

Cao Huyền Trang (6) and her family stand in front of their home after a landslide triggered by Super Typhoon Yagi in Viet Nam.

UNITED KINGDOM

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for every child

SHORT CHANGED

Analysing the UK's child-focused international climate finance

April 2025

UNICEF.ORG.UK

United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF UK),

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ABOUT US

UNICEF, the United Nations Children’s Fund, is mandated by the UN General Assembly to uphold the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and promote the rights and wellbeing of every child. Together with partners, UNICEF works in over 190 countries and territories around the world, including here in the UK, focusing special effort on reaching the most vulnerable and excluded children, to the benefit of children everywhere.

Here in the UK, **the UK Committee for UNICEF** (UNICEF UK) is a registered charity that raises funds for UNICEF’s global work, advocates for change for children and works with over two million children through our Child Friendly Cities and Communities programme with local authorities, our Baby Friendly Initiative in hospitals and health centres, and our Rights Respecting Schools Award network of 5,000 schools.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported that between 2011 and 2020 global warming from human activity had most likely reached 1.1°C above pre-Industrial average temperatures.¹ The planet is already experiencing widespread adverse effects, and these are set to get worse. The UK's 2035 Nationally Determined Contribution recognises the stakes: 'there is no global stability without climate stability'.²

The window for action is closing, while the gap between need and available funding continues to grow. Children will bear the brunt of intensifying climate impacts over the course of their lifetime, with children aged 10 in 2020 set to experience five times as many extreme events as a person born in 1960 under current climate policy pledges.³

International climate finance (ICF) is critical to climate action. It is crucial to efforts to limit global heating and deliver a green transition. ICF is needed to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, so that today's children and their children inherit a liveable planet.

Invest in children

Children and future generations are the ultimate beneficiaries of all climate action and finance. For children to grow up and feel the benefits of this action, funding must address the specific needs and vulnerabilities they have in the face of climate change today. Investing in children and the services that they rely on has the potential to reduce their climate risk and help end child poverty.

As many countries experiencing the worst impacts of climate change have younger populations, targeting climate finance towards children can also play a role in supporting these countries to build human capital. Global evidence shows that, beyond ensuring child rights, public spending on children is a smart investment.⁴

This report builds on UNICEF UK's *Leave No Child Behind*, published in 2024, which assessed child-focus spending across the UK's aid budget.⁵ This new analysis takes a deep dive into the child-focus of the UK's ICF from 2011 to 2023, looking at project-level data to analyse flows to children and to the sectors that they rely on across the UK's ICF portfolio.

The UK has played a significant role in the international response to climate change, including in securing the 2015 Paris Agreement and more recently hosting COP26 in 2021. Both the UK's domestic commitments and progress and their strategic financial pledges have helped to drive momentum internationally.

However, this analysis shows that the UK's child-focused bilateral ICF has fallen in recent years, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of total ICF. In 2023, child-focused ICF fell by over 46% from its peak in 2018. Only a small portion of this fall can be attributed to the pressures on the UK's aid budget since 2020, as the findings show that ICF was largely protected. As identified with ODA and the UK's international development policy more generally, there is no cohesive strategic approach to ensure children are prioritised. Without this, changing priorities have led to a decline in spending for children.^a

On paper, the UK is committed to investing ICF in climate adaptation of services that children rely on, like health, education, water and sanitation and social protection, as part of its International Climate Finance Strategy. Yet this analysis of bilateral ICF shows that very little is invested in those sectors. Investment has also declined in recent years as key sectors like social protection and water and sanitation were deprioritised. This trend matches with a lack of strategic focus on children, both as a uniquely vulnerable group and as important stakeholders in climate action.

- The UK spent £990 million in child-focused ICF between 2011 and 2023, around 11 % of total bilateral ICF spending.
- UK child-focused ICF fell to just 9.0% of bilateral ICF in 2023, after reaching a peak of 17.3% of bilateral ICF five years earlier.
- Almost all child-focused UK ICF was spent through climate adaptation programmes.
- The majority of child-focused ICF funded projects were in social protection (39%), environmental policy and administration (17%) and water, sanitation and hygiene (16%).
- Bilateral ICF spending in key sectors that children rely on was low over the entire period, £100 million in health and £70 million in education.

Children around the world are already experiencing the impacts of the climate crisis. Children living in low- and middle- income countries, where they make up almost half the population, are most vulnerable. They are important stakeholders and agents of change in climate spaces with a right to participate in decisions that affect them. As climate shocks increase in frequency and intensity, safeguarding children's access to the services they rely on like health, education, water and sanitation and social protection is more important than ever.

^a A similar trend was identified in UNICEF UK's 2024 report *Leave No Child Behind*, which found that the UK's child-focused bilateral ODA fell 56% from 2016 to 2022.

Recommendations

The UK is already committed in their International Climate Finance Strategy to invest ICF in services that children rely on, like health, education, water and sanitation, and social protection. This is an important first step. Making sure the UK's ICF works for children is the next logical step. This means acting to increase the child-focus of the UK's ICF by:

1. Prioritise ICF investment for children by:

- Increasing adaptation funding to ensure child-critical systems like health, education, social protection, and water and sanitation can withstand climate shocks.
- Advancing and funding platforms for children and young people to meaningfully participate in decisions about climate policy and action.
- Leveraging UK influence in climate funds and other multilateral spaces to improve their child focus.

2. Adopt a new strategic approach to child rights in UK ICF by:

- Incorporating an explicit recognition of children as rights holders with unique needs and vulnerabilities resulting from the climate crisis into UK's future International Climate Finance strategies and investments.
- Conducting child rights impact assessments for all Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) programmes and policies to ensure that children's unique needs and vulnerabilities are captured and addressed.
- Improving the collection of age disaggregated data as part of UK ICF impact reporting.

3. Scale up high-quality ICF reaching the most vulnerable, including children.

- Committing to an ambitious ICF4 package commensurate with the scale of the climate crisis and the UK's current and historic responsibility, recognising the new financial goal to provide \$300 billion and the ambition to mobilise \$1.3 trillion per year by 2035.
- Acting with urgency to secure new public-led sources of ICF that are additional to ODA flows, recognising that it is no longer tenable to fully fund ICF solely from the ODA budget.
- Prioritising grant-based funding, championing and participating in sustainable debt burden reduction and debt relief mechanisms.
- Ensuring that the methodology for capturing UK ICF is robust, transparent and accurately represents spending on climate mitigation, adaptation and, going forward, loss and damage.

1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is already affecting children around the world, with one billion living in high-risk areas.⁶ Globally, one in seven students already experienced school disruptions due to climate events in 2024.⁷ Children have unique needs and vulnerabilities and are important stakeholders and agents of change in climate policy.

Time is running out to limit global warming to 1.5°C. The gap between global climate finance needs and available funding is growing.⁸ Investment in adaptation continues to lag behind funding for mitigation. While adaptation finance needs are estimated to be at least \$215 billion a year, international public climate finance flows for adaptation were less than \$30 billion in 2022.⁹ At the same time, the costs of loss and damage are rising.

As the world's sixth largest economy and one of the largest historical emitters of greenhouse gases, the UK has a responsibility to cut its own emissions and to support the climate response in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).¹⁰

Against a backdrop of worsening climate impacts and stalled progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), investing in children and the sectors that support them has the potential to deliver positive outcomes for people and the planet. Children, particularly those living in LMICs, have contributed least to the climate crisis, but they are set to experience the worst of its impacts. Delays in mitigation are increasing climate impacts, reducing the options for adaptation and increasing the chances that children will face greater harm.

This analysis finds that in recent years, UK bilateral ICF supporting children and the sectors they rely on has fallen. UK child-focused bilateral ICF peaked in 2018 at £158 million and has since declined to just £83 million in 2023, a decline of 46%. Only a small portion of this can be attributed to the pressures on the UK's aid budget since 2020, as the findings show that ICF was largely protected. As with child-focused ODA more generally, the decline is the result of changing priorities.

Box 1: What is child-focused spending?

Following on from *Leave No Child Behind*, this report defines child-focused ICF as funding spent in sectors likely to directly impact children (e.g. education), delivered through channels that directly target children (for example, through UNICEF), or on projects that mention children and related terms in their description. See annexe 1 for full methodology.

As the UK Government plans its fourth round of international climate finance (ICF), it is time to focus on children and make sure UK ICF is working for them. Making the UK's ICF deliver for children requires investing in the climate- and disaster-resilience of sectors that they rely on like social protection, water and sanitation, health and education and ensuring that children's unique needs and vulnerabilities are addressed through targeted solutions. It is also essential that children and young people have opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them.

In addition, the scale of global need, the UK's historical responsibility and the UK government's climate leadership aspirations require a significant rethink in how ICF is funded. Scaling up high-quality ICF is also required to facilitate the fastest possible green transition that can deliver a better world for children, as well as to jump-start urgently needed adaptation.

The UK's ICF, which has historically been funded exclusively from the ODA budget, has risen significantly since 2011. Bilateral ICF and contributions to climate funds combined increased from £347 million in 2011 to £1.7 billion in 2023. ICF was largely protected from aid cuts and rising in-donor refugee costs (IDRCs) since 2020. As a result, it has become a much larger share of the UK's ODA budget. With the most recent announced cuts to the UK ODA target to 0.3% of GNI, it is no longer tenable to source ICF solely from the aid budget.

1.1 Methodology

The OECD Rio-markers are often used to track climate finance, as they are easily accessible. In UNICEF UK's report *Leave No Child Behind*, these markers were used to provide indicative trends in aid that has both a child-focus and a climate objective. However, as noted in that report, this is not the approach that the UK uses to measure climate finance, and it yields significantly different numbers to those that the UK discloses in official climate finance figures. This report therefore examines more closely what the UK counts as ICF, and the share of this spending that is focused on children's well-being.

