

## Intergovernmental Partnerships in Climate Change Mitigation: Toward a Strategic Orientation

Bosch, Tim; Fahimi, Abdullah; Vinke, Kira

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# DGAP POLICY BRIEF

## Intergovernmental Partnerships in Climate Change Mitigation

### Toward a Strategic Orientation



**Tim Bosch**  
Project Manager,  
Center for Climate  
and Foreign Policy



**Dr. Abdullah Fahimi**  
Research Fellow,  
Center for Climate  
and Foreign Policy



**Dr. Kira Vinke**  
Head of the Center  
for Climate  
and Foreign Policy

Over the past 15 years, Germany has developed a range of intergovernmental partnerships with the aim to implement and accelerate climate action beyond its borders. The current government has expanded an already diverse portfolio of partnerships. Since these partnerships are developed and managed by different ministries and cover specific aspects of climate action, the question emerges what these partnerships aim to achieve (geo-)strategically and how to strengthen them given rising global emissions and budgetary constraints.

- Germany relies on strong partnerships for the implementation of its climate foreign policy.
- Based on a review of government documents – including the new Climate Foreign Policy Strategy – and official government communication, we identify four strategic priorities of Germany’s foreign policy in climate change mitigation: accelerated, concerted decarbonization; security of energy supplies; market access and economic opportunities; just sustainability transitions
- The German government should use its longstanding experience to position more holistic thinking of Earth system stability into different policy fields. The sustainability considerations in the National Security Strategy and cross-cutting references in the Climate Foreign Policy Strategy provide a relevant framework to explore co-benefits for e.g. emissions mitigation, biodiversity protection and human health.
- Germany should integrate labor migration policy into its partnerships for the European Green Deal implementation. Providing vocational training and supporting higher education in the sustainability sector together with focused labor migration could benefit both partners.

## THE ROLE OF PARTNERSHIPS FOR GREEN TRANSFORMATION

In recent years there has been a proliferation of partnership and cooperation initiatives in the international governance of energy and climate action. The rise of partnership arrangements is partly spurred by the urgency to move from ambition to action in climate protection. The 2015 Paris Agreement foresees an expanded role for partnership arrangements, including the participation of subnational and non-state actors in addition to the state-driven multilateral process of global emissions mitigation.<sup>1</sup> The post-2015 international architecture thus marks a shift toward more polycentric climate governance.<sup>2</sup> The partnerships target various economic systems, technologies, and sectors. While some initiatives focus on specific technical cooperation around decarbonization, as in industry, others are more broadly conceptualized to tackle climate or green economic development.

Partnerships also increasingly span actor groups beyond nation states. The so-called multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs)<sup>3</sup> include:

- Intergovernmental partnerships
- Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)
- Partnerships between states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or sub-national actors
- Non-governmental initiatives (which may or may not be initiated with the help and funding of governments)

Partnership initiatives are a central component and agreed means of implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and an important element to

achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).<sup>4</sup> With SDG 17, “partnerships for the goals” are themselves elevated to the rank of an SDG.<sup>5</sup>

Climate action is directly relevant to the fulfillment of several SDGs, including SDG 7: affordable and clean energy, SDG 12: responsible consumption and production, and SDG 13: climate action. As such, climate action and energy transition have transformative potential for the broader SDG agenda. Because there are trade-offs and synergies between the various SDGs and their specific targets, transformative approaches “seek to exploit synergies between goals to achieve multiple SDGs by organizing implementation around SDG interventions that generate significant co-benefits.”<sup>6</sup> The German government considers partnerships central to deliver on ambitious targets and find equitable, tailored solutions to scale up climate action.<sup>7</sup> These include, for instance, the ‘Just Energy Transition Partnerships’ (JETPs), the ‘Climate and Energy Partnerships’, or the bilateral ‘Climate and Development Partnerships’ (P+).<sup>8</sup>

## MOBILIZING CLIMATE AND ENERGY PARTNERSHIPS TO PURSUE STRATEGIC GOALS

While the multilateral UNFCCC process remains a central pillar of Germany’s climate policy, the National Security Strategy recognizes that “(i)t must be accompanied by more flexible forums and instruments.”<sup>9</sup> Significant gaps remain for implementation of the Paris Agreement, despite some progress noted in the First Global Stocktake.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, by definition, commitments made in

1 Sander Chan et al., “Climate Ambition and Sustainable Development for a New Decade: A Catalytic Framework,” *Global Policy* 12, no. 3 (2021), p. 247: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12932>.

2 Andrew J. Jordan et al., “Emergence of polycentric climate governance and its future prospects,” *Nature Climate Change* 6 (2015), pp. 977–982: <https://doi.org/10.1038/nclimate2725> (last accessed December 14, 2023); Thomas Hale, “All Hands on Deck: The Paris Agreement and Nonstate Climate Action,” *Global Environmental Politics* 16, no. 3 (2016): pp. 12–22: [https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP\\_a\\_00362](https://doi.org/10.1162/GLEP_a_00362) (last accessed December 14, 2023).

3 Angela Bester and Leon Hermans, “Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships: Implications for Evaluation Practice, Methods and Capacities,” in *People, Planet and Progress in the SDG Era. Proceedings from the National Evaluation Capacities Conference 2017* (New York 2018), pp. 267–275, p.268: [https://nec.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NEC2017\\_1.pdf](https://nec.undp.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/NEC2017_1.pdf) (last accessed December 14, 2023).

4 David Horan, “A New Approach to Partnerships for SDG Transformations,” *Sustainability* 11, no. 18 (January 2019): p. 4947: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11184947> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

5 The 2018 UN General Assembly Resolution “Towards global partnerships” defines partnerships as “voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and, as mutually agreed, to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits.”

