

DOI : 10.14746/rie.2025.19.19

JOANNA DOBOSZ-DOBROWOLSKA¹

Z. Wojciechowski for Western Affairs Institute in Poznań

ORCID: 0000-0002-0336-2205

An Epoch-Making Change? The Federal Republic of Germany Approach to Humanitarian Aid

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, while still the CDU/CSU candidate for the post, announced in a foreign policy speech that Germany would henceforth align its foreign aid with its national interests (23 January 2025, Körber Foundation). He justified this shift by citing the need to adapt German aid policy to the “epochal change” (*Epochenbruch*) taking place in the world. According to Merz, “development cooperation [and with it humanitarian policy] must be an integral part of a foreign policy guided by German interests” (Merz, 2025). With this statement, Merz departed from previous German declarations that framed the country’s aid as guided by the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence – principles traditionally used to determine where German-funded aid is allocated, who the preferred partners are, and who the final beneficiaries should be. Until now, the German Foreign Office (*Auswärtiges Amt*) had maintained that “German humanitarian aid is based on humanitarian principles, which are rooted in the principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and enshrined in international humanitarian law” (*Auswärtiges Amt*, 2024a). However, it seems appropriate to conclude that Merz did not announce or implement an actual change in Germany’s aid practice, but rather made the narrative surrounding it more transparent and realistic.

The article examines the humanitarian aid practices of the Federal Republic of Germany between 2016 and 2025. It presents the findings of research conducted to test the hypothesis that German humanitarian aid during this period was subordinated to the objectives of German foreign and security policy. The study employs comparative and historical methods to analyse changes in the practices of Germany and other aid donors. It draws on data from the UN OCHA Financial Tracking System (UN OCHA FTS) database, from which conclusions are derived regarding shifts in the volume, geographical allocation, and transfer channels of German aid. The research approach relies primarily on synthesis as a method for gathering and integrating dispersed data. The reasoning is inductive, and the explanatory framework is nomothetic.



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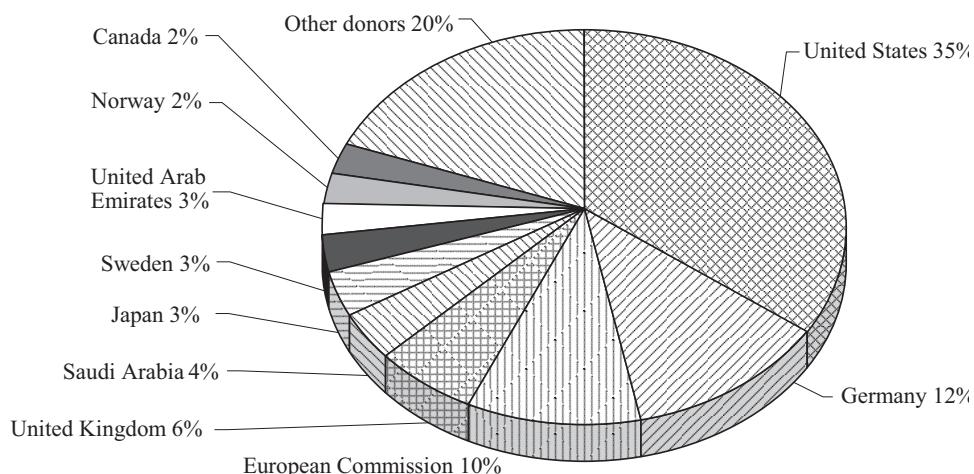
1. Germany in the global aid architecture

2016–2024

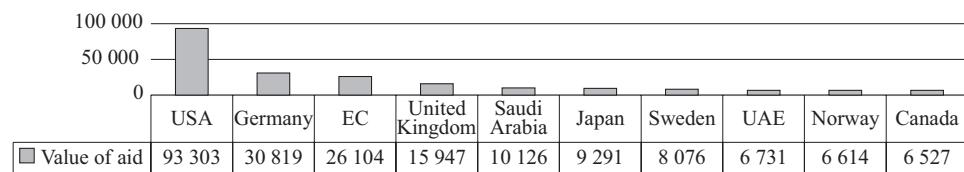
For more than a decade, Germany has ranked among the world's leading donors of humanitarian aid. Between 2016 and 2024, the Federal Republic of Germany consistently occupied second place globally, accounting for 12% of total humanitarian funding. The United States remained the largest donor, contributing around 35% of the global humanitarian budget, while the European Commission ranked third with 10%².

Humanitarian aid provided by the ten largest donors – nine countries and the European Union – accounted for around 80% of all assistance distributed worldwide. The United States alone contributed slightly more than one-third of the total global budget. The combined aid from the largest European donors – Germany, the European Union, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Norway – was almost equivalent to that of the United States, together representing about one-third of global humanitarian funding. Completing the group of major donors were Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – relatively new actors in the global aid system – along with Japan and Canada.

Chart 1 and Table 1. Share of the 10 largest donors in the global humanitarian budget and the value of their aid (USD millions) in 2016–2024



