

# universität freiburg Master of Science Global Urban Health

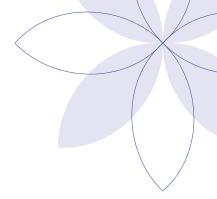
# Report Academic Year 2024/2025

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DIE WAHRHEIT WIRD LYCH FREI MACHEN

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## I. Introduction

The mission of our interdisciplinary and international Master in Global Urban

Health is to contribute to the improvement of the health situation in urban settings, particularly in LMICs (Low- and Middle-Income Countries). The core team responsible for the day to day implementation is: Dr. Sonia Diaz-Monsalve (Teaching Coordinator); Monika Gaalova (Financial and Administrative Officer); Molly Catherine (Technical Officer) and Prof. Dr. Axel Kroeger (Scientific Advisor). They lead the way to our joint commitment to



a healthier, more sustainable world through the strongest pillar of change: quality education.

Our small and powerful team at the Master programme presents a summary of our endeavours and celebrations throughout the last year (2024/25). We are particularly grateful for our upcoming celebration in September 2025: 10 years' anniversary: Up to date, around 150 students from 60 countries (majority LMICs) representing roughly 50 disciplines have been trained at our programme.

# II. Highlights

- 10 years of Master GUH: celebration including a high level symposium and Alumni day in September 2025
- Inaugural ceremony of the 9th cohort: 22 students from 13 countries and 13 disciplines were warmly welcomed
- 35 Master alumni are now PhD students; 5 of them in the final phase
- DAAD PAGEL project on migration successfully finished with many concrete deliverables
- 20 new scientific publications were made this academic year by Master staff and alumni

#### **III. Activities**

#### **A. Teaching Activities**

#### Inaugural ceremony (11 October 2024):

For the academic year 2024/25, we received 322 applications; the number continues to grow compared to 45 applications received in the year 2016 when the programme started. The 9<sup>th</sup> cohort had the inaugural ceremony on 11 October 2024. **22 students from 13 countries and 13 disciplines** including six



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students financed by DAAD EPOS scholarship started the first advanced module. Until now, two students did not complete the course (due to exceeding 30% absences based on our Master regulations).

#### **Excursions:**

Students took part in several excursions to notable institutions, including:

- WHO, UN and other institutions in Geneva;
- Swiss Tropical and Public Health (TPH) Institute in Basel;
- Rehaklinik Glotterbad in the Black Forest; LEA migrant centre in Freiburg;
- Sports Department (AHS) at the University of Freiburg;
- Water Treatment Plant in Forchheim
- Sustainable urban living concepts in Vauban neighbourhood of Freiburg
- Biodiversity area at Freiburg airstrip;
- "Schrebergarten" (gardening) in Merzhausen



Basel (Swiss TPH),15 November 2024

#### **Practical Sessions**

All modules include practical sessions such as sampling exercises at the local cemetery; survey among Freiburg students; session on walkability during the NCDs and Environment module, where students had the opportunity to get familiar with real data and propose inter-disciplinary solutions.

Some of our Master alumni are now delivering Master sessions as lecturers (Statistics, Systematic/scoping reviews, sessions within Environment, Migration and Mental Health modules). Some of the relevant sessions/ workshops this year were:



## **Statistics Workshop:**

Sadhbh Byrne from Ireland (cohort 2022-23) delivered 4 sessions (2 hours each) on "Applied Statistics" during the core module.

#### **Effective Communication Workshop:**

Lufthans "Hans" Arstipendy, DAAD EPOS student from Indonesia (cohort 2020-21) got a 3-month visiting scholarship and as part of it, he provided a workshop on Effective Communication to our current cohort in April to better prepare our students for the oral exam in May. The feedback from students was overwhelmingly positive. Participants described the session as "very helpful", "well-prepared" and "necessary". Many highlighted the benefit of learning from a former student's perspective, which made the advice both practical and relatable. One student shared that Hans's tips helped them understand how to communicate messages more clearly and connect with audiences more effectively. Another commented that the session should be repeated for future cohorts due to its usefulness.