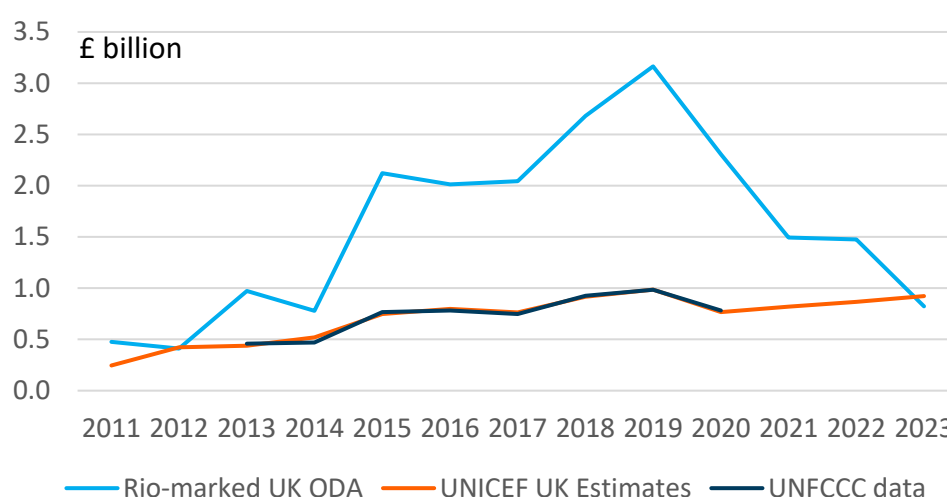
Obtaining a clear picture of UK spending on ICF at the project level is difficult. While the UK publishes a list of projects included in ICF figures in its ICF results page, this does not provide any information about the projects. This list can be combined with other datasets, but inconsistencies between datasets make this challenging.

The approach for the analysis presented below starts with the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) dataset, which contains complete information on bilateral aid spending by DAC countries. To identify the share of each project counted as ICF, this dataset is combined with data from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). IATI is a global initiative to improve transparency of aid flows to which FCDO reports. In this data the UK tags which

expenditures are included in ICF figures. However, this dataset is incomplete, and a number of other assumptions are made. The full methodology is outlined in the methodological Annexe.

To verify this methodology, estimates for UK ICF were checked against the numbers reported to the UNFCCC as part of Biennial Report (BR) submissions. This is often regarded to be the most official source of climate finance but is only available up until 2020 and contains little project information. Figures were found to closely match UK figures from BR reports (Figure 1). Rio-markers by comparison not only overstate total climate finance but show a different trend. In particular, they suggest a recent decline in ICF which is at odds with government statements on recent ICF trends^b.

Figure 1: Comparison between Rio-marked UK aid, UNICEF UK ICF estimates and official figures



In 2024, the UK announced changes to the way that it measures ICF.^c The analysis in this report focuses on what is currently tagged as climate finance by the UK or included in the ICF results page, without attempt to replicate these changes. This is primarily because the analysis focuses on the period from 2011 to 2023, before these changes are introduced, but also, because of insufficient transparency in how these changes will be implemented. However, where possible, the potential impact of these changes is considered, for example, by attempting to calculate what a climate share of multilateral development bank (MDB) contributions could look like.

^b A closer match can be obtained by adjusting the 'significant' marked ODA (that for which climate is not the main objective). But the UK does not use a constant share of adaptation projects and so such an assumption would be arbitrary, and still would not match trends in reported figures as accurately.

^c The UK government introduced four changes to the way it measures ICF in 2024: a fixed percentage of 30% of humanitarian programmes operating in the 10% countries most vulnerable to climate change will be classified as ICF; calculations of ICF channeled through British International Investment will reflect the actual proportion addressing climate change; a percentage of the UK's core contributions to multilateral development banks will be classified as ICF; and the existing aid portfolio was 'scrubbed' to find existing eligible programmes. See ICAI (2024).

2. THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A CHILD RIGHTS CRISIS

Children are recognised in the Paris Agreement – of which the UK is a signatory – both as a vulnerable group and as important stakeholders in climate decision-making.¹¹ Recently the intersection between child rights and the climate emergency has gained greater attention globally.

In 2023 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child explicitly affirmed children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.¹² At COP 28, the Global Stocktake mandated the first expert dialogue on the disproportionate impact of climate change on children. This dialogue took place in 2024.¹³ The United Arab Emirates Framework for Global Climate Resilience, also agreed at COP28, explicitly encourages a rights-based approach that takes into consideration children and youth and ensures intergenerational equity.¹⁴ This global recognition needs to be translated into action at every level.

Almost every child on Earth is exposed to at least one climate or environmental hazard, shock or stress. According to UNICEF's Children Climate Risk Index, over half of the world's children live in areas at high risk of climate change impacts.¹⁵ As the world continues to warm, the impacts of the climate crisis are set to intensify, exposing more children to greater and more dangerous impacts. Recent IPCC data shows that, by 2100, children who were aged 10 or under in 2020 will face a nearly four-fold increase in extreme weather events in their lifetime under a 1.5°C warming scenario and a five-fold increase under a 3°C warming scenario.¹⁶ Today:

- 1 billion children at extremely high risk of the impacts of the climate crisis.¹⁷
- 739 million children are exposed to 'high or extremely high' water scarcity.¹⁸
- 559 million children are exposed to high heatwave frequency.¹⁹
- Over the past six years, 43.1 million internal displacements of children were linked to weather-related disasters.²⁰

While keeping global heating within the 1.5°C limit is essential for avoiding the worst consequences, the impacts of climate change are already putting children at risk and disrupting their access to basic social services like health, education, social protection, and water and sanitation services. Their unique physiology makes children disproportionately vulnerable to climate impacts such as extreme heat, water and food scarcity and vector- and water-borne diseases. A recent study by UNICEF found that "climate change is impacting almost every aspect of child health and well-being from pregnancy to adolescence."²¹

- The risk of pre-term birth, still birth and low birth weights increase as extreme heat, droughts, floods, storms and wildfires worsen.
- Newborns and infants have a higher risk of death from air pollution and extreme heat.
- Malnutrition, already the leading cause of death for children under the age of five, is set to increase in the wake of extreme weather events.
- Killer infectious diseases for children, like malaria and dengue fever, are expected to spread and intensify as the planet heats up, while increased flooding can lead to higher incidence of cholera outbreaks.
- Non-communicable diseases like asthma, heat stroke, allergies and chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease are linked environmental changes associated with climate change.
- Children's and adolescents' mental health is negatively affected by extreme weather events and living through the climate crisis.

And it's not only children's physical and mental health that is affected. Climate change also contributes to children missing out on education, reducing their life chances and heightening their risk of displacement, exploitation and abuse.

- Globally, at least 242 million students – from pre-primary to upper secondary education – have experienced school disruptions due to climate events in 2024.²²
- Over 43 million internal displacements of children between 2016-2021 were attributed to weather-related disasters, primarily floods and storms.²³

Climate change does not affect everyone equally. Children living in LMICs, children living in poverty and experiencing other forms of exclusion and marginalisation are the least responsible for climate change yet will bear the heaviest burden of its impacts. Actions that minimise climate change and its impacts are critical for ensuring children's futures. Addressing children's needs requires targeted solutions alongside more general investment in the climate- and disaster-resilience of child-critical sectors like health, education and nutrition so they can withstand the immediate and expected impacts of climate change.

Investing in children and the services that support them has the potential to reduce their climate risk and help end child poverty. This is a clear win-win. For example, social protection payments, such as child benefits, are crucial forms of poverty reduction and resilience building. They are key to helping protect children from the worst impacts of the climate crisis, but coverage rates for children in countries highly vulnerable to climate impacts are a third lower than

for those not in high-risk countries. 1.4 billion children are missing out on social protection, leaving them vulnerable to disease, poor nutrition, and poverty.²⁴

Children as stakeholders

Children and young people are not mere victims of the climate crisis; they are important stakeholders and agents of change in climate discussions. It was in response to the persistent efforts of children that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child issued its general comment on children's right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.²⁵ Given their stake in addressing the climate crisis, it is no surprise that some of the most visible climate advocates in recent years have been children and young people. Children and young people need access to climate decision-making spaces at all levels. They have a right to be included, in age-appropriate ways, in the discussions affecting their future.

The UK recognises the value of children and youth as agents of change in its domestic climate commitments. Following on from their endorsement at COP29 of the Youth Clause for Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC)²⁶, the UK's 2035 NDC acknowledges the role of youth and children as 'important drivers of climate action and agents for change'.²⁷ It emphasises the importance of young people and children's participation in climate-related decision-making and the need for education that provides children and young people with the skills, knowledge and behaviours to connect with the natural world, access green careers and thrive in a world with a changing climate. This approach should be brought into the next round of UK ICF.

THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A CHILD RIGHTS CRISIS

1 billion children are at 'extremely high risk' of the impacts of the climate crisis



School was disrupted by climate change for **1 in 7 children** (242 million) in 2024.



739 million children are currently exposed to high or extremely high water scarcity every year.



Children under the age of five bear the brunt of **nearly 90%** of the global burden of disease associated with climate change.

3. THE UK'S ICF AND CHILDREN



Ntokozi Ewee washes her hands at a waterpoint installed at her school in Matebeleland, southwest Zimbabwe. This is part of a programme of 'dream schools' that are greener, more climate resilient, and deliver quality education. © UNICEF/Karel Prinsloo

To date the UK has committed to three rounds of ICF funding, each larger than the last. It has a strong track record of delivering against its ICF commitments.