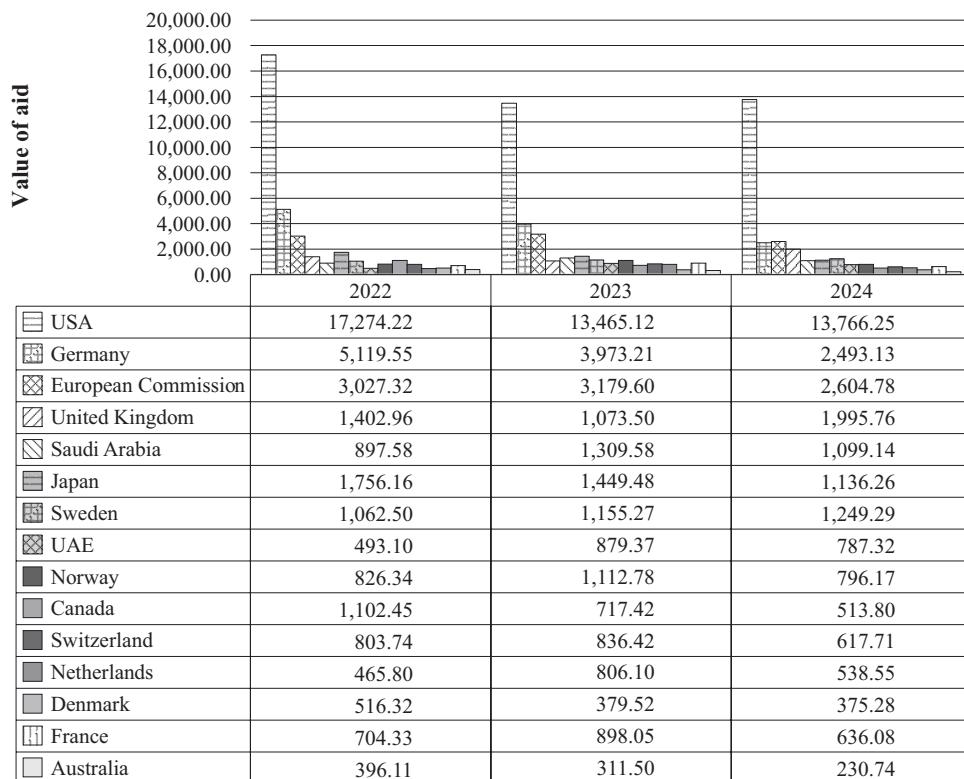
² All data in the text are the result of the author's own calculations based on data from the Financial Tracking System database maintained by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA FTS). The data represent the total aid provided by governments and their institutions/subordinate units (*child organisations*). Unless otherwise indicated, they represent the status as of 31 December 2024. Due to their incompleteness in the UN OCHA FTS database caused by the fact that the year has not yet ended, the data for 2025 are fragmentary and reflect the status as of 31 October 2025. The research presented in the text was financed by the Z. Wojciechowski Western Institute in Poznań with the support of EU COST Action CA 23129 "Peace Research Community Europe" (PEACE).



Source: Own calculations based on UN OCHA FTS data.

Germany held the position of the world's second-largest donor for five consecutive years (2019–2023). During this period, German contributions not only exceeded those of the European Commission, but were also several times greater than the aid provided by any other European country. However, in the last two years (2023–2024), Germany's humanitarian aid declined sharply, falling in 2024 to a level below that recorded in 2016. As a result, Germany lost its second-place position among global donors to the European Commission in 2024.

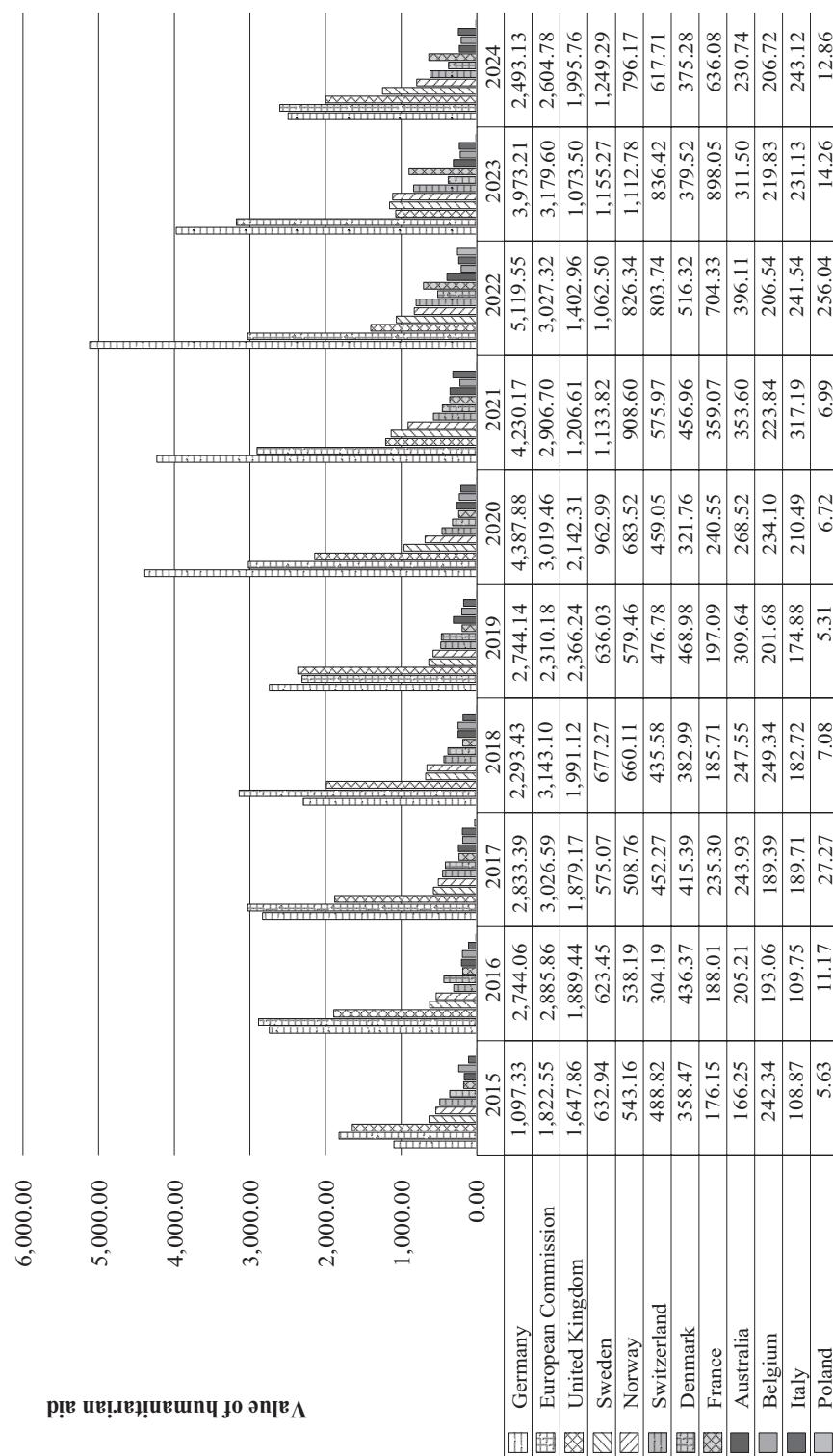
**Chart 2 and Table 2. Value of aid from the largest donors in 2022–2024
(in USD million)**



Source: Own calculations based on UN OCHA FTS data.

