

Lala Soa, 5, and Kristavine, 5, play in the vegetable garden in Berano, Anosy, southeast Madagascar.

UNITED KINGDOM



for every child



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# LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

## Analysing the cuts to UK child-focused aid

November 2024

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank everyone who supported the drafting of this report, including many conversations we held with experts across the sector and FCDO officials. They have hugely helped to shape and inform our understanding of the issues the report covers.

Many thanks also to colleagues from across UNICEF UK for their support, insights, and expertise.

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**UNICEF works to build a better world for every child. A world where every child has the chance to fulfil their potential and grow up healthy and safe.**

UNICEF has 15,000 people working for children in more than 190 countries and territories, responding to emergencies and building long-term resilience. UNICEF has the world's largest humanitarian response for children. We save children's lives with vaccines, safe water, and therapeutic food. We protect children from violence, exploitation and abuse. We support quality education that provides the tools for children to reach their full potential. And we seek to create a safe and sustainable world where children can live, learn and grow. Reaching children whenever and wherever they need us most. We advise governments, influence businesses, and lobby leaders to create lasting change for children.

The United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF UK) is a UK registered charity that raises funds for UNICEF's work for children around the world and advocates lasting change for children worldwide. We uphold the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and work with partners and supporters to promote children's voices, unlock resources for children, and advocate for and create change.

# FOREWORD

**One of the first things I did as the new Chief Executive of UNICEF UK was to attend Soccer Aid for UNICEF. I came away with a sense of just how much the British public care about the children UNICEF supports. These are children living in the most difficult circumstances on the planet, without access to the very basic things they need – clean water, healthcare, nutritious food, and an education.**



UNICEF UK commissioned this report because we wanted to understand what the impact of UK cuts in development assistance has been on children around the world. This feels more important than ever now, as children face the worsening impacts of climate change, increasing levels of conflict and the continued aftermath of Covid-19.

What we have found is that the UK has been cutting aid focused on children far more deeply than other sectors. What is even more concerning is that this started before the government's major aid cuts of 2021, when they reduced the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) target from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5%. From 2019 to 2022, the government cut child-focused bilateral aid by 56% - while non-child focused bilateral aid fell by 34%.

This means for example, that despite years of the government publicly championing girls' education, only 4% of bilateral aid was spent on education in 2022, down from 11% in 2016. Aid for organisations that focus on children was cut by 76% between 2016 to 2022.

Our assessment of why children have suffered deeper cuts is that the FCDO does not have the structures or strategies in place to make the case for or co-ordinate, efforts that reach them. It shows why it's absolutely critical to embed children's rights within international development policy. Without this, children have been sidelined with devastating consequences.

Children make up almost half of the population of low- and middle- income countries. Development policy must recognise that gains for children are gains for their wider societies. For this new UK Government to deliver on its commitments to a more equitable, sustainable world and to play its part in meeting the SDGs, it will need to urgently start doing more for children.

A child rights strategy, with accompanying staffing structures and a senior champion, should set the FCDO on to the right course. And of course, the funding must be there too. The UK should bring child-focused spending back up

to where it was before 2019. To enable that, the government will need to return the 0.7% ODA target and find a way of funding refugees in the UK that doesn't take away from children living in poverty around the world.

Now is the time for the UK to reset the course of its international development policy and put children at its heart.



**Philip Goodwin**

**Chief Executive Officer,  
UK Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF UK)**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**In 2015, the world adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, “a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future”.<sup>1</sup> Underpinning the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was a pledge to **leave no one behind**. As we approach 2030, many of the SDGs are off track, including critical development outcomes for children. Under current trends, 59 countries will miss the under-five mortality rate target and 64 will miss the neonatal mortality rate target.<sup>2</sup> Rates of completing early childhood education, reading proficiency and children attending school are also off targets.<sup>3</sup>**

The global economic environment has become more challenging as economic growth has slowed, and interest rates and debt have risen. This is particularly salient for low income and least developed countries. Domestic and international funding for children is failing to keep pace with needs. Without concerted effort to accelerate investment in critical child-focused social services, the SDGs will not be achieved.

This report analyses the UK’s record in child-focused aid over the last 10 years. The UK has historically played a significant role in international development and helped develop the SDGs. Despite the UK’s commitment to child rights, children are not sufficiently mainstreamed across the UK’s foreign and development policies.

The analysis shows that the UK’s child-focused aid has fallen dramatically in recent years – both in absolute terms and as a percentage of total Official Development Assistance (ODA). This decline has been especially steep for bilateral aid. As a share of bilateral aid, the decline started in 2016 and, following a brief rebound in 2019, deepened from 2020. **By 2022, child-focused bilateral ODA had fallen by 56% since 2016.**

While the 2021 drop in the ODA spending target to 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI) and the dramatic surge in spending of ODA on in-donor refugee costs (IDRC) are an important part of the story, the decline in UK child-focused ODA started as far back as 2016 and was more severe after 2019. **The UK’s child-focused bilateral aid fell by 57% from 2019 to 2022, while non-child-focused bilateral aid fell by 34% (excluding IDRCs).** The UK’s child-focused multilateral contribution also fell by 52.3% from 2019 to 2022 (but was partly due to delayed disbursements). The UK’s child-focused aid spending declined across all measures, including:

- Funding to education fell from 11% of bilateral UK aid spending in 2016 to 4% in 2022.

- Aid that was identifiably spent through child-focused organisations (such as UNICEF) declined by 73% from around £669 million in 2016 to £181 million in 2022.
- Across bilateral health funding, the UK's percentage of child-focused spending declined from an average of 50% between 2012 and 2019, to 45% in 2022.
- Across bilateral climate spending (identified using the OECD's Rio-markers<sup>4</sup>), the UK's percentage of child-focused spending fell from 31% in 2019 to 13% in 2022.
- Overall, the share of bilateral aid with a child-focus declined from 30% to 18% between 2016 and 2022, for total UK aid (including our multilateral estimates) the drop is from 25% to 17%.

Children make up almost half the population (46%) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Children have a significant stake in the future of their societies and a right to participate in decisions that affect them. Recent analysis found that every dollar spent on child-focused ODA results in a \$10 return.<sup>5</sup> This requires a more systematic approach that prioritises children across the UK's international development portfolio. A child rights strategy would signal political commitment and prevent similar disproportionate cuts to child-focused ODA. To deliver the SDGs and ambitions for 'a world without poverty on a liveable planet', **we urge the UK Government to:**

## 1. ADOPT A NEW STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CHILD RIGHTS IN UK INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This should include:

- Developing and implementing a child rights strategy that champions children and youth across the UK's development and diplomatic efforts.
- Applying a child-focused lens to the UK's development assistance, including child rights impact assessments, disaggregated data on age, sex and disability, and a children and youth consultation mechanism.
- Investing in child rights expertise and capacity within the FCDO, including a child rights envoy and a dedicated team.

## 2. PRIORITISE ODA INVESTMENT FOR CHILDREN

This should include:

- Commit to reversing the decline in child-focused ODA, by matching the 25% of child-focused bilateral ODA spent in 2016.
- Return to measurable and trackable spending targets in sectors children rely on: 15.5% on health, 15% on education, 10% of bilateral ODA on nutrition, and 50% of International Climate Finance on climate adaptation.
- To enable the above, address the foundational challenges facing the ODA budget, by:
  - Committing to a clear roadmap to return to the legal commitment of spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA, including a clear and achievable fiscal test.
  - Reforming the methodology for counting IDRC with a goal of phasing out the use of ODA for in-donor refugee costs within the next year.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

**Globally, a dramatic acceleration is needed to get the SDGs back on track and tackle the climate crisis. Progress for children is critical to progress on the SDGs and to realising the 2030 Agenda's promise of a peaceful, sustainable future. Children make up almost half the population (46%) in LMICs. Children have a significant stake in the future of their societies and wider world and a right to participate in the making of decisions that affect them. Investing in children can deliver sizeable returns, creating a virtuous cycle of improved outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.**

As the new UK Government implements its approach to international development, delivering for children will be crucial to achieving 'a world without poverty on a liveable planet'. In 2022, 4.9 million children died aged under five - nearly half from malnutrition.<sup>6</sup> 333 million children are living in extreme poverty<sup>7</sup>. An estimated 119 million girls are not in education.<sup>8</sup> Many more children are being let down by education systems that are not teaching them the basics.

