*“The number of people facing extreme hunger worldwide has reached a new global high - and with a fifth failed rain on the horizon, the drought in East Africa is now the longest-running in decades. Despite the UK's historic leadership in championing early action and efforts to build resilience, worryingly, successive cuts to the UK’s aid budget have led to the UK only making limited commitments to Somalia and the wider region this year.”*

**Abukar Mohamud, Deputy Director Programs for IRC Somalia.**

**CONTEXT**

In 2021 the UK Government reduced its official development assistance (ODA) budget, or ‘UK Aid’, from the UN target of 0.7% to 0.5% of gross national income (GNI). This is the first time that UK Aid has dipped below 0.7% since the commitment was enshrined in law in 2015. It was announced as a “temporary measure” and the Chancellor at the time stated that the target will return to 0.7%, when the “fiscal situation allows”.

The reduction from 0.7% to 0.5% has equated to a cut of £4.6 billion. It happened at a time when need around the world is sky rocketing, against a backdrop of a global pandemic, increased conflict and climate crises. The UK is the only G7 country that has cut its aid budget during the pandemic, with the US and France committing to significantly increase their aid spending. The UK went from being the third largest ODA donor in the G7 in 2020, to the fifth largest in 2021. The impact of this cut has been devastating, [analysis](https://www.one.org/international/impact-of-uk-aid-cuts/) has calculated that the cuts will lead to:

* 100,000 children at risk of dying due to cuts to routine immunisation programmes
* 7.1 million children to lose their education, of which 3.7 million were girls
* 5.3 million women and girls to lose access to modern family planning methods
* 3.3 million to lose humanitarian aid

**The UK’s International Development Strategy (IDS)**

We welcomed the publication of the IDS earlier this year, particularly its commitment to immediately restore funding to women and girls, although we hope to see further detail on this. We also acknowledged and welcomed the Strategy’s focus on humanitarian aid and commitment to prioritise the most vulnerable people around the world, many of whom were impacted by the aid cuts.

However, there is a lack of detail on how the Strategy will be implemented and what prioritising the most vulnerable people looks like in practice. To ensure the Strategy lives up to its potential, the Government should urgently publish supporting strategies that provide more information on the implementation and full resourcing of the IDS. This will ensure it is robust, effective and that ODA is spent effectively, delivering for the British taxpayer and on some of the world’s most complex challenges.

**CHALLENGES**

**The most vulnerable communities have been disproportionately affected by the cuts.** [Analysis has shown](https://devinit.org/resources/uk-aid-trends-quality-quantity-oda/) that bilateral ODA has become less targeted towards people living in the greatest poverty. ODA to the least developed countries (LDCs) has decreased by 31%, more than the fall in total ODA (28%). Some middle-income countries such as India, China, and Brazil have seen a relative increase in bilateral ODA from the UK, whereas conflict-stricken states such as Ethiopia and Yemen have seen cuts to their bilateral ODA of up to 63%. We have seen this within our own programming as well, previously, the largest IRC FCDO funded portfolio was in Syria providing education, health and protection programming, which was significantly scaled back by 75% due to the cuts.

**Fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS) have been deeply affected by cuts and yet the IDS lacks detail on how it will mitigate this.** UK aid cuts to humanitarian spending totaled $1 billion in 2021, more than any other government donor. [Countries most impacted were fragile and conflict affected Syria, Yemen, and Sudan](https://devinit.org/resources/uk-aid-trends-quality-quantity-oda/#:~:text=UK%20aid%20fell%20by%2028,billion%20to%20%C2%A311.5%20billion.) with cuts of 64%, 40%, and 74% respectively compared to spending in 2020. The [IRC Watchlist](https://www.rescue.org/report/2022-emergency-watchlist) has found that just 20 countries - all in conflict - account for almost [90% of global humanitarian need](https://www.rescue.org/press-release/david-morse-lecture-council-foreign-relations-president-and-ceo-international-rescue) and four-fifths of refugees. The Foreign Secretary has stated that the aim of the IDS is to eliminate poverty and prioritise those most in need. Most of the world’s poorest people live in FCAS, and that proportion will grow to two-thirds by 2030 - these countries should therefore be prioritised.

