The EU’s global health policy in times of Covid-19: challenges and prospects

Susan Bergner

1German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin, Germany
Contact: susan.bergner@swp-berlin.org

The Covid-19 crisis has laid bare weaknesses in the capacity of the European Union (EU) to act as a global health player. Most of those challenges have existed prior to the pandemic and are linked to a limited implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - the global agenda acknowledging interconnections between different policy fields. Despite the EU’s commitment to implement the Agenda 2030 in its internal and external policies, there is a lack of visibility and
sufficient reference to the SDGs on a strategic level as well as in the EU’s actions and partnerships in global health. The Union has shown during the Covid-19 pandemic that it is a relevant global health actor; however, there seems to be a lack of strategic visions and resources.

The poster aims to illustrate on the one hand the weaknesses and challenges of the EU global health policies in times of Covid-19 and beyond. On the other hand, it identifies advantages of the EU in the field of global health and explores future pathways. Applying a mixed-method approach I did a review of academic and grey literature; content analysis of official EU documents and statements, expert interviews and gathered insights from events such as policy dialogues.

Preliminary results indicate that the EU has a strong focus on infectious disease control in its external health policies and hereby neglects the health system dimension and interlinkages with other foreign policies such as trade. Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of resilient health systems in a crisis and the interlinkages between different policies for an effective response. To pursue a genuine health-in-all-policies approach prioritising health system strengthening within a updated strategic roadmap is necessary. Moreover, efforts to ensure an equitable distribution of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics should be pushed through the development and implementation of respective criteria.

**Key messages:**
- The focus of the EU in global health should shift from a narrow health security lens towards health system strengthening including disease control.
- The EU should prioritize and implement the health-in-all-policies approach in its global health policies through an ambitious roadmap.