

COVID-19: The general public's attitudes towards development policy measures and vaccine distribution; results of a survey on international solidarity during the coronavirus pandemic

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Kurzbericht / abridged report

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Eger, J., Schneider, S. H., Sassenhagen, N., & Bruder, M. (2022). *COVID-19: The general public's attitudes towards development policy measures and vaccine distribution; results of a survey on international solidarity during the coronavirus pandemic*. (DEval Policy Brief, 2/2022). Bonn: Deutsches Evaluierungsinstitut der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (DEval). <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-79708-5>

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COVID-19: THE GENERAL PUBLIC'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEVELOPMENT POLICY MEASURES AND VACCINE DISTRIBUTION

Results of a survey on international solidarity during the coronavirus pandemic

Key findings

The results of a representative survey among 1,000 individuals in Germany conducted in November 2021 reveal the following:

- 1) The level of support among the German population for development policy measures to tackle the coronavirus pandemic in the Global South remains high. This is particularly true of health care and food security measures. In contrast, those surveyed were more sceptical towards granting debt relief or providing economic aid.
- 2) The population supports donating an increased number of vaccine doses to countries of the Global South.
- 3) With regard to suspending the patent protection for COVID-19 vaccines, public opinion is divided.

Despite the acute coronavirus situation in Germany, the high level of public support for measures to tackle the pandemic in the Global South provides a solid basis for development cooperation.

COVID-19 in the Global South as a development policy challenge

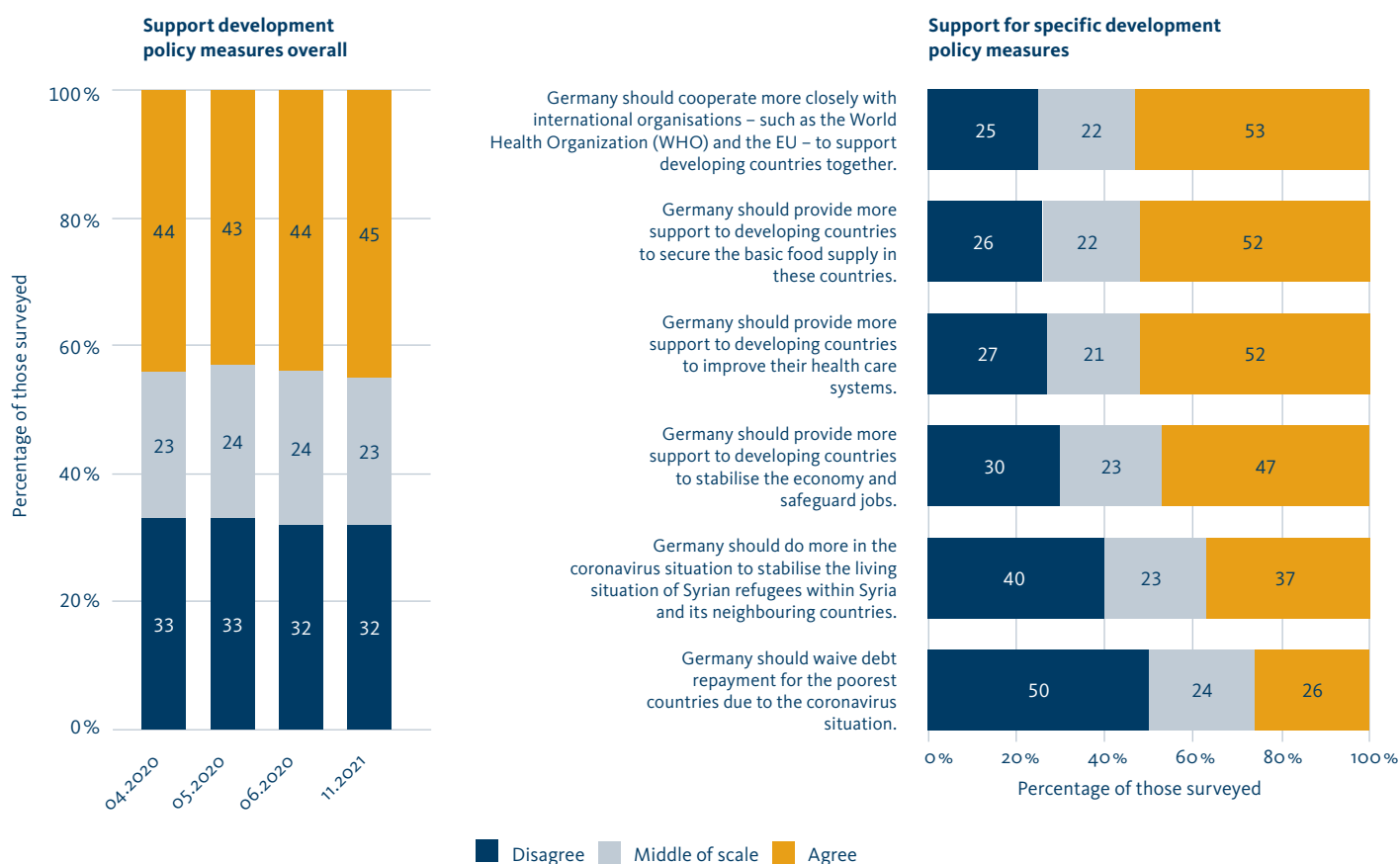
Many countries of the Global South need support in handling the coronavirus pandemic – in terms of procuring vaccines and buffering the negative economic and social consequences of the pandemic. Whereas vaccination rates are high in most countries of the Global North, vaccination campaigns in the Global South are often still in their infancy (John Hopkins University, 2021).