**Programmes supporting women and girls have been disproportionately affected by the aid cuts and local experts are being frozen out of support.** Achieving gender equality requires long-term investments in changing the structural barriers and harmful social norms that women and girls face, howeverIRC-supported [analysis](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/536c4ee8e4b0b60bc6ca7c74/t/619e319e4d47284b912d5831/1637757342558/Updated_UK_Government_decisions_to_cut_UK_Aid_are_disproportionately_falling_on_women_and_girls_22.11.2021_-_Copy.pdf) has estimated that programs for 20 million women and girls including health, education and humanitarian assistance were cut by the UK Government. In Sierra Leone, the budget for one IRC program providing family planning outreach and community sensitisation, [was cut by 60%.](https://www.rescue.org/uk/press-release/uk-aid-cuts-will-negatively-impact-women-and-girls-around-world) Before this cut the programme reached over 3 million people – mostly young girls – and in a country where one in 17 women die in pregnancy or childbirth, programmes like this are essential.

**The cuts have damaged trust with local communities. I**NGOs have attested that the biggest cuts have been seen in [working with local civil society organisations](https://committees.parliament.uk/event/13167/formal-meeting-oral-evidence-session/). This has had a negative impact on trust, with some long-standing programmes being given just 90 days' notice to close, leaving communities without essential service provision. All of IRC’s FCDO-funded health, education and protection programming in Nigeria ended, leaving us without any FCDO funding to deliver services in the country at all. This forced us to scale down programming and, in some cases, close activities altogether. This left people who have experienced human rights violations – including gender-based violence – with more limited support to secure the services they need to recover from violence.

**There are concerns UK Aid is being used to further geopolitical goals at the expense of those most in need.** Though the IDS has a stated commitment to alleviating poverty for those most in need, the shift to prioritising bilateral aid and cuts to multilateral aid suggests that ODA will be used to further the Government’s strategic foreign policy priorities, rather than focusing on the most vulnerable. This could mean less funding for tackling development and humanitarian issues, at a time when needs around the world continue to rise.

**WHAT CAN THE UK GOVERNMENT DO?**

* **Reinstate 0.7% Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget as a matter of urgency.** With ongoing crises in Afghanistan, East Africa, Yemen, Syria, Ukraine, Myanmar as well as others, combined with lasting impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world’s most vulnerable people simply cannot wait. It is critical the UK returns to its 0.7% commitments immediately, rather than waiting to meet the fiscal criteria currently set by the Treasury.
* **Prioritise spending UK aid on reaching those living in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS).** Those residing in FCAS are the most vulnerable people who have been disproportionately affected by the cuts to ODA. The Government should urgently provide more detail on its humanitarian funding, where this funding will be targeted, and how it will support people living in FCAS, and commit to spending at least 50% ODA in FCAS.
* **Provide more clarity on what the women and girl’s budget will look like.** It is welcome to see the restoration of funding for women’s and girl’s budget in the IDS as a step to addressing the impact of the cuts. However, we still lack clarity on how this will be restored and to who. The lack of mention of women-led or women’s rights organisations within the Strategy, who often provide the best value for money and are best positioned to support women and girls, is concerning. The FCDO must provide more detail on how it plans to reinstate funding for women and girls and how women-led groups will be prioritised as partners for delivering programmes.

**The IRC’s Work**

The IRC is a global humanitarian organisation with programmes in over 40 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and the U.S. Our mission is to help people whose lives and livelihood are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their future.

We are proud of our longstanding partnership with successive UK Governments, first through the Department for International Development, now through the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). IRC currently receives UK Aid to deliver programming in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda. The IRC does this through a variety of programmes that provide services such as cash relief, education, health and those that focus on women’s protection and empowerment. With the support of UK Aid we also deliver cutting-edge research in countries including Bangladesh, Democratic Republic of Congo, Jordan and Nigeria.

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