

## Research Briefing

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# UK aid and women and girls



## Summary

- 1 Women and girls in global development
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- 4 UK diplomacy, sanctions and participation in international alliances

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## Summary

Empowering women and girls has long been a priority for UK aid. Under [2014 legislation](#), the government must have regard to spending aid in such a way as “likely to contribute to reducing poverty in a way which is likely to contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender”.

In 2024, UN Women reported that despite declining poverty and narrowing of gaps in education, [global progress remains off track on Sustainable Development Goal 5](#) (gender equality and empowering all women and girls).

This research briefing sets out development challenges facing women and girls, global aid spending on gender equality, and UK spending and strategy.

## Development and women and girls

[Global development challenges affect different people in different ways](#), and can be influenced by their [economic status](#), sex, gender, [ethnicity](#), [migration status](#), [location](#), [faith or belief](#), [sexual orientation](#), [age](#), or [disability](#).

In its 2023 white paper on development, the government argued unlocking the power and potential of women and girls would [accelerate “progress on all the UK’s global priorities”, such as economic growth and security](#).

Compared with men, [women and girls often experience higher rates of poverty](#) and increased risks during [humanitarian crises and natural disasters](#), including [displacement](#). [Child marriage rates](#) have fallen globally for girls and boys (though more girls than boys are married aged under 18), but [conflict-related sexual violence](#) and [intimidate partner violence](#) are high. Globally, [gaps remain in sexual health services and reproductive rights](#).

While education participation rates between girls and boys has narrowed globally, [education participation disparities between boys and girls remain in low-income and conflict-affected countries](#). The [participation of women in the labour market](#) also remains lower than expected, given increased educational participation. [Women and girls assuming greater informal caring responsibilities](#) is cited as one factor in this.

[Peace processes that involve more women are associated with longer-lasting peace agreements](#), but [women remain underrepresented in peace processes](#) and [in parliaments across the globe](#).

## How is UK aid supporting women and girls?

The 2022 [Strategy for international development](#) made women and girls one of its four priority areas. Interventions focused on education, empowerment, and ending violence (known as the “three Es”). In 2023, the [International women and girls strategy 2023 to 2030](#) set out further aims for the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). This includes ensuring 80% of the FCDO’s bilateral programmes support gender equality by 2030.

Since taking office in July 2024, the Labour government has said it will [prioritise women and girls](#) and announced new funding for [sexual and reproductive health and rights](#), and work on [tackling gender-based violence](#), including child marriage. Baroness Harriet Harman was appointed [UK Special Envoy for Women and Girls](#) in March 2025.

## How is aid spending on gender measured?

There is no specific data on aid spending on women and girls. However, aid reported to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) uses a three-point scale to measure whether gender equality is a “significant” or “principal” objective of a programme, or neither. [32 states report their data to the OECD](#), including all major donors except China.

In 2023, [US\\$9.5 billion of bilateral aid was targeted at gender equality](#) as its principal objective, with a further \$99.1 billion having gender equality as a significant objective. This is the highest since recording began in 2000. In the UK, the proportion of FCDO bilateral [aid programmes with a significant or principal focus on gender equality](#) was 58% in 2022 and 52% in 2023.

UK aid spending has fallen from 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) in 2020 to 0.5% in 2025, with the [Conservative government citing the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the economy](#) as the reason for this. Under the Labour government, [aid will gradually reduce to 0.3% of GNI by 2027](#), to fund increased defence spending. [2021](#) and [2023](#) (PDF) equality assessments found aid for women and girls were among the areas affected by the reductions.

## What initiatives has the UK launched?

Global initiatives led by the UK include the [Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative](#) (PSVI) in 2012; [a global summit to end sexual violence in conflict in 2014](#), [G7 initiatives on global education](#), and [establishing the International Alliance on PSVI](#) in 2022. It also implements UN Security Council resolutions on [women, peace and security](#), which aim to protect and promote women leaders, humanitarian actors, and human rights defenders.

# 1 Women and girls in global development

This section sets out progress on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as they relate to women and girls, and some of the specific development challenges facing them.

This section includes reference to sexual violence, which readers may find distressing.

## 1.1 What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

SDG 5 is achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls

The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) were launched in 2015 and are a set of [17 goals intended to be met by 2030](#). The central aim is to “leave no one behind” and “reach the furthest behind first”.<sup>1</sup> Someone might be “left behind” on the grounds of income, gender, disability, age, ethnicity, or where they live.<sup>2</sup> SDGs include:

- Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (SDG 1).
- Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (SDG 4).
- Achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (SDG 5).

While gender equality is listed separately as SDG 5, empowering women and girls supports the achievement of the other 16 goals.<sup>3</sup>

As of 2024, the UN reports that only 17% of SDGs are on track to meet, or have already met, their 2030 targets. Data for 18% of SDGs indicates stagnation and 17% have regressed below the 2015 baseline levels. The remaining 48% of targets have had “moderate” or “marginal” progress.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs, [The 2030 agenda for development](#)

<sup>2</sup> UN SDG group, [Principle 2: leave no one behind](#)

<sup>3</sup> UN Development Programme, [Gender equality as an accelerator for achieving the SDGs](#), 2019; UN Women, [Why gender equality matters across all SDGs](#) (PDF), 2018

<sup>4</sup> UN, [The SDGs report 2024](#), June 2024, p4

Data on the SDGs is often lacking and can be over three years old

## Gaps and estimates of SDG progress data

There remain gaps in the data used to assess SDG progress. In 2024, the UN said around 68% of indicators had “good data coverage” (meaning more than 50% of countries reported on them) but areas such as gender equality and climate action were among those with poorer data coverage. In around a third of indicators, data is also at least three years old.<sup>5</sup>

For more data on the SDGs and its issues, see:

- Our World in Data, [SDG 5](#), 2018
- UN Women, [It will take 22 years to close SDG gender data gaps](#), 2022
- UN Women, [Are we on track to achieve gender equality by 2030?](#), 2022
- SDG Action, [Gender data can reinvigorate the SDGs](#), 2023
- UN Women, [Progress on the SDGs: gender snapshot 2024](#), 2024
- Equal Measures 2030, [2024 SDG gender index: full report](#), 2024
- World Economic Forum, [Global gender gap report](#), 2024

For more analysis of SDG 5, see:

- European Parliamentary Research Service, [Accelerating progress on Sustainable Development Goal 5 \(SDG 5\)](#), September 2024
- World Economic Forum, [Gender equality progress under threat at mid-point of sustainable development goals](#), September 2023
- Equal Measures 2030, [2024 SDG Gender Index](#)

## 1.2

Women aged 25 to 35 are 1.2 times more likely than men to be poverty

## Extreme poverty

“Extreme poverty” is defined as living on [less than US\\$2.15 per person per day](#). Global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty have been affected by factors including the covid-19 pandemic in 2020, armed conflict, poor governance, and lack of access to adequate social protection, health and education.<sup>6</sup>

In 2024, it was estimated that a total of 692 million people lived in extreme poverty, accounting for 8.5% of the world’s population.<sup>7</sup> By 2030, a projected 623 million people (7.3% of the world population) will live in extreme poverty.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> UN, [The SDGs report 2024](#), June 2024, p4

<sup>6</sup> As above, p8

<sup>7</sup> World Bank Group, [Poverty, prosperity and planet report 2024](#), 2024, pp1-2

<sup>8</sup> World Bank Group, [Poverty, prosperity and planet report 2024](#), 2024 p2



In 2024, it was estimated that a total of “24.3 million more females live[d] in extreme poverty compared [with] males.”<sup>9</sup> The highest poverty gaps were seen among those aged 25 to 34, with women in this age group 1.2 times more likely to live in extreme poverty than men. By 2030, 8.0% of women (compared with 7.6% of males) are projected to remain in extreme poverty, missing the SDG target.<sup>10</sup>

Women are more likely to participate in informal employment, with lower-paid and non-standard roles with limited protection, as well as interrupt employment more often for caring and other responsibilities.<sup>11</sup> See the following sections for information on women’s participation in employment, healthcare and education.

## Lower level of social protection coverage for women

Globally, 50% of women and 45% of men are not covered by at least one social protection policy

Globally, in 2023 50% of women (compared with 55% of men) were covered by at least one social protection (such as unemployment or sickness benefits or pensions). This was equivalent to 2 billion women and 1.8 billion men remaining without any single type of social protection.

In the same year, 36% of mothers with newborns were covered by maternity benefits. In sub-Saharan Africa, this was only 6% of mothers.<sup>12</sup>

The divide in the level of social protection continues into older age. Globally, 29% of working-age women contribute to a pension, compared with 41% of working-age men. In a similar trend, 77% of women receive a pension when at or above retirement age, compared with 83% of men. In northern Africa and western Asia, only 48% of women receive a pension when at or above retirement age, compared with 77% of men.<sup>13</sup>

## Impact of the life cycle on poverty prevalence

The World Bank notes that men and women experience poverty differently, and that these experiences are partly related to specific moments in the life cycle: children are “consistently poorer than adults and seniors”, and women are two percentage points poorer than men aged 25 to 34 (this is likely related to different rates of participation in the workforce and caring responsibilities).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> UN, [The Gender Snapshot 2024](#), 2024, p8

<sup>10</sup> UN, [The Gender Snapshot 2023](#) (PDF), 2023, p8

<sup>11</sup> UN Women, [World survey on the role of women in development 2024](#), 2024, p56

<sup>12</sup> UN, [The gender snapshot 2024](#), 2024, p8

<sup>13</sup> UN Women, [World survey on the role of women in development 2024](#), 2024, p56

<sup>14</sup> World Bank, [Gender differences in poverty and household composition](#), 2018, p10, 12

## Early marriage, and divorce and separation are correlated with increased female poverty

The World Bank says that early marriage is “highly correlated” with higher poverty rates for both girls and boys, and widowhood at the ages of 15 to 17 makes girls especially vulnerable to poverty. For women, divorce or separation marginally increases their poverty rate compared with married women, while men are less likely to be in poverty than women if they divorce or separate.<sup>15</sup>

Widowhood at all ages is a poverty increasing factor. The non-governmental organisation (NGO) HelpAge International has estimated that older women are twice as likely as men to live alone and suffer higher levels of poverty.<sup>16</sup>

### Women and girls and poverty

- World Bank, [Gender differences in poverty and household composition through the life-cycle : a global perspective](#), 2018
- SDG Action, [Poverty is not gender neutral](#), 2023
- UN Women, [Harnessing social protection for gender equality, resilience and transformation](#), 2024

## 1.3

## Education

In 2018, the World Bank estimated that differences in rates of girls and boys completing 12 years of education cost between US\$15 trillion and \$30 trillion globally in lost lifetime productivity and earnings.<sup>17</sup>

## 129 million boys and 122 million girls are out of school (2024)

Before the start of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020, 49% of countries had achieved parity in primary education between girls and boys, and 42% in secondary education.<sup>18</sup> The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reports that, as of 2024:<sup>19</sup>

- Globally, 251 million children and young people remain out of school. Of these, 129 million are boys and 122 million are girls. The number has fallen by 1% since 2015. However, UNESCO notes that the number can be an underestimate due to armed conflict making data difficult to collect.
- There are more girls than boys out of school in Northern Africa and Western Asia, Oceania and sub-Saharan Africa world regions.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, [Gender differences in poverty and household composition](#), 2018, p14

<sup>16</sup> HelpAge International, [Less than one per cent of aid spent on gender equality benefits older women](#), October 2024

<sup>17</sup> World Bank Group, [Not educating girls costs countries trillions of dollars \[...\]](#), 11 July 2018

<sup>18</sup> G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council, [Building Back Better for Women and Girls](#), October 2021

<sup>19</sup> UNESCO, [Global education monitoring report 2024/25](#), 2024, pp150, 154, 206

- Half of children out of school are in sub-Saharan Africa.
- The out of school rate is 33% in [low-income countries](#), 19% in lower middle-income ones, and 8% in upper-middle income.