Amidst a backdrop of stalled progress on the SDGs, more and better investment in children's well-being and rights is needed. The UK has an important role to play, but after years of decline, urgent action is needed to reverse two key trends in the UK's bilateral ODA spending. Firstly, the decline of ODA allocations to social sectors that children rely on for their well-being (which means increasing spending on child protection, social protection, health, nutrition, education and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene)). Secondly, the decline of child-focused spending across the UK's international development portfolio.

## 1.1 Methodology

Using the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS) data, the research identified the UK's bilateral spending on child-focused ODA. This was done by looking at the sector in which it is spent, the channels through which it is spent and by keyword indicators in project titles and descriptions. Since 2019, aid marked as having a reproductive, maternal and newborn child health objective was included (whether significant or principal).

Given this methodology, this report defines child-focused aid as that which is spent through sectors or channels likely to disproportionately benefit children, or that which mentions children as beneficiaries in project descriptions.



The report considers the UK's bilateral and multilateral aid separately. While the UK has direct control over bilateral aid, which therefore better reflects its policy priorities, the UK is a significant contributor to the multilateral system. The same methodology is used to assess the child-focused aid of multilateral organisations. The figures may not be exactly comparable due to different reporting practices, but give an indication of the relative importance of multilaterals for this area. The methodological appendix provides more details.

## 1.2 Return on investment in children

The last years have been marked by stagnation and the reversal of hard-won progress toward the SDGs. However, investing in children provides the scale of returns needed to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Recent analysis completed by Ernst & Young for World Vision found that every \$1 invested in children through ODA returns \$10 in benefits to children and the broader community, through health, education and social value.<sup>9</sup> The research found that listening to local communities, including their children and young people, provides additional returns. Similar rates of return have been found for sector-specific investments:

- \$1 invested in early child development generates \$13 in return<sup>10</sup>
- \$1 invested in vaccination returns \$26<sup>11</sup>
- \$1 invested in nutrition returns between \$4 and \$35<sup>12</sup>
- Each additional year in school generates a 10% increase in annual earnings.<sup>13</sup>

As it stands, globally only 12% of ODA is used for programmes that directly or indirectly benefit children.<sup>14</sup> Given the potential returns on investment, failing to sufficiently invest in children misses our best opportunity to achieve the SDGs.

# 2. THE UK'S INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

**Historically one of the top five OECD DAC donors, the UK is widely recognised as a champion of evidence-based programming with a strong focus on impact and results. The UK has played a leading role in the Leave No One Behind agenda and coordinated some of the world's most impactful global initiatives for advancing children's rights and well-being. More recently, the UK's reputation as an international development champion has been called into question, following the creation of the merged Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the reduction of the UK's ODA target.<sup>15</sup>**

## 2.1 Pressures on UK ODA

The UK's international development portfolio has faced a series of challenges since 2020, starting with the significant ODA cuts that year as the coronavirus pandemic impacted GDP.<sup>16</sup> This resulted in the first reduction in the UK's ODA spending since commitment to the 0.7% spending target was enshrined in law in 2015. It was followed by the government at the time's decision to 'temporarily' drop the 0.7% ODA spending target to 0.5% in November 2020.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the UK's ODA spending in 2021 fell by 21% to £11.4 billion from £14.5 billion in 2020, setting UK ODA spending back to 2013 levels.<sup>18</sup> UK ODA spending returned to growth in 2021 and reached £15.4 billion (0.58% of GNI) in 2023.

At the same time, IDRCs (the costs to the UK for hosting refugees and asylum seekers in the UK) rose significantly – to almost 30% of the ODA budget in 2022 and 2023. Almost of all the increase to ODA spending from 2021 to 2023 went to IDRCs. The impact of these rises was partially offset by an additional allocation that saw UK ODA rise to 0.58% of GNI in 2023.<sup>19</sup> The government has confirmed that this allocation will not be repeated in 2024, and ODA is projected to go back to 0.5% of GNI<sup>20</sup>. The net result is that the UK's effective ODA budget has been squeezed from two sides.

|                         | UK ODA spending adjusted for in-donor refugee costs (£GBP billion) |              |             |              |
|-------------------------|--|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Year                    | 2020   | 2021         | 2022        | 2023         |
| UK ODA total            | £14.5  | £11.4        | £12.8       | £15.4        |
| UK IDRCs                | £0.63  | £1.1         | £3.7        | £4.3         |
| <b>UK ODA remaining</b> | <b>£13.87</b>  | <b>£10.3</b> | <b>£9.1</b> | <b>£11.1</b> |

Over the past four years, UK funding available for global poverty alleviation in LMICs (the primary purpose of UK ODA) is significantly below where it could be. In 2023, a 0.7% ODA spending target would have provided an additional £3.1 billion for global poverty alleviation. With the £4.3 billion spent on IDRCs repurposed, the UK would have had an additional £7.4 billion to spend on its international development priorities. For comparison, the provisional total for the UK's 2023 bilateral ODA spending was £7.2 billion (excluding IDRCs).

The new government has an opportunity to reduce the pressure on the UK's ODA budget by addressing its root causes. Firstly, a clear and achievable pathway back to the 0.7% GNI spending target is needed in the coming Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The current fiscal tests<sup>21</sup> have not been met since 2001<sup>22</sup> and the Autumn budget confirmed they are unlikely to be met in the life of this parliament.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, the government can revise its approach to reporting IDRC as ODA, which could maximise funding for global poverty alleviation. This would bring UK policy into line with the spirit of the OECD DAC rules, which emphasise the need for a conservative approach to reporting given their potential to impact development budgets.<sup>24</sup> Thirdly, the government should commit to an urgent top up to the ODA budget in the 2025 Spring Budget to offset the burden of IDRC until the government measures to reduce it begin to take effect.

### 3. IMPACT ON CHILD-FOCUSED AID



**In line with its obligations under the Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC),<sup>25</sup> children featured across both the UK's International Development Strategy and the White Paper. The 2022 strategy includes child-focused statements around education and learning, with a strong focus on girls' education, ending violence (including child marriage and child abuse) and ending preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children. It also recognises children's vulnerability to climate change. These statements are reiterated and built on in the 2023 White Paper, for example, with specific commitments on immunisation and child malnutrition, as well as developing a new strategy on children in conflict, and harnessing innovation to make children safer in the real world and online.**

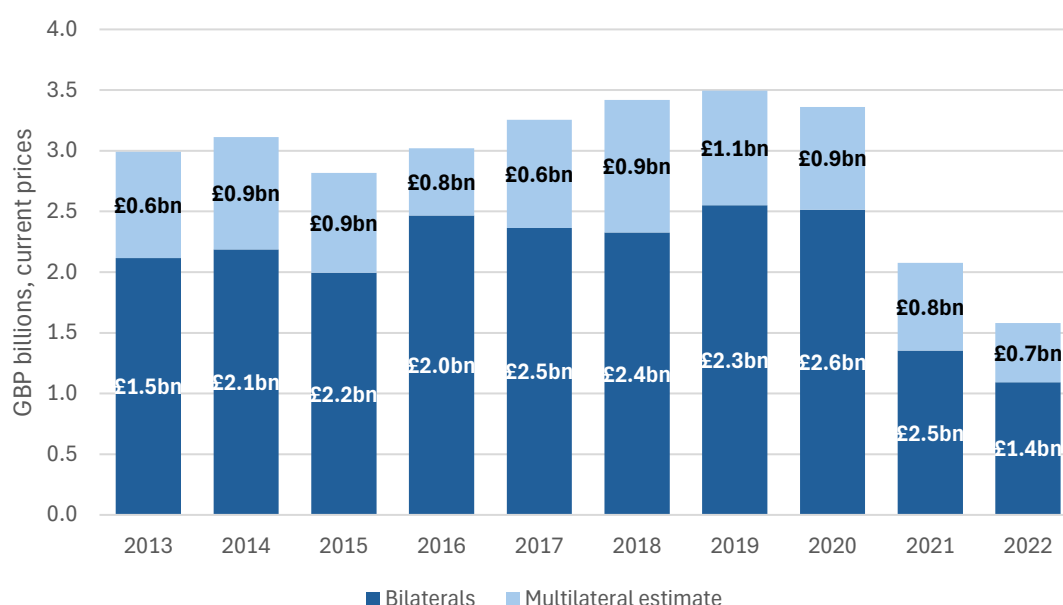
However, children are not a primary focus of the UK's approach to international development. While many teams work on issues related to children, there is no central team within the FCDO ensuring a child focus, as there is for gender. Children appear as beneficiaries, particularly in sectors like health and education, but there is no strategy or a coherent narrative for the UK's work in this area.