6 David Horan, “A New Approach to Partnerships for SDG Transformations,” *Sustainability* 11, no. 18 (January 2019): p. 4947: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11184947> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

7 The Federal Government, “Robust. Resilient. Sustainable. Integrated Security for Germany. National Security Strategy,” 2023, p.64: <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/National-Security-Strategy-EN.pdf> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

8 For a comprehensive study of Germany’s energy, climate, development, and raw material partnerships, and their role for German foreign policy and the global transformation agenda, see Raffaele Piria and Leon Martini, “Developing Germany’s Partnerships for Transformation,” Report, Ecologic Institute, Berlin (September 2023), p.4: <https://www.ecologic.eu/19406> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

9 The Federal Government, “Robust. Resilient. Sustainable. Integrated Security for Germany. National Security Strategy,” 2023, p.64: <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/National-Security-Strategy-EN.pdf> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

10 UNFCCC, “First global stocktake,” Doc. No. FCCC/PA/CMA/2023/L.17, December 13, 2023: [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023\\_L17\\_adv.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023_L17_adv.pdf) (last accessed December 19, 2023).

the international climate negotiations must be followed through with concrete action. Global emissions reached an all-time high in 2023.<sup>11</sup> However, according to the IPCC, they would need to peak around the mid-2020s and then rapidly decline in order to keep the 1.5°C goal in reach for the second half of the century, with a considerable overshoot.<sup>12</sup> Since limiting global warming to well below 2°C is a German security interest, scaling up climate action by forging partnerships is imperative.

At the same time, energy and climate partnerships are not “just” a technical tool to implement the Agenda 2030 and meet climate targets. Rather, partnerships are a relational construct where resources, risks, responsibilities, and benefits are shared.<sup>13</sup> In other words, *how* the partnership is shaped and implemented is not clear from the start, but rather is a result of political discussions, converging or diverging values, and interests. This paper builds on the conception of partnerships as inherently political phenomena, that is, relational constructs where parties’ interests are dynamically negotiated. In this context, partnerships are an instrument or means to achieve overarching strategic goals, rather than an end in themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Strategic priorities and concrete partnership initiatives are thus dynamically related. On the one hand, strategic priorities – which are set at the highest political level and often formalized through strategy documents – provide the overarching framework and set broad goals for the implementation of concrete policy measures and instruments.

On the other hand, it is through the concrete implementation of instruments like climate and energy partnerships that strategies come to fruition and are

“tested.” In other words, partnerships are one of the means to meet the broader strategic ends of foreign policy. Experiences from specific partnerships may inform future policy and highlight necessary adjustments. If the current partnership portfolio does not deliver the desired outcome, it may need to be adapted or amended. Successes and setbacks of initiatives may lead to the readjustment of broader foreign policy strategy, creating a feedback loop (see Figure 1).<sup>15</sup>

As an actor that traditionally emphasizes international coordination and multilateralism as virtues of its foreign policy, Germany’s actions are embedded in value-based European approaches, the Green Deal, and a multilateral approach to the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement.<sup>16</sup> However, considering the green transition’s ramification for geopolitics, national security, and global distributional justice, Germany has a distinct interest in *how* the emissions-mitigation agenda should be pursued. We identify a set of strategic priorities around emissions mitigation that may guide Germany in the implementation of its climate and energy partnerships.

Such a strategic approach is beneficial for several reasons:

First and foremost, the identification of strategic priorities can help Germany obtain the green transition it wants. While there is international agreement on the need for an accelerated global transition, there is debate and divergence about the means to achieve it. Considering its role as a self-declared leader on international climate action, a clear articulation of strategic priorities helps to navigate this difficult terrain.

11 Pierre Friedlingstein et al., “Global Carbon Budget 2023,” *Earth System Science Data* 15, pp. 5301-5369: <https://doi.org/10.5194/essd-15-5301-2023> (last accessed December 14, 2023)

12 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: “Summary for Policymakers,” in: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Eds. Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 2023) pp. 1-34, Para. B.6.1: [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_SPM.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf) (last accessed December 14, 2023)

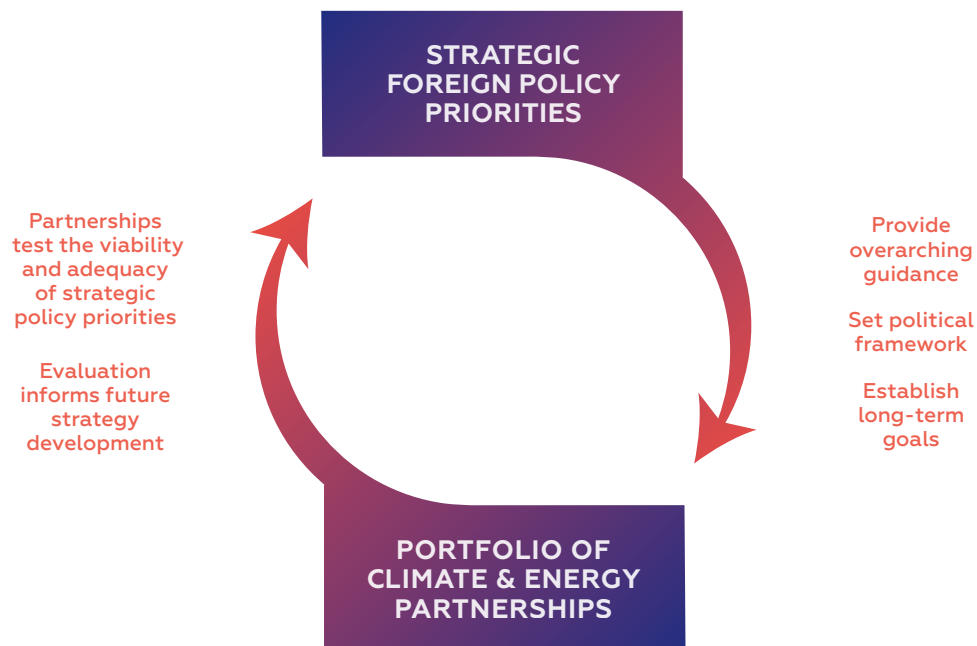
13 UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/73/254 defines partnerships as “voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and, as mutually agreed, to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits”. United Nations General Assembly, “Towards global partnerships: a principle-based approach to enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners,” adopted December 20, 2018, A/RES/73/254: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1661126> (last accessed December 15, 2023).