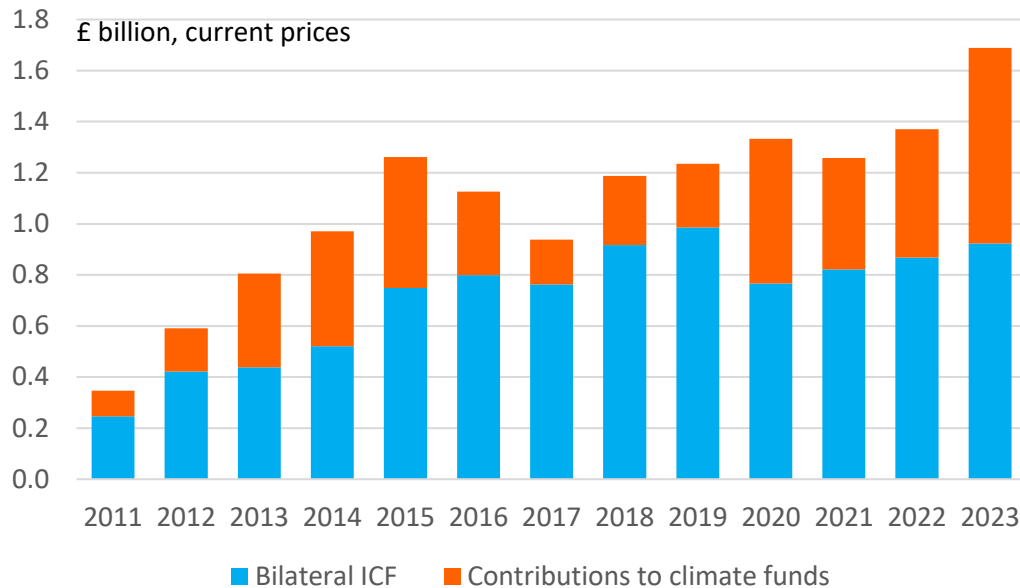
- £3.8 billion pledged for 2011/12-2015/16 in ICF 1
- £5.8 billion pledged for 2016/17 to 2020/21 in ICF 2
- £11.6 billion pledged for 2021/22-2025/26 in ICF 3

The following section will analyse UK ICF spending between 2011 and 2023, looking at general trends as well as child-focused spending. It will also review the current ICF strategy and related policy documents for a better understanding of the UK's approach to children.

3.1 General trends

UK climate spending has increased substantially since the first ICF round began in 2011.^d Bilateral ICF and contributions to climate funds combined increased from £347 million in 2011 to £1.7 billion in 2023 (Figure 2). As a share of total ODA, this represented an increase from 3.9% to 11.0% over this period.

Figure 2: UK ICF estimates, 2011-2023



Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page

In recent years, the UK ODA budget has come into increasing pressure. Not only has the aid budget been cut, but an increasing share of remaining aid has been absorbed by a dramatic increase in expenditure on in-donor refugee costs (IDRCs), from £477 million to £4.3 billion between 2019 and 2023. However, the political commitment to spend £11.6 billion on the third round of ICF (2021-2026) appears to have protected ICF spending from the worst of these aid cuts. UK aid excluding IDRCs^e decreased between 2019 and 2023 by 25%, whereas ICF *increased* by 37%. Consequently, ICF has become a much larger share of UK aid spending over this period.

^d The UK committed £3.8 billion in ICF 1 (2011/12-2015/16), £5.8 billion in ICF 2 (2016/17-2020/21) and £11.6 billion in ICF 3 (2021/22-2025/26).

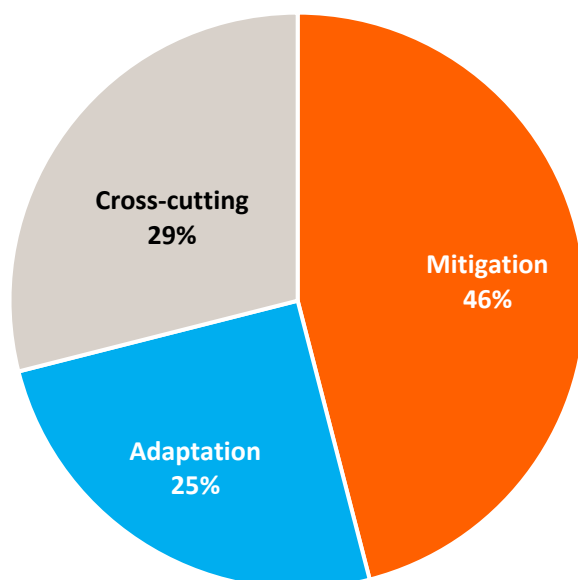
^e This category of aid is excluded from some of the analysis as it is all spent within the UK and largely does not reflect intentional efforts to reduce poverty. These costs have increased in recent years because of a backlog in asylum claims and the war in Ukraine, rather than any policy changes.

Balance between mitigation and adaptation

As well as commitments for aggregate spending on ICF, the UK has also committed to 'balance' ICF between mitigation and adaptation, and to triple adaptation spending from £0.5 billion to £1.5 billion by 2025.²⁸ The urgency and need for greater adaptation funding has grown as climate-related shocks increase in frequency and intensity. Adaptation is crucial for building children's resilience and for safeguarding and improving their access to essential services like health, education, water and sanitation and social protection.

However, progress towards the UK's commitments to adaptation is difficult to interpret because of the substantial share of ICF that has both an adaptation and mitigation component. Between 2011 and 2023, the share of this 'cross-cutting' ICF was 29% (Figure 3). In the ICF3 period so far, the average has been even higher, at 35%.

Figure 3: Total UK ICF estimates by climate focus, 2011-2023



Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page

While the share of ICF that has an adaptation component is 54%, the share of ICF solely focusing on adaptation is only 25%, considerably lower than the share solely focusing on mitigation. In the ICF 3 period so far this difference is even starker: 47% of ICF since 2021 had a sole mitigation focus, compared to 18% for adaptation. Other research has noted that progress towards the UK's key performance indicators on adaptation ('Number of people supported to better adapt to the effects of climate change' and 'Number of people whose resilience has been improved') has slowed in recent years, but that this is not the case for mitigation.²⁹

Bilateral ICF

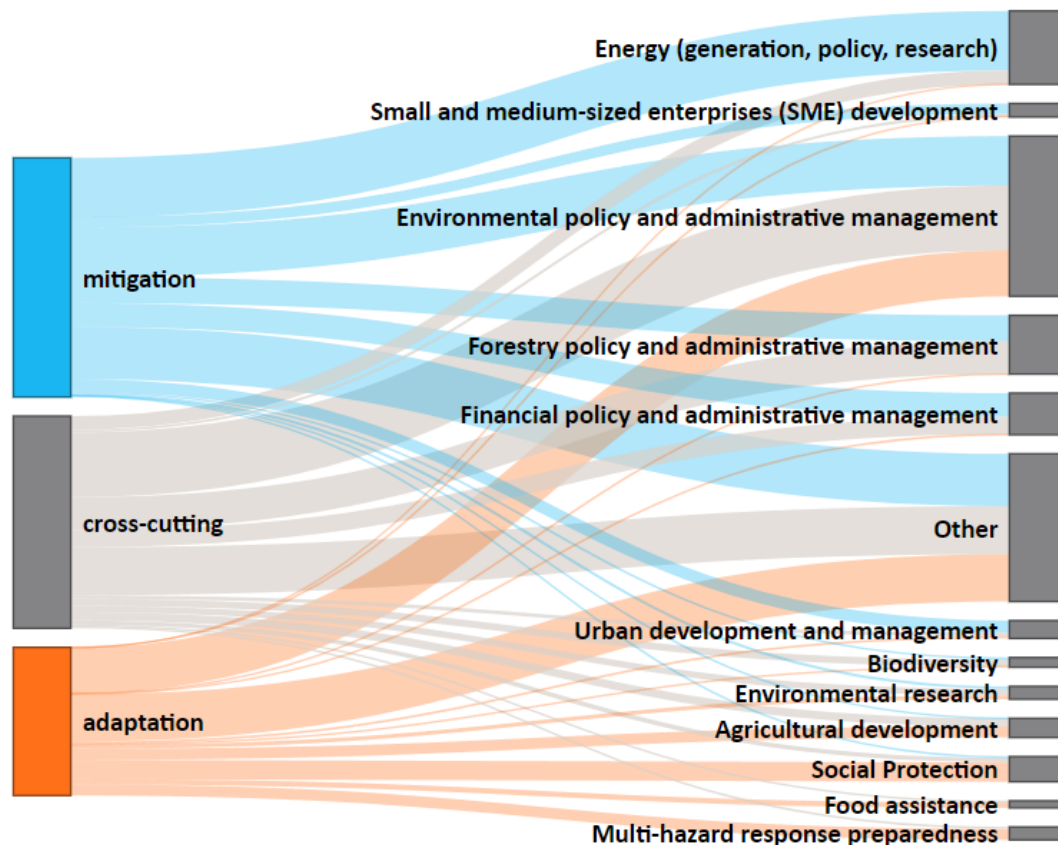
The UK's bilateral ICF reached £923 million in 2023 according to estimates in this report, but this remains below its peak in 2019 of £986 million.

UK's bilateral ICF tends to be focused on improving climate and environmental policies, for example, by helping governments to integrate resilience into government planning or helping them to make their mitigation strategies more ambitious. By far the largest sector to receive UK bilateral climate finance is 'environmental policy and administrative management', which has accounted for 27% of bilateral ICF on average between 2011 and 2023. It was also the largest sector in nearly every year. The second largest was 'forestry policy and administrative management', accounting for 10% over the same period.

However, in the OECD reporting system, sectors are reported at a detailed level, and so similar themes can be addressed by multiple sectors. For example, energy research, renewable energy and energy policy are all in the top 10 largest sectors to receive ICF. If all energy sectors are treated together, this is the second largest sector to receive UK ICF, accounting for around 16% of UK ICF between 2011 and 2023. Figure 4 shows how mitigation, adaptation and cross-cutting climate finance are split across the main sectors.