The pressure on UK ODA since 2020 has resulted in direct cuts to programmes supporting children. The sheer scale of the cuts required in 2021 meant that good programmes were lost alongside underperformers<sup>26</sup> and that even government priorities like girls' education and health could not be fully protected.<sup>27</sup> Inevitably, this had substantial impact on the absolute value of child-focused aid.

The analysis presented here shows, however, that the UK's child-focused aid spending declined earlier and more steeply than the decline in total UK aid spending. For bilateral aid, the decline occurred across almost all sectors from 2019 to 2022, with education experiencing the largest drop. Our estimates of the child-focus of multilateral contributions also suggest a decline, although this rebounded in 2023.<sup>28</sup> When both are considered together, our estimates suggest that the percentage of UK aid that is child-focused fell from 23% to 17% between 2019 and 2022. Coupled with the total drop in UK aid, this meant £1.9 billion less in spending targeted at child well-being. While there is uncertainty around the exact figures, it is clear that this decline was caused not just by aid cuts, but also by shifting priorities.

**Figure 1:** Child-focused ODA has declined substantially in recent years, from both bilateral aid multilateral contributions

*UK aid with a child-focus, £m, current prices*



Notes: See appendix for description of child-focused aid. GBP millions, current prices. Estimates between bilateral and multilateral are not directly comparable as multilaterals do not use the RMNCH policy marker.

Source: OECD DAC CRS, UK Statistics on International Development

The decline has been much sharper for the UK's bilateral aid. This fell from £2.6 billion to £1.1 billion between 2019 and 2022, a fall of 57%, compared to a fall in total bilateral aid (excluding IDRC) of 40%.

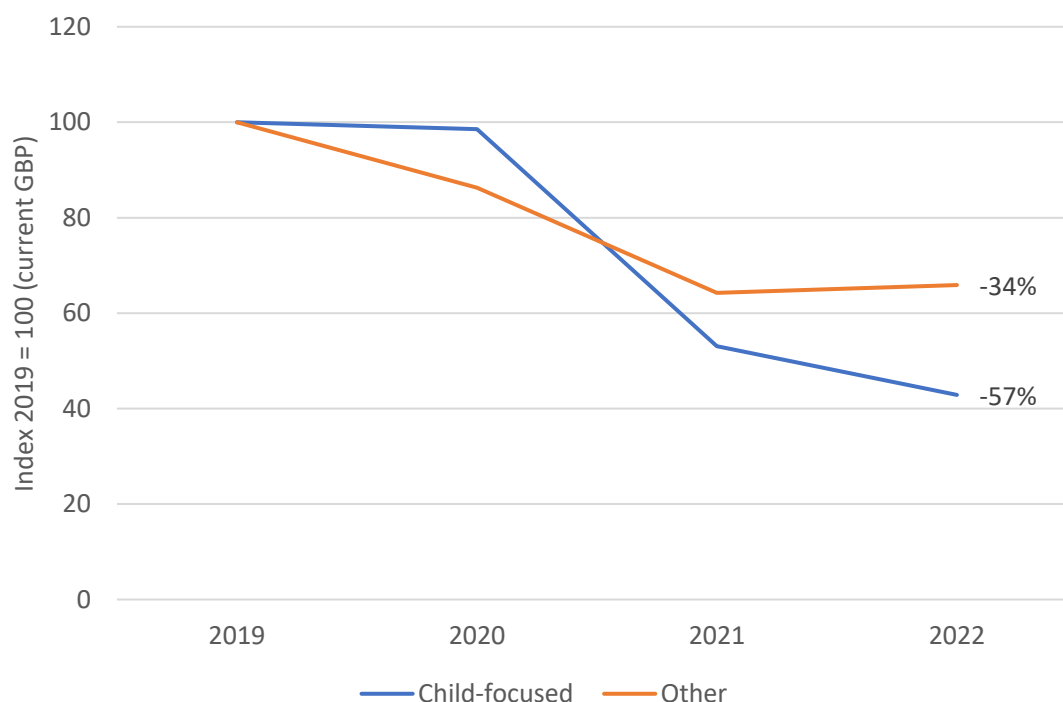
## 3.1 Decline in child-focused bilateral aid

Child-focused bilateral aid fell faster than the total aid budget. In 2019, it reached a peak of £2.6 billion, but by 2022 had fallen to £1.1 billion - a decline of 57%. Whereas other bilateral aid had steadily increased between 2016 and 2019, child-focused aid was stagnant over this period, increasing from £2.5 billion to only £2.6 billion.<sup>29</sup> This means that while the decline in absolute terms began following the cuts, child-focused aid has been falling as a share of the UK's bilateral aid for several years prior. The UK's recent Statistics on International Development release suggests that this figure will be roughly unchanged in 2023: it suggests that bilateral child-focused aid increased by 1.2%.

The decline of 57% in child-focused ODA between 2019 and 2022 compares with a decline in other bilateral aid<sup>30</sup> (excluding in-donor refugee costs) of 34%. Therefore, while the cut from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI and impact of IDRC on the aid budget explains a large part of the decline in child-focused aid, it is not the whole story.

**Figure 2:** Child-focused ODA disproportionately hit by recent cuts

*UK bilateral aid (excluding IDRCs) as a percentage of 2019 values*



Notes: See appendix for description of child-focused ODA.

Source: OECD DAC CRS.

A large share of the decline in child-focused aid can be explained by a shift away from the education sector in UK spending, which fell most years between

2016 and 2022. Consequently, education fell from 11% of bilateral UK aid spending in 2016, to 4% in 2022 (or 6% excluding IDRCs), a decline from £824 million to £266 million in absolute terms. This is despite the priority placed on education in both the International Development Strategy and White Paper. Primary education was particularly hard hit, having fallen by 80% over the same period, and was only £83 million in 2022. However, the decline was broad-based: child-focused aid declined in nearly every sector between 2019 and 2022. Family planning, reproductive healthcare and social protection also accounted for large shares of the decline.

While child-focused aid is often identified by the sector in which it is spent, other indicators that aid is child-focused have also declined. Since 2016 there has been a sharp decline in the likelihood that project titles or descriptions refer to children or related terms. Projects identifiable as child-focused from titles alone fell from £434 million in 2016 to £80 million in 2022, and those identifiable from descriptions as well fell from £1.3 billion to £0.7 billion over the same period. While it is possible that project titles and descriptions are simply becoming less informative, this does not seem to be the case: both have generally gotten longer over time.