14 This is illustrated in the German government’s priorities for its 2022 G7 presidency, according to which: “Partnerships above and beyond the G7 are intended to promote the transfer of knowledge and technology, support climate policy reform and to accelerate the just global transition towards sustainable and climate-neutral societies.” The Federal Government, “Policy Priorities for Germany’s G7 Presidency in 2022,” January 2022, p.3: <https://www.g7germany.de/resource/blob/998352/2000328/197be81a1581e488d29450128aa4065f/2022-01-21-g7-programm-en-data.pdf?download=1> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

15 It is promising that the German Climate Foreign Policy Strategy sets out an evaluation of Germany’s partnership portfolio in the field of climate and energy in 2024. See Die Bundesregierung, „Klimaaußenpolitik-Strategie der Bundesregierung,“ December 2023, p. 71: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2633110/a64259603803cb057a6bf6ed99e86419/kap-strategie-data.pdf> (last accessed December 11, 2023).

16 See section on foreign affairs and multilateralism in the government’s coalition agreement: “Dare more progress. Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability,” English translation of the German Federal Government Coalition Agreement for 2021-2025, available via the Italian section of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, pp. 134-135: [https://italia.fes.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/German\\_Coalition\\_Treaty\\_2021-2025.pdf](https://italia.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/German_Coalition_Treaty_2021-2025.pdf) (last accessed November 22, 2023).

**Figure 1 – A feedback loop between strategic foreign policy priorities and partnership initiatives**



Source: Authors' own illustration

Second, strategic goals in climate and energy partnerships inform the broader strategic re-orientation of German foreign policy. Facing multiple geopolitical crises and confronted with the reshuffling of the global order, Germany is under pressure to recalibrate its alliances, strategic interests, and goals. The discourse about the *Zeitenwende*, a “sea change” or “watershed” in German foreign and security policy initiated by the repercussions of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, reflects the need to employ a more strategic foreign policy, in which interests and values are clearly articulated.<sup>17</sup> In that sense, this paper contributes to an ongoing debate about Germany’s strategic positioning in a changing geopolitical context in a climate-crisis-induced “new era of risk.”<sup>18</sup>

Third, the identification of interests and values may provide a clear compass when engaging with countries that may diverge from the German position on certain values and/or interests. For instance, the German government has long sought to cooperate with China on climate mitigation, even though it is perceived as a strategic competitor or even a systemic rival in other policy areas. The German China Strategy understands climate diplomacy as an area for cooperation, but also identifies clear risks in the two countries’ relationship.<sup>19</sup>

Another case in point is petro-economies, with which Germany may disagree on the fossil fuel agenda but cooperate on issues such as renewable energy. Substantiating climate partnerships with

17 The term “Zeitenwende” was used by Chancellor Scholz in his parliament speech following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The Federal Government, “Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin,” February 22, 2022: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378> (accessed December 20, 2023)

18 José Francisco Alvarado Cobar et al., “Environment of Peace: Security in a New Era of Risk,” SIPRI Report, May 2022: <https://doi.org/10.55163/LCLS7037> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

19 Federal Foreign Office, “Strategy on China of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany,” July 2023: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2608580/49d50fecc479304c3da2e2079c55e106/china-strategie-en-data.pdf> (last accessed November 22, 2023).

underlying strategic interests and values is gaining importance in a geopolitically charged environment.

## IDENTIFYING STRATEGIC CORE PRIORITIES IN INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE MITIGATION

Building on these observations, we identify what we refer to as the “strategic priorities” for Germany’s bilateral and plurilateral partnerships in the field of climate mitigation.

First, our aim is not to provide a comprehensive overview or analysis of every partnership initiative that the German government pursues. Over the past 15 years, the partnerships portfolio has expanded considerably.<sup>20</sup> Rather, our analysis builds on an assessment of broader, overarching foreign policy doctrine and action. We review the declared ambitions and goals as explicated in strategic government documents (the overview can be found in the annex). Additionally, we consider recent discourse on climate foreign policy, as well as developments in the broader partnerships landscape. Our ambition is to bring together cross-cutting issues that underly the policy streams and processes dispersed across ministries, known as “Team Deutschland” on international climate issues.<sup>21</sup>

Second, we consider energy and climate partnerships as one instrument in a larger diplomatic toolbox to accelerate and scale up international climate action. Other instruments include carbon pricing, carbon-border adjustment, supply chain regulation, and standard setting through the G7, G20, or the newly formed Climate Club.

## Accelerated, concerted decarbonization

Considering the dangers of climate impacts, the mitigation agenda has been elevated to a core security interest in the National Security Strategy.

Furthermore, climate mitigation is a cornerstone of all the federal government’s bi- and plurilateral climate and energy partnerships, the development of which began in 2006.<sup>22</sup> As is highlighted in Germany’s Climate Foreign Policy Strategy,<sup>23</sup> the bilateral climate and development partnerships and the plurilateral JETPs are particularly relevant in their role for accelerating internationally coordinated emissions reductions (see Table 1).<sup>24</sup>

A focus has been the reduced use and early decommissioning of fossil fuel infrastructures and parallel build-up of renewable energy infrastructure. The *phasedown* of fossil fuels (the structured reduction of their use) is, however, only a step towards a more comprehensive *phaseout*, namely the complete end of production.<sup>25</sup> The phasedown of fossil fuels – in particular, unabated coal power – in the energy sector and the decarbonization of key sectors such as industry, transport, and construction is a priority for German climate foreign policy.<sup>26</sup> Recent discourse from political leaders suggests a clear commitment for a phaseout of *all* fossil fuels. At least this is the long-term goal.

