

## Public Opinion on International Solidarity in the Coronavirus Pandemic

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# PUBLIC OPINION ON INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY IN THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## Summary

Coping with the coronavirus pandemic requires international solidarity and cooperation – especially with developing countries. But to what extent does the general public support this commitment? Data from the COVID-19 Snapshot Monitoring (COSMO) from April to June 2020 reveals that the general public is in favour of greater commitment by Germany to combating the coronavirus situation. However, reservations regarding debt relief for developing countries as well as aid for the economy and refugees in those countries exist. The data do not indicate that the concerns triggered by the pandemic have reduced support for development cooperation.

## International solidarity during the coronavirus pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic poses a major challenge for all countries. However, as a result of less well-performing health systems and poorer hygiene standards as well as generally worse living conditions, developing countries are particularly threatened by the pandemic, even though their younger populations mean they have fewer people in the high-risk group. Added to this are economic impacts of the pandemic that hit developing countries especially hard, as a greater proportion of the population works in the informal sector or relies on daily earnings.

Like other bilateral donors and multilateral organisations, Germany has promised to provide prompt medical and financial support to developing countries. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has launched an Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme of more than one billion euros (BMZ, 2020) in order, for example, to strengthen health care systems and ensure sufficient nutrition. The Federal

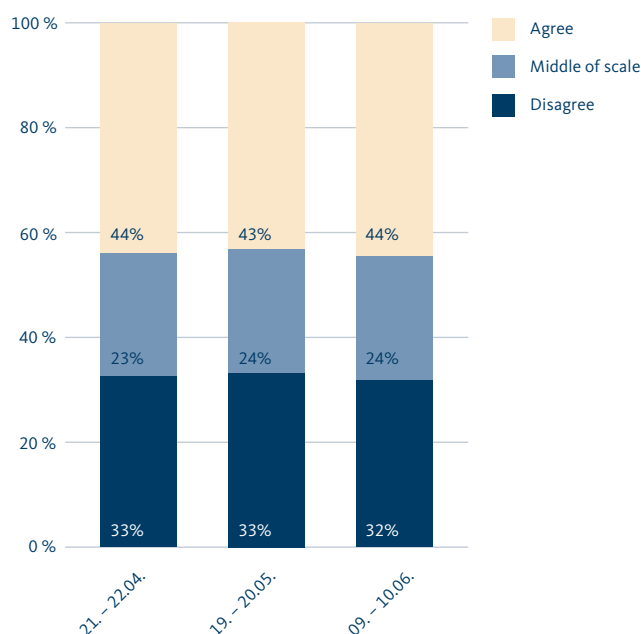
Foreign Office has pledged an additional 300 million euros for humanitarian aid (Federal Foreign Office, 2020).

This policy brief addresses the question to what extent the general public supports these measures for combating the coronavirus pandemic and the associated consequences. In view of the fact that Germany's citizens are also affected by the consequences of the pandemic, it is possible that support for international solidarity may decline. Conversely, a pandemic that does not stop at country borders and could potentially affect all humans may facilitate global solidarity. This gives rise to two key questions:

1. Does the general public support development policy measures in the context of the pandemic?
2. Could concerns triggered by the pandemic threaten public support?

### COVID-19 Snapshot Monitoring (COSMO)

The COSMO survey is conducted at regular intervals during the course of the pandemic. It includes around 1,000 people in each wave, who are surveyed online. The samples are representative of the German population in age, gender and regional terms. The participants are asked questions about their current living situation and psychological state and about how they are dealing with the pandemic. The survey is conducted by the University of Erfurt together with the Robert Koch Institute, the Federal Centre for Health Education and other actors. D Eval is the cooperation partner for the topic of international development and contributed questions regarding international solidarity and development policy to the surveys conducted on 21/22 April, 19/20 May and 9/10 June 2020.

**Figure 1. Public opinion on development policy measures during the coronavirus pandemic****DC support overall**

Source: COSMO survey; own visualisation.

Note: The right-hand figure refers to the survey of 19–20 May 2020. All the questions presented could be answered on a scale from 1 “Do not agree at all” to 7 “Completely agree”. For better visualisation, the results of answer categories 1 to 3 have been summarised as “Disagree” and those of categories 5 to 7 as “Agree”. Answer category 4 corresponds to the middle of the scale.

### Support for development policy measures, reservations regarding aid for refugees, economic assistance and debt relief

The general public’s support for increased development cooperation (DC) during the coronavirus pandemic remains at a consistently high level. In each of the surveys, around 44 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement “Germany should support developing countries with more money and know-how to help them cope with the corona situation and its consequences” (see Figure 1, left).