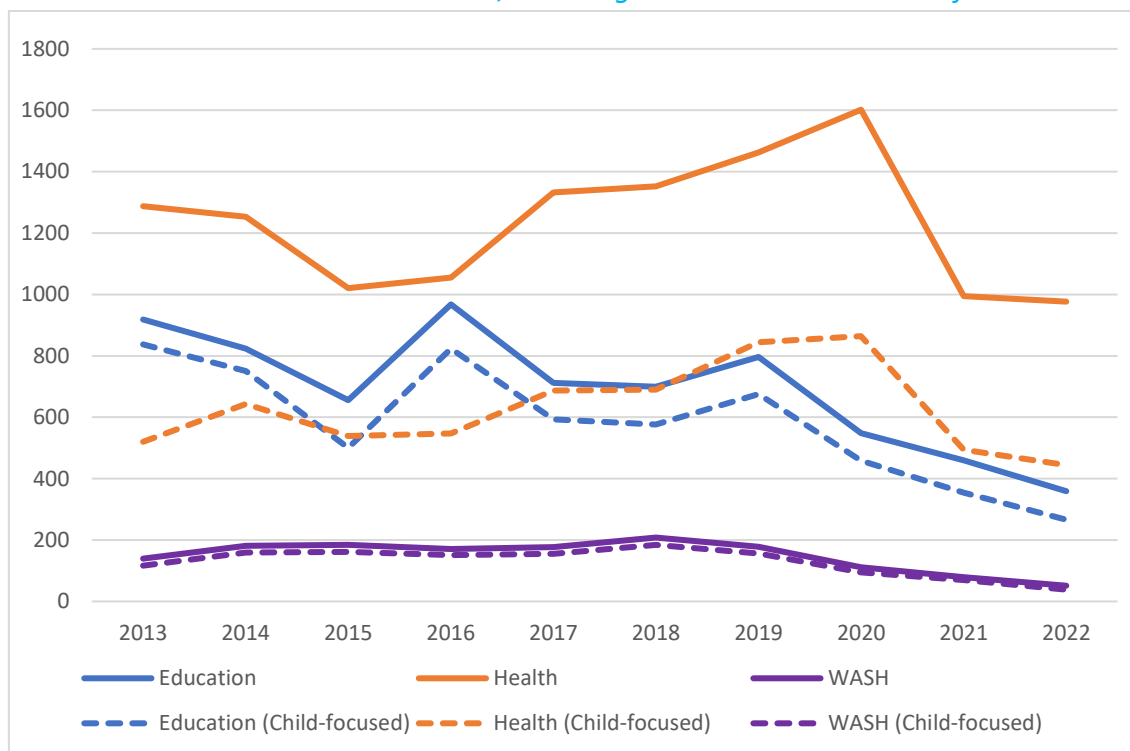
In addition, aid is now less likely to be spent through organisations with children at the centre of their mission. Aid that was identifiably spent through child-focused organisations (see the appendix for a full list in) declined by 73%, from around £669 million in 2016 to £181 million in 2022, a fall from 8% to 3% of total bilateral aid.

## Health

Overall UK bilateral aid to the health sector increased in 2020, from £1.46 billion in 2019 to £1.60 billion, largely as a result of aid provided in response to the global COVID pandemic. However, in 2021, despite the continuing impacts of the crisis, UK aid to the health sector declined precipitously, to £994 million, and again to £977 million in 2022 – a decline of 39% since its peak and the lowest level seen since 2011.

**Figure 3: Bilateral ODA to education, health and WASH sectors declined substantially since 2020**

*Total bilateral aid to the health sector, including health ODA with a child-focus*



Notes: See appendix for description of child-focused aid. GBP millions, current prices.  
Source: OECD DAC CRS.

Around 45% of UK bilateral health spending was child-focused in 2022. This is a considerably lower percentage than in recent years: in 2019 the figure was 58%. This is largely because types of health expenditure that are more likely to be directly child-focused, such as vaccination programmes, or reproductive and maternal health, have declined in importance in the UK’s health expenditure. For example, malaria control and basic health care are both sub-sectors that, according to our methodology, are predominantly child focused. Yet taken together, their share of UK health aid has fallen from 32% in 2013 to 6% in 2022. Reproductive health in particular has contributed substantially to the fall in child-focused ODA over time: declining from £265 to £92 between 2014 and 2022, a fall of 65%. Other types of health expenditure (such as medical research) are undoubtedly valuable and will contribute towards child well-being in the long term but may not address immediate needs.



The joint factors of declining overall ODA going towards the health sector and the falling proportion going to child-focused activities comes at a time when global health outcomes for children are at risk. The under-five mortality rate has more than halved since 1990, but globally 4.9 million children still died before their fifth birthday in 2022.<sup>31</sup> Immunisation coverage fell during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic and still has not fully recovered.<sup>32</sup> Around 21 million children were un- or under-vaccinated in 2023.<sup>33</sup>

### **Spotlight 1: Reproductive health programme's budget cut by more than half**

In 2019, the UK Government launched their Reproductive Health Supplies programme, stating that, as a global leader in comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, they were aiming to help 20 million women a year in 40 of the world's poorest countries.

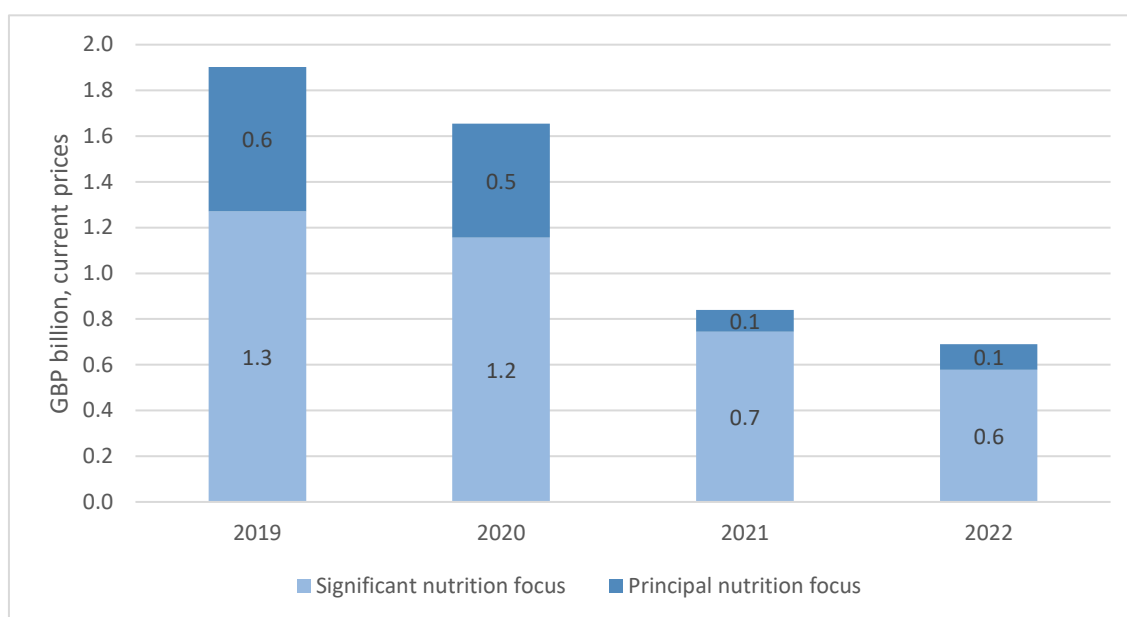
With an initial budget of £600 million, the programme set out to provide life-saving health and reproductive services to reduce maternal deaths and unintended pregnancies, as well as improve newborn and child health. Reviews of the programme stated that it was 'excellent value for money'.

However, by October 2024, this vital programme's budget had been cut by over half to £295 million, limiting millions of individuals access to life changing reproductive help and support.