However, Germany's humanitarian support over the past decade has fluctuated, with the overall trend forming a curve that peaked in 2022. The volume of German aid

Chart 3 and Table 3. Value of humanitarian aid provided by Germany, other major European donors and Poland in 2015–2024
(in USD million)



Source: Own calculations based on UN OCHA FTS data.

began to rise sharply in 2016, when – following the 2015 migration crisis – it increased two and a half times, from US\$1,097 million to US\$2,744 million, with most assistance directed to the regions of origin of the migrants. This elevated level was maintained until 2019, with only a slight dip in 2018. In 2020, aid levels surged again, from US\$2,744 million in 2019 to US\$4,387 million in 2020, reflecting increased funding for global food and medical assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

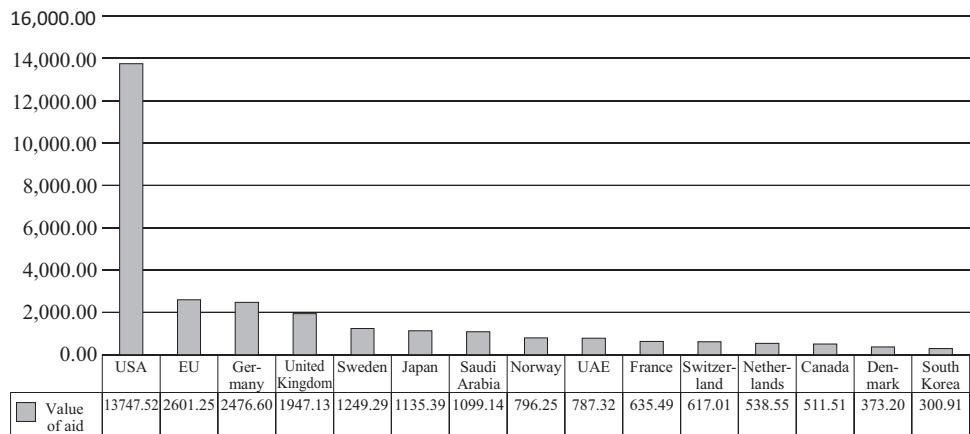
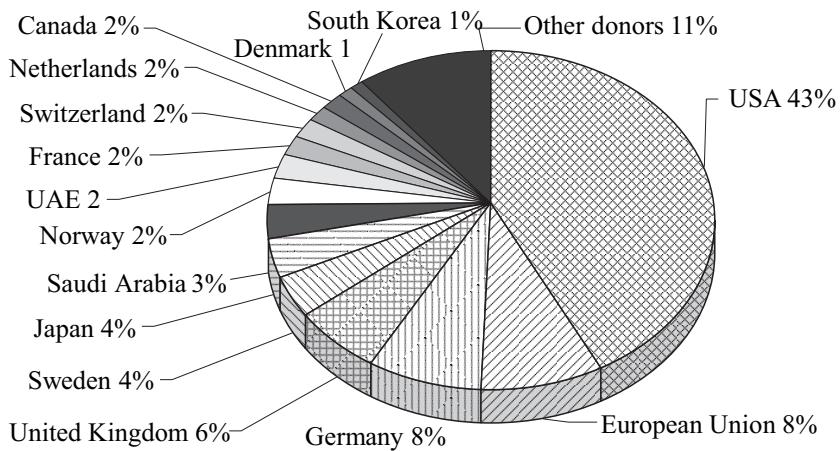
Germany provided the largest amount of humanitarian aid in its history in 2022, totalling US\$5,119 million, when support for Ukraine was added to its existing commitments. That year, Germany's aid exceeded the combined total provided by the 11 other EU countries among the world's 25 largest donors between 2015 and 2024 – namely Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Belgium, Italy, Ireland, Finland, Spain, Luxembourg and Austria – whose total contributions amounted to US\$3,870 million. At the same time, Germany's support also surpassed that of both the United Kingdom and the European Commission, reaching 360% of UK aid (US\$1,402 million) and 170% of EC aid (US\$3,027 million). The largest donor in 2022, as for several decades, remained the United States, with US\$17,274 million in humanitarian assistance. In comparison, Poland's aid totalled US\$256 million – a record amount, and almost 1,800 times higher than in 2021.

2024 and 2025

After a sharp decline in Germany's global humanitarian aid in 2023 – from US\$5,119 million to US\$3,973 million – there was a further reduction in 2024, when German assistance fell to US\$2,493 million. Despite this decrease, Germany's aid in 2024 remained considerably higher than that of most other European countries, exceeding the UK's contribution by less than 25%. However, for the first time in five years, Germany's aid was lower than that of the European Commission, and also below the combined total of the previously mentioned EU donors. Nevertheless, Germany remained the largest individual donor within the EU, providing almost four times as much aid as France and ten times more than Italy. In contrast, Poland's humanitarian support for conflict victims returned to very low levels after its exceptional 2022 peak, amounting to US\$14 million in 2023 and US\$18 million in 2024.