#### **B. Research Activities**

#### **Scientific Contributions**

Faculty members and alumni **published 20 scientific papers this year**, contributing to global public health discussions. Topics included Health System strengthening, Maternal and Child Health, Climate Change, Dengue Control, Vector-borne Disease Control, Health Promotion and Epidemic Preparedness.

#### PhD Track

35 Master alumni have now transitioned to PhD programmes, further contributing to the programme's academic reputation. The first 9 PhD students successfully finished or are now in their final phase. Some already work in senior positions in various countries including USA, Germany and the UK.

#### **Student Research**

The Scientific Advisor of the Master programme, **Prof. Dr. Axel Kroeger**, is highly engaged in addressing Latin America's dengue crisis, leading our team into the research of the Early Warning and Response System (EWARS) for climate sensitive disease outbreaks such as dengue and malaria. Collaborating closely in this WHO programme with colleagues and students, Prof. Kroeger's work aims to enhance our understanding and response to disease outbreaks.

Five students implemented their research theses to dengue control and prevention in Colombia and the



Dominican Republic. Prof. Kroeger additionally supervises four PhD students focusing on this critical topic.

It is highly notable that there was a statement from Prof. Kroeger in SMC (Science Media Centre in Germany) regarding Trump's attack on research:

"I would just like to mention that our research projects and collaboration in Thailand and Peru have been hampered by key USAID staff being laid off or not being informed of their current status. Our work with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in Washington is also severely limited because members cannot currently be involved".

#### **GLOHRA Postdoc Grant**

a) **Dr. Stefanie Harsch**, Master's Mental Health and Migration Module Convener, will finish in May her post doc GLOHRA (German Alliance for Global Health Research) scholarship on "Improving cancer-related health literacy using online stories in Sub-Saharan Africa" in May 2025. Stefanie is at the same time coordinating the advanced modules on Mental Health and Migration and supervising Master theses.

b) **Mojo Hossain**, a social scientist from Bangladesh (first cohort 2016-17) moved to the next phase for a new GLOHRA post doc scholarship for the coming 2 years. His relevant topic on "12stepsSaveLife: Improving patient-friendly pre-clinical and clinical care at medical emergencies in a LIMIC: it is much needed, but is it feasible in Bangladesh? (a feasibility assessment in Bangladesh)". This work will contribute to our programme, specifically to the NCDs module where we deliver a day on emergencies: The Steiger Day.

#### C. Cooperation and Partnerships

#### <u>Scholarships</u>

Continued partnerships with international institutions, including the WHO and DAAD (EPOS) have provided financial and logistical support to the programme (the DAAD EPOS partnership goes until 2028). Likewise, the Björn Steiger Foundation has supported students working on medical emergency services in their home countries.

The **DAAD EPOS scholarship financed six students** from six different countries and disciplines this year.

37% of the Master students in the last (9th) cohort received financial support from various donors (6 students from DAAD EPOS; 2 students from ASA; 2 students from Finance Ministry in Indonesia; 1 student from the Björn Steiger Foundation. We immensely thank our donors for investing in Global Health education, the key pillar for development particularly in LMICs.

#### AGEP Network

The Master programme is part of the The German Association of Postgraduate Programmes with special Relevance to Developing Countries (AGEP) network which offers postgraduate courses relevant to developing countries. Several alumni have benefited from AGEP's courses.

## DAAD PAGEL Project

We said "Hasta la vista" to our (4-year) **DAAD PAGEL project on migration** which successfully contributed to the peace process in Colombia by coordinating two important sectors: the justice sector and the health sector.



DAAD PAGEL Summer School in Bogota, October 2024

As part of our DAAD PAGEL project, **Sonia and Axel have been invited to several international conferences and symposiums:** in Paris, in Singapore, in Colombia, among many more events. Sonia presented twice the session on "Measuring the suffering of vulnerable populations in the Colombian border with Venezuela", once in Mexico and once in Cucuta, Colombia.