Figure 4: Largest climate finance sectors by climate focus, 2011-2023

Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page



Environmental policy and forestry policy tend to be counted as cross-cutting, given their focus on policy-level changes as opposed to individual projects. They are also the largest two sectors for adaptation funding. Environmental policy and forestry policy accounted for 31 % and 9 % of adaptation funding respectively between 2011 and 2023.

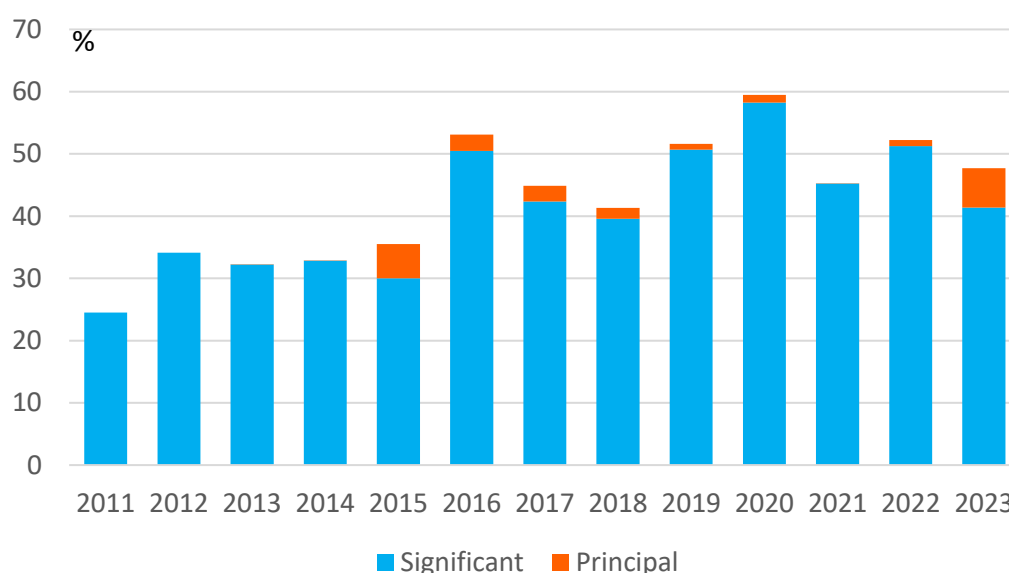
As well as being the most important sectors for both mitigation and adaptation spending, environmental and forestry policy also account for nearly the entire increase in bilateral ICF since 2020. This increase is in line with the UK commitment to spend £3 billion of ICF on projects that protect, restore and sustainably manage nature, and to spend £1.5 billion on forests specifically.³⁰

Gender focused ICF

The Paris Agreement – to which the UK is a signatory – explicitly acknowledges the importance of respecting gender equality and women’s empowerment in the response to climate change.³¹ Gender inequality intersects with multiple deprivations that are exacerbated in a changing climate, making investments in gender equality integral to lifelong positive outcomes for children. This section assesses whether UK ICF addresses gender by using the OECD gender marker that allows the UK to denote whether projects have a ‘significant’ or ‘principal’ gender focus.

The percentage of ICF that has a gender focus has increased from 24% in 2011 to 41 % in 2023 (although this is below its peak of 58% in 2020). Around 72 % of this had an adaptation component.

Figure 5: Percentage of bilateral ICF with a gender marker



Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page

Most of this ICF has had a significant rather than principal focus on gender, which implies that gender is an important objective but not the primary motivation for the project.^f This largely comes from ‘mainstreaming’ gender considerations – redesigning programmes to account for the impact on women. For example, the ‘Adaptation for Smallholder Agricultural Programme’ is primarily about helping small-holder farmers adapt to climate impacts through activities such as improving water storage, irrigation, and seed varieties.³² But the business case notes how women are overrepresented in this group, and (at least partially) targets the specific difficulties they face, for example, in accessing capital.

Where ICF projects have a principal gender focus, there are question marks around the accuracy of the marking. A quarter of ICF with a principal gender focus came from the ‘Market Accelerator for Green Construction’ project that aims to finance the construction of greener buildings in emerging markets, and there is no indication in the project description what gives it a ‘principal’ gender focus. As with the Rio-markers, care needs to be taken in interpreting the figures that the UK reports.



Three women are seen on a river which was their source of water before the construction of a Solar-powered Water System at Pembamoyo Village in Nsanje District, Malawi. Solar-powered water supply schemes are drilled deeper than traditional hand pumps, meaning they can reach reliable aquifers which are not affected during times of drought. © UNICEF/Chikondi

^f This is understandable in the case of ICF, for which the primary motivation is addressing climate objectives.

3.2 Children in the UK climate strategy

The UK's current international climate finance strategy has no explicit references to child rights or children's participation in climate decision-making and only minimal references to the specific vulnerabilities of children in the face of the climate and nature crisis.⁹ There are references to girls, but always in the context of 'women and girls', meaning the unique needs, vulnerabilities, experiences and perspectives of girls, as well as boys, are absent.

More positively, the Adaptation and Resilience pillar includes a commitment to invest in health, education, nutrition, social protection, and infrastructure including for water and sanitation, which are important child-critical services.³³ However, the share of ICF targeted at these sectors is limited, with health and education receiving just £100 million and £70 million in ICF respectively between 2011 and 2023. Water and sanitation and social protection, which historically received more ICF, were hit hardest by successive rounds of ODA cuts and shifting priorities.

It is also difficult to see if and how the UK's ICF is impacting children. The UK measures the impact of its international climate finance against 17 key performance indicators (KPIs) and publishes the results annually. Of the 17 KPIs, three measure the number of people benefitting from UK ICF: the number of people supported to better adapt to the effects of climate change (KPI 1); the number of people with improved access to clean energy (KPI 2); and the number of people whose resilience has been improved (KPI 4).³⁴

The available age-disaggregated data is extremely limited across all three measures. Fewer than five programmes reported on the number of children or youth better able to adapt to the effects of climate change or with improved access to clean energy. None reported on the number of children or youth whose resilience had been improved. In comparison, sex disaggregation was provided by 80% of programmes reporting the number of people supported to better adapt, 58% of programmes reporting on the number of people with improved access to clean energy and 65% of those reporting on improved resilience.³⁵ This shows that it is possible to collect better impact data with the right incentives.

Like all vulnerable groups, children have specific needs, face specific barriers and require targeted solutions. These lessons have been learned with other vulnerable groups, including women, indigenous communities and people with disabilities. So often peoples' needs are left unmet, solutions are missed, and important perspectives go unheard. A recent learning paper from the UK PACT's Green Recovery Challenge Portfolio, highlights the importance of gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) across the UK's climate portfolio. The

⁹ The only two references to children focus on the climate impacts on nutrition, highlighting additional stunting and child deaths from increased hunger.

lessons around identifying and creating entry points, involving disadvantaged groups, challenging social norms, facilitating inclusive participation, strengthening partnerships and institutionalising GESI provide a roadmap for improving the child-focus of the UK's ICF.³⁶

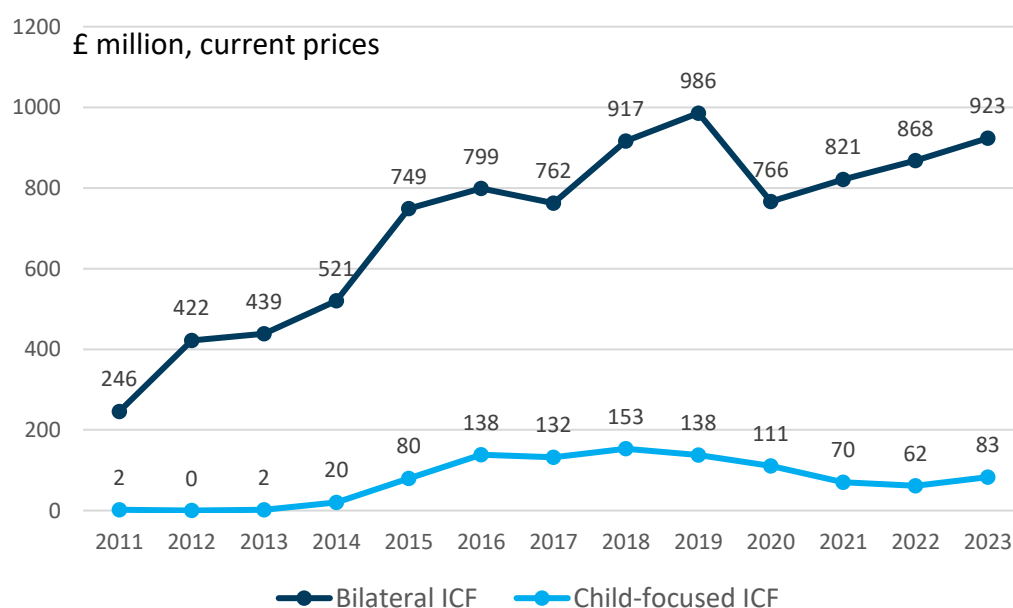
The FCDO, which disburses around 70% of UK ICF, lacks child rights expertise and capacity. While many FCDO teams work on issues related to children, there is no central team ensuring a child focus. Children appear as beneficiaries, particularly in sectors like health and education, but there is no strategy or coherent narrative for the UK's work in this area.³⁷

3.3 Child-focused ICF

The total amount of ICF with a child-focus is small. Of the £9.2 billion spent on bilateral ICF between 2011 and 2023, only £990 million was identified as child-focused – around 11% over that period. It has also declined substantially in recent years, even though bilateral ICF overall was relatively protected from the aid cuts.

In the first few years of UK ICF spend, there was very little overlap between aid addressing climate and children's needs (Figure 6). This increased substantially after 2014, and reached a peak of £153 million in 2018, around 17% of total ICF in that year. However, as with ODA overall, the share of child-focused ICF has declined significantly since then, so that even though ICF overall was relatively unaffected by the cuts, child-focused ICF roughly halved between 2018 and 2023, falling to £83 million (although this represents a slight increase relative to 2022, when child-focused ICF was £62 million).