However, official government guidelines and strategies questionably suggest that there is room for maneuver, in the medium term. The government’s new Climate Foreign Policy Strategy underlines the importance for an energy sector predominantly free of fossil fuels by 2030 and highlights the need for a

20 For a review, the reader is directed to Piria and Martini (2023) who recently presented a study of the suite of German partnerships in the field of energy, climate, and raw materials (referred to as “partnerships for transformation”). That study analyzes the goals, focus areas, and historical development of specific partnership initiatives and elaborates on room for improvement. Raffaele Piria and Leon Martini, “Developing Germany’s Partnerships for Transformation,” Report, Ecologic Institute, Berlin (September 2023): <https://www.ecologic.eu/19406> (last accessed December 14, 2023)

21 For a detailed analysis of set-up and functioning of the ministries involved in the “Team Deutschland,” see: Lukas Kahlen et al., “Climate Audit of German Foreign Diplomacy,” New Climate Institute, October 6, 2022: <https://newclimate.org/resources/publications/climate-audit-of-german-foreign-policy> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

22 Raffaele Piria and Leon Martini, “Developing Germany’s Partnerships for Transformation,” Report, Ecologic Institute, Berlin (September 2023), p.4: <https://www.ecologic.eu/19406> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

23 Die Bundesregierung, „Klimaaußenpolitik-Strategie der Bundesregierung,“ December 2023: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2633110/a64259603803cb057a6bf6ed99e86419/kap-strategie-data.pdf> (last accessed December 11, 2023).

24 The JETPs stand out as they are the first instrument to centrally connect climate financing to concrete commitments on climate action. As such, they are each substantiated with significant, multi-billion US-Dollar funding from a group of partner countries and institutions – this includes participating industrialized countries, the European Union and the G7 (referred to as the International Partners Group, IPG). See Raffaele Piria and Leon Martini, “Developing Germany’s Partnerships for Transformation,” Report, Ecologic Institute, Berlin (September 2023), p.27: <https://www.ecologic.eu/19406> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

25 „Phase Down and Phase Out of Fossil Fuels,“ DGAP Glossary: <https://dgap.org/en/research/glossary/climate-foreign-policy/phase-down-and-phase-out-fossil-fuels> (last accessed December 21, 2023).

26 These goals are frequently invoked in strategic government documents. See for instance: The Federal Government, “Policy Priorities for Germany’s G7 Presidency in 2022,” January 2022, p.4: <https://www.g7germany.de/resource/blob/998352/2000328/197be81a1581e488d29450128aa4065f/2022-01-21-g7-programm-en-data.pdf?download=1> (last accessed December 14, 2023).



**Table 1 – Strategic priorities of Germany’s foreign policy in climate change mitigation**

<b>OVERARCHING INTEREST</b>				
	<b>International leadership and engagement</b>			
<b>STRATEGIC PRIORITY</b>	<b>Accelerated, concerted decarbonization</b>	<b>Security of energy supply for Germany</b> (inward-looking economic resilience)	<b>Market access and economic opportunities</b> (outward-looking economic resilience)	<b>Just Sustainability Transitions</b>
<b>OPERATIONAL-IZATION</b>	Fossil fuel phase-down with affordable exit option for partners  Build-up renewables  Enhancing energy efficiency and circular economy	Securing imports through partnerships such as those on LNG and H2.  Balancing affordability, access and sustainability.	Market access for German companies  Proliferation of green technologies, green industrial policy  Building decarbonized trade relationships and supply chains	Principles of procedural justice, distributional justice, and justice as recognition  Feminist Foreign Policy
<b>FOREIGN POLICY INSTRUMENTS</b> (illustrative, partnerships are one among others)	NDC Partnerships under the UNFCCC  International carbon pricing  Climate and energy partnerships JETPs P+ partnerships  Technology transfers  Climate club  “Open, fair and sustainable” EU trade policy with sustainability chapters in FTAs	Climate and energy partnerships JETPs P+ partnerships  Raw materials partnerships in win-win constellation  Technological innovation  Diversification  “Open, fair and sustainable” EU trade policy with sustainability chapters in FTAs	Technology transfers  Technological innovation  “Open, fair and sustainable” EU trade policy with sustainability-chapters in FTAs	Compensating the losers of fossil fuel phasedown  Civil society engagement  Developing a “feminist reflex” in foreign policy: gender-responsive energy and climate project design, gender-sensitive and gender-targeted budgeting, linking women’s rights agenda and climate action in multilateral fora (FFP Guidelines).

global phase-out of *unabated* fossil fuels.<sup>27</sup> This wording leaves open the possibility of continued use of fossil fuels with abatement, for example through carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS) and other forms of technologies that thus far have not reached maturity. The document also emphasizes technological openness as a core principle that may in effect hinder allocation of resources to proven technologies and direct scarce investments to lobby-driven niches. This risks false promises that a complete phase-out of fossil fuels can be delayed even further.

Germany's updated guidelines on foreign trade and investment promotion also reflect a broader decarbonization agenda. The federal government's framework on export-credit and investment-credit guarantees establishes a taxonomy that specifies which foreign investments by German companies may benefit from state-sanctioned support.<sup>28</sup> While the framework rules out the coverage of investments into coal power and oil production, it defines a set of natural gas projects that may still benefit from governmental support. For instance, it allows for continued support if the technology is used to produce blue or turquoise hydrogen or if natural gas production contributes to security of supply or serves "geostrategic security interests."<sup>29</sup> Support is conditional upon compatibility with the 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement and the avoidance of lock-in effects, which is inconsistent considering the minuscule carbon budget that remains available globally.