35 representatives from senior actors and two municipalities in Colombia (Cucuta and Valledupar) participated in **the last PAGEL Summer School in Bogota in October 2024**. The general objective of the event was to disseminate the PAGEL products among national and international actors. Additionally, to formulate the next steps to ensure sustainability of the implemented activities within the framework of the PAGEL project. Medium term contribution was to improve the health and justice situation of Venezuelan migrants and the host population using an interdisciplinary approach. Agenda is available upon request.

# Key Achievements of the DAAD PAGEL Project:

#### 1. Capacity Building:

- Trained up to 500 professionals from the public health and justice sectors, equipping them with tools to analyse and respond to migration-related health and legal challenges.
- Organised 40+ national and international events, reaching up to 700 participants. Formats included panel discussions, conferences, academic seminars, poster presentations, international colloquia, public fairs, cross-institutional committees, symposia, expert meetings, and short courses.

#### 2. Tangible Outcomes:

- Developed key resources:
  - Glossary of Terms: Definitions and explanations of migration concepts.
  - *Practical Guide*: Information on Colombian institutions supporting migrants (available online).
  - Survey Results Booklet: Findings from household surveys on migration and violence.
- Published a peer-reviewed article in BMC Public Health: read <u>here</u>.

#### 3. Sustainable Networks:

- Established strong collaborations between public health and justice professionals.
- Pioneered the groundwork for a new Master's in *Human Mobility* at UFPS and UPC, with University of Freiburg's support.

#### 4. Dissemination & Impact:

- Hosted three international summer schools in Cúcuta, Freiburg, and Bogotá, including the most recent in Bogotá with 50+ participants, among them representatives from PAHO, IOM and national institutions.
- Organised over 40 events, reaching hundreds of stakeholders, from local communities to international organisations.
- A suite of training materials including session guides, case studies, and participatory tools – was developed and shared across partner institutions and remains available for ongoing use in professional development initiatives.

# WHO/TDR Collaboration

Sonia Diaz-Monsalve continues serving as a member of the WHO/TDR Committee on Global Health Research and Training to provide input and

recommendations on TDR Global approaches. Sonia Diaz-Monsalve is part of the Teaching Network on Migration & Health aiming to design a curriculum for medical students to respond to migration challenges using an intercultural approach required for this vulnerable population.



WHO-TDR Committee Meeting, March 2024

# <u>Global Health Hub</u>

a) Sonia Diaz-Monsalve was **elected as SC member for Global Health Hub Migration Community**. She presented the experience from the DAAD PAGEL project on migration and justice and other countries facing migration challenges would like to replicate the experience from Colombia.



b) Prof. Dr. Axel Kroeger, Scientific Advisor of the Master programme, along with the PhD

candidate Tatiana Rivera (Master alumna from cohort 2017/18), are **managers** of the Working Group "Epidemic Preparedness and Response" at the Hub.

c) Gabriela Pen Nasser (Master alumna from cohort 2019-20 who replaced Sonia during her 9-month unpaid leave last year) was elected as SC member for Global Health Hub NCDs Community. As we all know, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of the death worldwide. Our Gabi has been the NCDs module convener and we celebrate this new leadership role she is taking.

# D. Events and Other Activities



# Happy hour on 11 March 2025

We were privileged to receive the visit from <u>Prof. Dr.</u> <u>Nicole Webster</u>, Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Faculty Affairs in the College of Health and Human Development at Pennsylvania State University, USA.

The visit included sessions to discuss ways to further align ZMG and Master GUH activities with the

College of Health and Human Development (HHD) at Pennsylvania State University (PSU).

The Happy Hour was a Roundtable Discussion covering the topic: "The power of global health youth ambassadors to shape resilient and healthy LMICs countries and societies" which received excellent feedback from the target audience (21 Master students, 7 Master alumni and 5 Master lecturers).