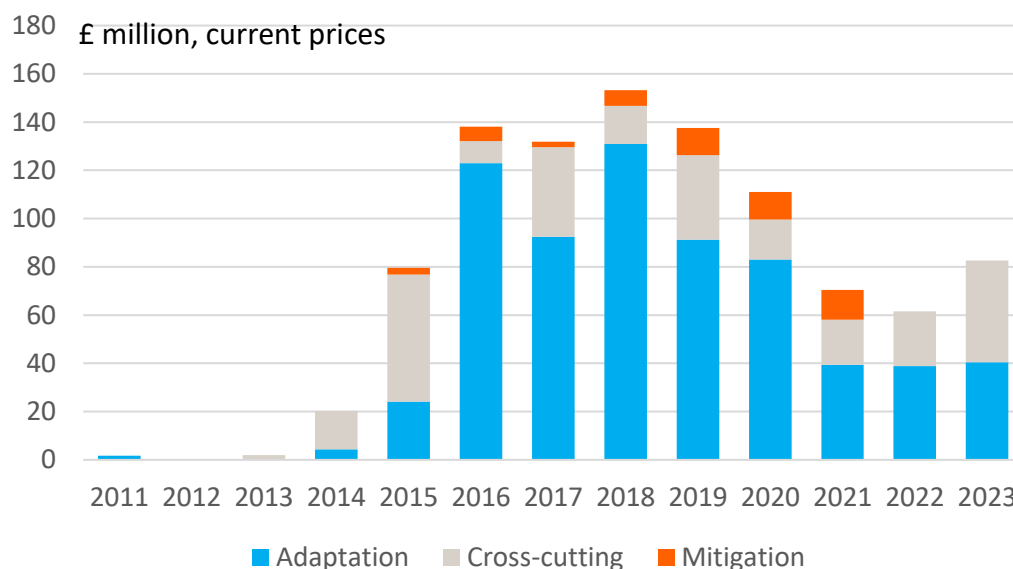
Figure 6: Child-focused bilateral ICF by climate objective



Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page

Nearly all ICF with a child-focus had an adaptation component: only 5% was focused solely on mitigation, around £52 million between 2011 and 2023 (Figure 7). This came from only a handful of projects that contain social protection or WASH elements as part of wider programmes. An example is the 'Green Growth Equity Fund' in India that will, among other things, increase the supply of clean water – crucial for combating waterborne diseases disproportionately likely to impact children.³⁸

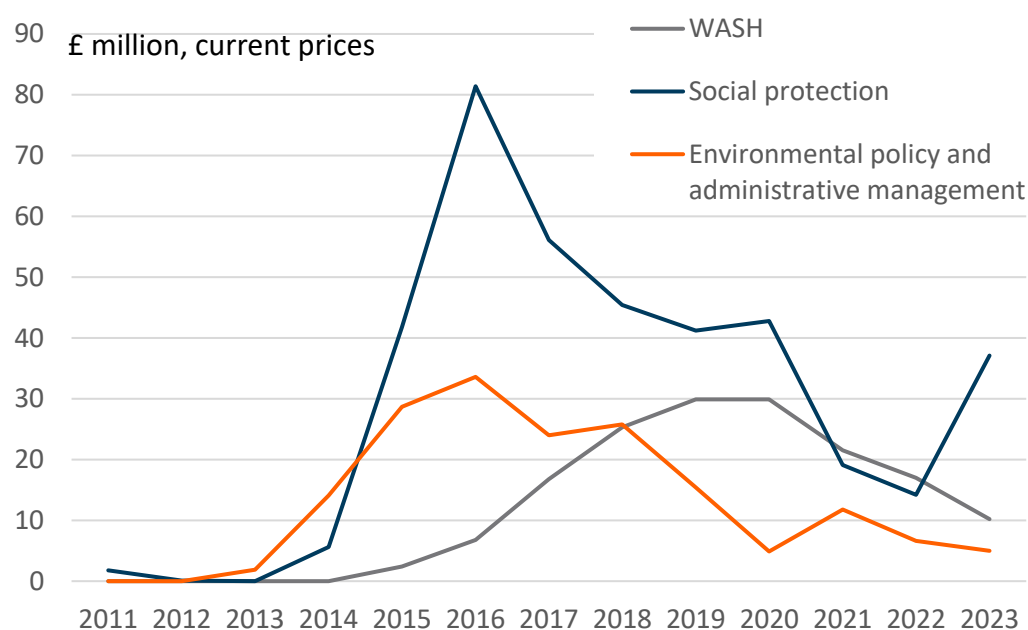
Figure 7: Child-focused bilateral ICF by climate objective



Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page

Child-focused ICF sectors

Figure 8: Top three sectors for child-focused ICF



Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page

Because of the small volume of child-focused ICF spending, the majority comes from a handful of projects, primarily in social protection and WASH sectors (Figure 8). Just 20 programmes account for over three-quarters of child-focused ICF throughout 2011 to 2023 (details in annexe 2). **This means that trends in child-focused ICF spending are heavily influenced by the starting and ending of individual projects.**

Box 2: Main child-focused ICF sectors explained

As explored in the main text, the main sectors to receive child-focused climate finance from the UK are social protection, 'environmental policy and administrative management' and WASH sectors (the latter is a combination of similar sectors).

Sector	OECD Sector Code	Definition
Social Protection	16010	A wide range of intervention types, programmes and policies aimed at addressing short- and long-term risks and stressors that can draw people into poverty by preventing and/or protecting them against vulnerabilities related to their living conditions and experienced through their lifetime. In the case of ICF, this often entails cash transfers to households vulnerable to climate shocks.
Environmental policy and administrative management	41010	Interventions aimed at improving environmental institutions, management and decision-making processes. This includes land use planning, conservation and protection measures and policies aimed at increasing resilience of particular groups or improving the response to disasters.
WASH	14010 - 14081	This includes a range of interventions aimed at improving water sanitation and hygiene, from large systems (such as water treatment plants, distribution systems and sewerage pumping stations) to small scale (rural water supply schemes using handpumps, rainwater collection, latrines or on-site disposal) and policy measures (such as water governance and regulation).

In practice, the boundaries between different sectors are blurry: lots of activities are multi-faceted and so there may be different sectors to which it could be justifiably attributed. For example, research into malaria could be attributed either to 'medical research' (purpose code 12182) or 'malaria control' (12262). Similarly, some activities classed as 'environmental policy and administrative management' include dimensions of risk reduction and preparedness, which may also fit in 'multi-hazard preparedness and response'.

Table 1: Top four largest programmes contributing to child-focused ICF (accounting for 37% of the total between 2011 and 2023)

Project title	ICF Amount	Main sector	Description
Productive Safety Net Programme Phase 4	£143m (14% of total)	Social protection	Cash/food transfers to reduce risk of famine in rural Ethiopia, with some targeting based on climate vulnerability.
Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters	£136m (14% of total)	Environmental policy and administrative management	Support government policy, grants to CSOs to scale tech to help people cope with climate events. Notes the educational and nutritional impacts on children from droughts and other climate events.
Rehabilitation of Freetown's Water Supply System	£47m (5% of total)	WASH	Aims to increase sustainable access to safe water, cites this as important component of Sierra Leone's adaptation strategies and impact on infant mortality.
Building Resilience in the Sahel through Adaptive Social Protection	£45m (5% of total)	Social protection	Establishing national level systems that will build the resilience of vulnerable populations. Explicitly targets reduced malnutrition in children.

Social protection

Social protection is by far the largest sector to receive child-focused ICF, accounting for 39% of the total between 2011 and 2023. Investments in social protection programmes with adaptation elements began to increase from around 2014. The 'Productive Safety Net Programme' in Ethiopia, for example, accounted for around 14% of all child-focused ICF between 2011 and 2023. The programme provided cash transfers and livelihood advice to support people in extreme poverty to build resilience for climate shocks. It achieved significant reductions in moderate acute malnutrition in children under 5, demonstrating the potential of such programmes to have long-term resilience impacts as well as immediate benefits for children.³⁹

However, total aid spending (including not climate-related) on social protection was de-prioritised from 2016 onwards, declining from a peak to £320 million in

2016 to £73 million in 2022. Proportionally, social protection spending with a climate focus fell even faster, from £81 million to £14 million over the same period. In 2023, there was an uptick on ICF spent on social protection, largely as a result of two projects,⁴⁰ but it remains to be seen whether this will continue in light of the announcement of further cuts to the aid budget. Cuts in this sector are likely to have a large impact on children and their resilience towards climate change.

Box 3: Child-responsive climate risk financing

UNICEF's Today and Tomorrow Initiative, launched in 2023, is the world's first integrated climate and disaster risk finance mechanism specifically targeted and designed to be effective for children and young people. It aims to move from traditional humanitarian response towards a proactive risk management approach to extreme weather events. This has the potential to improve the efficiency of emergency response by up to ten times.⁴¹

In the first year of a 3-year pilot, the initiative provided protection for over 13 million children across 8 countries vulnerable to tropical cyclones.⁴² On the one hand, the programme invests 'Today' in preparedness and low carbon solutions for sectors such as health, education and WASH – building the resilience of children and their communities to climate shocks. On the other hand, it minimises future damages with customised risk transfer insurance which guarantees children and households in areas affected by cyclones will receive rapid funding when disaster strikes. This 'Tomorrow' pillar of the initiative is partially funded by the UK's ongoing 'Global Risk Financing Programme'.⁴³

In Bangladesh, one of the pilot countries, the initiative has supported the creation of a National Early Action Protocol for Floods and Cyclones and establishment of community-based early warning systems. Nearly 4,000 households experiencing poverty received topped-up cash allowances during cyclones through the development of a shock-responsive social protection scheme.⁴⁴

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

WASH projects^h accounted for 16% of child-focused aid over the period, and followed a similar trend. ODA spending in WASH sectors increased until 2018, after which it declined precipitously, from £208 million to £37 million in 2023. WASH always remained a smaller component of child-focused ICF: it peaked at £29.9 million in 2020, before declining to £10 million in 2023. By 2023 there were only a handful of ICF projects with WASH components, primarily focusing on climate adaptation.