The JETP agreements consistently refer broadly to the opportunities of "decarbonization," a "low-carbon transition," or "low-carbon futures." They highlight the ambition to replace coal and highlight benefits

of renewable energies. However, they do not circle in on specific technologies employed in low-carbon scenarios.<sup>30</sup> In sum, while a clear emphasis is on the build-up of renewable energies, official government doctrine across ministries emphasizes a broad decarbonization agenda that allows flexibility as long as the carbon intensity of energy decreases. This is not however sufficiently ambitious for achieving the lower warming specifications of the Paris Agreement.

### **Bolstering energy security: Affordability and security of energy imports**

Energy security – understood here as "the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price"<sup>31</sup> – increasingly plays a role in climate and energy partnerships. While energy security did not feature prominently on the political agenda before 2021,<sup>32</sup> it has become a central consideration at different timescales. It is relevant to manage immediate import needs, and to strengthen economic resilience in the long-term geopolitical reshuffling of the green transition.<sup>33</sup>

Following Russia's war of aggression, Germany dramatically reduced its gas imports from Russia: from 52 percent in 2021 to 22 percent in 2022.<sup>34</sup> As of August 2022, natural gas imports from Russia came to a complete stop.<sup>35</sup> The federal government has since engaged in diplomatic efforts to perform a supply switch by replacing Russian imports with deliveries from other countries. While diplomatic quests for LNG supplies do not take place under formalized partnership arrangements, they do in part determine Germany's positioning vis-à-vis these countries. For instance, in November, Germany and Nigeria reached a political agreement whereby Nigeria will deliver LNG supplies to Germany as of 2026. This would

27 Die Bundesregierung, „Klimaaußenpolitik-Strategie der Bundesregierung,“ December 2023, p.31, 33: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2633110/a64259603803cb057a6bf6ed99e86419/kap-strategie-data.pdf> (last accessed December 11, 2023). This wording was also reflected in the European Council's Conclusions Ahead of COP28. See Council of the European Union, "Preparations for the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Dubai, 30 November – 12 December 2023) – Council Conclusions," October 17, 2023, para. 14: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14285-2023-INIT/en/pdf> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

28 Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, "Sektorleitlinien der Bundesregierung," July 24, 2023: [https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Downloads/S-T/sektoerleitlinien-der-bundesregierung.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=15](https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Downloads/S-T/sektoerleitlinien-der-bundesregierung.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=15) (last accessed December 14, 2023).

29 The document does not, however, provide a specification under which conditions security interests or security of supply may be threatened by the discontinuation of fossil fuel production.

30 See e.g. the JETP agreements with South Africa and Vietnam, respectively: The Federal Government, "Political Declaration on the Just Energy Transition in South Africa": <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1974538/b2264555c87d8cbdd97bd1eb8b16387a/political-declaration-on-the-just-energy-transition-in-south-africa-data.pdf?download=1> (last accessed December 13, 2023); United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, "Political declaration on establishing the Just Energy Transition Partnership with Viet Nam," December 14, 2022, Para. 10: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vietnams-just-energy-transition-partnership-political-declaration/political-declaration-on-establishing-the-just-energy-transition-partnership-with-viet-nam> (last accessed December 14, 2023). It may also be highlighted that the JETP agreement with Vietnam recognizes that country's ambition deploy CCUS in hard to abate sectors.

31 This definition is used by: International Energy Agency, "Energy Security": <https://www.iea.org/topics/energy-security> (last accessed December 17, 2023).

32 As Piria and Martini (2022) point out, the security of energy imports was not a central strategic theme of German energy cooperation under the Merkel IV government, reflecting that supply security was a strategic blind spot. Raffaele Piria and Leon Martini, "Developing Germany's Partnerships for Transformation," Report, Ecologic Institute, Berlin (September 2023), p.19: <https://www.ecologic.eu/19406> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

33 The resilience chapter in the National Security Strategy extensively covers supply resilience and energy imports security as central dimensions.

34 "Bundesnetzagentur publishes gas supply figures for 2022," Bundesnetzagentur, January 6, 2023: [https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/EN/2023/20230105\\_RueckblickGas2022.html](https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/EN/2023/20230105_RueckblickGas2022.html) (last accessed December 17, 2023).

35 "Gasimporte in GWh/Tag," Bundesnetzagentur: [https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/DE/Gasversorgung/aktuelle\\_gasversorgung/svg/Gasimporte/Gasimporte.html](https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/DE/Gasversorgung/aktuelle_gasversorgung/svg/Gasimporte/Gasimporte.html) (last accessed December 18, 2023).



cover up to two percent of German demand. In return, the government commits to invest \$500 million in Nigeria's renewable energy infrastructure.<sup>36</sup> The German government is also considering the support of new natural-gas-field exploitation in Senegal (a JETP country) where preparations are in process for the exploitation of about 425 billion cubic meters by 2043.<sup>37</sup> This contradicts previous commitments, as Germany pledged at COP26 in Glasgow along with dozens of other countries to stop financing fossil fuel projects abroad. Germany uses its economic leverage to advance the long-term strategic goal of decarbonization through the proliferation of renewable energy infrastructure while heavily compromising on structural changes to foster decarbonization abroad. This reflects the path dependencies Germany has entered through its reliance on natural gas and provides a cautionary tale about the creation of future lock-ins.