Rates of educational attendance for girls and boys are influenced by factors including armed conflict, household income, and social and legal restrictions on education (such as the [Taliban's ban on girls' secondary education](#)).<sup>20</sup>

**In conflict and fragile states, girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys**

Incidence of child marriage (see below box) influences participation in school: data from the UN Children's Fund, Unicef, finds that child marriage is most common in countries where girls have the least education (child marriage being defined as married or in a union before age 18). It also notes "girls with at least a secondary education are often spared early marriage".<sup>21</sup>

Unicef estimates that if all girls completed secondary school, the level of child marriage would likely fall by two thirds globally.<sup>22</sup>

World Bank research also estimates that in fragile and conflict-affected settings, girls are 2.5 times more likely not to be in school than in other contexts. Half of all girls who are out of school live in such countries.<sup>23</sup>

## Child marriage

Child marriage rates for girls have fallen worldwide. The proportion of women aged 18 to 24 who married before the age of 18 has fallen from 24% in 2003 to 19% in 2024. However, UN Women's 2024 gender snapshot estimates that on current trends it will not be eradicated until 2092.<sup>24</sup> Child marriage is associated with increased risks of early pregnancy and social isolation, disruption to education, limiting career opportunities, and domestic violence.

Unicef data estimates that 12 million girls are married in childhood every year, including around 37% of girls aged under 18 in West and Central Africa.<sup>25</sup> From 2015 to 2023, 3% of boys globally were also married before 18, including 5% in West and Central Africa.<sup>26</sup>

For more information, see:

- Unicef, [Is an end to child marriage within reach?](#), 2023
- World Bank, [Child marriage: the unspoken consequence of Covid-19](#), 2020

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO, [Global education monitoring report 2024/25](#), 2024, pp206, 209

<sup>21</sup> Unicef, [The power of education to end child marriage](#), 2022

<sup>22</sup> As above

<sup>23</sup> World Bank, [Girls' education in conflict is most at risk](#), 12 March 2025

<sup>24</sup> UN, [The gender snapshot 2024](#), 2024, p13

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF, [Child marriage](#), accessed 6 March 2025

<sup>26</sup> As above, data download

- World Bank, [Economic impacts of child marriage: global synthesis report](#), 2017
- UN Population Fund, [Child marriage](#)
- Girls not Brides, [Child marriage and conflict and crisis](#)

## Girls and education

- Unicef, [What has changed for girls? Adolescent girls' rights over 30 years](#), 2025
- UNESCO, [Progress on girls' access to education](#), 2025
- UNESCO, [The costs of children and youth not learning by 2030](#), 2025
- Girls Education Challenge, [Making the case for continued investment in the education of at-risk and out-of-school girls](#) (PDF), 2024
- World Bank, [Why girls' education should remain a priority](#), 2023
- World Bank, [Achieving gender equality in education](#), 2023
- World Bank, [Economic impacts of child marriage](#), 2017

## 1.4

## Health and healthcare

The maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births halved from 1985 to 2020

The covid-19 pandemic negatively affected progress on improving global health and [universal health coverage](#). While the UN [2024 SDG report](#) determined that most health-related indicators were progressing globally, it projected that the targets set for 2030 will not be met based on current trends.<sup>27</sup> Women and girls faced specific inequalities including:<sup>28</sup>

- greater barriers to access health information and critical services
- not being able to make their own healthcare decisions or access to finances
- being subject to discriminatory attitudes
- experiencing low prioritisation of safe, quality and affordable sexual and reproductive health services

<sup>27</sup> UN, [The SDG report 2024](#), June 2024, pp12-13

<sup>28</sup> WHO, [Gender and health](#), May 2021; UN Women, [The gender snapshot 2024](#), September 2024, p10

Spending on women's healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health, is estimated to have fallen during the covid-19 pandemic to fund wider health responses.<sup>29</sup>

World Health Organization (WHO) data on health goals notes that:<sup>30</sup>

- The [maternal mortality](#) ratio per 100,000 live births has improved from between 403 to 490 deaths in 1985 to between 202 and 255 deaths in 2020.<sup>31</sup>
- [Adolescent birth rates](#) per 1,000 girls (aged 15 to 19) have fallen since 2000, from 65 in 2000 to 41 in 2023. In Africa, the adolescent birth rate was 97, compared with 13 in Europe.<sup>32</sup>
- Rates of [anaemia](#) among women changed little from 2000 to 2019, remaining around 27% to 33% of women aged 15 to 49.<sup>33</sup>
- [Obesity rates](#) for adults are higher among women than men, being around 17% to 19% globally compared with 13% to 14% of men.<sup>34</sup>

## Women and girls and healthcare

- WHO, [Building a healthier world by women and for women](#), 2025
- UN Population Fund, [The future of sexual and reproductive health and rights](#), 2024
- World Bank, [Achieving gender equity in health](#), 2024
- World Economic Forum, [Why is the health of at least half the global population so often overlooked?](#), 2023
- WHO, [A gender and equity analysis of the global health and social workforce](#), 2019

<sup>29</sup> World Economic Forum, [Access to healthcare: why we need to prioritise women and girls](#), May 2022

<sup>30</sup> For an overview, see WHO, [World Health statistics 2024](#), May 2024

<sup>31</sup> WHO, [Maternal mortality ratio](#)

<sup>32</sup> WHO, [Adolescent pregnancy](#), 10 April 2024

<sup>33</sup> WHO, [Anaemia in women and children: 2021 edition](#)

<sup>34</sup> WHO, [World Health statistics 2024](#), May 2024, p71

## 1.5

## Sexual and gender-based violence

The WHO defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting”.<sup>35</sup>

### Female genital mutilation

The WHO estimates that more than 230 million girls and women have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM) in 30 countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia where it is practised (though it also occurs elsewhere). The agency says FGM is mostly carried out on young girls between infancy and age 15.

The UN Population Fund (UNFPA)’s [FGM: FAQs](#), has more on where FGM is performed, by whom, and local and global legislation.

Lifetime prevalence of partner violence is estimated at 22% to 30% of women aged 15 or above

### Physical and/or sexual violence by a partner

In 2021, the WHO published an estimate of physical and/or sexual violence against women who were, or had been, in a relationship. It estimated that, based on reviewed prevalence data from 2000 to 2018:

- between 22% and 30% of women aged 15 and above, who have ever been married or partnered, had been subject to physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former husband/partner at least once in their lifetime
- between 8% and 12% of women aged 15 and above, who have ever been married or partnered, had been subject to physical and or/sexual violence from a current or former husband/partner in the last 12 months

The lowest rates of physical and/or sexual violence were reported in Europe and parts of Asia, while the [least developed countries](#), sub-Saharan Africa, and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand) had the highest lifetime prevalence. Lifetime prevalence was estimated at 33% of women in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>36</sup>

The lifetime prevalence was highest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (36%), followed by Afghanistan (35%) and Papua New Guinea (31%).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> WHO, [Violence against women](#), 25 March 2024

<sup>36</sup> As above, pvii

<sup>37</sup> As above, pvii

The WHO's [Violence against women prevalence estimates 2018](#) (March 2021) provide briefings on different world regions. Higher rates of intimate and sexual violence are associated with factors including low levels of gender equality and women's access to employment, harmful use of alcohol by males and harmful masculine behaviors and societal norms.<sup>38</sup>

The World Bank reports that 104 economies have “comprehensive” laws that address domestic violence, compared with 86 that do not. An additional 29 countries have laws that address [femicide](#), while 161 do not.<sup>39</sup>

## Conflict-related sexual violence

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is defined by the UN as “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity” that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.<sup>40</sup>

Speaking in a debate on CRSV at the UN Security Council in April 2024, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Pramila Patten, said the UN had verified 3,688 cases of CRSV in 2023, an increase of 50% since 2022. Women and girls constituted 95% of the verified cases.<sup>41</sup>

### Violence and conflict-related sexual violence

- World Bank, [Laws and policies to address violence against women in countries affected by fragility and conflict](#) (PDF), 2023
- UN Women, [Femicides in 2023: global estimates of intimate partner/family member femicides](#), 2024
- World Bank Gender Portal, [Violence against women and girls—what the data tell us](#), 2022
- Commons Library debate briefing, [Prevention of sexual violence in conflict](#), May 2024. Overview of recent statistics and UK policy, for a [Westminster Hall debate](#) held on 14 May 2024
- Commons Library, [Conflict related sexual violence and the UK's approach](#), April 2023. Details the UK strategy on the issue.

<sup>38</sup> WHO, [Violence against women](#), 25 March 2024

<sup>39</sup> World Bank, [Women, business and the law 2024](#), 2024, pp25, 26

<sup>40</sup> UN, [CRSV](#)

<sup>41</sup> UN, [Remarks of the SRSG Pramila Patten at the Security Council open debate](#), 23 April 2023

## 1.6

## Access to water, sanitation and hygiene

Across the world, in 2023 around 2.2 billion people lacked access to safe drinking water, 3.5 billion people lacked access to safe sanitation, and 2 billion people lacked access to basic hygiene services. Around 650 million people had no access to facilities at all.<sup>42</sup>

People living in [fragile and conflict-affected situations](#) are twice as likely to lack safely managed drinking water and basic hygiene, and one and a half times as likely to lack safely managed sanitation services.<sup>43</sup>

### Lack of private wash facilities affects health and safety

Women and girls play a disproportionate role in acquiring water. Assessing progress from 2000 to 2022, the WHO reports:

- In 70% of households where people must collect water from sites off premises, women and girls are primarily responsible for water collection.<sup>44</sup>
- Around 500 million people share sanitation facilities with other households. Women often report feeling unsafe when accessing these facilities in the dark and are more likely to face physical, sexual or verbal assault when using open defecation.<sup>45</sup>
- Lack of handwashing facilities affects adolescent girls and women, who are primarily responsible for care and domestic work.<sup>46</sup> (UN Women estimates women spend 2.8 times as much of their day on unpaid care compared with men).<sup>47</sup>
- Women, adolescent girls and people who menstruate often lacked private facilities to wash, change and dispose of menstrual materials and to wash and change at home.<sup>48</sup>

### Women, girls and water, sanitation and hygiene

- WASH Matters, [Seven ways that WASH enhances women's economic empowerment](#) (PDF), 2023
- WHO, [Progress on household WASH 2000 to 2022](#), 2023
- UN Women, [Gender-responsive water and sanitation systems](#), 2018

<sup>42</sup> UNICEF, [Global annual results report 2023: goal area 4](#), August 2024, p3

<sup>43</sup> As above, p3

<sup>44</sup> WHO, [Progress on household WASH 2000 to 2022](#), July 2023, pp16-18

<sup>45</sup> As above, pp39-42

<sup>46</sup> As above, p65

<sup>47</sup> UN Women, [Forecasting time spent in unpaid care and domestic work](#) (PDF), 2023, p5

<sup>48</sup> WHO, [Progress on household WASH 2000 to 2022](#), 2023, ppxi, 85-7



## 1.7

## Participation in politics and peace talks

Women remain underrepresented in public life, including in politics, civil society and peace processes.