#### UN-Habitat Collaborative Centre Meeting on 17 February 2025

Axel organised a meeting with of 10 members from different faculties and organisations working in the context of urban health. Dr. Graham Alabaster presented the work of UN-Habitat, supporting and developing programmes in the context of



health and urban living. The final part of the meeting was dedicated to explore different ways to collaborate with the UN-Habitat's vision and mission. A follow up of the event is planned for early June. An MoU is in preparation.

#### Meeting with the University of Ghana

The Master GUH team was invited by the International Office to be part of the discussions with the University of Ghana in the presence of the Vice-Chancellor and the Dean. The visit was called "Signals of Life".

Representatives from different units/faculties at the University of Freiburg explored opportunities to work together. Sonia and Axel presented the Master programme and potential areas for cooperation. Three Master students from Ghana also attended one of the sessions.

We said "AKWAABA" (Welcome) to the Ghanaian female delegation!



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#### Colombian Health Networking in Germany "Red Salud Colombia en Alemania"

Since the beginning of the year 2025, Sonia is leading the participation of our Master Alumni from Colombia to support health projects financed by GIZ in Colombia. The Colombian team sent a concept paper for a one-year project on Dengue. We hope that we can continue our contribution to this vulnerable country and maintain our commitment to the Health Network.



#### CAPAZ

Das Deutsch-Kolumbianische Friedensinstitut CAPAZ (Instituto Colombo-Alemán para la Paz – CAPAZ) ist a networking platform for scientists and universities in Colombia and Germany conducting research on peace,conflict prevention and formation of a post-conflict society.

Similar as in previous years, Sonia is supporting a proposal submitted to CAPAZ and participating in the research project called "Implementation of Digital Narratives for Peace through Video Games as an Educational Tool for the Repair of the Social Fabric in the Department of Meta".

The Master supports her participation in this initiative, contributing with our expertise in mental health and psychosocial care, as well as in the definition of pedagogical and technological aspects of the video game prototypes.

#### WB Meetings with Toni

The Master team enjoys the network organised meetings by Toni Buenemann creating a community of practice about postgraduate training. The agenda covers important items such as reports from senior meetings about new regulations, how to promote postgraduate programmes, our activities, networking quality



improvements, and relevant events among many more themes. The Master team would like to immensely thank Toni Buenemann for her great technical support and her loving and caring attitude to our international programme.

**Master coordination meetings** have been consistently implemented every two to three weeks. Agendas, meeting minutes and financial reports are available. The meetings are the main instrument to follow up on activities and make joint decisions, before involving the Study Regulations Committee members. All ZMG directors and the WB Coordinator receive the agendas before and the minutes and financial reports after the coordination meetings.

Prof. Michaela Haug –new ZMG Director- joined one of our meetings in March 2025. Her inter- cultural experience and constructive attitude was highly valued by Master members. Likewise, Prof. Michael Scherer-Lorenzen and Toni Buenemann contributed to the discussions.



#### **Christmas celebration**

As each year in December, Master GUH organised again a Christmas gathering with the Master students. Celebrating also the end of the core module (which lasted 13 weeks), this event gave everyone the feeling of gratitude, Christmas spirit and inspiration for the new year. Students and the Master team brought various Christmas food and drinks from their countries and shared international Christmas traditions.



#### High-level symposium on 25-26 September 2025

The planned symposium on planetary health aspects in urban areas has the overall aim to strengthen the networks of students, graduates and senior experts working towards a better future and sharing with colleagues and students the current work being done in the context of planetary health. The occasion is threefold: to celebrate the 10th cohort of our Master programme in Global Urban Health, to mark the renaming of our university centre into "Centre for Planetary Health" and to acknowledge our Centre's new status as a UN-Habitat Collaboratina Centre. These milestones have a common goal: to address interrelated challenges of planetary health -particularly in urban areas - and to motivate our current and



former students to advocate for a healthier and more sustainable future through dialogue and interaction with senior experts from the academia and international organisations. We immensely thank **One Health Platform** for financially supporting the high level event.