## **Nutrition**

Since 2019, the UK has identified aid related to nutrition using the OECD nutrition policy marker. As with other sectors likely to disproportionately benefit children, aid marked as having either a significant or principal nutrition focus has declined faster than overall bilateral aid (excluding IDRCs). Bilateral aid with a significant focus has fallen from £1.3 billion to £577 million between 2019 and 2022, whereas aid with a principal nutrition focus fell from £630 million to £113 million (falls of 55% and 82% respectively). This trend corroborates similar findings from the Global Nutrition Report, which uses a more extensive method and finds that total nutrition spending from the UK fell 61.3% between 2020 and 2021, and by roughly half in the humanitarian sector specifically.<sup>34</sup>

Figure 4: Aid with a nutrition focus has declined substantially since marker was introduced  
Aid marked with the OECD nutrition policy marker



At the same time, more investment is needed if the SDGs nutrition outcomes are to be realised. Every day, 1,000 children under five die from diarrhoeal diseases caused by unsafe drinking water.<sup>35</sup> Undernutrition accounts for nearly half of under-five deaths.<sup>36</sup> Stunting, the result of chronic or recurrent malnutrition, has steadily declined since 2000, but 148 million children are still affected.<sup>37</sup> In the past decade, no decrease in stunting has been observed in LICs.<sup>38</sup> In 2022, wasting affected at least 45 million children, more than double the 2030 target of 3%.<sup>39</sup>

## Education

The vast majority of aid spending in the education sector is directly relevant to children. However, as discussed above, the focus of UK's bilateral aid has shifted away from education in recent years, having fallen from 11% on average between 2012 and 2016 to 4% in 2022, despite some high-profile policy announcements relating to girls' education. Consequently, the UK spent less bilateral aid on education in 2022 than in any year in the past decade, and this has accounted for a large share of the decline in child-focused aid.

At the same time, within the UK's funding to the education sector, there has been a shift away from primary/secondary education, general facilities and policy, and towards higher education and adult life skills, which are inherently less focused on children. Therefore, while education spending has fallen by 63% since its peak in 2016, the fall in child-focused spending has been greater at 68%.

This is happening at a time when learning outcomes have regressed, with the latest World Bank simulations estimating 70% of children in LMICs are now 'learning poor'.<sup>40</sup>

### **Spotlight 2: Primary education programme cut by £142 million**

'Shule Bora' means 'Quality Education' in Swahili. In 2022 the UK Government announced £215 million funding for a new 'Shule Bora' Programme in Tanzania, with the aim of helping four million children in Tanzania, at least half of them girls, gain a better-quality primary education. The programme set out to improve learning outcomes especially around reading and writing, as well as supporting more girls into secondary school and the inclusion of children with disabilities. Seen as very successful, the project was 'A' rated when it was evaluated.

By 2024, Shule Bora's budget had been slashed to just £73 million with the programme having to refocus resources with 'new results that are presently being finalised'. Such cuts will undoubtedly impact the chances of many children in Tanzania getting a decent primary education along with life changing basic literacy skills.

## **Water, sanitation and hygiene**

Aid to the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector has never been a large part of UK bilateral aid: between 2012 and 2019, it accounted for 2% of bilateral aid on average. Consequently, it has never accounted for a large component of child-focused aid, even though the bulk of UK funding for WASH is child-focused. Clean water and improved sanitation are key to reducing child mortality; unsafe drinking water contributes to hundreds of children dying every day from diarrhoeal diseases.<sup>41</sup> WASH sector aid peaked in 2018 at £208 million, but has fallen by 75% since then, to £51 million in 2022.

Over the past decade, aid to the WASH sector primarily went to the 'basic drinking water and sanitation' sub-sectors, which accounted for around two thirds of WASH spending between 2012 and 2019. More recently, both water sector policy, and aid to large-scale water and sanitation systems have increased as a share of total WASH expenditure

### **Spotlight 3: A WASH programme cut by more than 70%**

The Climate Resilient WASH in Africa and Asia programme began in 2017. It was designed to improve the resilience of water and sanitation services in some of the poorest and most climate vulnerable counties, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Nepal. It included a focus on responding to pressing climate-related changes in the incidence of water and sanitation related diseases.

At the start of the programme the budget was set at £27 million. By the time the programme closed in 2022 the budget had been cut to £7.6 million. The projects 2022 annual review pointed out that the budget reduction had a "significant impact on the programme", effecting the number of people who would gain access to vital water and sanitation services.

## **Climate and nature**

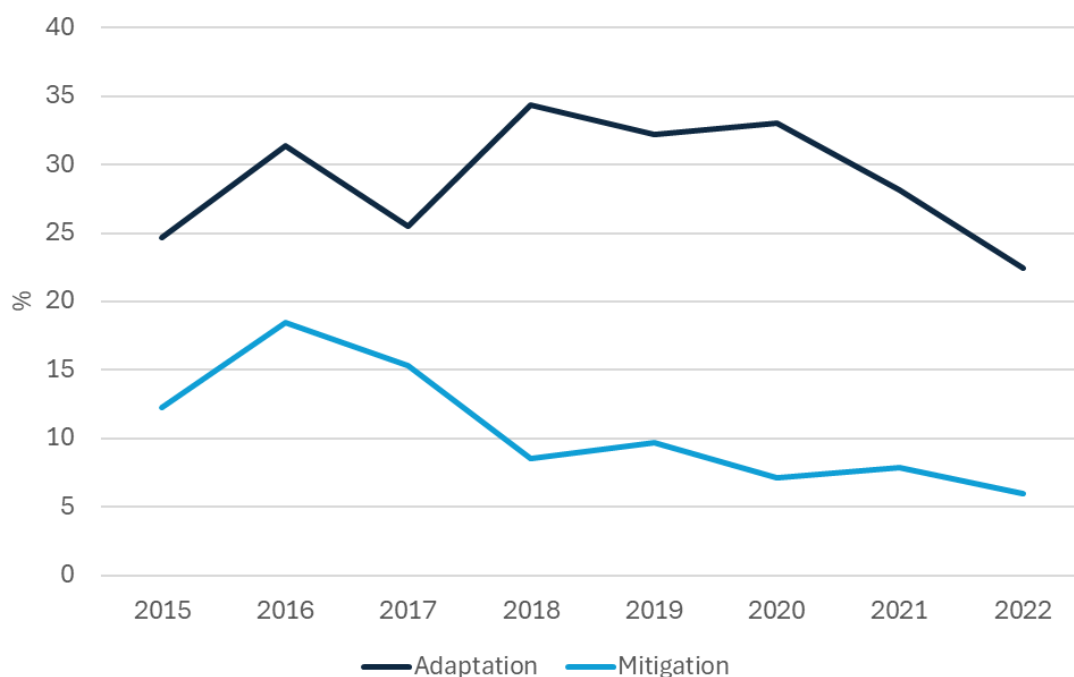
What counts as spending on climate is the subject of a thorny debate,<sup>42</sup> and clarity in trends of climate finance is therefore elusive. This is exacerbated by providers shifting their reporting methodology over time.<sup>43</sup> In ODA data, climate finance is often identified with the OECD Rio-markers, which allow donors to denote whether projects have significant or principal adaptation or mitigation objectives. However, when measuring progress towards its £11.6 billion climate finance commitment, the UK uses a different reporting system. Therefore, while UK aid with a climate focus fell by 53% between 2019 and 2022 according to the Rio-markers, official UK international climate finance increased over this period, although the exact amount is uncertain for 2021 onwards.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, examining aid that has been assigned Rio-markers reveals a similar picture to other sectors: as well as an overall decline, there has been a decline in the share of such aid that is identifiably child-focused. In 2019, 31% of Rio-marked ODA was child-focused, but this fell to 13% by 2022.

This is partly explained by a decline in social protection spending, a key sector for child well-being. Between 2016 and 2022 around half of such spending was Rio-marked (mostly as adaptation). However, total social protection spending fell from £320 million to £73 million over this period, and Rio-marked social protection spending fell from £240 million to £28 million. In addition, half of expenditure in WASH sectors had a Rio-marker applied over this period (also primarily adaptation).

**Figure 5:** Adaptation-marked ODA is much more likely to be child-focused than mitigation.

*Percent of mitigation and adaptation ODA with a child-focus*



**Notes:** Adaptation/mitigation ODA includes ODA with both significant and principal Rio-markers applied, and some projects have both.

One billion children live in the 33 countries classed as ‘extremely high risk’ by UNICEF’s Children’s Climate Risk Index.<sup>45</sup> The climate crisis is already exposing children to extreme temperatures, exacerbating water scarcity, increasing flooding, producing stronger and more frequent cyclones and contributing to the proliferation of vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue fever. It is also disrupting education, driving displacement and worsening food security.