In 2024, Germany's share of the global humanitarian aid budget fell to 8%, and declined further to 7% in 2025. The European Commission's share also dropped to 8% in 2024, but by 2025 it had surged almost two and a half times, reaching 19%. Almost all of the world's major donors reduced their humanitarian assistance in 2024, with the exceptions of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. Although U.S. aid rose slightly compared to 2023, it remained 20% lower than in 2022. Among the leading European donors, the United Kingdom recorded a significant increase, while Sweden and Italy expanded their support marginally. All other major European contributors, including Germany, cut back their aid allocations. In 2025, the European Union became the world's largest humanitarian donor, expanding both its share of the global budget and the absolute volume of assistance. By contrast, U.S. aid collapsed almost six fold, following President Donald Trump's decision to freeze and dismantle

Chart 4 and Table 4. Share of the 15 largest donors in the global humanitarian budget and the value of their aid (in USD million) in 2024

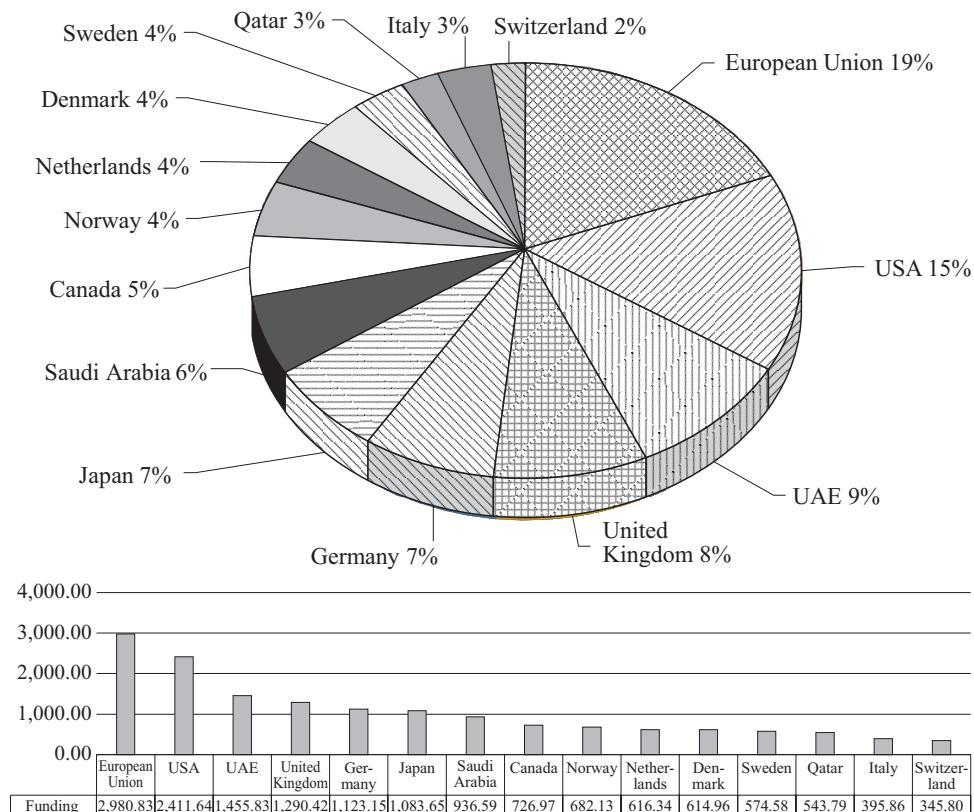


Source: Own calculations based on UN OCHA FTS data.

humanitarian funding. The United States ranked second among global donors only because of aid tranches released by the Biden administration in early 2025. The share of European state donors, including Germany, continued to decline. The United Kingdom, which overtook Germany among global donors, reduced its aid by one third, while Germany's contribution fell by more than half, placing it fifth worldwide as of 31 October 2025. Sweden also cut its aid by half, and France, with total assistance of US\$286 million, dropped out of the top 15 donors. At the same time, one of the so-called non-traditional donors – the United Arab Emirates – doubled its humanitarian contributions, becoming the third largest global donor. Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Qatar maintained their support at roughly the same levels as in 2024 (taking into account that 2025 data cover only the first ten months).

The reduction in aid from most major donors led to a sharp contraction of the global humanitarian budget. In 2022, the total budget amounted to US\$42.05 billion, but by

Chart 5 and Table 5. Share of the 15 largest donors in the global humanitarian budget and the value of their aid (in millions of USD) in 2025 (as of 31 October 2025)



Source: Own calculations based on UN OCHA FTS data.

2024 it had fallen by 20%, to US\$33.35 billion. In 2025, it declined by a further 44%, reaching only US\$18.62 billion. During this period, the number of people requiring life-saving humanitarian assistance did not decrease, remaining between 300 and 330 million. Humanitarian agencies estimated that US\$51.64 billion was needed to meet global needs in 2022, and US\$49.59 billion in 2024. The funds actually provided were insufficient to cover these needs: in 2024, only 50.5% of humanitarian requirements were met, and by 31 October 2025, just 23.4%.

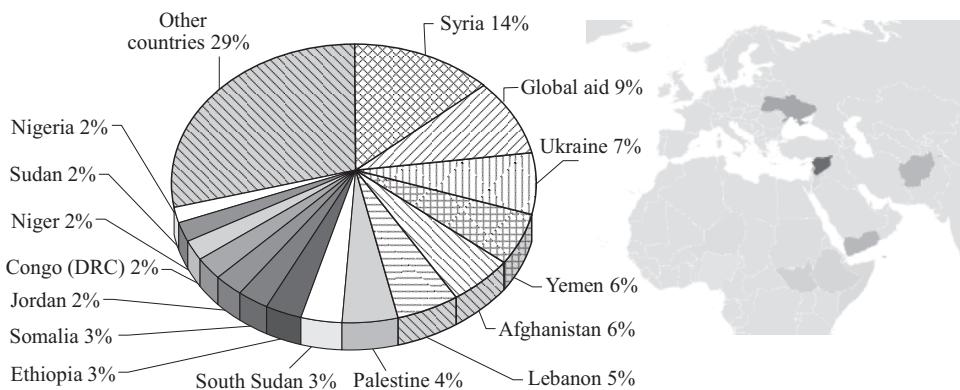
2. Allocation of German aid

2020–2024

Between 2020 and 2024, Germany provided humanitarian assistance to countries across all regions of the world. However, the vast majority of this aid was concentrated in regions neighbouring Europe, particularly in the broadly defined Middle East.

The largest recipients in this area were Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Palestine. Together, these countries accounted for 35% of Germany's total humanitarian aid budget during this period. Until 2023, victims of the Syrian conflict remained the primary focus of German assistance each year. In 2024, however, Ukraine became the main priority. Countries in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel also received significant support between 2020 and 2024, although not to the same extent as the Middle East or Ukraine, which began receiving large-scale German aid in 2022.