Environmental policy and administrative management

Most programmes in the environmental policy sector do not tend to have a child focus. However, there are important exceptions with a few projects focused on disaster risk reduction and resilience that consider the specific circumstances of children. Given the amount of ICF provided for this sector, these have a large impact on child-focused ICF, and consequently this sector accounted for 17% of child-focused ODA. A key example of child-focused programmes in this sector, 'Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters'⁴⁵ specifically discussed the importance of considering the impact of climate shocks on children.ⁱ This programme alone accounted for 14% of total child-focused ICF between 2011 and 2023.

Box 4: Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate and Extreme Disasters (BRACED)

The programme ran between 2013 and 2021, with the aim to help poor and vulnerable communities (including children) cope with extreme climate and weather events. This funded a range of interventions designed to generate learnings on how to incorporate disaster risk reduction into broader decision-making. The completion review estimated that 14 million people were supported to better cope with weather events, and although this was not disaggregated to show the impact of children, they were a primary intended beneficiary. In addition, it generated several case studies on how to incorporate vulnerable groups into resilience planning. The benefits of this programme could go far beyond the 14 million people directly assisted, but this would entail the learnings being applied to future programmes.

^h Whereas social protection and environmental policy and administrative management have their own purpose codes in OECD data (16010 and 41010 respectively), WASH is an amalgamation of several different purpose codes (those between 14000 – 14999).

ⁱ One issue with sectoral reporting is that many projects could be described as being in a number of sectors, for example, a project that “supports governments to strengthen their policies to respond to climate extremes” could be described as either ‘environmental policy and administrative management’ or ‘multi-hazard preparedness’, each of which have separate codes in OECD data.

Health and education



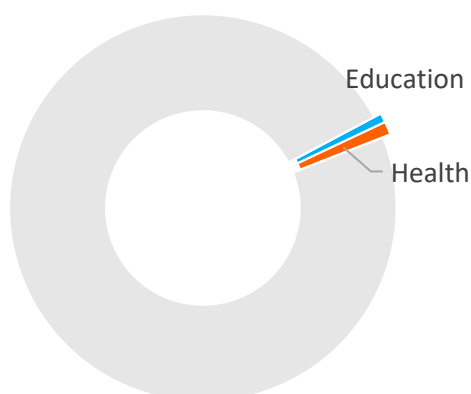
Children play outside a Transitional School Structure built after the 2022 floods in the Balochistan province of Pakistan. The school is climate resilient and supported by WASH services. Temporary learning centres and transitional schools in districts affected by floods have helped more than 10,000 students to continue their education. © UNICEF/A. Sami Malik

UNICEF UK's *Leave No Child Behind* report examined trends in ODA expenditure in a few key sectors that are disproportionately likely to impact children, including health and education. It found that ODA to each sector had been cut disproportionately, meaning that decline in child-focused ODA spending was even steeper than for ODA overall.

Spending in education and health sectors do not tend to be classed as ICF. **Between 2011 and 2023, only £70 million of ICF was spent in the education sector, and £100 million in health; each sector accounted for only around one percent of ICF spending over the same period (figure 9).**

Figure 9: Share of bilateral ICF spent in education or health sectors

Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page



Yet the potential climate impacts in these sectors are devastating, and the adaptation needs are significant. For example, LMICs are estimated to require at least \$11 billion per year in this decade to adapt to the health impacts of climate change.⁴⁶ This funding is needed, for example, to support countries to cope with the additional costs of disease control and surveillance for climate-exacerbated infections like malaria and dengue.⁴⁷ More than 90% of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) include health considerations,⁴⁸ but only 6% of adaptation funding globally is allocated to projects that explicitly seek to protect or improve human health.⁴⁹

Such spending is essential for children's ability to adapt to climate change. As temperatures increase, climate shocks are more likely to disrupt education, and conditions are more conducive for diseases spreading. Spending in health and education that takes into account the impact of climate change and builds their climate resilience therefore becomes even more important even if it is not directly targeted at climate objectives.

In addition, adaptation spending more generally has the potential to improve outcomes in these sectors. The 'Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters' programme, while not an education project, contains provisions that are intended to minimise the disruption to children's educations in the event of a disaster, by tackling one of the reasons children are taken out of school in such situations (loss of parental assets or income).

Box 5: Climate-smart education in Mozambique

In 2019, Cyclones Idai and Kenneth caused widespread devastation and affected over 330,000 students. Following the disasters, UNICEF worked with the government and other partners to climate-proof classrooms, including through elevating buildings and strengthening roofs to withstand cyclone-force winds. When Cyclone Freddy struck in 2023, none of the new climate-proof classrooms suffered any damage, protecting children and their education.^a

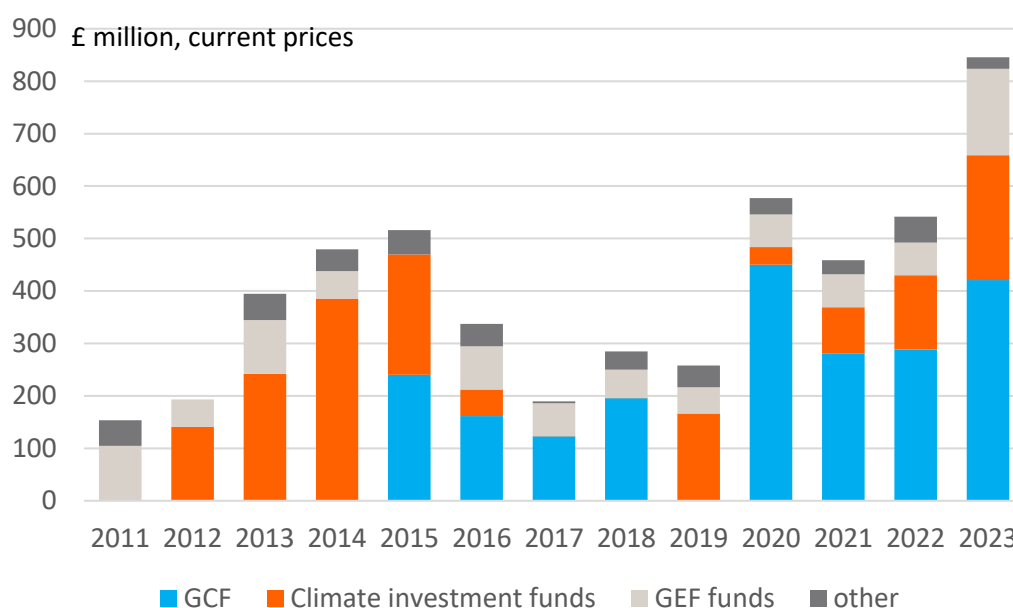
3.4 Multilateral climate funds

A sizable and increasing share of the UK's climate finance comes from contributions to multilateral climate funds. These are funds that are dedicated to climate finance, often mandated by intergovernmental processes under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Such contributions have increased from £101 million in 2011 to £766 million in 2023. As a share of total multilateral ODA, this is an increase from 3% to 14% over this period.

Multilateral contributions are often 'lumpy', in that there are no contributions most years, interspersed with years in which large payments are made.

By far the most important climate fund is the Green Climate Fund (GCF), which accounted for 40% of UK's contributions to climate funds between 2011 and 2023 (and 59% in the last four years). The UK has stepped up its contributions to the GCF: between 2020 and 2023 it contributed £1.4 billion, twice as much as it contributed between 2011 and 2019.

Figure 9: Contributions to multilateral climate funds



Notes: Climate investment funds include the Clean Technology Fund and the Strategic Climate fund. GEF funds include the Global Environment Facility Trust Fund, Least Developed Countries Fund and the Special Climate Change Fund.

Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page

It is not possible to identify spending from all climate funds in the OECD CRS dataset. But focusing on the largest (the Green Climate Fund, Climate Investment Funds that include the Strategic Climate fund and Clean Technology Fund, and those associated with the Global Environment Facility) it is evident that these do not contribute significantly to the UK's child-focused ICF. Of the \$14 billion spent by these funds between 2011 and 2023, around \$5.4 billion was spent on general environmental protection, \$2.4 billion in the renewable energy sector, and \$1.4 billion in forestry, together accounting for around two-thirds of the total. The UNICEF report 'Falling Short: Addressing the Climate Gap for Children' analysed the portfolio of the GCF, the Adaptation Fund and the Global Environment Facility funds, and found that only 2.4% of climate finance from these funds 'can be classified as supporting projects incorporating child-responsive activities'.⁵⁰

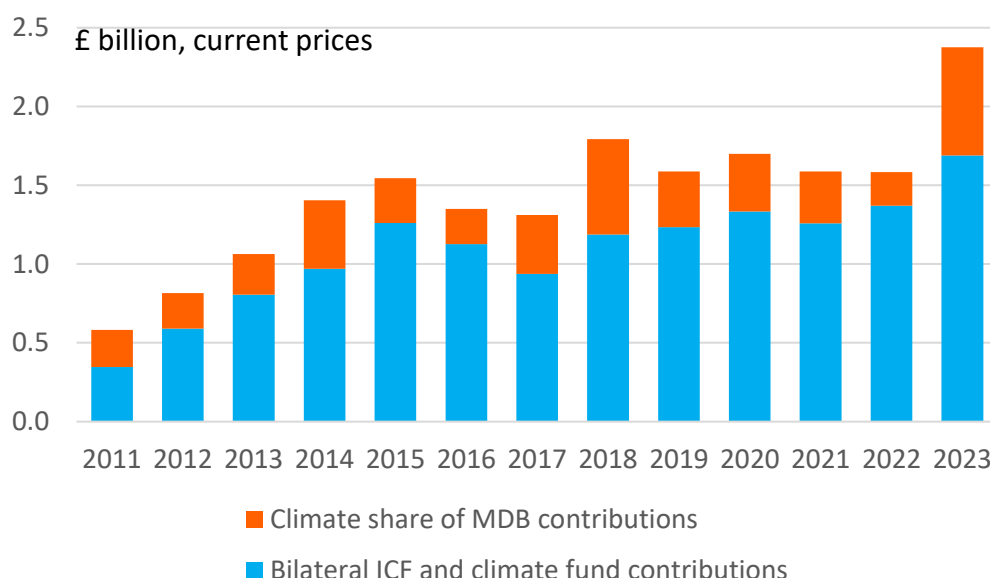
It is imperative that the UK continues to contribute to these funds given their importance in helping countries finance their climate strategies. But the UK could use its leadership at such organisations to ensure they are responding to children’s vulnerabilities and closing the gap in funding for adaptation and resilience building of child-critical services and systems.