### **Child-focused aid by region**

The region that consistently receives the largest amount of bilateral aid from the UK is Africa, and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in particular. It is also the region that receives the highest share of the UK’s child-focused aid - this has risen on average over the last decade from 34% of total bilateral aid to the region in 2012 to 50% in 2022. However, given the substantial recent decline in aid to SSA (of around 61% since 2019) this region nevertheless contributed the most to the decline in child-focused aid.

Over the past decade, the South and Central Asia region received the second-highest share of the UK’s child-focused ODA (31%). However, for this region, aid has become substantially less child-focused over time - the share declined

from 40% in 2016 to 14% in 2022, meaning that total child-focused aid to South and Central Asia fell from £501 million to £102 million over that period.

### Comparison with other countries

While it is a challenge to use our methodology to identify child-focused aid in other countries (because of difference reporting practices and languages), a comparison of the sectors in which countries spend aid gives a good indication of their relative focus.

Between 2012 and 2016, the UK was consistently among the top three donors in terms of the percentage of aid spent in sectors that children rely on (for example education, social protection and various health sectors; see the appendix for the full list). Over this period, the UK spent around 19% of bilateral aid in such sectors - nearly twice the DAC average of 10%. The decline since then has led to the UK falling to 5.8% in 2022 – behind the DAC average which had also declined to 6.3%. Both figures have been impacted by the increase in IDRC in 2022. When this is excluded, the UK spend is 9.4% compared to a DAC average of 7.7%.

## 3.2 Estimates of child-focused multilateral contributions

The UK is a large contributor to the multilateral system, both to specialist child-focused organisations, and to multilateral agencies and development banks (MDBs) that cover a range of areas, some of them relevant to children. Consequently, a lot of the UK's impact on children comes from such contributions. To calculate the share of UK's multilateral aid with a child focus, the research first calculates the share of disbursements from each multilateral that has a child focus (by the same methodology) between 2017 and 2022 (last five years of data). Then, those shares were applied to the contributions that

### **Box 1: Some impacts on child-focused multilateral aid**

Although this report focuses on bilateral aid, some of the UK's multilateral spending also contributes to children's well-being, for example through core contributions to UNICEF or GAVI (the Vaccine Alliances), which primarily focuses on children's vaccines. These contributions were also impacted by the cuts. Core contributions to UNICEF fell from £40 million in 2019 and 2020, to £16 million in 2021-2023, a decline of 60%. While core contributions to GAVI increased slightly in 2021 – to £222 million, up from £200 million in the preceding two years – they fell to zero in 2022, before going back up in 2023 to £234 million.

the UK makes to those multilaterals and sum to obtain the total figure. For example, around 22% of the International Development Association (IDA)'s expenditure between 2017 and 2022 was child-focused, so it was assumed that 22% of the UK's contributions to IDA are child-focused. Unfortunately, some organisations do not report their expenditure to the CRS. For these organisations, it was assumed that no expenditure is child-focused (this primarily affects the Council of Europe and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)). These estimates should be considered illustrative, as reporting practices and levels of detail vary across multilateral reporting.

The UK's multilateral contributions that were classed as child-focused initially peaked in 2018, at £1.0 billion (19% of total multilateral contributions). Since then, it declined sharply, falling to £477 million in 2022. However, this was partly because in these years, the UK had been postponing large contributions to some multilaterals because of the ODA cuts it had to impose. These were finally provided in 2023, and consequently, child-focused multilateral contributions increased back to £1.0 billion (19% of total contributions, as in 2018). Overall, although child-focused multilateral contributions have fluctuated, they have not shown a clear trend either in absolute terms or as a percent of total multilateral contributions.

As a result of its size, IDA has generally accounted for the largest share of child-focused multilateral contributions. While its share of child-focused disbursements was 22%, lower than many other multilaterals, it also accounts for the largest share of total multilateral contributions. In 2023, it accounted for 39% of the UK's total multilateral contributions, and 43% of its child-focused contributions. GAVI accounted for the second largest share - 25% in 2023<sup>a</sup>. EU institutions have also historically accounted for a large share. It was previously the organisation to which the UK contributed the most, so despite only 14% of disbursements having a child-focus, it had a large impact on total child-focused multilateral aid.

Of the multilaterals that the UK contributes towards, UNICEF, UNRWA and GAVI were those that recorded the highest share of child-focused disbursements. UNICEF disbursements are all counted as child-focused, and the share was 60% for the other two organisations.

Given that the share of multilateral aid with a child-focus has remained relatively stable over time, multilateral contributions have mitigated the decline in the share of UK's overall aid which is child-focused. Whereas the share of bilateral aid with a child-focus declined from 30% to 18% between 2016 and 2022, for total UK aid (including our multilateral estimates) the drop is from 25% to 17%.

<sup>a</sup> This includes UK contributions to the International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm) which supports GAVI but doesn't report separate expenditure to the OECD CRS

## 4. THE WAY FORWARD

Right now, for too many children, poverty, disability, geography and gender determine the quality of their lives. Almost half of all children in LMICs are deprived in at least one dimension of health, education, nutrition, WASH or housing.<sup>46</sup> Investing in children can deliver sizeable returns, creating a virtuous cycle of improved outcomes for individuals, families and communities.<sup>47</sup> This requires a clear strategy for ensuring that children are not left out or behind.

In recent years, there has been a stark decline in the UK's child-focused aid. Even stated priorities – like girls' education, ending preventable deaths and nutrition – have experienced significant cuts in funding. This has occurred at the same time as critical development outcomes for children are falling behind. In 2023, analysis by UNICEF found that globally only one in three of the 48 child-related indicators in the SDGs had been met or were on track to be met (i.e. more than 50% of their target value achieved).<sup>48</sup> Low-income countries (LICs) are furthest behind, with less than 20% of the indicators met or on track to be met.<sup>49</sup>

The new UK Government has made welcome pledges to tackle poverty, instability and the climate crisis, to build respectful and meaningful partnerships with the global south, and to empower women and girls. A UK international development approach that invests in, champions, and listens to children would support the government to achieve these commitments. This is not about creating a child-focused silo but about recognising the centrality of children (their rights, their wellbeing, and their perspectives) in international development.



Ratanadip on his way to school.  
Dibrugarh, Assam,  
India

©UNICEF/SmilePleasePhotography



The new UK Government has an opportunity to play its part in remedying the global underinvestment in children by getting its own child-focused ODA back on track. This will require a more intentional and systematic approach that prioritises children across the UK's international development portfolio. A child rights strategy would signal political commitment and provide the necessary framework for delivering for children in all their diversity. It would complement the UK's strategy on women and girls and inclusive development strategy. A child rights strategy that looks across the UK's international development portfolio would support wider, multi-sectoral system strengthening efforts, while ensuring that children's needs, rights and perspectives are met. It would also ensure the UK has the right capacity across the FCDO to deliver for children. This needs to go hand in hand with moves towards locally led development backed by genuine, country-led partnerships.

A UK child rights strategy could guide and inform the UK's foreign and international development policies, resulting in better outcomes for children and their communities. This strategy should articulate how the UK will:

- Mainstream child rights in UK international development. This will require introducing a child-right impact assessment for the UK development programmes, and establishing sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated data for ODA reporting. This will mean there is more systematic inclusion and protection of children's rights across all the FCDO's work.
- Champion child rights in all relevant spaces. This will require deploying the UK's diplomatic and development capacity in support of child rights, advocating for more and better child-focused funding, and building partnerships that deliver for children.
- Listen to children and young people. This will require working with partners to support their participation in relevant national and international decision-making forums and provide them opportunities to have an impact. Children have an undeniable stake in the future of their societies and wider world – and a right under the UNCRC to participate in decisions that affect them. They are important agents of change, with innovative ideas for addressing global challenges.