Chart 6, Map 1, and Table 6 illustrate the allocation of German humanitarian aid in 2020–2024 for recipients with a share exceeding 2% of the German humanitarian budget. (Values expressed in million USD; the map presents the cumulative aid total for 2020–2024)



Country/Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2020–2024	2022–2024
Syria	699.68	687.53	666.58	538.74	157.16	2,749.69	1,362.48
Global aid	564.51	46.00	436.51	403.52	347.60	1,798.14	1,187.63
Ukraine	57.61	27.45	464.59	439.91	487.32	1,476.88	1,391.83
Yemen	238.23	308.60	340.88	190.60	61.36	1,139.68	592.84
Afghanistan	29.06	391.55	447.42	134.38	107.57	1,109.97	689.37
Lebanon	385.98	297.17	202.79	99.10	70.15	1,055.19	372.04
Palestine	154.97	165.51	148.81	192.20	223.42	884.91	564.43
South Sudan	181.75	164.25	116.81	132.48	61.89	657.17	311.18
Ethiopia	94.35	123.96	217.57	97.27	51.57	584.73	366.41
Somalia	112.42	88.63	131.33	120.42	58.52	511.33	310.27
Jordan	181.50	113.39	108.59	65.37	24.66	493.51	198.62
Congo (DRC)	158.12	104.84	85.61	67.20	51.03	466.80	203.84
Niger	145.62	104.84	94.34	39.68	51.66	436.14	185.69
Sudan	33.68	74.25	75.86	128.51	101.48	413.78	305.85
Nigeria	88.52	88.61	110.52	39.68	16.02	343.34	166.22
Other countries	1,252.75	1,428.10	1,438.69	1,227.99	529.33	5,876.86	3,196.01
Total	4,378.74	4,214.67	5,086.92	3,917.04	2,400.75	19,998.12	11,404.71

Source: Own calculations based on UN OCHA FTS data.

After the outbreak of the full-scale war in Ukraine, Germany's humanitarian assistance to people remaining within this conflict zone increased significantly – by 1,700%. Despite this sharp rise, Ukraine did not become the top beneficiary of German aid in 2022 and 2023, as the Middle East continued to receive the largest share of support. In 2023, Ukraine received 11.23% of Germany's humanitarian budget, compared to 9.13% in 2022. During the same years, Syria remained the main recipient, with 14.2% of the German aid budget in 2023 and 13.2% in 2022. Both Syria and Ukraine received significantly more support than the next largest beneficiaries: in 2023, Yemen and Palestine received 4.9% and 4.6% of the total, respectively. In 2022, the situation was slightly different, as Afghanistan ranked just behind Ukraine, receiving 8.7% of German humanitarian aid.

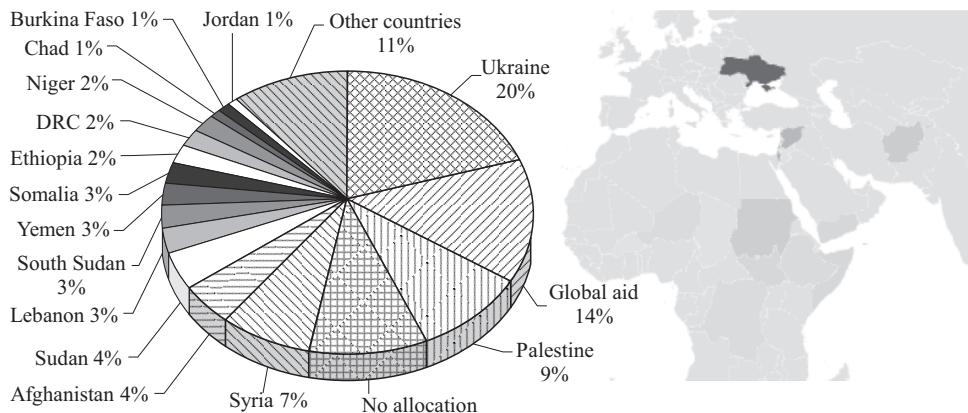
Support for Palestine followed a very different pattern from that of Ukraine. After the outbreak of war in the Gaza Strip, the amount of German aid to Palestine did not rise significantly. In 2024, Palestine ranked second among the crises supported by Germany, yet despite the much higher number of victims, it received less than half the aid allocated to Ukraine. Although German assistance to Palestine increased by 16% year-on-year, this growth was disproportionate to the sharp escalation of humanitarian needs that followed Israel's full-scale offensive.

2024 and 2025

In 2024, Germany allocated the vast majority of its humanitarian funds to countries neighbouring Europe, directing 89.9% of its total aid to the 15 largest recipients in this region. Ukraine received the largest share of German assistance, accounting for 20.4% of the total. Four countries in the Levant – Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan – collectively received another 20.4%. Afghanistan and Yemen were allocated 4.4% and 2.6%, respectively. The Horn of Africa (Somalia and Ethiopia) received 4.7%, the Sahel region (Sudan, South Sudan, Chad, Niger, and Burkina Faso) 11%, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo 2.1%. In 2025, Ukraine again remained the largest recipient, with 14.5% of German aid. The Levant countries together received 10.8%, with Palestine accounting for a quarter of that share – 2.13% of Germany's total humanitarian budget. Germany provided more assistance than to Palestine to South Sudan, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Chad, Somalia, and Burkina Faso.

