pooled funding models—particularly in regions susceptible to climate-related crises or with high levels of gender-based violence—to prevent armed violence and reduce the humanitarian consequences when it occurs. ■

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