3.5 The UK’s change in methodology

One of the methodological changes the UK introduced in 2024 was to start counting a share of contributions to Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) as climate finance. While this is an approach taken by other countries, it was widely seen as ‘moving the goal posts’: a way to make it easier to meet international climate commitments without providing additional finance.

These contributions will be measured by assessing the share of outflows from MDBs that are climate related, and applying that percentage to UK contributions. For example, the largest MDB that UK funds is the International Development Association (IDA). In the latest data, 35% of IDA expenditure was classed as climate finance, and so 35% of any new contributions to IDA will count towards the UK’s ICF.

Figure 11: Impact of including share of MDB contributions on UK ICF



Sources: OECD CRS, IATI, UK Statistics on International Development, UK ICF results page, OECD Imputed Multilateral Climate Shares

This methodological change is likely to have the most substantial impact given the size of UK’s contributions to the multilateral system. While the method is not being applied retroactively, Figure 11 demonstrates the difference that would have made between 2011 and 2023. Over this period, MDB contributions would have increased UK ICF by around £4.6 billion, which would

have made UK ICF roughly one third higher. Around two-thirds of this would have come from IDA contributions.^j

While this change will help the UK to meet its ICF target, it won't actually increase the amount of ICF that the UK is spending, and it will also impact the balance between grants and loans for UK ICF. Traditionally, the UK has provided most of its ICF as grants, alleviating pressure on developing countries to service debt. This had begun to change with an increasing share of ICF coming from British International Investment (BII), which primarily makes commercial investments in developing countries.

Including MDB contributions will accelerate this trend: two-thirds of IDA's climate finance was in the form of loans in 2022.⁵¹ If this holds in 2023, then this alone would mean that roughly 16% of UK's ICF would have been provided in the form of loans if the UK had used the new methodology. This is important given that 93% of the world's most climate vulnerable states face debt crisis and many of them spend five times more on debt servicing than on climate, even during climate crises.



A Rohingya volunteer shares cyclone preparedness messages and offers vital guidance to locals sheltering at a Multipurpose Children and Adolescent Centre, just hours before tropical cyclone REMAL made landfall in Bangladesh in 2024. © UNICEF/Bashir Ahmed Sujan

^j For this estimate, climate shares are taken from OECD data, however this only goes up to 2022. Data from the World Bank suggests that the climate share has increased since then.

4. UK ICF UNDER PRESSURE

UK ICF has historically come from the ODA budget. Reductions to the UK's ODA target and the spending of ODA on IDRCs have made it more difficult from the UK to meet its commitment to provide at least £11.6 billion in ICF3. While climate projects were relatively protected from the successive rounds of cuts seen since 2020, a high proportion of spending for ICF 3 was still pushed to the end of the commitment period, with £3.4-£3.8 billion slated to be spent in 2025/26 alone.⁵²

The challenge of meeting even the UK's current ICF commitments under the constraints of the existing aid budget is apparent from the recent methodological changes to how ICF is measured. Each of the four changes will result in higher reported ICF without any increase in spending. According to data provided to ICAI by the FCDO, these methodological changes have reclassified £1.724 billion as ICF.⁵³ That is around 15% of the total ICF 3 commitment, and more than the UK spent on ICF in the first two years of the spending round. It is only through what ICAI has described as 'moving the goal posts,' that the UK will be able to meet its current target.⁵⁴

Recent estimates from CAN UK, using the latest publicly available figures, suggest that in final year of ICF3, the UK's international climate finance will amount to 24% of the UK's ODA budget.^k With ICF taking up a growing share of the UK aid budget, the need to ensure that children's unique needs are being met is more important than ever, including by investing in the sectors they rely on like health, education, social protection and WASH. Instead, the UK's child-focused ICF has declined as a percentage from a peak of 17.3% in 2018 to an estimated 9.0% in 2023. **The lack of a child focus in UK ICF is a missed opportunity to prevent negative outcomes for children and to set children up for success.**

The latest changes to the ODA target, which will see a progressive reduction in the target from 0.5% of GNI to 0.3% by 2027, will only increase the pressure on the aid budget. There is no good way forward under the current system.

Whether the government continues to protect ICF at the expense of its development and humanitarian priorities or reduces its ICF commitments going forward, everyone, but most of all children and future generations, will lose. A 0.3% GNI ODA budget makes the continued sourcing of ICF solely from the ODA budget untenable.

^k This estimate was calculated based on the latest available figures from FCDO and the published ministerial statement that put the international climate finance spend for 2025/26 at £3.4 billion, drawn from a 0.5% ODA budget.

It is not the only choice. ICF was always meant to be new and additional to development aid. Climate change has created new challenges and additional needs. While there is some overlap, the solutions required are often different from those needed for development. As far back as 2009, this was recognised by then Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who proposed a 10% ceiling on the amount of ICF coming from the ODA budget.⁵⁵

The UK government has repeatedly stated its ambition to be a climate leader and to rebuild trust among partners and allies. The Labour Party's 2024 manifesto set out a mission statement 'to create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet'.⁵⁶ International climate finance is a crucial mechanism for achieving that goal and for delivering global climate commitments. The gap between what is available and what is needed is growing.⁵⁷ As the sixth largest economy and one of the largest historical emitters of greenhouse gases, the UK has a responsibility to not only cut its own emissions but to support the climate response in low- and middle-income countries.⁵⁸

The UK is expected to announce its commitments for the next round of international climate finance (ICF4) in 2025. In 2019, the UK's £11.6 billion commitment represented a doubling of its previous commitment of £5.8 billion. The fourth round of UK ICF comes in the wake of the new climate finance goal announced at COP 29 in Baku. High income countries have committed to mobilise at least \$300 billion in international climate finance to support low- and middle-income countries to achieve their climate mitigation and adaptation goals by 2035.⁵⁹ This is three times the previous finance goal of \$100 billion by 2020, a goal that was not met until 2022.

It can't just be about doing more with less. Without a significant rethink, the UK's ability to meet its international climate responsibilities is at risk, let alone its reputation for international climate leadership. Finding alternative sources of funding for ICF beyond ODA would demonstrate real climate leadership and go some way to rebuild trust among partners and allies. It would also bring UK ICF more in line with Paris Agreement commitments that ICF would be new and additional.

5. THE WAY FORWARD

The world is not doing enough to protect children. Climate change is affecting children everywhere, but children who live in LMICs are at particularly high risk. While all efforts to alleviate the impacts of the climate crisis are likely to have a positive effect on children's lives, tailoring solutions to children's unique needs and vulnerabilities will make them even more effective. International climate finance is a key enabler of climate action. Now is the time to invest in children and the sectors they rely on. With the prospects of keeping global warming at 1.5 °C slipping away and the dangerous realities of a changing climate already here, it is no longer possible to just do more with less.

Making UK ICF work for children

The UK is already committed to invest ICF in services that children rely on, like health, education, water and sanitation, and social protection as part of their International Climate Finance Strategy. This is an important first step. Making sure the UK's ICF reaches and works for children is the next logical step. This means acting to increase the child-focus of the UK's ICF by:

1. Prioritise ICF investment for children by:

- Increasing adaptation funding to ensure child-critical systems like health, education, social protection, and water and sanitation can withstand climate shocks.
- Leveraging UK influence in climate funds and other multilateral spaces to improve their child focus.
- Advancing and funding platforms for children and young people to meaningfully participate in decisions about climate policy and action.

2. Adopt a new strategic approach to child rights in UK ICF by:

- Incorporating an explicit recognition of children as rights holders with unique needs and vulnerabilities resulting from the climate crisis into UK's future International Climate Finance strategies and investments and acting on that basis.
- Conducting child rights impact assessments for all FCDO programmes and policies, to ensure that children's unique needs and vulnerabilities are captured and addressed.
- Building the FCDO's child rights expertise and capacity so that ODA investments in child-critical social systems, as well as disaster risk reduction, meet children's unique needs.

- Improving the collection of age disaggregated data as part of UK ICF impact reporting.

3. Scale up high-quality ICF reaching the most vulnerable, including children by:

- Committing to an ambitious ICF4 package commensurate with the scale of the climate crisis and the UK's current and historic responsibility, recognising the new financial goal to provide \$300 billion and the ambition to mobilise \$1.3 trillion per year by 2035.
- Acting with urgency to secure new public-led sources of ICF that are additional to ODA flows, recognising that it is no longer tenable to fully fund ICF solely from the ODA budget.
- Prioritising grant-based funding, championing and participating in sustainable debt burden reduction and debt relief mechanisms, including automatic triggers for debt-service suspension during climate crises.
- Ensuring that the methodology for capturing UK ICF is robust, transparent and accurately represents spending on climate mitigation, adaptation and, going forward, loss and damage, including by:
 - Including a column in its Statistics on International Development publication data containing the percentage of each project included as ICF.
 - Improving departmental reporting to IATI by UK departments delivering ICF, especially by Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ) and the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra).