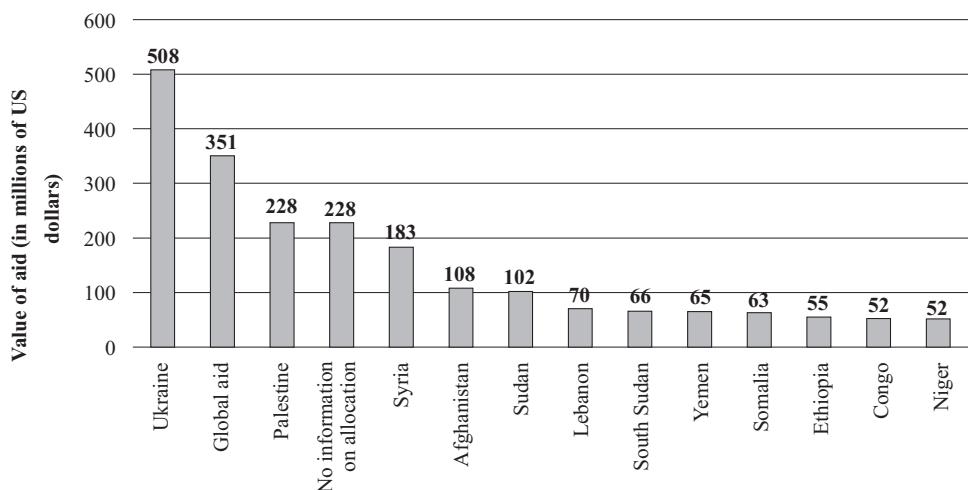
In 2024, only the victims of humanitarian crises in three countries – Ukraine, Palestine, and Niger – received more German aid than in previous years. For all other recipients, the volume of German assistance in 2024–2025 was significantly reduced. The most striking example was the record 70% cut in aid to Syria, which could not be justified by any improvement in the humanitarian situation on the ground. In 2024, support for countries outside the 15 largest recipients – each receiving no more than 2% of Germany's humanitarian budget individually – was reduced by a total of 57%. Germany also cut contributions to global aid mechanisms, including UN pre-financed funds such as the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and major humanitarian organisations providing assistance wherever needs were greatest, by 14%. This downward trend in German humanitarian funding continued into 2025.

Chart 7 and Map 2. Allocation of German humanitarian aid (15 largest recipients, above 1% of Germany's humanitarian budget, in millions of USD) in 2024



Source: Own study based on UN OCHA FTS.

Figure 8. Value of German aid to its 12 largest recipients (above 2% of Germany's humanitarian budget, in million USD)



Source: Own calculations based on UN OCHA FTS data.

In 2024, the geographic distribution of German aid closely mirrored the locations of armed conflicts most significant to German foreign policy – notably Ukraine and the Gaza Strip – as well as the countries of origin of the largest groups of migrants arriving in Europe in 2023. These included Syria, whose citizens submitted 153,000 asylum applications in the EU (of which 88% were approved in 2024), and Afghanistan, with 88,000 applications (57% approved) (Eurostat, 2024).

Countries identified by humanitarian organisations as the worst in the world for civilian humanitarian conditions – listed by the International Rescue Committee's 2024 “2025 Emergency Watchlist” as Sudan, Palestine, Myanmar, Syria, South Sudan, Leb-

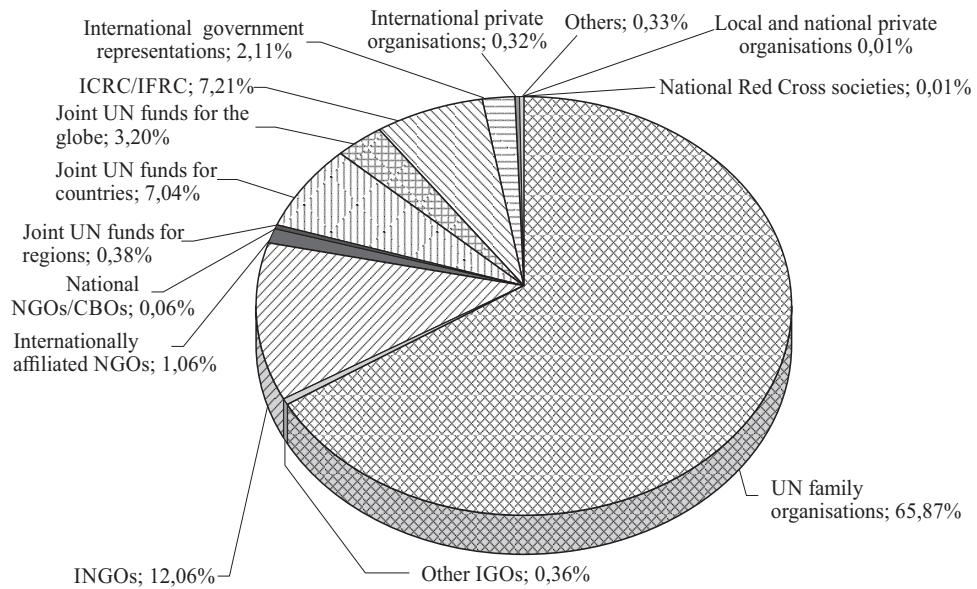
anon, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Mali, and Somalia – were all recipients of German government humanitarian aid. However, with the exception of Palestine and Syria, the vast majority of these countries received less support in 2024, both in nominal terms and relative to their humanitarian needs (International Rescue Committee, 2024).

3. Transfer of German aid

For years, successive German governments have maintained close partnerships with major global humanitarian organisations, not only by funding aid delivered through these entities to crisis areas, but also by supporting their core operational budgets. Germany is also actively engaged in the governance of intergovernmental organisations; for instance, in 2025, it serves as a member of the UNICEF Executive Board Bureau.

Between 2020 and 2024, German humanitarian assistance reached those in need in conflict zones and crisis areas primarily via organised international transfer channels. During this period, UN agencies and funds were Germany's largest partners, managing 66% of all German humanitarian aid disbursements.

Figure 9. Channels for the transfer of German aid in 2020–2024



Source: Own calculations based on UN OCHA FTS data.

Germany's contributions to its humanitarian partners – particularly international intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations – fell into two main categories. Some payments (varying by organisation and often made in tranches) were allocated to the organisation's core activities as part of its regular budget contributions. Others, also typically transferred in tranches, were earmarked for the implementation of specific programmes, usually targeting particular crisis areas, beneficiaries, or ob-

jectives defined by Germany. This structure effectively linked the pursuit of humanitarian goals with the realisation of German foreign policy priorities. On the same basis, Germany also contributed to pre-financed UN funds established to meet predictable humanitarian needs in crisis regions. However, Germany showed a clear preference for pooled UN funds dedicated to specific countries, rather than those with a regional or global scope.