## Parliamentary representation

The proportion of women MPs globally has risen from 11% to 27% (1995 to 2025)

As of 2024, the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) reports that across the globe, around 27% of members of lower houses of parliament were women. This was lowest in the Middle East, at 18%, and highest in the Americas, at 35%.<sup>49</sup>

Between 1995 and 2025, the proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments rose by 16% (from 11%). However, the IPU noted that progress has slowed since 2015. In 2024, for example, it rose by 0.3%.<sup>50</sup>

In six nation states, women constitute at least half the members of their lower houses of parliament. These nations are: Rwanda (64% of members), Cuba (56%), Nicaragua (54%), Mexico (50%), Andorra (50%) and the United Arab Emirates (50%).<sup>51</sup>

According to IPU data, the share of all parliamentarians aged 30 or under was 3% in 2025.<sup>52</sup>

The IPU cites quotas for female representation, violence against women in politics and women's media participation as factors that influence female representation in parliaments.<sup>53</sup> In 2016, an IPU survey of 55 women parliamentarians from 39 countries found psychological violence to be the most common form of violence against women parliamentarians.<sup>54</sup>

## Involvement in peace processes

Women are underrepresented in peace negotiations. In 2024, the UN reported that of more than 50 peace processes analyzed, only 10% of negotiators were women.<sup>55</sup> As of 2022, around 8% of military, police and civilian peacekeepers were women, rising to 30% among civilian staff.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>49</sup> IPU, [Global and regional average of women in national parliaments](#), accessed March 2025

<sup>50</sup> IPU, [Women in parliament 1995 to 2025](#)

<sup>51</sup> IPU, [Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments](#), accessed March 2025

<sup>52</sup> IPU, [Data on age: global and regional averages](#), accessed March 2025

<sup>53</sup> IPU, [IPU outlines five ways women parliamentarians can get ahead](#), 2022

<sup>54</sup> IPU, [Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians](#), 2016

<sup>55</sup> UN Women, [The gender snapshot 2024](#), September 2024, p21

<sup>56</sup> UN Peacekeeping, [Women in peacekeeping](#)

## Women's participation makes peace agreements more likely to hold

Case studies suggest that peace negotiations that involve women are more likely to be sustained, while countries with greater gender equality are less likely to experience internal conflict.<sup>57</sup> Cited reasons for the increased durability for agreements includes local women being connected with civil society groups, bridging political and other divides, informing topics for negotiation and settlement.<sup>58</sup>

### Women, politics and security

- IPU, [Gender equality](#). IPU reports and findings
- UN Women, [Facts and figures: women, peace and security](#)
- Peace Research Institute Oslo, [Women's participation in peace processes](#) (PDF), 2020
- World Economic Forum, [The secret to ending war? More women in peace negotiations](#), 2018

## 1.8

## Employment

### More women than men are engaged in informal work, lacking protection

In 2023, across the globe around 2 billion workers were estimated to be in [informal jobs](#) (jobs which are not regulated or protected by the state and therefore lacking social protection). This constitutes 58% of the global workforce.<sup>59</sup> Nearly 90% of workers in sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia were informally employed, compared with 11% in Europe and Northern America.<sup>60</sup>

Research has found that:

- 63% of women aged 25 to 54 were engaged in the labour force (both formal and informal), compared with 92% of men.<sup>61</sup>
- Women are more likely to be in informal employment, standing at 90% in [UN-defined least developed countries](#) and in sub-Saharan Africa and Central and Southern Asia.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> World Bank, [Can gender equality prevent violent conflict?](#), March 2018 and Council on Foreign Relations, [Women's participation in peace processes](#),

<sup>58</sup> J Krause, [Women's participation in peace negotiations and the durability of peace](#), International Interactions, vol 44, 2018; M O'Reilly and others, [Reimagining peace-making: women's roles in peace processes](#) (PDF), 2015, pp6, 10-12

<sup>59</sup> UN, [The SDG report 2024](#), 2024, pp24-25

<sup>60</sup> UN, [The SDG report 2024](#), 2024, pp24-25

<sup>61</sup> As above, p6

<sup>62</sup> As above, p6

An estimated 708 million women are not in employment due to unpaid caring roles. 40 million men are also not in work due to unpaid caring roles.

- As migrant workers, women are more likely to hold low-paid, low-skilled jobs and have more limited access to support services than male migrant workers. In 2019, women accounted for 42% of the world's international migrant workers.<sup>63</sup>
- Women undertake both paid and unpaid caring responsibilities, and that these responsibilities often overlap with the “prime productive years” in the workforce (from ages 25 to 54).<sup>64</sup>
- For 2023, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated that 708 million women (aged over 15) were outside the labour force globally because of unpaid caring responsibilities. This compared with 40 million men.<sup>65</sup>

## Women and employment

- World Bank, [Women, business and the law: 2024 report](#). Analyses legal reforms to create equal economic opportunities. In addition to pay and employment rights, it includes related indicators such as child marriage, domestic violence and sexual harassment.
- International Labour Organization, [Impact of care responsibilities on women's labour force participation](#), 2024
- SDG Action, [Improving women's access to decent jobs](#), 2024
- International Labour Organisation, [Gender gap in employment: what's holding women back?](#), 2022

## 1.9

## Armed conflict and humanitarian crisis situations

### Armed conflict

Conflict can result in higher levels of gender-based violence against women and girls, including arbitrary killings, torture, sexual violence (including as a tactic of war) and forced marriage.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> UN Women, [The gender snapshot 2024](#), 2024, p18

<sup>64</sup> World Bank, [Gender differences in poverty and household composition through the life-cycle : a global perspective](#), June 2018, page 17-18; 33

<sup>65</sup> ILO, [Unpaid care work prevents 708 million women \[...\]](#), 29 October 2024

<sup>66</sup> Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability](#), accessed 6 March 2025

The UN Secretary-General reported that in 2023 that the UN estimated that 40% of civilians killed in armed conflict were women and 30% children:

recorded at least 33,443 civilian deaths in armed conflicts [...], a 72 per cent increase as compared with 2022. The proportion of women and children killed doubled and tripled, respectively, as compared with 2022. In 2023, 4 out of every 10 civilians killed in conflicts were women, and 3 out of 10 were children.<sup>67</sup>

The UN monitors six “grave violations” against children. These include recruitment or use of children as soldiers and denial of humanitarian access for children. In 2023, the UN Secretary-General said that children were increasingly having their rights disregarded during armed conflicts:

children bore the brunt of multiplying and escalating crises that were marked by a complete disregard for child rights, notably the inherent right to life [...]

The United Nations verified 32,990 grave violations, of which 30,705 were committed in 2023 and 2,285 were committed earlier but verified in 2023. Violations affected 22,557 children (15,847 boys, 6,252 girls, 458 sex unknown) in 25 situations and one regional monitoring arrangement covering the Lake Chad basin region.<sup>68</sup>

Armed conflict raises the risk of displacement, maternal mortality and food insecurity for women and girls

Also in 2023, the UN and its agencies said that:

- 612 million women and girls lived within 50 kilometres (31 miles) of at least one armed conflict. This was a 41% increase from 2015.<sup>69</sup>
- Around half of the 117.5 million people forcibly displaced by persecution, conflict and violence worldwide were women and girls.<sup>70</sup> In Ukraine, following the Russian invasion of 2022, as of January 2025, 59% of internally displaced households are female (overall, 23% were children and 26% aged over 60), and 60% of those expected to receive humanitarian aid in 2025 will be women and girls.<sup>71</sup> In Sudan, in 2025 there are more equal numbers of males and females who have been displaced and are in humanitarian need.<sup>72</sup>
- 61% of preventable maternal mortality occurred in 35 crisis-affected countries (around 500 deaths a day).<sup>73</sup>

<sup>67</sup> UN, [Protection of civilians in armed conflict: report of the Secretary-General, S/2024/385](#), May 2024, para 6

<sup>68</sup> UN, [Secretary-General annual report on children and armed conflict S/2024/384](#), June 2024, para 5

<sup>69</sup> UN Women, [Gender snapshot 2024](#), 2024, p21

<sup>70</sup> UN, [Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security, S/2024/671](#), para 39. Note demographic data is available for 70% of the 117.5 million displaced.

<sup>71</sup> UN International Organization for Migration, [Ukraine internal displacement](#), January 2025, p7; UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [Ukraine](#), accessed March 2025

<sup>72</sup> UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, [Sudan](#), accessed March 2025

<sup>73</sup> UN, [Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security, S/2024/671](#), para 42

- While 25% of women and girls globally experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, in conflict-affected settings, 50% of women and girls faced moderate or severe food insecurity.<sup>74</sup>
- The average incidence of child marriage in conflict-affected countries was 14.4 percentage points higher than in non-conflict settings.<sup>75</sup>

## Natural disasters and other humanitarian crisis situations

Climate change is predicted by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to have negative effects on poverty rates, water scarcity and food security.<sup>76</sup> IPCC reports are based on analysis of peer-reviewed academic and other research on climate change and related issues.

Climate change exacerbates some existing inequalities and may cause a rise in violence and employment vulnerability

The IPCC notes that groups more vulnerable to climate change include women, older people, low-income households, indigenous people and small-scale producers, due to preexisting vulnerabilities and challenges, such as poverty incidence or discriminatory laws.<sup>77</sup>

The IPCC also judges that:

- Extreme weather and climate impacts are associated with increased violence against women, girls and vulnerable groups. Early marriage can be used as a coping strategy for managing the effects of extreme weather events.<sup>78</sup>
- Women and girls already play a disproportionate role in acquiring water, which affects education and employment opportunities. Pressures on water supply may increase this burden.<sup>79</sup>
- Women and women-led households are considered more vulnerable to men as a result of climate-induced food insecurity because they have less access to productive assets (such as land or livestock).<sup>80</sup> While in 2019 it was estimated that 43% of agricultural workers globally were women, it was also estimated that they form only 15% of landowners.<sup>81</sup>
- Distinct challenges to female health include increased vulnerability to heat when pregnant, and some infectious diseases, food-borne infections and air pollution. Extreme weather events are also associated with

<sup>74</sup> UN, [Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security, S/2024/671](#), para 44

<sup>75</sup> UN Women, [Gender snapshot 2024](#), 2024, p13

<sup>76</sup> IPCC, [Sixth assessment report: climate change 2022: impacts, adaptation and vulnerability](#), 2022, ch 8

<sup>77</sup> As above, para TS.B.3.5, pp1388, 1691

<sup>78</sup> As above, p1088

<sup>79</sup> As above, pp462, pp585, 655-56

<sup>80</sup> As above, pp751, 780

<sup>81</sup> As above, p2700

reduced access to prenatal care, paediatric care, and unattended deliveries.<sup>82</sup>

The IPCC notes that women are often excluded from climate change adaptation planning.<sup>83</sup> However, it also says that climate change may create opportunities for greater female agency, including migration changing household composition and structure, a greater decision-making capacity and economic role in order for a household to adapt to climate change.<sup>84</sup>

Section 1 of the Commons Library research briefing [UK aid and climate change](#) has more on the potential impacts of climate change on development goals.