According to the National Security Strategy, means to achieve a climate-friendly energy supply are technological innovation, diversification of supply sources, and procurement of raw materials from reliable partners.<sup>38</sup> In its pursuit of climate neutrality by 2045 and energy security, Germany aims to become a major provider of hydrogen technology and importer of green hydrogen, as outlined in the country's Hydrogen Strategy.<sup>39</sup>

### Market access and economic opportunities

As an export-oriented economy, Germany has an interest that lower emissions in production and adherence to environmental standards becomes an economic advantage. The Climate Foreign Policy Strategy emphasizes that: "Robust climate action should give companies a competitive edge internationally."<sup>40</sup> To that end, the government pursues a regulatory environment that rewards climate-friendly production: for example through sustainability chapters in trade agreements, the alignment of WTO rules with the Paris Agreement and the SDGs, and green supply chain regulation.<sup>41</sup> Instruments of foreign trade promotion also aim to support German companies'

international positioning as leaders in green technologies and markets.

Additionally, partnerships aim to promote a socio-ecological transformation and set standards for sustainable technologies.<sup>42</sup> Bilateral and plurilateral initiatives on green technologies and energy sources, such as on the development of hydrogen markets, combine two economic rationales: First, they aim to position Germany in the geopolitical reshuffling of the energy transition as an energy importer (see the paragraph above). Second, they hold opportunities for the German business sector to export technologies or access new markets.

This latter dimension, i.e. the ambition to secure opportunities and tap into new markets, may have been an only implicit, even marginal goal of German climate foreign policy in the past. Traditional fossil-linked industries had more political leverage with their large domestic employment base and featured more prominently in Germany's international positioning. However, growing competition and the geopolitical danger of asymmetric dependencies in key sectors of the green transition have changed this, allowing for heightened presence of green industrial concerns. By diversifying its energy partnerships, such as through the JETPs, Germany also seeks to bolster economic resilience, as set out in the National Security Strategy. The emergent debates about the need for a robust green industrial policy at the European and national levels reflect this trend. It is important that in seeking economic resilience, priorities such as just transitions are not undermined.

### Just Sustainability Transitions

A just transition is at the heart of the UN's Agenda 2030 with its ambition to "leave no one behind." A core challenge that materialized over the decades of climate negotiations is the weighing of burdens of the transformation against the burdens of inaction on those who are affected first by climate impacts. If climate mitigation action is further delayed, climate

36 Felix Onuah, "Nigeria and Germany sign \$500 mln renewable energy and gas deal," Reuters, November 21, 2023: <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/nigeria-germany-sign-500-mln-renewable-energy-gas-deal-2023-11-21/> (last accessed December 18, 2023).

37 Krista Larson, "Europe Turns to Africa in Bid to Replace Russian Natural Gas," AP News, October 12, 2022: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-middle-east-africa-business-senegal-52c9da7d4d79d999fef1e35d0430dba25> (last accessed December 18, 2023).

38 The Federal Government, "Robust. Resilient. Sustainable. Integrated Security for Germany. National Security Strategy," 2023, p. 54: <https://www.nationalesicherheitsstrategie.de/en.html> (last accessed November 22, 2023).

39 The Federal Government, "The National Hydrogen Strategy," June 2020: [https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/downloads/files/bmwi\\_nationale-wasserstoffstrategie\\_eng\\_s01.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=2](https://www.bmbf.de/bmbf/shareddocs/downloads/files/bmwi_nationale-wasserstoffstrategie_eng_s01.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2) (last accessed December 17, 2023).

40 The Federal Government, "Strategy on Climate Foreign Policy," English Summary, December 6, 2023, p. 6: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2633116/fad2c8f3b1f820fb2a95cdf41dddb057/kap-strategie-en-data.pdf> (last accessed December 17, 2023).

41 Ibid.

42 Die Bundesregierung, "Klimaaußenpolitik-Strategie der Bundesregierung," December 2023, p. 15: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2633110/a64259603803cb057a6b6f6ed99e86419/kap-strategie-data.pdf> (last accessed December 11, 2023).

impacts will continue to grow, thereby increasing the burden for vulnerable populations and inflating the costs of adaptation and loss and damage. Thus far, the preservation of the fossil industry has taken priority over the needs of the most vulnerable, younger generations, and the stability of the Earth system. For economic systems entrenched in fossil fuel use, improved burden sharing is necessary to build public acceptance of the transformation.

When considering the distributional effects of mitigation policy, in particular, a strategic goal is the creation of inclusive post-carbon economies in which climate protection and socio-economic prosperity go hand in hand for all relevant population groups. With its connection to several SDGs (see above), inclusive energy transitions center around individuals' livelihoods, as well as socio-economic rights. At the same time, the design of a just and inclusive transition is also relevant for geopolitical stability and economic resilience at the country-level. This is especially true for states in which the economic development pathway has relied heavily on the extraction, production, and processing of fossil fuels. As the green transition challenges the status quo and requires major economic adjustments, it is essential to provide viable economic alternatives, anticipate geopolitical risks, and prevent and address socio-economic inequalities. In this sense, German climate foreign policy broadly frames a just transition as "the precondition for peace, stability, and lasting prosperity."<sup>43</sup>

Building on the environmental justice literature<sup>44</sup>, debates are often structured around three distinct tenets of climate justice: First, distributional justice considers how costs and benefits (of the green transition) are distributed among members of different social groups. Second, procedural justice "speaks to the idea of fair processes, and how people's perception of fairness is strongly impacted by the quality of

their experiences and not only the end result of these experiences."<sup>45</sup> Third, recognition justice is a complex, relational concept that focuses on "the avoidance of humiliation and disrespect,"<sup>46</sup> giving due consideration to human dignity, and differences between dominant and marginalized social groups.

In Germany's political engagement toward a just transition, a focus has been to consider women and marginalized groups in the spirit of its Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP).<sup>47</sup> German FFP focuses on three main components, namely to strengthen rights, resources, and participation of women and marginalized groups. As such, it has been particularly relevant for distributive (rights and resources) and procedural justice (participation). The National Security Strategy formulates the ambition to develop a "feminist reflex" in foreign policy. Strategic documents, particularly the Climate Foreign Policy Strategy, highlight that the just transition is intrinsically linked to FFP considerations.