In 2024, Germany channelled the majority of its humanitarian aid – USD 1,270 million – through UN organisations and funds. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) received USD 605 million, while USD 345 million was transferred to pre-financed UN funds set up to prepare for anticipated humanitarian needs. The Red Cross Movement received USD 242 million.

The largest share of German funds was distributed by three UN agencies: the World Food Programme (WFP) – USD 588 million, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – USD 188 million, and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) – USD 157 million. Other key partners that each handled over USD 100 million of German aid included the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) – USD 155 million, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) – USD 146 million, and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) – USD 109 million. Among German organisations, the German Red Cross (USD 78 million) and Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e.V. (USD 65 million) received the largest allocations for their humanitarian projects.

Germany's humanitarian priorities in 2024 focused primarily on food assistance, to which it allocated USD 647 million. Other major areas included health aid (USD 147 million), shelter provision for displaced populations (USD 122 million), and protection from violence (USD 116 million). Across all these sectors, Germany placed particular emphasis on supporting children. Additionally, Germany earmarked USD 91 million specifically for the protection of children in humanitarian crisis and armed conflict zones. A further USD 571 million was donated to humanitarian organisations without a designated sector, to be used where needs were deemed most urgent.

German federal aid donors

In 2024, the German government allocated the majority of its humanitarian aid directly to international humanitarian organisations operating in conflict regions. However, part of the funding was also channelled through German institutions that implement humanitarian projects on behalf of the government. The main donor remained the German government itself, which in 2024 managed overall humanitarian activities and transferred USD 2,400.75 million directly to the global humanitarian community. Additional affiliated entities included: the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), through which Germany channelled USD 62.34 million, the Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt), which allocated USD 0.35 million, and the KfW Development Bank, which provided USD 13.15 million in humanitarian funding.

This structure of aid distribution enables flexibility in Germany's humanitarian response, allowing for the rapid allocation of funds to regions of strategic importance

and to projects prioritised by the government. At the same time, it ensures visible German involvement in the areas where aid is delivered. This visibility is further strengthened by entrusting German humanitarian organisations with the direct distribution of assistance to end beneficiaries. Other major donors also employ similar multi-channel approaches, combining governmental and non-governmental mechanisms for aid delivery. Among the 15 largest donors in 2024, this model was used not only by Germany, but also by the United States, the European Union, France, Switzerland, Japan, Norway, and Kuwait.

GIZ's humanitarian activities in 2024 were concentrated primarily in Syria and Ukraine, which received 34.7% and 23.9% of its total funding, respectively. A substantial share was also directed to Palestine (7.2%), while smaller amounts were distributed among numerous countries across various regions. In practice, GIZ channelled nearly all of its funds (97.5%) through non-governmental organisations. The largest recipient was The HALO Trust, which received 21.2% of GIZ's total budget for mine clearance and explosive ordnance disposal operations in Ukraine. The second-largest partner was the Start Network, a consortium of British humanitarian organisations focused on innovating humanitarian aid delivery. It received USD 9.7 million, the largest single transfer from GIZ's budget, to support experimental projects involving advance funding for local communities, small organisations, and local leaders, aimed at decentralising the humanitarian response system. Interestingly, GIZ also transferred USD 0.31 million to the German Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtiges Amt) for ad hoc operations in several countries: Mongolia (USD 107,000), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (USD 96,000), Palestine (USD 74,000), Brazil (USD 31,000), and Jamaica (USD 3,000).

KfW Development's aid is primarily focused on the Horn of Africa (Somalia – 33% of aid and South Sudan – 22.5%) and Asia Minor (Yemen 26.8%). A small portion of the aid was also directed to Burkina Faso (9.1%) and Turkey (8.5%). The core of KfW's activities is food aid, which accounts for 64.6% of its funds. It was provided:

- through the International Labour Organisation and integrated into the creation of conditions for the sustainable return and reintegration of refugees in Somalia by financing labour-intensive infrastructure reconstruction works (USD 4.3 million);
- through the French Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development and integrated into a broader effort to reconstruct and strengthen production infrastructure in South Sudan (USD 2.96 million);
- through Save the Children for direct life-saving food assistance in Burkina Faso (USD 1.2 million).

The second pillar of KfW's humanitarian assistance focused on ensuring access to clean water (26.8%). Within this framework, USD 3.5 million was allocated to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to support water resource management projects in Yemen. These activities were complemented by “early recovery assistance” (9.1%), aimed at improving the working conditions of Syrian refugees in Turkey, for which USD 1.12 million was provided.

As part of the funds allocated directly to it by the federal government for humanitarian aid (excluding GIZ-managed funds), the Auswärtiges Amt provided ad hoc support to victims in two countries. In Bangladesh, the majority of funds (USD 0.27 million)

were channelled through UNICEF to improve access to water for Rohingya refugees and flood victims. In Mongolia, USD 0.08 million was transferred via World Vision International to provide livestock feed and related assistance.

Summary and conclusions

Humanitarian aid provided by Germany between 2016 and 2024, which placed the country second among the world's largest humanitarian donors, was neither uniform nor consistent throughout the period. The trend of German aid volume over the past decade formed a parabolic curve, reaching its peak in 2022. The value of German aid began to rise sharply in 2016, increasing 2.5 times compared to the previous year, following the 2015 migration crisis. Another significant surge occurred in 2020, when funds were directed toward global food and medical assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Germany achieved its historic peak in 2022, when aid to Ukraine was added to its existing commitments. That year, German humanitarian support far exceeded the combined aid provided by 11 other EU countries among the 25 largest global donors (Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, France, Belgium, Italy, Ireland, Finland, Spain, Luxembourg, and Austria). At the same time, it surpassed both British and European Commission (EC) aid, amounting to 360% of the UK's support (USD 1,402 million) and 170% of EC aid (USD 3,027 million).

From 2023 onwards, the volume of German humanitarian aid declined sharply. In 2024, Germany remained one of the world's leading donors, but lost its second place to the European Commission. Despite this, Germany's 2024 contribution was still four times greater than France's, ten times higher than Italy's, and more than 200 times larger than Poland's. In 2025, Germany's humanitarian aid was cut by more than half compared to 2024, placing the country fifth among global donors. Germany fell behind not only the EU, the United States, and the United Kingdom, but also the United Arab Emirates. Its aid volume was slightly higher than Japan's and Saudi Arabia's, yet it remained four times greater than France's, 100 times higher than Poland's, and only twice as large as Italy's.