With regard to specific measures, such as those contained in the BMZ Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme, roughly half of respondents supported commitment in the areas of food security, multilateral cooperation and health (see Figure 1, right). The respondents were more sceptical towards measures that aim to support the economy or refugees in developing countries. The policy that the least number of respondents supported relates to

**Support for specific DC measures**

Germany should provide more support to developing countries to secure the basic food supply in these countries.

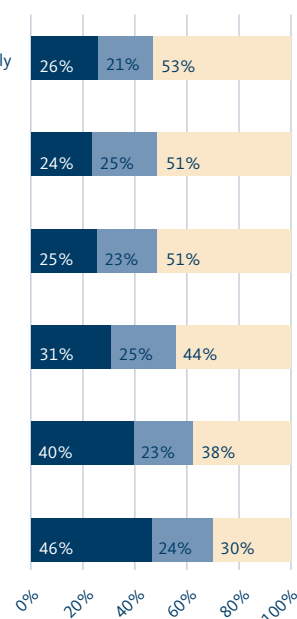
Germany should cooperate more closely with international organisations – such as the World Health Organisation and the EU.

Germany should provide more support to developing countries to improve their health care systems.

Germany should provide more support to developing countries to stabilise the economy and safeguard jobs.

Germany should do more in the corona situation to stabilise the living situation of Syrian refugees within Syria and its neighbouring countries.

Germany should waive debt repayment for the poorest countries due to the corona situation.