The FFO guidelines on FFP set out the ambition to allocate project funding on a gender-sensitive basis and increase the share of gender-targeted funding.<sup>48</sup> The FFO also aims to apply gender-responsive energy and climate project design. For instance, a declared ambition is to assess the International Climate Initiative's (IKI) impacts on women and marginalized groups, and to require implementing agencies to institute safety measures if there is a risk of negative impact.<sup>49</sup>

### International Leadership and Engagement

Finally, we consider Germany's positioning as a leader in international climate action as a cross-cutting strategic interest. Leadership and engagement here refer to efforts to assume a frontrunner role in the implementation of existing climate pledges and commitments, or to initiate new initiatives towards climate action in cooperation with likeminded partners.

43 Ibid., p. 12.

44 David Schlosberg, "The Justice of Environmental Justice: Reconciling Equity, Recognition, and Participation in a Political Movement", in Andrew Light and Avner de-Shalit (Eds.), *Moral and Political Reasoning in Environmental Practice*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2003, pp. 77-106.

45 "Procedural Justice", Yale Law School Justice Collaboratory: <https://law.yale.edu/justice-collaboratory/procedural-justice> (last accessed December 17, 2023).

46 Axel Honneth, "Recognition and Justice: Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice," *Acta Sociologica* 47, no. 4 (December 2004), pp. 351-364: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4195049> (last accessed December 17, 2022).

47 The pursuit of a Feminist Foreign Policy was endorsed by the government in its 2021 coalition agreement and has since been operationalized through two complementary guiding documents. First, the Federal Foreign Office's Feminist Foreign Policy Guidelines, and second the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development's Feminist Development Policy. See Federal Foreign Office, "Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy. Federal Foreign Office Guidelines," March 2023: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2585076/4d2d295dad8fb1c41c6271d2c1a41d75/ffp-leitlinien-data.pdf> (last accessed November 22, 2023); Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, "Feminist Development Policy. For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide," March 2023: <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf> (last accessed November 22, 2023).

48 Federal Foreign Office, "Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy. Federal Foreign Office Guidelines," March 2023, pp. 79-80: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2585076/4d2d295dad8fb1c41c6271d2c1a41d75/ffp-leitlinien-data.pdf> (last accessed November 22, 2023)

49 Ibid., pp. 47-48.

For example, Germany has used its 2022 G7 presidency to put climate action at the top of the agenda and make tangible contributions to reducing emissions through international cooperation, as well as promoting a just transition within the G7 and abroad.<sup>50</sup> A concrete institutional outcome is the Climate Club, announced during its G7 presidency and formally launched at COP28.<sup>51</sup> Another case in point is Germany's diplomatic leadership on the way to the establishment and operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 and its capitalization at COP28.

Moreover, leadership also becomes discernible through the broad portfolio of climate and energy partnerships established over the past 15 years. Past and present government coalitions have invested political capital and significant financial resources in the expansion of the partnerships' portfolio. In this process, the government has at times pioneered new modes of cooperation. For instance, when the IKI was launched in 2008, "(...) it stood out from conventional development cooperation programmes because climate protection was defined as the primary goal of the initiative, and it had an innovative bottom-up structure for selecting projects and proposals (...)."<sup>52</sup> Such leadership is now also materializing in JETP funding and other initiatives.

This engagement has also positioned Germany as a leader on climate finance. While the developed countries' commitment to collectively provide \$100 billion annually in climate finance has not been met in recent years, Germany has been among the leading funders, though substantially through loans.<sup>53</sup>

One goal behind Germany's diplomatic engagement is to keep the green transition on track in times of economic competition or even rivalry in other issue areas. The Climate Foreign Policy Strategy stipulates that

"the climate crisis necessitates common engagement in a world of increasing tensions and geo-economic shifts."<sup>54</sup> This is also exemplified in relations with China, where the government explains its belief "(...) that vital international cooperation on climate action must not be used as leverage for asserting interests in other areas."<sup>55</sup> In sum, it becomes evident that the German government considers cooperation on climate mitigation as a long-term overarching priority that should withstand, and ideally outlast, geopolitical turmoil.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Germany relies on strong partnerships for the implementation of its climate foreign policy strategy. The four strategic priorities identified in this analysis across various strategic documents and policies could be strengthened through the following measures:

### Accelerated, concerted decarbonization

Building on momentum after the COP28 decision to triple renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency by 2030, partnership agreements should focus on implementation and accountability by defining clear decarbonization targets, for example a percentage point reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions or increase of renewable energy in a country's energy mix. Agreements should be reciprocal and target German domestic energy transition as well, so that accountability and eye-level partnerships are ensured.

### Security of supply for Germany (inward-looking economic resilience)

Climate and energy partnerships can be an effective instrument. While in the past the procurement of fossil resources such as oil and natural gas was at the heart of Germany's energy diplomacy, new partnerships should

50 The Federal Government, "Policy Priorities for Germany's G7 Presidency in 2022," January 2022: <https://www.g7germany.de/resource/blob/998352/2000328/197be81a1581e488d29450128aa4065f/2022-01-21-g7-programm-en-data.pdf?download=1> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

51 When it was launched on December 1, 2023, at COP28 in Dubai, the Climate Club consisted of 36 member states. Its main goal is to advance a high-ambition agenda for industrial decarbonization for increased collective action. See "The Climate Club": <https://climate-club.org> (last accessed December 17, 2023).

52 Sonja Butzengeiger-Geyer et al., "Experiences from the German International Climate Initiative (IKI)," in Axel Michaelowa and Anne-Kathrin Sacherer, *Handbook of international climate finance*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham 2022, p. 213.