Development policy actors therefore support donating vaccine doses – such as within the COVAX initiative instigated by the World Health Organization (WHO) – and are discussing the possibility of suspending the patent protection for COVID-19 vaccines. The assumption is that suspending patent protection would enable countries of the Global South to produce vaccines themselves. As a result, they would be able to vaccinate their population at lower cost and most likely achieve higher vaccination rates. However, this would lead to financial losses for pharma companies developing and producing vaccinations.

At the same time, the number of coronavirus infections in Germany (as at: February 2022) is currently increasing again rapidly and reaching new peak values. This shows that even a vaccination rate of around 70 percent does not provide sufficient protection against further serious outbreaks of the coronavirus. Booster vaccinations, vaccines for children and vaccinations for people who have not yet been vaccinated are needed in order to protect the population in Germany against the virus.

This leads to the question as to whether citizens endorse development policy measures supporting countries of the Global South – for example through financial support – and donating vaccines or suspending patent protection.

A representative online survey was therefore conducted in November 2021, asking 1,000 individuals about their perception of the pandemic and their opinion of development policy engagement to tackle the pandemic.

Figure 1 Support for development policy measures to tackle the coronavirus pandemic

Source: own visualisation. Data: DEval survey conducted by the market research institute Respondi (Nov. 2021, $N \approx 1,000$) and COVID-19 Snapshot Monitoring surveys (COSMO; 04.2020-06.2020; N in each case $\approx 1,000$; see Schneider et al. 2020). The right-hand figure refers to the survey in November 2021. All the statements presented could be answered on a scale from 1 “Do not agree at all” to 7 “Completely agree”. For better visualisation, answer categories 1 to 3 have been summarised as “Disagree” and those of categories 5 to 7 as “Agree”. Category 4 corresponds to the middle of the scale.

The population supports development policy measures to tackle the pandemic

Figure 1 (diagram on the left) shows that around 45 percent of citizens support development policy engagement to deal with the coronavirus situation. In contrast, 30 percent do not (rather) support development policy measures for this purpose. The level of agreement is thus largely unchanged compared to that in the spring and summer of 2020 (Schneider et al., 2020).