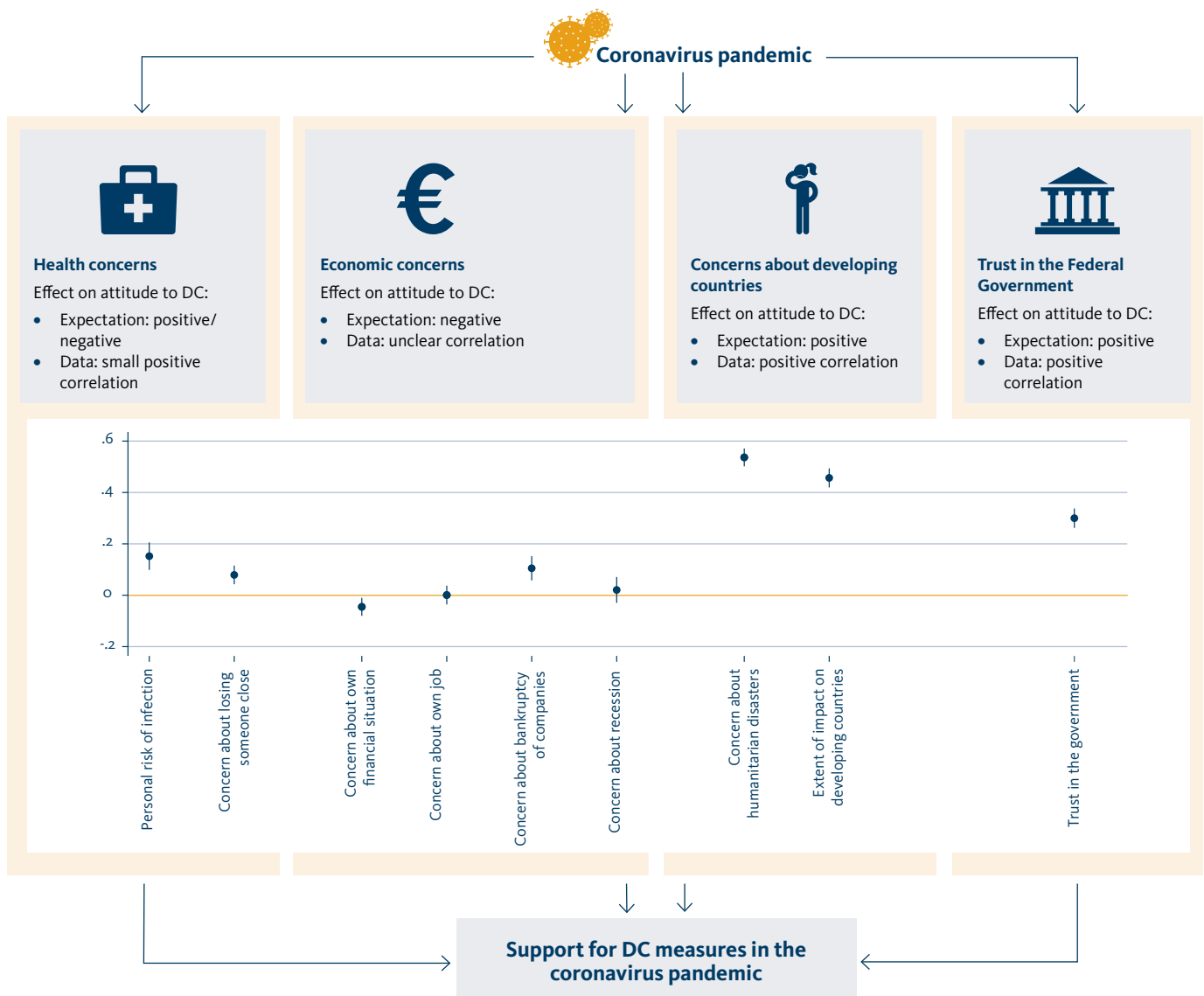


debt relief for developing countries. Only 30 percent agreed with this.

### Perception of the pandemic and support for international solidarity

The coronavirus pandemic has health-related, economic, social and psychological impacts on people everywhere. Particularly in the case of economic or health-related worries, a reasonable hypothesis is that the general public weighs up the use of medical and financial resources in Germany against international commitments. On the other hand, it is possible that the pandemic may increase awareness of the situation in developing countries and empathy with the people living there. Trust in the government is also being put to the test by the pandemic and is simultaneously a factor that may facilitate support for global solidarity. Figure 2 outlines how the pandemic is influencing citizens and what impact it could have on attitudes towards DC.

**Figure 2. Perception of the pandemic and support for global solidarity**



Source: COSMO survey; own visualisation.

Note: In the lower part of the figure, regression coefficients from a joint analysis of all three COSMO waves are shown. The coefficients show how the surveyed factors correspond to support for increased DC measures in the coronavirus pandemic (scale from 1–7; higher values indicate greater approval). The analysis also takes into account various sociodemographic features and differences between the COSMO waves. As long as the vertical confidence intervals (95 percent) do not cross the horizontal zero line, a statistically significant correlation can be assumed. Positive (negative) coefficients mean that if the independent variable is increased, the support will increase (decline) on average. Coefficients close to the zero line with confidence intervals that cross the line do not indicate any significant effect. This means it is not possible to identify any correlation of the variables. Detailed information on the analyses is available on request.

1. The data show that the indicators for health concerns correlate slightly positively with support for DC. The greater the concern for the health of family and friends or one's own health, the greater the approval of increased DC measures.
2. For economic concerns, the picture is more complicated. Respondents' concerns about their own financial situation have a very small negative effect, while concerns about German companies going bankrupt show a slightly positive effect. No significant correlations can be identified for concerns about jobs or an economic recession.
3. Concerns about humanitarian disasters in developing countries and the perception of such countries as particularly badly affected by the pandemic have a strong positive correlation with support for DC. The greater the concern or the perception of the countries as particularly badly affected, the higher the approval of stronger measures to help developing countries.

4. Finally, the support for DC correlates relatively strongly with the trust in the Federal Government. The more trust a person has in the government, the stronger their support for DC measures during the pandemic.

### Implications for development policy actors

The COSMO data send an ambivalent signal to development policy actors in Germany. On the one hand, the general public is in favour of a stronger development policy commitment during the coronavirus pandemic. On the other hand, there are reservations when it comes to debt relief for developing countries as well as support for the economy and refugees in those countries.

The connection between the concerns triggered by the pandemic and the attitude towards DC currently do not indicate that the pandemic is undermining public support for DC or that people see a trade-off between measures in Germany and support for developing countries. On the contrary, when looking at health

concerns, there are indications that the pandemic could facilitate greater international solidarity.

Trust in Germany's own government and the concern that developing countries could be particularly badly affected by the coronavirus correlate positively with the support for increased DC during the pandemic. There are potential risks here – especially if the trust in the government and its decisions declines during the course of the pandemic.

For governmental and civil-society DC actors at the current time, this implies that it is important to continue transparently communicating what the situation is like in developing countries and what measures they believe to be helpful. This communication should take place in a way that strengthens trust in these actors by providing matter-of-fact answers that match the challenge at hand. Some measures – particularly debt relief – are not only disputed among the scientific community and challenging to effectively implement through development policy, but clearly also more difficult to explain to the general public.

### Literature

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