Revitalising the ODA budget is also critical to ensure the right resources are available for the poorest and most vulnerable children globally. Addressing the fundamental challenges currently limiting ODA resources goes hand in hand with centring children in the UK international development. This includes a clear roadmap towards restoring ODA to 0.7% of GNI, with a fit for purpose, clear and achievable fiscal test. It also includes reforming the approach of counting spending on refugees and the asylum system in the ODA budget, to ensure most ODA resources are getting to those who most need them. This will enable the UK to invest in children and reverse the decline in child-focused

ODA. This will require increasing the proportion of UK aid going to sectors that children rely on like education, health and nutrition. It will also mean making sure that spending across the UK's portfolio intentionally targets children.

### **Box 2: A child-focused approach to UK ODA**

A child-focused approach to UK ODA could deliver significant increases in ODA for key services children rely on. For example, even with a 0.55% GNI ODA spending target, returning to 2016 levels of bilateral funding for children (29%) would increase child-focused bilateral ODA by £7.1 billion over the next four years (2025-2028). A graduated return to the 0.7% target would deliver an additional £1.7 billion over the same period. This could easily be achieved by reducing the amount of ODA spent on IDRCs.

**Therefore, the new UK government should commit to the following:**

#### **1. ADOPT A NEW STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CHILD RIGHTS IN UK INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

This should include:

- Developing and implementing a child rights strategy that champions children and youth across the UK's development and diplomatic efforts.
- Applying a child-focused lens to the UK's development assistance, including child rights impact assessments, disaggregated data on age, sex and disability, and a children and youth consultation mechanism.
- Investing in child rights expertise and capacity within the FCDO, including a child rights envoy and a dedicated team.

#### **2. PRIORITISE ODA INVESTMENT FOR CHILDREN**

This should include:

- Commit to reversing the decline in child-focused ODA, by matching the 25% of child-focused bilateral ODA spent in 2016.
- Return to measurable and trackable spending targets in sectors children rely on: 15.5% on health, 15% on education, 10% of bilateral ODA on nutrition, and 50% of International Climate Finance on climate adaptation.
- To enable the above, address the foundational challenges facing the ODA budget, by:
  - Committing to a clear roadmap to return to the legal commitment of spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA, including a clear and achievable fiscal test.
  - Reforming the methodology for counting IDRC with a goal of phasing out the use of ODA for in-donor refugee costs within the next year.

# APPENDIX 1

## METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING CHILD-INCLUSIVE AID

**OECD DAC data has no official way of tracking aid spending that has a child-focus. This appendix describes the method used to identify aid that has a child-focus.**

Aid is considered to be child-focused if spent in the following sectors (in practice, lots of aid from other sectors is included if identified by other parts of the methodology, outlined below):

- All education sectors (sector codes 111-114) excluding “Basic life skills for adults” (purpose code 11230), “Higher Education” (11420) and “Advanced technical and managerial training” (11430)
- Reproductive health care (13020) and Family planning (13030)
- Basic drinking water supply and sanitation (14030, 14031, 14032) and Water supply and sanitation - large systems (14020, 14021, 14022)
- Child soldiers (prevention and demobilisation) (15261)
- Social protection (16010)

In addition, aid is considered to be child-focused if delivered through the following channels (OECD channel codes in brackets):

- Save the Children (21505)
- Save the Children donor country office (22502)
- UNICEF (41122)
- Global Campaign for Education (21011)
- Forum for African Women Educationalists (21010)
- Global Partnership for Education (47501)
- International Finance Facility for Education (47147)

In addition, a keyword search is performed in project titles and descriptions. This search is performed using regular expressions which allows for matching wildcards and partial matches. All text is converted to lower case before searching. The search included the following expressions:

- "child(ren)?"
- "infant"
- "boy(s|hood)?"
- "girl(s|hood)?"
- "adolescent"
- "youth"
- "young person"
- "toddler"
- "bab(y|ies)"
- "under ?5"

In addition, many channels in the CRS are non-descriptive (such as "Donor country based NGO" or "International NGO"). Relying on CRS descriptions alone would therefore likely underestimate aid delivered through child-focused channels. This was therefore supplement with additional information from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), which often gives more detail on recipient organisations. The same list of keywords was used to search within the receiver organisation field to identify spending through child-focused organisations. This is only available for FCDO spending, as other departments do not report adequate data to IATI. In addition, FCDO reporting to IATI is incomplete, and therefore this may miss relevant spending. This is then matched to projects in the CRS using the transaction ID from IATI and the project number variable from the CRS.

Finally, our measure includes aid that has been assigned a principal or significant RMNCH marker. It should be noted that the marker has only been used since 2019, and therefore there is a small inconsistency before and after that year. In addition, most multilaterals do not use the policy-markers. However, much of the aid identified as child-focused using the marker was already identified as such by other means, and so the difference is small.

# APPENDIX 2

## SCENARIOS FOR CHILD-FOCUSED ODA

Three scenarios were developed for child-focused UK bilateral aid spending between 2025 and 2028. These were developed using the Office for Budgetary Responsibility's projections for GNI published in November 2023. From these, we calculated a range of ODA spending from 0.5 to 0.7% GNI. This provided a total envelope of projected spending from which we were able to calculate different potential allocations to sectors that children rely on, including health and education, as well as within bilateral health ODA for nutrition.

The scenarios, while based on the best available data, are snapshots. In keeping with the focus of this report, they look only at bilateral ODA to the education, health and nutrition sectors. As such, they are not detailed models for UK aid spending over the next few years, rather they illustrate the levels of funding that are possible, if certain policy decisions are taken.

### Scenario 1: Frozen status quo

In this scenario, UK ODA meets the current 0.5% of GNI target for the life of this parliament, and there is no change in the allocation of ODA to key sectors for children. This model assumes the decline in child-focused ODA is halted, but not reversed. It assumes that the ratio of bilateral to multilateral spending remains fixed at 75.4%. In 2022, the UK allocated 4% of its bilateral ODA (including IDRCs) to education, 10% to health and 4% to basic nutrition. Applying these percentages to future ODA budgets allows us to see the amounts available in critical sectors for children. Here we also hold the overall percentage of child-focused ODA steady at 11%, in line with 2022 levels.

|                         | <b>Scenario 1: The frozen status quo</b><br>(£ million) |             |             |             |
|-------------------------|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Year</b>             | <b>2025</b>   | <b>2026</b> | <b>2027</b> | <b>2028</b> |
| <b>UK ODA total</b>     | £14,100   | £14,600     | £15,100     | £15,700     |
| <b>UK bilateral ODA</b> | £10,631   | £11,008     | £11,385     | £11,837     |

|                                    |        |        |        |        |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Child-focused bilateral ODA</b> | £1,191 | £1,233 | £1,275 | £1,325 |
| <b>Health</b>                      | £1,063 | £1,101 | £1,138 | £1,184 |
| <b>Education</b>                   | £425   | £440   | £455   | £473   |
| <b>Nutrition</b>                   | £755   | £782   | £808   | £840   |

In this scenario, only a modest (in line with GNI growth) increase can be seen in overall child-focused spending and sector-specific funding for health, education and nutrition. In this scenario, by 2028, total bilateral aid for health has increased by £207 million, for education by £114 million and for nutrition by £85 million from the 2022 baseline. Child-focused aid will have increased by £135 million. These increases reflect the growth in ODA spending that occurs because the target percentage is pegged to GNI.