Acronyms

BR: Biennial Reports (Data submitted to UNFCCC)

BRACED: Building Resilience through Adapting to Climate and Extreme Disasters

CRS: Creditor Reporting System

DAC: Development Assistance Committee

FCDO: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

GESI: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

GCF: Green Climate Fund

GEF: Global Environment Facility

IATI: International Aid Transparency Initiative

ICF : International Climate Finance

IDRC: In-donor Refugee Costs

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

LICs : Low Income Countries

LMICs: Low- and Middle-Income Countries

MDB: Multilateral Development Bank

NDC: Nationally Determined Contribution

ODA: Official Development Assistance

OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

SDG: Sustainable Development Goal

UMICs: Upper-Middle Income Countries

UNFCCC: UN Framework for the Convention on Climate Change

WASH: Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

ANNEXE 1: FULL METHODOLOGY

Bilateral ICF

While the UK has made important progress in climate finance transparency, it is still difficult to ascertain which projects are included because the relevant information is divided across different datasets, some of which are incomplete. To estimate ICF, information was combined from several sources and a number of assumptions were made. The following sources were included:

- **OECD CRS:** This is the main dataset for project-level aid statistics, and contains complete bilateral aid data for each member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC). This provides information on sectors, recipients, project descriptions and as well as a range of policy markers such as the Rio-markers for adaptation and mitigation. While many countries use these markers to report climate finance, the UK uses a separate methodology and so it is not possible to calculate UK climate finance from the CRS alone. In addition, the use of Rio-markers in 2023 is implausibly low (a reduction of 57% relative to 2022).
- **International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI):** This is a global initiative to improve transparency of aid flows, which gives aid providers greater flexibility in the structure of their reporting than the CRS. In its IATI reporting, the UK has included a variable denoting which activities are included as climate finance. However, the main limitation is that this data is incomplete: while FCDO reports nearly all of its aid data to IATI, reporting from other departments is limited.
- **UNFCCC Biennial Reports:** These reports contain the project level data that the UK submits to UNFCCC as its 'official' climate finance data, and so the analysis regarded this as the most accurate source. However, it is produced at a significant lag: data is still only available up until 2020. In addition, it provides only partial information, missing project descriptions and core project objectives.
- **UK ICF Results page:** This is a report detailing the achievements of UK ICF projects. It includes a list of project codes and titles that are counted as ICF. It doesn't provide any information about the projects, but is useful as a reference list for projects that the UK regards as climate finance.

Combining data from the different sources is not simple. While all projects contain identification codes that allow matching between datasets, for DEFRA and DESNZ, these codes have changed over time, and are not consistent across datasets. In addition, datasets have not kept up with departmental reorganisations, so that many projects are described as being implemented by departments that no longer exist.

The following method was employed to construct ICF statistics for the UK using these sources:

- For FCDO, IATI data was matched to the CRS to obtain the ICF tags (that denote which project activities are counted as ICF). There were 11 projects mentioned in the ICF results page that were not included in IATI. Four did not appear in any other dataset and are probably therefore new projects without expenditure. Another was not reported to UNFCCC for any year of operation, and so was excluded. The remainder were included as ICF if they were Rio-marked.
- For DEFRA, aid was included as ICF if either Rio-marker was non-zero, or if the programme was listed in the ICF results page.
- All projects with the agency listed as 'Department for Energy and Climate Change' (DECC - a defunct department) were counted in full.
- Projects with the agency listed as 'Business for Energy and Industrial Strategy' were included if either Rio-marker was non-zero, unless the project code indicated that it was linked to spending from research councils. Excluding research council spend is a limitation. However, including even principal-marked aid produces a much larger figure for ICF through research councils than is reported to UNFCCC.
- Any other programmes listed in the ICF results page, and detectable in the CRS were also included. Several projects listed on the ICF results page do not seem to exist in any other dataset. Others were reported to IATI but not to the CRS (although these tended to be more recent projects).
- UNFCCC data was used to check discrepancies and to ensure that final estimates were close to what the UK reported.

This process is to determine whether a not a project is included as ICF, but it does not specify whether projects are mitigation or adaptation focused. For this, the Rio-markers were used. However, in 2023 there is a sudden reduction in use of the markers, from £1.9 billion to £0.8 billion, a 57% drop. Some

programmes that had markers in previous years did not in 2023. For such programmes, the highest value of markers from previous years was used for 2023 figures for any project included in ICF estimates. There were still some programmes with missing markers. For DECC, all projects were assumed to be mitigation, in line with previous years (in which all DECC projects had a principal mitigation marker and no adaptation focus). For a few remaining projects, a judgement was made based on descriptions, and occasionally project documents. Full R script is available on request.

UK changes to ICF methodology

In 2024, the UK announced changes to the way that it measures ICF, to make it easier to meet the £11.6 billion target. The changes included:

- Counting 30% of humanitarian aid delivered to the 10% most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts (as measured using the Notre-Dame GAIN index)
- Counting climate-related outflows from the UK's development finance institution, British International Investment (BII) instead of a fixed share of capital contributions
- Counting a percentage of contributions made to Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) such as the World Bank
- 'Scrubbing' existing activities to find additional projects that could count as climate finance.

Multilateral climate funds

For multilateral ICF, the following multilateral channels were included:

- Adaptation Fund
- CGIAR Fund
- Clean Technology Fund
- Global Environment Facility - Least Developed Countries Fund
- Global Environment Facility - Special Climate Change Fund
- Global Environment Facility Trust Fund (*percentage of contributions varying by year*)
- Global Green Growth Institute (*percentage of contributions varying by year*)

- Green Climate Fund
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- Strategic Climate Fund
- United Nations Environment Programme
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

This is based on the ICF results page project list, and UNFCCC Biennial Report tables. Contributions to the CGIAR fund are included as a bilateral project in the UK's UNFCCC data, but as a multilateral project elsewhere.

Mitigation/Adaptation split

To analyse the breakdown between mitigation and adaptation spend within total UK ICF, the Rio-markers were used in conjunction with ICF estimates, as these are the only source for this breakdown for bilateral data. For multilateral climate funds, the analysis relies on the coefficients calculated by the OECD in their 'Imputed multilateral climate shares' data. This shows for example that the Green Climate Fund, the climate fund to receive the most UK ICF, spends 47% on mitigation, 35% on adaptation with a further 18% spent on projects with both objectives, or 'cross-cutting' finance

Child-focused ICF

To determine which aid projects have a child-focus, the analysis used the same methodology as outlined in UNICEF UK's *Leave No Child Behind* report, which is based on a keyword search in project titles and descriptions, channel of delivery, sectors, and whether it is marked as reproductive, maternal and newborn child health objectives. Specifically, aid is considered to be child-focused if spent in the following sectors:

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

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

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

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

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

We supplement this with additional information from IATI, which often gives more detail on recipient organisations. We use the same list of keywords to search within the receiver organisation field to identify spending through child-focused organisations. This is then matched to projects in the CRS using the transaction ID from IATI and the project number variable from the CRS. Finally, our measure includes aid that has been assigned a principal or significant RMNCH marker, which has only been used since 2019, and therefore there is a small inconsistency before and after that year.

ANNEXE 2: TOP 20 CHILD-FOCUSED ICF PROJECTS

According to the methodology adopted in this report, there are 20 projects that account for 75% of total ICF spending with a child-focus. This table provides summary information for these 20 projects.

Project title	Child focused ICF (£m)	Total ICF (£m)	Total expenditure (£m)	Largest sector (for child-focused ICF)	DevTracker link
Productive Safety Net Programme Phase 4	143	191	301	Social Protection	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-204290/summary
Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters	136	136	136	Environmental policy and administrative management	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-202921/summary
Rehabilitation of Freetown's Water Supply System	47	47	47	Water supply and sanitation - large systems	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-205195/summary
Building Resilience in the Sahel through Adaptive Social Protection	45	45	45	Social Protection	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-204044/summary
Strategic Partnership Arrangement II between DFID and BRAC	39	42	226	Primary education	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-204916/summary
Productive Social Safety Net Programme	36	40	111	Social Protection	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-203473/summary
Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience in South Sudan (HARISS) 2015 - 2021	34	40	770	Road transport	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-204019/summary

Ethiopia Crises 2 Resilience (EC2R)	32	32	119	Social Protection	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-301474/summary
Strengthening Ethiopia's Adaptive Safety Net (SEASN)	32	32	41	Social Protection	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300683/summary
UK-INDIA Partnership on National Investment and Infrastructure Fund's 'Green Growth Equity Fund'	28	110	110	Water supply and sanitation - large systems	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300418/summary
Support to Bangladesh's National Urban Poverty Reduction Programme (NUPRP)	27	27	53	Environmental policy and administrative management	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-203491/summary
Strengthening Health Facilities in the Caribbean	24	46	46	Basic health care	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-203272/summary
WISER 'Weather and climate Information and SERVICES for Africa'	22	32	32	Environmental research	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-204624/summary
Sustainable Energy for Women and Girls (SEWG)	18	18	18	Environmental policy and administrative management	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-1-204202/summary
Water, Environmental Sanitation and Hygiene Programme	17	19	27	Water supply and sanitation - large systems	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300067/summary

Strengthening Climate Resilient Systems for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Services in Ethiopia (SCRS - WASH)	16	16	16	Basic drinking water supply and basic sanitation	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300237/summary
Building Resilience and adapting to climate change in Malawi	15	68	70	Social Protection	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300113/summary
Global Risk Financing (GRIF) Programme	15	120	121	Multi-hazard preparedness and response	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300751/summary
Zambia Social Protection Expansion Programme Phase II	15	15	42	Social Protection	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300161/summary
Transforming Access to WASH and Nutrition Services in Mozambique	14	14	23	Basic drinking water supply	https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300725/summary

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