#### **Alumni in High-Level Positions**

We are proud to share the recent professional achievements of our alumni, who continue to make impactful contributions in global health and beyond:

- Monica Andrea Quintero Castellanos has been appointed International Relations Coordinator at the Faculty of Medicine, Universidad de La Sabana in Bogotá, Colombia.
- Keeney Ritchie Evelyn Rose has joined GIZ's Global Programme for Pandemic Resilience and One Health in Bonn, Germany.
- Reagan Tichenor has begun a new role as Graduate Teaching Assistant at the O'Donnell School of Public Health, UT Southwestern, Texas, USA.
- Mohammed Yaeqoub is now working with the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Libya as a Migration Health Officer.
- Ahmed Asa'ad Al-Aghbari has taken on the role of Communication Officer at the Centre for International Health Protection (ZIG) within the Robert Koch Institute (RKI).
- Greer Brown has recently embarked on a new journey as a Recreational Therapist at Assisted Independence, USA.

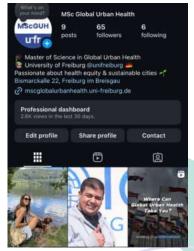
#### Homepage, Social Media and New Instagram Account

New homepage of the Master programme has brought more visibility to our actors and facilitated promotion and admission of potential international students. The ZMG directors would like to improve the ZMG homepage to also gain more visibility now that the new name of the centre will be used (Centre



for Planetary Health instead of Centre for Medicine and Society).

This year marks the launch of our new Instagram account **@mguhfreiburg**, created to showcase the vibrant life of the Master in Global Urban Health programme and strengthen our digital presence. Through this platform, we aim to connect more closely with prospective students, alumni, and partners by sharing highlights from academic activities, student experiences, alumni journeys, research contributions, and special events such as our upcoming 10-year anniversary.



# IV. Strengths / Opportunities

- Master Ownership: the implementers of the programme are fully committed and are contributing with high integrity to the success of the activities with high integrity.
- Financial stability: The increase of the Master fees by 1,000 EUR (starting with the 10th cohort) will give the programme more financial solidity.
- Process and procedures in place: all Master processes have been established and are working according to our quality standards.
- Sufficient numbers of potential students: applications are being processed via the online platform HISinOne since three years and international students receive official acceptance letters directly from the system. The process brings more efficiency.
- New facilities have been assigned for our Master programme as the building at Bismarckallee 22 will be closed in June. We are still thankful to Prof. Sabine Dabringhaus who found our house at Bismarckallee and we had the opportunity to operate for the last six years
- Topic of global health belongs to top priorities in Germany: since the COVID pandemics, global health activities have been receiving more funds. Master GUH brings a great opportunity to contribute to the importance of planetary health.
- ZMG senior support: We are grateful for the valuable support we have received from our ZMG Directors for the last years and we are looking forward to continuing with the same spirit of collaboration.

#### V. Challenges

- University Ownership: Master costs are currently entirely covered by tuition fees (including HR costs). There are several ongoing senior discussions regarding overhead payments to the university. Hopefully exceptional measures will be applied as we are not able to contribute to overheads payments. From one of our projects (CaLioS) the university kept 70% of the overheads provided by the donor.
- The various applications to different donors have not been successful (e.g. application for a new DAAD PAGEL project in Colombia). This project was planned to cover some percentage of personnel costs.
- The promotion of CAS courses (in spite of using several networks) have not yet been successful. CAS represents additional potential income with very low additional burden.

#### VI. Feedback from Students

The feedback provided by our students included again many positive, inspiring comments. We would like to use some examples to illustrate how the students assessed our Master programme:

"Looking back on this phase of the Master in Global Urban Health programme, one thing is evident – there is a strong sense of motivation. From the dedication of our lecturers to the active engagement of



students, the journey so far has been marked by a deep commitment to learning, growth, and collaboration."