## Women and girls in armed conflict, climate change and humanitarian need

The UN Secretary General, António Guterres, publishes annual reports on [women, peace, and security](#), [children and armed conflict](#), the [protection of armed civilians in conflict](#), and on [conflict-related sexual violence](#).

See also:

- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability](#)
- What works to prevent violence, [Overcoming an unseen barrier to effective climate action](#), 2024
- Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [Gender dynamics in internal displacement](#), 2023
- World Bank, [Women's and girls' vulnerability to gender-based violence in the aftermath of disasters](#), 2023
- World Bank, [Gender dimensions of disaster risk and resilience](#), 2021
- UN Population Fund, [Five ways climate change hurts women and girls](#), 2021

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<sup>82</sup> IPCC, [Sixth assessment report: climate change 2022: impacts, adaptation and vulnerability](#), 2022, pp1051, 1073

<sup>83</sup> As above, p973

<sup>84</sup> As above, p1085

## 2

## Women and girls in UK aid strategies

### 2.1

### Legislative requirement on gender inequality

Under the [International Development Act 2002](#), as amended by the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014, the government must, when making decisions on allocating overseas aid spending, consider whether the proposed assistance will reduce poverty in a way which is also likely to contribute to reducing gender inequality.<sup>85</sup>

### 2.2

### Labour government commitments, from 2024

#### General prioritisation of women and girls

On taking office in July 2024, then International Development Minister Anneliese Dodds said that the government's mission is to “create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet” and that “empowering women and girls” was one of four priorities for UK aid.<sup>86</sup> In a speech to the Chatham House think tank in October 2024, she said that UK aid and diplomacy would be deployed to advance that objective.<sup>87</sup>

The government has not confirmed the status of all the strategies published under the Conservative government (see section 2.3), but has said it supports the “three Es”. These are: supporting women and girls' education, empowering women and girls to stand up for their health and rights, and ending violence against women and girls.<sup>88</sup>

#### New special envoy appointed in 2025

In 2024, the Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, commissioned three reviews into UK aid policy, and, as of April 2025, is currently considering his response.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> [International Development \(Gender Equality Act\) 2014](#), Section 1 (2)

<sup>86</sup> Anneliese Dodds MP on Twitter/X, [Rebuilding our global reputation](#), 10 July 2024

<sup>87</sup> FCDO, [Minister for Development speech at Chatham House](#), 17 October 2024

<sup>88</sup> PQ 25250 [[Developing countries: women's rights](#)], 29 January 2025

<sup>89</sup> PQ 22620 [[Development aid: reviews](#)], 8 January 2025; PQ 23136, [[Development Aid: Reviews](#)], 10 January 2025; FCDO, [Foreign Secretary launches expert reviews to strengthen UK's global impact and expertise](#), 9 September 2024

In March 2025, the government appointed Baroness Harriet Harman to the role of UK Special Envoy for Women and Girls. This position will involve coordinating global initiatives aimed at empowering women and girls and safeguarding their rights. The areas of focus include sexual and reproductive health, access to education, and protection from gender-based violence.<sup>90</sup>

The Conservative government had previously appointed a Special Envoy on Girls' Education from 2021 to 2025.<sup>91</sup>

## Envoy for Preventing sexual violence in conflict

The government has also confirmed it will continue to support the [Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative](#) (PSVI), established in 2012 (see below, section 2.3). The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Minister, Lord Collins, has been appointed the UK's special envoy for PSVI.<sup>92</sup>

## Example funding commitments since July 2024

Government funding commitments since July 2024 include (note that this is not an exhaustive list):

- Healthcare: investing £37 million in the [Grassroots and counter rollback programme](#) (2024 to 2029) to support efforts to advance rights and access to healthcare, including HIV and sexual and reproductive health services, for LGBT+ people, adolescents, disabled people and women and girls.<sup>93</sup>
- Economic empowerment: £7.5 million over two years, and continued support beyond that, for the World Bank's [Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality](#). This has supported research and collection of data on gender.<sup>94</sup>
- Gender-based violence: supporting evidence-based approaches to preventing gender-based violence (GBV) by investing £67.5 million to the [What Works to Prevent Violence programme](#).<sup>95</sup>
- Gender-based violence: also investing £27 million to tackle technology-facilitated GBV.<sup>96</sup>
- Child marriage: £5 million to address child marriage.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>90</sup> FCDO, [Women's rights to be championed by appointment of new UK Special Envoy](#), 8 March 2025

<sup>91</sup> Prime Minister's Office, [Prime Minister appoints special envoy on girls' education](#), 16 January 2021

<sup>92</sup> FCDO, [Lord Collins appointed Special Representative on PSVI](#), 15 November 2024

<sup>93</sup> PQ 28226 [[Development Aid](#)], 3 February 2025; GOV.uk, [[...](#)] [Prime Minister said ahead of World AIDS Day](#), 29 November 2024

<sup>94</sup> FCDO, [UK Development Minister to push for gender equality at World Bank annuals](#), 23 October 2024

<sup>95</sup> FCDO, [Tough new action to tackle violence against women and girls](#) [[...](#)], 25 November 2024

<sup>96</sup> As above and PQ 27527 [[Gender based violence: women's rights](#)], 30 January 2025

<sup>97</sup> FCDO, [UK scales up support to end violence against children](#) [[...](#)], 7 November 2024



- Climate: at the COP 29 climate conference, Anneliese Dodds announced up to £5.5 million to support grassroots organisations and to increase women's voices and active participation in the design of water and nature-based solutions across the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>98</sup>
- Afghanistan: continuing the commitments of the previous government, the UK has pledged to ensure 50% of its bilateral aid reaches women and girls each year.<sup>99</sup>

As set out in section 3.4, in 2027, UK aid will be further reduced to 0.3% of gross national income (GNI), down from a current 0.5% of GNI. The government has not set out how aid programming will be affected.

## 2.3

## Strategies under the Conservative government

### 2022 international development strategy and 2023 white paper

The Conservative government's 2022 [strategy for international development](#) identified women and girls as one of its four priority areas (alongside financial investment, humanitarian aid, and climate change). Its [2023 white paper](#) also recommitted to the same priority areas, with the overall purpose of accelerating progress on the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Under the 2022 strategy, UK aid work on women and girls covered three broad areas (often referred to as the “three Es”):<sup>100</sup>

- education: ensuring every girl receives 12 years of quality education
- empowering women and girls: supporting sexual and reproductive health, ensuring women's voices are heard at all social, political and economic levels, and improving economic security (such as addressing inequalities in access to services)
- ending violence against women and girls: addressing violence in conflict, homes, schools, online and workplaces

The 2022 strategy also committed to restoring aid spending on women and girls in 2022/23 to 2020/21 levels, totalling £745 million.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>98</sup> PQ 27526 [[Climate change: women's rights](#)], 30 January 2025; PQ 27527 [[Gender based violence: women's rights](#)], 30 January 2025

<sup>99</sup> Commons Library research briefing, [Recent developments in Afghanistan](#), section 5.2

<sup>100</sup> [The UK government's strategy for international development](#), 2022, paras 15-17

<sup>101</sup> PQ 39856 [[Development Aid: Females](#)], 19 July 2022: International Development Committee, [Oral evidence: future of UK aid](#), 18 May 2022, Q342

Section 3, below, sets out UK aid spending on gender equality and some of the challenges in measuring spending on women and girls and gender equality.

## International women and girls' strategy 2023 to 2030

In March 2023 the government launched its [International women and girls strategy 2023 to 2030](#). The strategy recommitted to the “three Es” listed above. The FCDO set five governing principles for the strategy:<sup>102</sup>

1. speaking out for women's and girls' rights and freedoms whenever possible
2. supporting grassroots women's organizations and amplifying their work
3. targeting FCDO investment at key life stages, including early childhood, foundational learning, adolescence, pregnancy and childbirth, and the transition into the labour market
4. supporting women and girls in the UK's humanitarian work
5. strengthening change in political, economic and social systems that support gender equality, and embracing innovative financing models and technologies

The strategy also identified three new goals for the FCDO:

1. Delivering a major global campaign on women and girls

The FCDO said it would “spearhead a series of high-profile global moments and conversations on women and girls”. It would support initiatives on topics including education, violence, child marriage, malnutrition, and online harassment and abuse. UK missions would be deployed to maximise the impact. The UK would use its convening power to act in forums including the UN Security Council, the Commonwealth and the G7.<sup>103</sup>

2. Putting women and girls at the centre of its operations and investments

The FCDO also committed to at least 80% of its bilateral assistance programmes having a focus on gender equality by 2030, as measured by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) gender marker (see section 3.1). The commitment included increasing the proportion of the UK's gender marked [International Climate Finance](#) (ICF).<sup>104</sup>

The gender marker is a tool used to analyse the policy objectives of development activities. It uses a three-point scale to categorise initiatives:

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<sup>102</sup> FCDO, [International women and girls strategy 2023 to 2030](#), March 2023, p12

<sup>103</sup> As above, p23

<sup>104</sup> As above, p24

targeting gender equality as the principal objective, targeting gender equality as a significant objective, and not targeting gender equality.<sup>105</sup>

The Labour government has committed to meeting the 80% pledge by 2030.<sup>106</sup>

Priority areas for investment included safe abortion, comprehensive sexuality education, support for women with disabilities, child marriage, conflict-related sexual violence, and integrating nutrition work across multiple aspects of the FCDO's work.<sup>107</sup>

### 3. Provide a new evidence and research offer

Under the third goal, the FCDO committed to investing in new evidence to fill knowledge gaps and to apply this to its programming and investments by other donors. UK actions would include establishing a new centre for expertise on education and new UK Gender and Equalities Resources Gateway to provide easier access to technical expertise and guidance.<sup>108</sup>

## Responses to the 2023 strategy

Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) welcomed the strategy's focus on supporting grassroots women's organizations, sexual and reproductive health, and its acknowledgement of the increasing rollback of women's rights globally.<sup>109</sup>

However, many raised concerns around the strategy's lack of financing commitments, particularly given the [reduction of UK aid spending from 0.7% of GNI to 0.5% since 2020](#).<sup>110</sup>

Bond, the umbrella group of UK NGOs, raised concerns about the lack of recognition of the "structural [socio-legal and economic] barriers" that it said hinder progress, and argued that to be effective, the strategy needed to be accompanied by wider changes to global finance, trade and investment policies that promote the needs of the most marginalised women.<sup>111</sup>

## Monitoring of 2023 strategy

The women and girls' strategy also said that the government would set itself milestones to track progress, and a progress report would be issued every two years:

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<sup>105</sup> OECD, [DAC gender equality policy marker](#), February 2024

<sup>106</sup> PQ 34267 [[Development aid: women](#)], 13 March 2025

<sup>107</sup> FCDO, [International women and girls strategy 2023 to 2030](#), March 2023, p24

<sup>108</sup> As above, p25

<sup>109</sup> Women for Women International, [The UK Government's new women and girls strategy](#), 2023

<sup>110</sup> Countdown 2030 Europe, [UK's new international women and girls strategy](#), March 2023; Action Aid, [UK's international women and girls strategy](#), March 2023; Gender Action for Peace and Security, [GAPS response to the launch of the UK's international women and girls strategy](#), March 2023

<sup>111</sup> Bond, [Is the launch of the Government's international women and girls strategy a fitting way to celebrate International Women's Day?](#), March 2023

We will hold ourselves to account against these goals and commitments that sit under them by establishing a delivery plan with milestones and tracking our progress through results-focused reporting. This will include a new biennial public report on our progress against the strategy, summarising our reach and impact, lessons learned and the expanded evidence base and offer.<sup>112</sup>

The first report is due in 2025. Its publication has not been confirmed.