## Scenario 2: Increased child-focused ODA

In this scenario, UK ODA was assumed at 0.55% of GNI over the life of this parliament, and the government commits to ambitious ODA spending in key sectors that children rely on from 2025. For this scenario, the following targets was set: 15.5% of bilateral ODA on health, 15% on education and 10% of bilateral health spending on basic nutrition. Here it was assumed that overall bilateral child-focused spending will return to 29% in line with 2016 levels. This scenario assumes the ratio of bilateral to multilateral ODA remains constant at the estimated 2023 level (64.1%) which is closer to recent averages.

|                                    | <b>Scenario 2: More child-focused UK ODA, constant ODA target</b><br>(£ million) |             |             |             |
|------------------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Year</b>                        | <b>2025</b>  | <b>2026</b> | <b>2027</b> | <b>2028</b> |
| <b>UK ODA total</b>                | £15,500  | £16,000     | £16,600     | £17,300     |
| <b>UK bilateral ODA</b>            | £9,936   | £10,256     | £10,641     | £11,089     |
| <b>Child-focused bilateral ODA</b> | £2,881   | £2,974      | £3,085      | £3,216      |
| <b>Health</b>                      | £1540  | £1590       | £1649       | £1719       |

|                  |       |       |       |       |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Education</b> | £1490 | £1538 | £1596 | £1663 |
| <b>Nutrition</b> | £994  | £1026 | £1064 | £1108 |

Compared with the first scenario, it is clear how the UK could improve its child-focused spending by changing how ODA is allocated. This assumes a strategic decision in line with the recommendations in this report. While it does assume a modest increase in the ODA GNI target, most of the increase for these key sectors comes hitting specific targets. This scenario would deliver an additional £2 billion in health spending, £4.5 billion in education and £1 billion for nutrition over the course of the four years. Overall child-focused ODA increases by £7.1 billion over 4 years.<sup>50</sup> The sectoral increases could mostly be achieved from savings found by getting IDRC under control or no longer reporting it as ODA.

## Scenario 3: Revitalised, child-focused ODA

In scenario 3, UK ODA as a percentage of GNI increases over the life of this parliament, reaching the 0.7% GNI target in 2028. The government also commits to meeting ambitious targets for spending on the key sectors of education, health and nutrition. The same targets from scenario 2 were kept. This means spending 15.5 % of bilateral ODA on health, 15% on education and 10% on nutrition. The overall target for bilateral child-focused ODA is 29%, in line with the 2016 peak. This scenario assumes the ratio of bilateral to multilateral ODA remains constant at the estimated 2023 level (64.1%) which is closer to recent averages.

|                                    | <b>Scenario 3: Revitalised, child-focused UK ODA</b><br>(£ millions) |                    |                     |                    |
|------------------------------------|--|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Year</b>                        | <b>2025 (0.55%)</b>  | <b>2026 (0.6%)</b> | <b>2027 (0.65%)</b> | <b>2028 (0.7%)</b> |
| <b>UK ODA total</b>                | £15,500  | £17,500            | £19,700             | £22,000            |
| <b>UK bilateral ODA</b>            | £9,935   | £11,217            | £12,628             | £14,102            |
| <b>Child-focused bilateral ODA</b> | £2,881   | £3,253             | £3,662              | £4,090             |

|                  |        |        |        |        |
|------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Health</b>    | £1,540 | £1,739 | £1,957 | £2,185 |
| <b>Education</b> | £1,490 | £1,682 | £1,894 | £2,115 |
| <b>Nutrition</b> | £994   | £1122  | £1262  | £1410  |

This is a highly aspirational scenario, but it shows how much child-focused UK ODA spending could be provided, with sufficient political will. Compared with Scenario 1, Scenario 3 would deliver an additional £2.93 billion in funding for health, an additional £5.39 billion ODA for education and £1.6 billion for nutrition over the next four years. Compared to scenario two there would be an additional £1.7 billion in child-focused spending.



# ACRONYMS

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| CRS   | Creditor Reporting System                              |
| DAC   | Development Assistance Committee                       |
| FCDO  | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office           |
| IDRC  | in-donor refugee costs                                 |
| LMIC  | low- and middle-income countries                       |
| ODA   | official development assistance                        |
| OECD  | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| SDGs  | Sustainable Development Goals                          |
| UNCRC | UN Convention on the Rights of the Child               |
| WASH  | Water, Sanitation and Hygiene                          |

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<sup>22</sup> Dawn Holland and Dirk Willem te Velde, *The Macro-Economic Effects of UK Aid Returning to 0.7% of GNI*, NIESR Discussion Paper 535, March 2022, pp 20.

<sup>23</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672b9695fbd69e1861921c63/Autumn\\_Budget\\_2024\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/672b9695fbd69e1861921c63/Autumn_Budget_2024_Accessible.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> OECD DAC, *In-donor Refugee Costs in Official Development Assistance* Available at <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/oda-eligibility-and-conditions/in-donor-refugee-costs-in-official-development-assistance-oda.html> Accessed 07/10/24.

<sup>25</sup> OHCHR, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child> Accessed 09/09/24.

<sup>26</sup> Euan Ritchie and Ranil Dissanayake, 'Survival of the Fittest or Missing at Random? How the FCDO cuts have fallen across the portfolio', *Centre for Global Development Blog Post* August 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Ranil Dissanayake 'The Shape of Things to Come? FCDO after the cuts' *Centre for Global Development*

<sup>28</sup> The UK's Statistics on International Development publication suggests that child-focused bilateral aid remained fairly flat in 2023: increasing by only 1.3%. However, this data does not contain variables such as the RMNCH marker used in the methodology, and there are slight inconsistencies between this data and the CRS.

<sup>29</sup> This is despite the fact that the figure for 2016 does not include any aid marked with the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn Child Health (RMNCH) OECD policy marker, which was only introduced in 2019. However, in practice, the majority of expenditure with the marker applied were already identified as child-focused by other means.

<sup>30</sup> Aid not identified as child-focused by our methodology

<sup>31</sup> David Sharrow, Lucia Hug, Yang Liu, Naomi Lindt, Wanli Nie and Danshen You, *Levels and Trends in Child Mortality: Report 2023*, UNICEF, New York, 2024.

<sup>32</sup> UNICEF *Progress on Children's Well-being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda*, UNICEF, New York, September 2023, pp 22.

<sup>33</sup> UNICEF 'Global childhood immunization levels stalled in 2023 leaving many without lifesaving protection' *Press Release* 15 July 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Natalie Evans, *FCDO's Aid Spending for Nutrition 2021* Development Initiatives, Bristol, June 2023.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF *Progress on Children's Well-being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda*, UNICEF, New York, September 2023, p 22.

<sup>36</sup> UNICEF *Progress on Children's Well-being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda*, UNICEF, New York, September 2023, p 23.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF *Progress on Children's Well-being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda*, UNICEF, New York, September 2023, p 23.

<sup>38</sup> UNICEF *Progress on Children's Well-being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda*, UNICEF, New York, September 2023, p 23.

<sup>39</sup> In 2022, wasting affected at least 45 million children, more than double the 2030 target of 3%

<sup>40</sup> Learning poverty is defined as the inability to read and comprehend a simple text by the age of 10. World Bank, *The State of Global Learning Poverty: 2022 Update*, World Bank, Washington DC, June 2022, p 7.

<sup>41</sup> See <https://www.unicef.org/water-sanitation-and-hygiene-wash>

<sup>42</sup> Ritchie and Bekele *Do we need a common definition of climate finance? It depends on who you ask 2024* Development Initiatives <https://devinit.org/blog/do-we-need-common-definition-climate-finance/>

<sup>43</sup> Euan Ritchie *Missing Baselines: have recent increases in climate finance been exaggerated? 2024* Development Initiatives <https://devinit.org/blog/missing-baselines-have-recent-increases-in-climate-finance-been-exaggerated/>

<sup>44</sup> Euan Ritchie *How much has the UK spent towards its £11.6 billion climate finance commitment? 2023* Development Initiatives.

<sup>45</sup> UNICEF, *The Climate Crisis is a Child's Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index*, UNICEF, New York, August 2021, p 13.

<sup>46</sup> UNICEF *Progress on Children's Well-being: Centring child rights in the 2030 Agenda*, UNICEF, New York, September 2023, p. 57.

<sup>47</sup> IEG World Bank Group, *Later Impacts of Early Childhood Interventions: A systematic review* IEG Working Paper 2015/3, IEG World Bank Group, Washington DC, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> UNICEF *Progress on Children's Well-being: Centering child rights in the 2030 Agenda*, UNICEF, New York, September 2023, p 1–2.

<sup>49</sup> UNICEF *Progress on Children's Well-being: Centering child rights in the 2030 Agenda*, UNICEF, New York, September 2023, p 2.

<sup>50</sup> The overall child-focused spending cannot be added to sectoral estimates without double counting.

# A BETTER WORLD FOR EVERY CHILD

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