Measures that aim to improve the health systems in countries of the Global South and secure the basic food supply continue to have the greatest support (from around half of those surveyed; see Figure 1, diagram on the right). A similar proportion of survey participants also endorses increased cooperation with

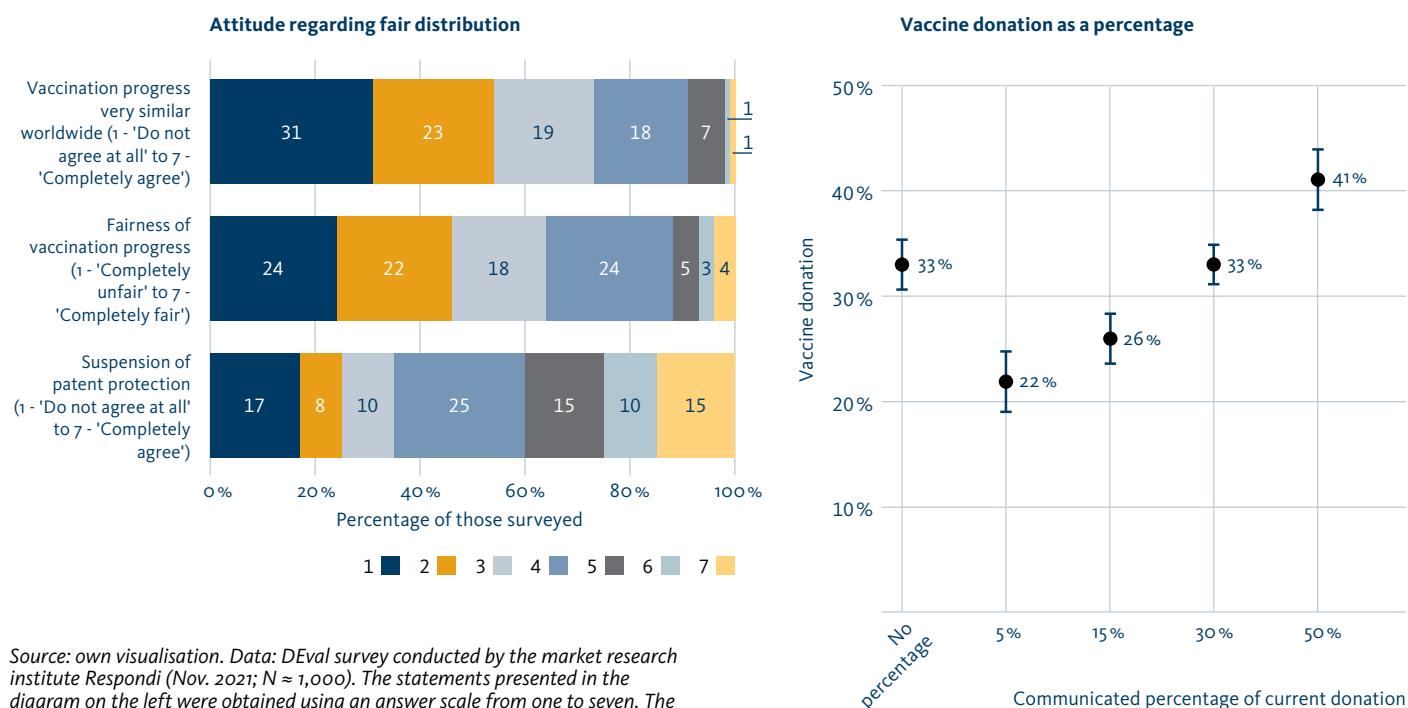
international organisations such as the WHO and the European Union (EU) to deal with the pandemic.

The population is sceptical towards granting debt relief. Only around 26 percent of respondents approve of debt relief for the poorest countries due to the coronavirus situation. These results remain largely unchanged compared to previous surveys.