In 2023, the government published a report on its progress under the 2022 aid strategy, which included actions on women and girls ([Delivering the UK's international development strategy](#)).

## Other UK strategies on women and girls

The Conservative government published several other strategies focusing on specific issues relating to women and girls.

### Education: Every girl goes to school, stays safe and learns strategy (2021 to 2026), 2021

The [Every girl goes to school, stays safe and learns strategy](#) committed to shaping a renewed international effort to make progress on the SDGs on education, through:<sup>113</sup>

- obtaining support for two new global targets on girls' school access and learning: 40 million more girls in school, and 20 million more reading by age 10, by 2026
- mobilising a network of British ambassadors and high commissioners to national governments in an effort to get girls into school and learning

### Sexual violence: Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative strategy, 2022

A [strategy to accompany the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative](#) (originally launched in 2012) was launched in 2022. The strategy included plans to:

- strengthen the global response to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV): working with international organisations to strengthen the global response to CRSV and strengthening the international legal architecture

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<sup>112</sup> FCDO, [International women and girls strategy 2023 to 2030](#), March 2023, p26

<sup>113</sup> FCDO, [Every girl goes to school, stays safe, and learns \[...\]](#), May 2021

- prevent CRSV: addressing the root causes such as harmful gender norms through the [‘What works to prevent violence’ programme](#), and reducing the emergence, duration and intensity of conflict
- strengthen justice for all survivors of CRSV and hold perpetrators to account: working with international organisations to strengthen justice and accountability mechanisms, expertise, and support
- enhance support available to survivors and children born of sexual violence in conflict

The strategy was supported by up to £12.5 million of new funding for the Preventing Sexual Violence in conflict Initiative (PSVI) from 2022 to 2025.<sup>114</sup> In November 2024, the Labour government confirmed the continuation of this funding.<sup>115</sup>

## The UK’s Preventing Sexual Violence in conflict Initiative

The Commons Library research briefing [Conflict-related sexual violence and the UK’s approach](#) (April 2023) provides more on the Preventing Sexual Violence in conflict Initiative (PSVI). Since 2012, under the PSVI the UK has:

- Trained 17,000 military and police personnel on sexual violence issues, sent over 80 deployments of the UK team of experts to affected countries, committed over £33 million in UK funding and supported numerous projects around the world.
- Hosted a global summit in 2014 to end sexual violence in conflict, which initiated the [International Protocol on the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict](#).<sup>116</sup>
- Hosted a further conference in 2022. A total of 54 countries signed the political declaration on conflict-related sexual violence and made national pledges.<sup>117</sup>

## Health: Ending the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030 strategy, 2021

The [Ending the preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030 approach paper](#), published in 2021, set out four pillars of action to end these preventable deaths. These were supporting:

<sup>114</sup> FCDO, [PSVI strategy](#), November 2022

<sup>115</sup> FCDO, [Lord Collins appointed special representative on PSVI](#), 15 November 2024

<sup>116</sup> PSVI, [2014 global summit to end sexual violence in conflict](#), 9 March 2017

<sup>117</sup> PSVI, [International ministerial conference on PSVI 2022](#), updated 1 June 2023; Commons Library research briefing, [Conflict-related sexual violence and the UK’s approach](#), April 2023

- Stronger health systems. This included technical assistance, integrating efforts across local health systems and globally, and focusing on specific situation such as humanitarian crises and programmes such as polio, nutrition and family planning.
- Human rights, gender and equality. This included advancing human rights and universal sexual and reproductive health access, and better data collection.
- Healthier lives and safe environments. This included support for nutrition, developing resilient water, sanitation and hygiene services, and climate-resilient infrastructure.
- Technology research and innovation. This included supporting research in delivering health and nutrition services at scale and supporting product development and access to safe, affordable technologies and medicines.<sup>118</sup>

## Strategy on disability inclusion and rights

The FCDO's [disability inclusion and rights strategy 2022 to 2030](#) (February 2022) also includes commitments on gender.

For more information, see the Commons Library research briefing [Disability, development and UK aid](#) (February 2022).

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<sup>118</sup> FCDO, [Ending preventable deaths of mothers, babies and children by 2030](#), December 2021

## 3

## UK and global aid for gender equality

There is no specific data on aid spending on women and girls. However, the level of aid committed to gender equality objectives is measured.

## 3.1

### Monitoring spending on gender equality

In 2023, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) committed to targeting gender equality in at least 80% of its bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) programmes by 2030, using the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) gender marker (see below). The Labour government has said it is committed to this aim.<sup>119</sup>

ODA is aid intended to promote the economic welfare and development of lower-income states.

#### What is the gender marker?

The gender marker is a tool used to analyse the policy objectives of development activities and is used by all [32 members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee](#) (DAC) for monitoring aid projects on gender equality. The DAC includes most of the world's largest aid donors, except China. It uses a three-point scale to assess whether gender equality is:

- the “principal” objective of an initiative,
- a “significant” objective of an initiative, or
- not an objective of an initiative.<sup>120</sup>

In its [Handbook on the gender equality policy marker](#), the OECD provides guidance on what should be reported as a gender equality project and what criteria must be fulfilled for a project to be classified as “principal” or “significant” under the above categories.

<sup>119</sup> PQ 25730 [[Development aid: gender equality](#)], 30 January 2025

<sup>120</sup> OECD, [DAC gender equality policy marker](#), February 2024

## How effective is the gender marker?

DAC members have committed to tracking their ODA commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment. However, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) think tank reports it is not uniformly applied. In 2022:

- 7% of DAC members' bilateral ODA (US\$7 billion) was not screened.
- In France, Italy, and Lithuania, over 40% of contributions were not screened.
- Multilateral development banks and organizations like UN agencies did not systematically apply the gender marker.<sup>121</sup> The OECD estimates that less than 20% of multilateral institutions' ODA flows were screened against the gender marker.<sup>122</sup>
- Private capital mobilisation is also largely excluded from screening, with only 27% of flows screened between 2018 and 2022.<sup>123</sup>

The ODI suggests the lack of systematic analysis may be because the OECD gender marker is only applied to aid spending for specific policies and programmes rather than more general spending.<sup>124</sup>

A 2020 Oxfam study also judged the reporting using the gender marker to be incomplete. According to the study, many of the projects examined in the study were self-reported and mislabelled as "principal" or "significant" without meeting OECD criteria for each classification.

Oxfam sampled 72 projects from seven DAC donors across different sectors and concluded that none had high-quality gender equality projects.<sup>125</sup> Of the 72 projects, only two were judged to meet the OECD minimum criteria for the gender marker, and less than 20% had at least six of the seven required components.

## How much UK aid is focused on gender equality?

In January 2025, the UK Government gave the following breakdown of FCDO bilateral aid spending from 2022 and 2023 (though other departments also spend aid and aid is also spent through multilateral agencies like the World Bank):<sup>126</sup>

- 2022: 58% of UK aid had a focus on gender equality. Of this, 45% was marked as significant and 13% marked as principal.

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<sup>121</sup> ODI Global, [A blurred picture: three global gender data gaps that need plugging](#), June 2024

<sup>122</sup> As above

<sup>123</sup> As above

<sup>124</sup> As above

<sup>125</sup> Oxfam, [Are they really gender equality projects? \[...\]](#), February 2020

<sup>126</sup> PQ 25730 [[Development aid: gender equality](#)], 30 January 2025



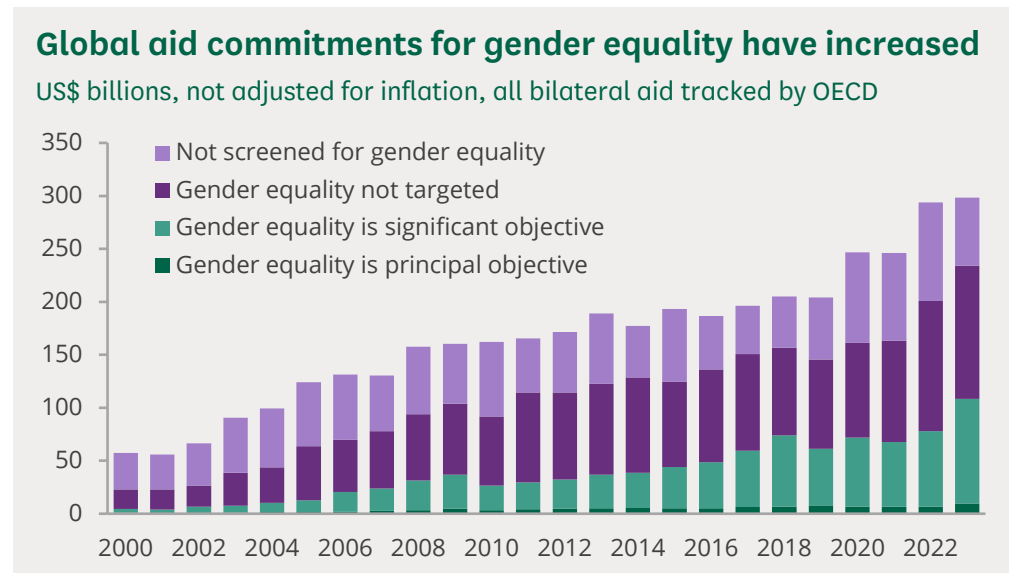
- 2023: 52% of UK aid had a focus on gender equality. Of this, 40% was marked significant and 12% marked as principal.

Of UK international climate finance, in 2022, 61% of FCDO programmes were marked as significant and 1% as principal.<sup>127</sup>

## 3.2

## How much aid globally is spent on gender equality?

According to OECD data, US\$9.5 billion of bilateral aid was targeted at gender equality as its principal objective in 2023, with a further \$99.1 billion having gender equality as a significant objective. As the chart below shows, this is the highest amount on record.