53 In 2022, German climate finance for mitigation and adaptation amounted to EUR 6.4 billion (considering budgetary allocations as well as grant equivalents of low-interest loans), with an additional EUR 3.1 billion raised by Germany's development bank KfW on capital markets. See Deutsche Klimafinanzierung, "German climate finance 2022: Pledge fulfilled early – but will it last?," October 23, 2023: <https://www.germanclimatefinance.de/2023/10/23/german-climate-finance-2022-pledge-fulfilled-early-but-will-it-last/#:~:text=Overall%20German%20public%20climate%20finance,to%20almost%20%E2%82%AC10%20billion> (last accessed December 17, 2023).

54 The Federal Government, "Strategy on Climate Foreign Policy," English Summary, December 6, 2023, p. 4: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2633116/fad2c8f3b1f820fb2a95cdf41dddb057/kap-strategie-en-data.pdf> (last accessed December 17, 2023).

55 Federal Foreign Office, "Strategy on China of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany," July 2023, p. 27: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2608580/49d50fecc479304c3da2e2079c55e106/china-strategie-en-data.pdf> (last accessed November 22, 2023).

focus on supply and technological collaboration in the renewable energy sector (green hydrogen) and other important elements in the renewable energy value chain (raw materials, ammonia, etc.).

#### **Economic opportunities and green industrial policy (outward-looking economic resilience)**

Germany should integrate labor migration policy into its partnerships for European Green Deal implementation. Providing vocational trainings and supporting higher education in the sustainability sector together with focused labor migration could benefit both partners. One example is the Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union that will allow Tuvaluans to migrate to Australia in the context of climate change, and supports education and training in the small island nation while bolstering Australia's position in the Pacific against Chinese influence. Linking educational and vocational training to international climate action has the potential to use synergies by strengthening capacity-building as a means of implementation for achieving the goals of the Agenda 2030.

#### **Just Sustainability Transitions**

To ensure just transitions and climate justice, and in recognition of its historical high emissions as an industrialized nation, German climate and energy partnerships should be designed such that all stakeholders including women, civil society organizations, and marginalized groups are involved in every step. Risks and benefits that result from these partnerships must be distributed fairly. As highlighted in the literature, partnerships could explore mechanisms and institutions to accompany economic transformations, especially where weak governance structures or lacking financial capacities may challenge just and inclusive transitions.<sup>56</sup> The literature points to experiences from national contexts, including the German Coal Exit Commission.<sup>57</sup> The JETPs might be a forum to address the distributional and procedural justice aspect of the green transition while also bolstering Germany's leadership role among the JETP funders, such as the International Partner Group.

#### **Leadership and Engagement**

The German government should use its longstanding experience to position more holistic thinking of Earth system stability into different policy fields. This could include the planetary boundary framework that highlights other forms of overuse of natural resources, such as air pollution, ocean acidification, or the introduction of novel (chemical) entities.<sup>58</sup> The National Security Strategy with its sustainability chapter and the concept of integrated security, and the Climate Foreign Policy Strategy with its references to biodiversity protection, provide a relevant framework. Project planning could link climate mitigation with other efforts to safeguard planetary boundaries.

Germany could focus its program planning on creating synergies between global emissions mitigation and local environmental protection. Specifically, the government could link the mitigation agenda with efforts to combat local air pollution in line with the health dimension laid out in the Climate Foreign Policy Strategy. Fossil fuel consumption comes with significant external social costs worldwide, including local health damage.<sup>59</sup> Besides investing more in clean energy development abroad, Germany could support more research and public communication efforts on the co-benefits of climate action for health, in line with the primacy of prevention laid out in the National Security Strategy.

56 See: David Horan, "A New Approach to Partnerships for SDG Transformations," *Sustainability* 11, no. 18 (January 2019): p. 8: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11184947> (last accessed December 14, 2023).

57 Ibid.

58 Katherine Richardson et al., "Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries," *Science Advances* 9, no. 37, eadh2458 (2023): <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458> (last accessed December 20, 2023).

59 International Monetary Fund, "Fossil Fuel Subsidies," <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/climate-change/energy-subsidies> (last accessed December 17, 2023).

## ANNEX: LIST OF STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED

(in reverse order of publication date)

Die Bundesregierung, „Klimaaußenpolitik-Strategie der Bundesregierung“, Dezember 2023:

<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2633110/a64259603803cb057a6bf6ed99e86419/kap-strategie-data.pdf> (last accessed December 11, 2023)

The Federal Government, “Strategy on Climate Foreign Policy,” English Summary, December 2023:

<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2633116/fad2c8f3b1f820fb2a95cdf41dddb057/kap-strategie-en-data.pdf> (last accessed December 17, 2023)

Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz, „Industriepolitik in der Zeitenwende. Industriestandort erneuern, Wirtschaftssicherheit stärken“, Oktober 2023:

[https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikationen/Industrie/industriepolitik-in-der-zeitenwende.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=12](https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Publikationen/Industrie/industriepolitik-in-der-zeitenwende.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=12) (last accessed November 22, 2023)

Federal Foreign Office, “Strategy on China of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany,” July 2023:

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“Dare more progress. Alliance for Freedom, Justice and Sustainability,” English translation of the German Federal Government Coalition Agreement for the 2021 – 2025 period, available via the Italian Section of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung:

[https://italia.fes.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/German\\_Coalition\\_Treaty\\_2021-2025.pdf](https://italia.fes.de/fileadmin/user_upload/German_Coalition_Treaty_2021-2025.pdf) (last accessed November 22, 2023)





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Rauchstraße 17/18  
10787 Berlin  
Tel. +49 30 254231-0  
[info@dgap.org](mailto:info@dgap.org)  
[www.dgap.org](http://www.dgap.org)  
📧@dgapev

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