The decline in the volume of German humanitarian aid can now be regarded as permanent, while the situation in 2020–2022 appears to have been exceptional. The above-average increase in aid funding during those years was driven by the response to the global food crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. Earlier, Germany had also expanded its humanitarian spending because assistance in crisis regions served as a tool to curb migration flows and maintain open internal borders within the Schengen area. In 2025, however, with the reintroduction of border controls in Germany, this additional motivation for providing aid lost its previous strategic importance.

As in previous years, and despite Germany's formally global humanitarian policy and the distribution of aid to various regions worldwide, the reduced German assistance remained largely concentrated near the EU's external borders. Its primary aim was to stabilise crisis zones whose instability – including potential migration waves – could directly affect Europe. In 2024, the geographical focus of German aid aligned

closely with the armed conflicts most relevant to German foreign policy – namely Ukraine and the Gaza Strip – as well as with the countries of origin of the largest groups of migrants arriving in Europe, particularly Syria and Afghanistan.

For decades, German humanitarian aid has been subordinated to the objectives of German foreign and security policy. Although it is formally guided by principles distinguishing it from other areas of foreign policy – including humanitarianism, impartiality, neutrality, and independence – in practice, Germany's humanitarian policy and operations, integrated into its development policy, remain a tool for advancing national interests on the international stage. Germany's substantial humanitarian engagement – which continues despite the recent decline in funding – enables the country to respond to crises, address humanitarian needs, and support civilian survival. At the same time, this assistance contributes to stabilising crisis regions, thereby reducing migration pressure towards Europe. Moreover, Germany leverages its humanitarian aid to foster a favourable international climate for its broader diplomatic and political activities, reinforcing its image as a responsible global actor. Humanitarian aid serves as tangible proof of Germany's credibility in assuming greater responsibility for global challenges, enhancing its international networks and commitment to multilateralism. Thus, beyond its strictly humanitarian function, Germany's aid practice supports the pursuit of broader strategic objectives – consistent with those of previous CDU/CSU and SPD governments, and now reaffirmed by Friedrich Merz – namely, the maintenance of multilateral and effective systems for managing global peace and security, the stabilisation of crisis regions, and the preservation of Germany's influence within them.

The reduction in humanitarian aid by Germany – and by most other European donors – since 2023 coincided, in early 2025, with the suspension of aid transfers by the United States, the world's largest donor, and the withdrawal of US funding from one of the key humanitarian institutions, the World Health Organization. The resulting shortage of funds for essential humanitarian supplies – including food, medicines, and water purification materials – is already worsening conditions in crisis zones, particularly in regions close to Europe's borders. In the near future, this is likely to lead to rising malnutrition and hunger, prompting more people to seek survival opportunities outside crisis areas, including within Europe. This scenario appears increasingly plausible given the steady growth in the number of people requiring life-sustaining assistance since the COVID-19 pandemic. As during the pandemic, a renewed escalation in global humanitarian needs could once again prompt Germany to increase its humanitarian spending in the coming years. The likelihood of such renewed engagement will grow in proportion to the extent of the internationalised impact of humanitarian crises occurring in Europe's immediate neighbourhood, affecting both Germany and the European Union. A further increase in German involvement is also probable in 2027–2028, when Germany – currently a candidate – may serve as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council.

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Summary

The article examines the humanitarian aid practices of the Federal Republic of Germany between 2016 and 2025. It analyses data from the UN OCHA Financial Tracking System (FTS) to identify changes in the volume, geographical allocation, and transfer channels of German aid. The German approach is contextualised through a comparison with the practices of other major global donors of humanitarian assistance.

The study concludes that German humanitarian aid has long been subordinated to the objectives of Germany's foreign and security policy. Although it is formally guided by principles that distinguish it from other areas of foreign policy – including humanitarianism, impartiality, neutrality, and independence – in practice, Germany's humanitarian policy and operations, integrated into its development policy, remain an instrument for advancing German interests on the international stage.

Key words: humanitarianism, Germany, humanitarian aid, foreign and security policy

Epokowa zmiana? Podejście Republiki Federalnej Niemiec do pomocy humanitarnej

Streszczenie

Artykuł traktuje o pomocy humanitarnej Republiki Federalnej Niemiec w latach 2016–2025. Autorka analizuje dane Biura ds. Koordynacji Pomocy Humanitarnej ONZ (UN OCHA) w celu zidentyfikowania zmian w wielkości, alokacji geograficznej i kanałach transferu niemieckiej pomocy. Niemieckie podejście zostało ujęte w kontekście działań innych głównych globalnych donatorów pomocy humanitarnej.

W badaniu stwierdzono, że pomoc humanitarna RFN jest podporządkowana realizacji celów niemieckiej polityki zagranicznej i bezpieczeństwa. Chociaż formalnie kieruje się ona zasadami, które odróżniają ją od innych obszarów polityki zagranicznej – w tym humanitarianem, bezstronnością, neutralnością i niezależnością – w praktyce polityka i działania humanitarne RFN, zintegrowane z polityką rozwojową, pozostają instrumentem realizacji niemieckich interesów na arenie międzynarodowej.

Slowa kluczowe: humanitarian, Niemcy, pomoc humanitarna, polityka zagraniczna i bezpieczeństwa

Author Contributions

Conceptualization (Konceptualizacja): Joanna Dobosz-Dobrowolska

Data curation (Zestawienie danych): Joanna Dobosz-Dobrowolska

Formal analysis (Analiza formalna): Joanna Dobosz-Dobrowolska

Writing – original draft (Piśmiennictwo – oryginalny projekt): Joanna Dobosz-Dobrowolska

Writing – review & editing (Piśmiennictwo – sprawdzenie i edytowanie): Joanna Dobosz-Dobrowolska

Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist
(Sprzeczne interesy: Autor oświadczył, że nie istnieją żadne sprzeczne interesy): Joanna Dobosz-Dobrowolska