Source: OECD, [Creditor Reporting System data](#), 21 February 2025

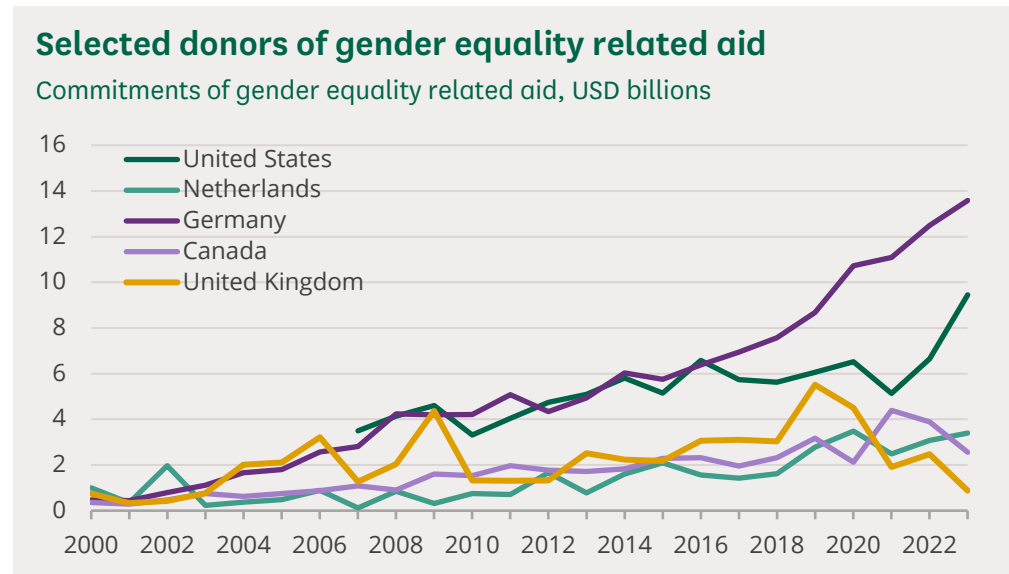
2023 also had the highest proportion of aid that was either principally or significantly targeted at gender equality, at 36%.

Most major aid donors have also increased the amount that they target at gender equality. As the chart below shows, Germany targets the most aid either principally or significantly at gender equality, with a total of \$13.6 billion in 2023. Despite being a much larger aid donor overall (in recent years, at least), the United States targets a relatively low proportion of its aid at gender equality (17% overall between 2014 and 2023, compared with Germany's 34%).

Among DAC members, on average in 2022 and 2023, the Netherlands had the highest share of gender-equality-focused ODA, with 84.7% of its contributions gender-marked, 27.9% of which were marked as "principal". It was followed

<sup>127</sup> PQ 187511 [[Development aid: climate change](#)], 2 June 2023

by Ireland and Belgium. Across the DAC, around 46% of ODA had gender equality as an objective, up from 44% in 2021 to 2022.<sup>128</sup> No donor reached the international target of directing at least 85% of its ODA to gender equality.<sup>129</sup>



Source: OECD, [Creditor Reporting System data](#), 21 February 2025

## Further resources on the OECD marker and global aid

- OECD, [Development finance for gender equality 2024](#), November 2024
- OECD, [Development finance for gender equality](#). Interactive dashboard
- Center for Global Development, [Are providers of climate finance tackling gender effectively?](#), March 2025
- Focus 2023, [Which countries support gender equality in their ODA?](#), April 2024
- Overseas Development Institute, [What recent ODA trends indicate for gender equality](#), June 2024

<sup>128</sup> OECD, [Development finance for gender equality: comparison for 2022-23](#), March 2025

<sup>129</sup> Focus2023, [Which countries support gender equality in their ODA?](#), March 2024

## On which sectors does spending focus?

ODA support for gender equality varied across different sectors and policy objectives in 2022 and 2023:<sup>130</sup>

- The humanitarian aid and energy sectors had the lowest shares of gender-marked aid across DAC members, with 19% and 33% of respective ODA targeting gender equality.
- The sectors that received the highest proportion of gender-marked aid were “other social infrastructure and services” (81%), “agriculture and rural development” (72%), and “education” (68%).
- Aid for women’s rights organisations and government institutions averaged \$693 million in 2022 and 2023 down from a recent peak of \$738 million in 2018 and 2019. Germany, France and EU institutions provided the most. The UK was the fifth-largest donor, with \$46 million.
- Aid to end violence against women and girls averaged \$572 million in 2022-23, the highest recorded since at least 2016-17. The UK was the largest donor, providing \$91 million, followed by EU institutions.

HelpAge International has separately estimated that in 2021, 16 (0.2%) out of the 7,231 projects reported by OECD-DAC members to promote gender equality explicitly included reference to older women. This accounted for 0.1% of total gender equality aid.<sup>131</sup>

## Which countries have the most gender equality aid?

The OECD reports that in 2022-23, of the top 10 recipient countries of bilateral aid, Ukraine received the lowest proportion of aid with gender equality objectives, at 14% of its value. The highest proportion of aid with gender equality objectives was to India, at 79%, and the Philippines, at 74%. In Afghanistan, 50% of aid had gender equality objectives.<sup>132</sup>

For the UK’s top ten recipients of bilateral aid, 100% of UK aid to Somali had gender equality objectives, followed by Ethiopia at 96%. The lowest of these top-ten recipient states were Bangladesh at 48% and Ukraine at 53%.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>130</sup> OECD, [Development finance for gender equality: comparison for 2022-23](#), March 2025

<sup>131</sup> HelpAge International, [Less than one per cent of aid spent on gender equality benefits older women](#), October 2024

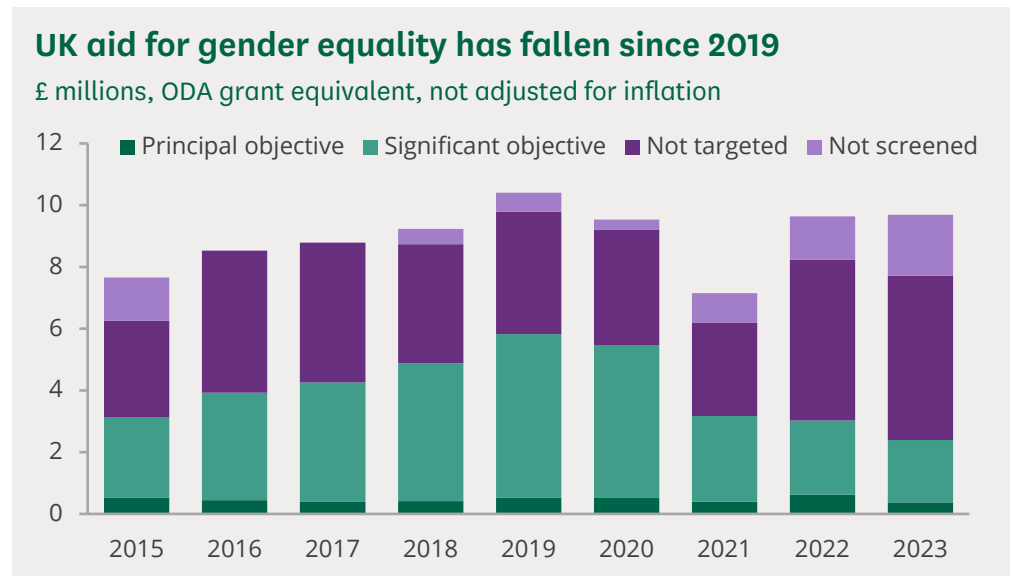
<sup>132</sup> OECD, [Development finance for gender equality: comparison for 2022-23](#), March 2025

<sup>133</sup> As above

## 3.3

## How much does the UK spend on gender equality?

The UK targeted increasing amounts of aid at gender equality during the 2010s, reaching a peak of £5.8 billion in 2019. However, as the chart below shows, the amount targeted either principally or significantly at gender equality has fallen in every year since then, reaching a total of £2.4 billion in 2023.



Source: OECD, [Creditor Reporting System data](#), 21 February 2025

The proportion of UK aid targeted at gender equality had also fallen, from 57% in 2020 to 25% in 2023.

More gender-related UK aid is spent on government and civil society than any other purpose (18% of the total between 2015 and 2023). Other major sectors include humanitarian aid (17%), education (11%), and banking, business and financial services (10%).

## 3.4

## Future spending plans

In January 2025, the FCDO said its aid spending plans for 2024/25 will be published in its annual report, published in summer 2025.<sup>134</sup> Spending plans for future years will be determined in the 2025 Spending Review.<sup>135</sup>

In February 2025, Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced a reduction of UK aid from 0.5% to 0.3% of gross national income (GNI) in 2027 to fund

<sup>134</sup> PQ 27284 [[Developing Countries: women's rights](#)], 29 January 2025

<sup>135</sup> PQ 18364 [[Development aid](#)], 16 December 2024

increased defence spending. He said the government aim remains to return to spending 0.7% of GNI on aid when fiscal circumstances allow.<sup>136</sup>

The government said that it would use the Spending Review to make decisions on how the reduced aid budget will be used. It said it will use a range of tools to make these decisions, including impact assessments.<sup>137</sup>

The government has not set out any specific plans on gender equality or women and girls for future years.

To minimise the effects of the reduction, the Gender and Development Network, on behalf of 29 organisations, has made several recommendations, including that the government should:<sup>138</sup>

- aim for at least 20% of bilateral aid to have gender equality as its “principal” target by 2030, under the OECD criteria
- ensure at least 80% of bilateral aid has gender equality has a “significant” focus on gender
- ringfence innovative and effective programmes, such as the [What works to prevent violence](#) and [support for women’s rights organisations through the Equality Fund](#)
- help aid recipient countries raise their own finance, such as through reducing debt interest repayments
- reform the international finance architecture and financial institutions to help fill funding gaps

## 3.5

## Evaluations of the effectiveness of UK aid for women and girls

### Forthcoming reviews in 2025/26

In 2025, the International Development Committee (IDC) [launched a new inquiry into women, peace and security](#).

<sup>136</sup> GOV.uk, [Prime Minister sets out biggest sustained increase in defence spending since the Cold War, protecting British people in new era for national security](#), February 2025; House of Commons Library, [UK to reduce aid to 0.3% of gross national income from 2027](#), February 2025

<sup>137</sup> PQ 33919 [[Development aid](#)], 26 February 2025

<sup>138</sup> Gender and Development Network, [Joint letter to Foreign Secretary David Lammy](#), March 2025

The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) has also announced it will investigate [UK aid spending on ending violence against women and girls](#). It is expected to conclude in the winter of 2025-26.

Below is a section of reports evaluating UK aid efforts aimed at women and girls.

## National Audit Office, 2020

In 2020, the National Audit Office (NAO) published a [report on improving the lives of women and girls overseas](#). The report assessed progress under the then Department for International Development's (DFID) [Strategic vision for gender equality](#), launched in 2018. It covered spending from 2018 to 2020.

The NAO concluded that there were challenges in implementing the strategic vision. These included a need to improve mainstreaming of gender across DFID's programme portfolio, a need to address social norms, and monitoring of its programmes.<sup>139</sup> The NAO said that DFID was introducing new systems, including country office plans, to help monitor development spending at a local level and ensure value for money.<sup>140</sup>

The report noted that there were several issues affecting gender mainstreaming, including a lack of regular central assessments of programme compliance and engagement by some programming staff. It cited a 2016 international departmental review that judged its compliance with the [International Development \(Gender Equality\) Act 2014](#) as being at "major risk".<sup>141</sup>

In response to the report, the government said it would publish monitoring milestones for the vision.<sup>142</sup>

## ICAI report on education, 2022

In 2022, the ICAI published a [report on UK aid for education](#), covering the period 2015 to 2022 and a sample of programmes. The ICAI rated the work as "green/amber", the second highest possible ranking.