"Our teaching faculty have brought each module to life, not only through wellstructured content but also by infusing their lectures with personal insights, practical experiences, and real-world relevance. This blend of academic excellence and professional application has transformed complex theories into meaningful learning experiences."

"Our classroom has been more than just a place for study, it has been a vibrant space where different perspectives come together to shape innovative solutions for urban health. The atmosphere has been positive and inclusive, with students forming strong connections and engaging in thoughtful, interactive group work that promotes fresh perspectives."

"The practical components of the modules have been especially valuable, and their expansion across all modules would only deepen the programme's impact. Excursions, peer interactions, and the occasional participation of additional classmates have brought new energy and insights, keeping our discussions dynamic and relevant."

"The support from the Master team has been exceptional. Their availability, expertise, and encouragement have ensured a smooth and enriching educational experience. Class representatives have also played a key role in fostering communication, further enhancing the learning environment and sense of community. This has been a time of learning, exploration, and transformation. With gratitude for what we have experienced and excitement for what lies ahead, we move forward confident in our shared purpose: to make meaningful contributions to global urban health through knowledge, compassion, and action."

Thank you!

#### VII. Published Articles

#### A. Publications from Master Coordination, Faculty and Scientific Team

- Bautista, G.O., Kroeger, A., Castillo, N.R., Osorio Sanchez, E.G., Gonzales Escobar, D.S., Olarte, R., Diaz-Monsalve, S. 2025. Facing migration under adverse conditions: challenges and resilience in the Colombo-Venezuelan border area. BMC Public Health 25, 261. <u>https://doi.org/</u> 10.1186/s12889-024-21222-0
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- Schlesinger, M., Alvarado, F.E.P., Ramos, M.E.B., Sewe, M., Merle, C.S., Kroeger, A., Hussain-Alkhateeb, L. 2024. Enabling countries to manage outbreaks: statistical, operational, and contextual analysis of the early warning and response system (EWARS-csd) for dengue outbreaks. Front. Public Health 12: 1323618. <u>https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1323618</u>
- Carrillo, M.A., Gessler, A.M., Ramirez, T.R., Cardenas Sanchez, R., Lindenmeier, J., Kern, W.V., **Kroeger, A**. 2024. WhatsApp-based intervention in urban Colombia to support the prevention of arboviral diseases: a feasibility study. Pathogens and Global Health, 118(4), 334-347. <u>https://doi.org/10.1080/20477724.2024.2358263</u>
- Cardenas Sanchez, R., Cabrera, O.L., Carrillo, M.A., Pineda, A., Ahumada, M.L., Yañez, Y., Ismael, H., Paine, M., Ramirez, T.R., **Kroeger, A**. 2024. Aedes aegypti control in breeding sites through an insecticide coating with dual effect: Laboratory trials and safety assessment. Medical and Veterinary Entomology, 1–14. <u>https://doi.org/10.1111/mve.12776</u>
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- Sanchez Tejeda, G., Benitez Valladares, D., Correa Morales, F., Toledo Cisneros, J., Espinoza Tamarindo, B.E., Hussain-Alkhateeb, L., Merle, C.S., **Kroeger, A**. 2023. Early warning and response system for dengue outbreaks: Moving from research to operational implementation in Mexico. PLOS Global Public Health 3(9): e0001691. <u>https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0001691</u>
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#### **B. Publications from Master Alumni**

- Geiselhart, K., Damm, M., Jeske, N., Knappmann, A., Nasser, G.P., Roth, L.F., Unkels, R., Winkler, A.S., Wolf, J., Falkenberg, T. 2024. Sufficiency healthwise: sustainable paths towards planetary and public health. *Front. Public Health*, 12: 1497657. <u>https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2024.1497657</u>
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