Vaccine distribution is perceived as unequal and unfair, donating vaccines is supported

The population perceives the global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines as unequal. Only 9 percent of those surveyed agree with this statement: “The progress with vaccination – in other words, the percentage of people who have been vaccinated – is very similar worldwide” (Figure 2, diagram on the left).

Figure 2 Perceptions and attitudes regarding the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines



Source: own visualisation. Data: DVal survey conducted by the market research institute ResponDi (Nov. 2021; N ≈ 1,000). The statements presented in the diagram on the left were obtained using an answer scale from one to seven. The precise formulations are available on request.

Further, the respondents particularly overestimate the progress with vaccination in the Global South. On average, they assume that the vaccination rate there is 29 percent. They estimate the progress worldwide at 48 percent and in the EU at 62 percent. The actual vaccination rates according to official statistics in November 2021 were two percent in low-income countries, 23 percent in lower-middle-income countries, 41 percent worldwide and 66 percent in the EU.¹

When survey participants are confronted with the current vaccination rates in Germany and in the Global South, they perceive the distribution as unfair. Only 12 percent state that they consider the distribution to be (rather) fair (Figure 2, diagram on the left).

The population is divided over the question as to whether patent protection for the vaccines should be suspended. Whereas 40 percent state that the patent protection should be suspended, 35 percent are against this. Citizens have a substantially more positive stance towards donating vaccine doses. On average,

they state that Germany should donate around 32 percent of its vaccines to countries of the Global South. This is a great deal more than the estimated proportion of 14 percent that has already been donated.²

A particularly interesting finding is that this value increases if respondents are told that the Federal Government has donated a higher quantity of vaccines. In an experiment, four groups were informed respectively that Germany donates 5, 15, 30 or 50 percent of its own vaccines; a control group received no information about the quantity that was donated. Figure 2 (diagram on the right) shows the average percentage of vaccines that each group advocates donating. When respondents received no information about the vaccines donated by the Federal Government (control group), they believed that the Federal Government should donate 33 percent of its vaccines. When the quantity of vaccines that Germany supposedly donates was communicated, the answers are oriented towards this figure and deviate from the result of the control group. When survey participants were informed that 5 percent of German vaccines

¹ Source: Our World in Data. Share of the population fully vaccinated against COVID-19, Nov 13, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations> (accessed on 26 November 2021). The figures specified are based on fully vaccinated individuals.
² Calculation: so far, around 110 million vaccine doses have been administered in Germany (<https://impfdashboard.de/>). Approximately 17.6 million vaccine doses have been provided to countries of the Global South, either bilaterally or through the COVAX initiative (<https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/corona-vakzine-deutschland-spenden-100.html>, accessed on 26 November 2021).

were donated, they advocated donating an average of 22 percent. In the group that was told that the donation was 50 percent of vaccines, the average was 41 percent.

The phenomenon of people greatly basing their decisions on available comparative information is referred to as the anchoring effect in psychology (Furnham and Boo, 2011).

Public support as a sound foundation for development policy coronavirus measures

The results of the survey show that, despite a clear exacerbation of the pandemic situation in Germany in early 2022, the population continues to support measures to tackle the pandemic in the

Global South. This also includes donating vaccines to a greater extent than has been done up to now. When the development policy decision to give a certain percentage of our own vaccines to countries of the Global South is communicated, this has a strong anchoring effect on those surveyed. This may be an indication that citizens believe development policy decision-makers to have the necessary expertise to assess the present situation appropriately and that they then base their own estimation on the assessment of the politicians. The extent to which these findings will also remain stable in the event of further exacerbation of the pandemic situation is unclear. However, the present data in no way shows the pandemic situation in Germany to have any strong negative or positive effects on the population's development policy attitudes.

Literature

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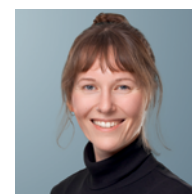
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