DFID data estimated that between 2015 and 2020, UK aid supported 15.6 million children to get a "decent education". Of these, over 50% were girls.<sup>143</sup> As of 2024, this figure had risen to 19.8 million, including 10 million girls.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>139</sup> National Audit Office, [Improving the lives of women and girls overseas](#), April 2020, pp10-11

<sup>140</sup> As above, p46

<sup>141</sup> As above, pp32-33

<sup>142</sup> PQ 59724 [[Development aid: females](#)], 23 June 2020

<sup>143</sup> ICAI, [Assessing UK aid's results in education](#), April 2022, figure 6

<sup>144</sup> FCDO, [About results estimates for children the FCDO supported \[..\]](#), 19 February 2024

On girls' education, the ICAI noted that the UK had implemented programming relevant to the needs of highly marginalised children, including hard-to-reach girls and girls with disabilities. However, it noted that 25% of the sampled education programmes did not meet UK expectations on ensuring children learn better and the [Girls' Education Challenge](#) (a global fund for education which ran from 2012 to 2024) did not initially meet UK goals for learning.<sup>145</sup>

The report also noted that budget reductions since 2020 (see next section) were likely to have an effect on education participation:

UK aid budget reductions in other sectors, such as sexual and reproductive health – which have been significant – are likely to have had a knock-on impact on girls' access to and attainment in education, as investing in this area can reduce adolescent pregnancy and early marriage, which often act as barriers to girls' education.<sup>146</sup>

The report made five recommendations, all of which were accepted by the FCDO (DFID merged with Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2020). The FCDO said that it would improve data collection to better track and measure improvements in learning and education quality, and that it would restore funding to priority areas including girl's education.<sup>147</sup>

## ICAI report on general UK spending, 2023

In 2023, the ICAI published a summary report of its evaluations of UK aid spending between 2019 and 2023. The ICAI noted that while gender was a stated priority, there were some areas where it was not well included:

- The FCDO had made progress on mainstreaming gender equality across aid policies and programmes, but other departments had “further to go”.
- There was a “mixed record” on mainstreaming gender equality on deforestation and biodiversity loss programmes.
- Gender-sensitive approaches “had not been mainstreamed” across Home Office services for refugees provided in the UK.
- “abrupt” reductions in spending meant some peacebuilding programmes had “left the participating women unsupported and at risk of harm”.
- “momentum” to prevent sexual violence in conflict, eliminate modern slavery, and tackle sexual abuse and exploitation in the international humanitarian system varied depending on ministerial commitment. It noted that work on the Preventing Sexual Violence in conflict Initiative

<sup>145</sup> ICAI, [Assessing UK aid's results in education](#), April 2022, 'introduction'

<sup>146</sup> ICAI, [Assessing UK aid's results in education](#), April 2022, 'budget reductions'

<sup>147</sup> FCDO, [FCDO response to ICAI recommendations on assessing UK aid's results in education](#), 9 June 2022

(PSVI) “lost direction once William Hague was no longer Foreign Secretary” (after 2015) and until after the FCDO’s creation in 2020.<sup>148</sup>

## International Development Committee report on sexual and reproductive health, 2024

In 2024, the International Development Committee (IDC) published a report on [The FCDO’s approach to sexual and reproductive health](#). This raised concerns about the decline in aid spending on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) since 2020 (see next section).

The IDC noted that the proportion of UK bilateral aid spent on reproductive health and population programmes declined before 2020, with around 6% to 8% of the budget spent on these areas between 2009 and 2014, before falling to 4% between 2016 and 2020 and to 2% by 2022.<sup>149</sup>

The IDC noted the reiteration of government support for SRHR and that its approach papers on preventable deaths indicated it was going “in the right direction”, but said these ran contrary to spending decisions.<sup>150</sup> One of the committee’s recommendations was that the government set a target for annual funding on SRHR and related water, sanitation and hygiene services in order to ensure that UK support is sufficient.<sup>151</sup>

The IDC also said that the government should better ensure marginalised groups, such as LGBT+ people, disabled people, and people in humanitarian contexts, are integrated into its work.<sup>152</sup>

In response to the report, the government acknowledged that spending reductions since 2020 had affected its work on SRHR and said that it would work with partners to mitigate the impacts. The government disagreed with the committee’s recommendation that it set targets, arguing that this would reduce the flexibility of budgets and risked “unintentionally crowding out other important work”.<sup>153</sup>

## FCDO assessment of gender-based violence, 2024

In March 2024, the FCDO published data on the effect of its [bilateral aid for gender-based prevention or response services](#).

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<sup>148</sup> ICAI, [UK aid under pressure](#), 2023, para 3.19

<sup>149</sup> International Development Committee, [The FCDO’s approach to sexual and reproductive health](#), 2024, para 3

<sup>150</sup> As above, paras 14, 33

<sup>151</sup> As above, paras 17, 38

<sup>152</sup> As above, para 83, 86

<sup>153</sup> FCDO, [The FCDO’s approach to sexual and reproductive health: Government Response to the Committee’s First Report \(PDF\)](#), May 2024, paras 8, 14, 29



Covering the period April 2021 to March 2024, the FCDO said it reached 4.2 million people with these services. Of those reached, 83% were reached through prevention activities, and 11% accessed response services.

At least 1.5 million (35%) of those accessing gender-based violence (GBV) services were female and 10% were male (data was recorded for the remaining 55% of users). Bangladesh had the highest number of people accessing GBV services, with over 1 million reached.

Services included psychosocial support, counselling, medical care, and legal services. Prevention services included GBV-related education, training, community engagement and work to change the social drivers of GBV such as gender inequality.<sup>154</sup>

## 3.6

### What were the effects of spending reductions from 2020?

In 2020, the government announced aid spending would fall from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI as a “temporary measure”, in response to the covid-19 pandemic’s effects on the UK’s public finances and economy.

In 2025, the government announced that spending would be reduced further to 0.3% by 2027 (see section 3.3).<sup>155</sup>

#### 2021 equality impact assessment

In 2021, the FCDO said that its equality impact assessment found programmes targeting those with protected characteristics were no more likely to be reduced than others.<sup>156</sup>

However, a report leaked to the Commons International Development Committee, drafted in March 2021, suggested there would be reductions in programmes targeted at women, girls, and disabled people in 2021/22.

This was based on an assessment of 42 draft country plans and thematic assessment. It noted:<sup>157</sup>

- likely reductions in violence against women and girls and SRHR programmes, which would impact girls’ education and access to services for those subject to sexual violence

<sup>154</sup> FCDO, [Factsheet: FCDO gender-based violence results April 2021 to March 2023](#), 11 March 2024

<sup>155</sup> Commons Library, [UK aid: spending reductions since 2020 and outlook from 2024/25](#)

<sup>156</sup> International Development Committee, HC 1141 [[Oral evidence: Future of UK aid](#)], 22 April 2021

<sup>157</sup> International Development Committee, [Equalities impact assessment](#), March 2021

- “programmes which have been marked as having a significant or principal focus on gender equality are not disproportionately likely to be discontinued”

The assessment noted some mitigations that could be applied, including mainstreaming gender equality work and diplomatic leadership.

## 2023 equalities impact assessment

In July 2023, the FCDO published an impact assessment of spending plans for 2023/24. The assessment was delivered to ministers in February 2023 and informed the spending plans released in the FCDO’s annual report in July 2023. The published spending plans, in part, sought to address some of the issues the assessment raised.

The assessment said that while the FCDO sought to prioritise spending on humanitarian assistance and women and girls, “the scale of the savings required” meant a “significant impact” on these areas was unavoidable.

Overall, the assessment judged the potential impact of the spending changes in 2023/24 on FCDO programming, and equalities in particular, to be “severe”. It said affected areas could include programmes for women and girls, gender-based violence survivors, disabled people, internally displaced people and children suffering from malnutrition.

The assessment cited aid reductions to central programming on girls’ education (54%), Pan Africa (49%) and human development (48%).

Other potential impacts included reductions to funding for the Women’s Integrated Sexual Health programme (WISH), affecting safe abortions, and 230,000 fewer girls benefiting from Education Cannot Wait in 2023/24.<sup>158</sup>

## International Development Committee on SRHR

The IDC’s report into SRHR, published in 2024, criticised the scale and nature of the reductions in UK aid on sexual and reproductive health.

The UK spent £546 million in bilateral aid on SRHR in 2019, £401 million in 2020, and £256 million in 2021, which amounted to a cut of almost one third from 2019. The IDC said that existing project budgets were either cut or cancelled entirely with little warning, which they assessed damaged “relationships with aid partners and recipients” and tarnished the UK’s reputation as a “credible and serious partner” in advancing SRHR globally.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Minister for International Development, [Correspondence \[...\] regarding ODA programme allocations \[...\] and equality impact assessments](#) (PDF), 19 July 2023 (published 2 August 2023)

<sup>159</sup> International Development Committee, [The FCDO’s approach to sexual and reproductive health](#), 2024, pp5-6, 9-10, 40

## Further reports

- Institute of Development Studies, [Development spending cuts will hit women and girls](#), 2025
- Unicef, [Analysing the cuts to UK child-focused aid](#), 2024
- Overseas Development Institute, [UK ODA cuts: how do they impact adolescent girls?](#), 2023
- Development Initiatives for Care International, [UK leadership on gender equality globally](#), 2023
- Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, [Getting back on track: the case for reinvestment in global sexual and reproductive health rights](#), 2023

## 4 UK diplomacy, sanctions and participation in international alliances

### 4.1 UK and UN sanctions

#### UK sanctions

The UK Government uses sanctions to restrict perpetrators of human rights violations and gender-based violence. These are applied to individuals and entities (meaning organisations and/or businesses). Sanctions are in the form of asset freezes, travel bans, and/or port-entry prohibition.

The UK has designated 14 preparators of CRSV related crimes since 2022. These include perpetrators in Mali, Syria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Central African Republic, and Myanmar.<sup>160</sup>

In 2025, there is an ongoing cross-government review of sanctions which aims to make UK sanctions more effective, easier to comply with and more flexible in their enforcement. The review is led by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and is expected to conclude in the spring.<sup>161</sup>

#### UN sanctions

The UK also applies sanctions issued by the UN Security Council.

As of 2023, the UN has 14 ongoing sanctions regimes in place. While the UN does not have human-rights specific sanctions, eight of these sanctions regimes cite human rights abuses and sexual and/or gender-based violence. These apply to the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Libya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>160</sup> FCDO, [UK sanctions targets 30 corrupt political figures \[...\]](#), 9 December 2022 and [UK sanctions perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence](#), 19 June 2023; HL 4994 [[Armed conflict: sexual offenses](#)], 25 February 2025; PQ HL 4182 [[Sexual offences](#)], 4 February 2025

<sup>161</sup> PQ 27267 [[Belarus: Sanctions](#)], 29 January 2025

<sup>162</sup> UN Security Council, [Sanctions: 2023 Fact Sheet](#), 2023

## 4.2

## UN Security Council resolutions and UN activity

The UN Security Council has adopted 10 resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) that collectively form the international policy framework on WPS. This aims to promote and protect the rights of women in conflict and post-conflict situations. As Security Council resolutions, these are binding and should be implemented by all UN member states and relevant actors, including UN system entities and parties to conflict.<sup>163</sup>

The first WPS resolution the council passed, Resolution 1325 (adopted in 2000) called on all actors involved in peacekeeping, diplomacy and conflict to involve women in their work. Requested measures included more support for local women's peace initiatives and for all parties involved in conflict to "take special measures" to protect women and girls from violence, particularly rape and sexual abuse.<sup>164</sup>

The UK Government has implemented all ten of the WPS resolutions and has led conferences and lobbying initiatives to increase awareness of WPS-related issues. In 2024, the government says its actions included:

- Tabling a resolution at the UN Security Council on the protection of civilians, which called on parties to take urgent steps to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and to improve protection and access to services. This was co-led by Sierra Leone but failed pass due to a Russian veto.<sup>165</sup>
- Lobbying at the UN Human Rights Council to successfully secure a mandate extension for the UN Fact Finding Mission which investigates human rights violations and abuses in Sudan, including crimes against children.<sup>166</sup>
- Co-hosting an event with Dutch and Swiss partners at the UN General Assembly to address conflict-related sexual violence in Sudan and draw international attention to the plight of women and girls; stressing the importance of survivor-centred, local and women-led response efforts.<sup>167</sup>

<sup>163</sup> UN, [Security Council Resolutions](#), Accessed 26 February 2025; Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, [About Women, Peace and Security in the Security Council](#), Accessed 26 February 2025.

<sup>164</sup> UN Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, [Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security](#)

<sup>165</sup> PQ 27014 [[Sudan: Armed Conflict](#)], 28 January 2025

<sup>166</sup> PQ 33482 [[Sudan: Offences against Children](#)], 25 February 2025; PQ 27014 [[Sudan: Armed Conflict](#)], 28 January 2025; PQ 17611 [[Sudan: Humanitarian Aid](#)], 3 December 2024

<sup>167</sup> As above

- Convening a meeting with senior representatives from the UN and influential countries to underline the importance of addressing Afghanistan's restrictions on the rights of women and girls.<sup>168</sup>
- Using the [G7+ meeting](#) of Special Representatives in Geneva to press Taliban ministers and officials on human rights abuses in Afghanistan, including the [2024 ban on female medical education](#).<sup>169</sup>
- Launching a report on “gender-based violence and climate” at the COP29 climate conference and committing to mobilising action on this issue at national and international levels.<sup>170</sup>

The UK Government also said it would use the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) meeting in March 2025 to further promote women’s economic empowerment, galvanise funding for the global grassroots women's rights movement, support women and girls in Afghanistan, and strengthen global action on conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>171</sup>

## 4.3

## UK-hosted international conferences

### 2022 PSVI Conference

In November 2022, the UK hosted the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) Conference. Over 1,000 delegates attended the conference, and a political declaration was put forward to “urgently accelerate action” which was endorsed by 54 states and the UN.<sup>172</sup> The declaration committed to four objectives:<sup>173</sup>

- strengthen global response
- prevent sexual violence in conflict
- promote justice
- support survivors

### 2021 Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief

In 2022, the UK hosted a human rights conference to urge increased global action on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all, with a particular focus on

<sup>168</sup> PQ 28618 [[Afghanistan: Women](#)], 4 February 2025

<sup>169</sup> PQ 22596 [[Afghanistan: Women's rights](#)], 8 January 2025

<sup>170</sup> PQ 27527 [[Gender Based Violence: Women's rights](#)], 30 January 2025

<sup>171</sup> PQ 31609 [[Armed Conflict: Women](#)], 13 February 2025

<sup>172</sup> FCDO, [Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative \(PSVI\) conference 2022: a political declaration on conflict-related sexual violence](#), June 2023

<sup>173</sup> FCDO, [Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative \(PSVI\) conference 2022: a political declaration on conflict-related sexual violence](#), June 2023

women and girls and marginalised groups. Eight countries, including the UK, co-signed a statement committing to seven key principles in relation to FoRB and gender-equality:

- Uphold and protect gender equality, non-discrimination and freedom of religion or belief, and challenge discriminatory laws that restrict women and girls' full and equal enjoyment of human rights.
- Promote equal access and un-biased funding to public goods, and infrastructure including health and education.
- Support the provision of inclusive, equal and non-discriminatory training and educational initiatives in the justice sector, the education system and elsewhere.
- Encourage FoRB for women and girls from all backgrounds and beliefs in national and local decision-making processes, and support capacity-building to strengthen respect for human rights and freedom of religion or belief.
- Protect and support individuals, organisations and institutions that work to promote human dignity through religious interpretations and practices.
- Support and build capacities of local religious and belief leaders

The statement was signed by Greece, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Romania, Slovenia, Ukraine and the UK.<sup>174</sup>

## 2021 Global Education Summit

In July 2021, the UK co-hosted the Global Education Summit with Kenya, in collaboration with the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), which is a multilateral education fund. The summit brought world leaders, non-governmental organisations and other partners together to discuss quality education for all children and make five-year pledges to support GPE's work and help transform education systems in up to 90 countries and territories. The UK pledged £430 million.<sup>175</sup>

The GPE committed to 3 objectives across the period 2021-2025:<sup>176</sup>

1. Strengthen gender-responsive planning and policy development for system-wide impact

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<sup>174</sup> FCDO, [Freedom of religion or belief and gender equality: statement at the International Ministerial Conference 2022](#), July 2022; FCDO, [Statement on freedom of religion or belief and gender equality](#), July 2022

<sup>175</sup> FCDO, [Global education summit: Foreign Secretary's speech](#), July 2021; Global Partnership for Education, [Global education summit: financing GPE 2021-2025](#), accessed 28 February 2025

<sup>176</sup> Global Partnership for Education, [GPE 2025 strategic plan](#), accessed 28 February 2025

2. Mobilize coordinated action and financing to enable transformative change
3. Strengthen capacity, adapt, and learn, to implement and drive results at scale

## 4.4

# Alliances and global commitments

## Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action

Agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and adopted by 189 countries, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action sets out a series of objectives on gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>177</sup>

The declaration identified [12 areas of concern](#), including women and poverty, armed conflict, and the environment. Each area of concern had specific objectives.

Every five years, countries review progress made against the goals. National and regional reviews were being published for the March 2025 meeting.<sup>178</sup>

In 2025, the UK Government said the world “must [...] take concerted action to build on the progress we have made both at home and overseas” under the declaration.<sup>179</sup>

## International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, 2022

In 2022, the UK Government established the International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. There are 29 members of the alliance (19 states and 10 multilateral partners and civil society organisations). Its purpose is to coordinate action on conflict-related sexual violence, and to act as a forum for sharing lessons and supporting survivor-centred action.<sup>180</sup>

## G7 pledge on girls' education, 2021

In 2021, G7 foreign and development leaders recommitted to supporting girls' education at a meeting in London. They called upon all governments to “unlock progress to achieving 12 years of safe and quality education for all children”. This included a recommitment to ensuring more girls enter education:

<sup>177</sup> UN, [Conferences: Fourth world conference on women](#), September 1995

<sup>178</sup> UN Women, [CSW69/BEjinign+30 preparations](#), accessed 26 March 2025

<sup>179</sup> FCDO, [UN Human Rights Council 58](#), 24 February 2025

<sup>180</sup> FCDO, [International Alliance on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict](#), October 2023; FCDO, [International Ministerial Conference on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative 2022](#), September 2022



a. 40 million more girls in school by 2026 in low and lower middle-income countries; b. 20 million more girls reading by age 10 or the end of primary school in low and lower middle-income countries, by 2026.<sup>181</sup>

The [Declaration on girls' education: recovering from Covid-19 and unlocking agenda 2030](#) (5 May 2021) provides more information on proposed actions.

In 2024, G7 leaders said they would “redoubl[e] our efforts to meet the G7 Girls Education targets by 2026”.<sup>182</sup>

## G7 pledge on sexual and reproductive health, 2021

In 2021, G7 foreign and development ministers reaffirmed their “full commitment to the sexual and reproductive health and rights” (SRHR) of all individuals. They committed to work together to prevent and address the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on SRHR.<sup>183</sup> This was reiterated in the 2024 G7 leaders’ meeting.<sup>184</sup>

## G7 and the “2X challenge”, 2018

In 2018, the G7 established the [2X Challenge](#), a partnership between G7 development finance institutions (DFIs), which leverages funding from DFIs and multilateral development banks to provide finance to female-owned and staffed businesses or products or services that particularly benefit women, supporting female economic empowerment.<sup>185</sup>

DFIs invest in businesses overseas to create jobs, with the aim of producing economic growth and reducing poverty. British International Investment (BII) is the UK’s DFI.<sup>186</sup>

In 2021, the G7 pledged a \$15 billion investment to the 2X Challenge over two years to help women in developing countries access jobs, build resilient businesses and respond to the economic impacts of covid-19.<sup>187</sup>

In 2024, the G7 said it aimed for \$20 billion to be unlocked over the following three years.<sup>188</sup>

## Whistler Declaration and humanitarian action, 2018

Agreed in 2018, the Whistler Declaration notes the challenges women and girls face in humanitarian crises, and the risk that these are overlooked.

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<sup>181</sup> FCDO, [G7 foreign and development ministers meeting](#), 5 May 2021, para 68

<sup>182</sup> G7 Italy, [Apulia G7 leaders’ communiqué](#), June 2024, p33

<sup>183</sup> As above, para 72

<sup>184</sup> G7 Italy, [Apulia G7 leaders’ communiqué](#), June 2024, p32

<sup>185</sup> FCDO, [G7 to boost girls’ education and women’s employment in recovery from Covid-19 pandemic](#), May 2021

<sup>186</sup> Commons Library, [British International Investment](#)

<sup>187</sup> FCDO, [G7 foreign and development ministers meeting](#), 5 May 2021, para 73

<sup>188</sup> G7 Italy, [Apulia G7 leaders’ communiqué](#), June 2024, p34

G7 foreign and development ministers said they would “urge” their humanitarian partners to integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment into their programming, strengthen access to healthcare, take steps to prevent gender-based violence and increase accountability.<sup>189</sup>

## G7 gender equality advisory council

In 2018, the G7 first convened an independent group of experts to form a gender equality advisory council. It has been convened to contribute to annual meetings since then, except for 2020. Its role is to make recommendations on areas the G7 could act upon.

The most recent set of recommendations were issued in 2024. These covered four issues and included:

- the women, peace and security agenda, including the sustainable participation of women in decision making and addressing sexual violence
- “recognising, reducing, and redistributing” care work undertaken by women
- investment in identifying and mitigating digital and internet threats, including online violence and pornography
- ensuring girls have access to a diverse range of educational choices, including science, technology and mathematics<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Government of Canada, [Whistler declaration on gender equality \[مس\]](#), June 2018

<sup>190</sup> G7 Information Centre, [Gender equality advisory council, 2018 to 2024 recommendations](#)

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