

# SURVIVE AND THRIVE:

**Analysing the crucial role of the UK in global maternal, newborn, and child health**

## ANNEX 1. FOCUS ON VACCINES

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This annex informs and supports the UNICEF UK report *Survive and Thrive: Analysing the Crucial Role of the UK in Global Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health*. It provides in-depth analysis underpinning the report's findings, focusing specifically on the UK's contribution to global immunisation efforts between 2016 and 2023. Vaccines were selected as one of three core domains for in-depth analysis because of their direct and measurable impact on maternal, newborn, and child health (MNCH) outcomes, and their value as a strategic indicator of progress across the broader MNCH landscape. This annex focuses on immunisation, while Annex 2 addresses nutrition and Annex 3 covers primary health care. Further details on methodology can be found in the main report.

### 1.0 SUMMARY

#### **UK support to vaccines has been defined by consistency and leadership**

Expanding access to vaccination has been a central pillar of the UK's global health strategy and contribution to MNCH. Between 2016 and 2023, the UK's work on immunisation was defined by a consistent policy commitment, deep engagement in multilateral partnerships, and bold, innovative financing.

As one of Gavi's founding and leading donors, the UK fulfilled its £1.44 billion pledge to Gavi 4.0 (2016 to 2020) and committed £1.65 billion to Gavi 5.0 (2021 to 2025), enabling Gavi to immunise 300 million children in low- and middle-income countries during this period.<sup>1</sup> UK backed programmes contributed to the introduction of new vaccines, such as for HPV and malaria, and to the immunisation of over 1.1 billion children globally since 2000, helping to prevent nearly 19 million deaths.<sup>2</sup>

The UK also led on financing innovation. It co-created and sustained high impact mechanisms such as IFFIm, pioneered match funding models, and

helped raise a record 8.8 billion US dollars at the 2020 Global Vaccine Summit. Its investments in UK life sciences, including malaria vaccine development, have yielded both global health gains and domestic economic returns.

Beyond financial contributions, the UK paired its investments with strategic policy leadership, amplifying equity and gender concerns, prioritising zero dose children, and promoting sustainability through Gavi's transition model. By 2022, 19 countries had moved to self-financing their national immunisation programmes, an outcome the UK actively championed.

While the UK's approach demonstrated global leadership and lifesaving outcomes, it was also marked by missed opportunities, including abrupt polio funding cuts and inconsistent support for equitable vaccine access during the COVID-19 pandemic. These tensions underscore the importance of sustaining UK investment and leadership in vaccines as a cornerstone of its global MNCH strategy.

This annex explores three core dimensions of the UK's contribution in more detail:

- Sustained political commitment to immunisation
- Strategic financial investments in partnerships.
- Programmatic impact

## **2.0 WHY VACCINES MATTER**

Vaccines are one of the most fundamental and effective public health interventions for reducing neonatal and child mortality.<sup>3</sup> They protect children from preventable but potentially deadly diseases such as measles, pneumonia, and diarrhoea, and provide them with a foundation for longer and healthier lives.

Equitable immunisation also empowers women<sup>4</sup> and safeguards maternal health. Vaccinating women during pregnancy ensures their own well-being and passes on life-saving antibodies to their newborns, offering early protection when infants are most vulnerable. Maternal immunisation against diseases such as tetanus, influenza, and pertussis reduces complications in pregnancy and improves outcomes for both mother and child.

Investing in immunisation for women and children together is a proven, cost-effective way to reduce child and maternal mortality and morbidity, strengthen health systems, promote gender equity, and ensure the next generation is healthy.

**Every \$1 invested in vaccinations delivers a return on investment of \$26.<sup>5</sup>**

However, progress toward the global immunisation targets remains significantly off track, still lagging behind after disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>6</sup> For example, in 2023 14.5 million children remained unvaccinated, those living in fragile and conflict affected states the most likely to be missing out.<sup>7</sup>

## **3.0 UK POLICY APPROACH**

Vaccines were the most consistently prioritised part of the UK's maternal, newborn, and child health efforts between 2016 and 2023. They were promoted as both a sustainable development necessity and a smart UK investment for preventing disease outbreaks and protecting the UK's own health security. This anchoring protected immunisation from the most dramatic aid cuts during this period, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic where the importance of protecting health was drawn into sharp focus.

### **3.1 Vaccines as a cornerstone of UK global health strategy**

Expanding vaccine coverage has been central to the UK's global health strategy for improving child survival. DFID's 2015–2020 strategy pledged to "save 1.4 million children's lives by immunising 76 million children against killer diseases by 2020,"<sup>8</sup> reflecting the UK's strong commitment to immunisation as one of the most cost-effective interventions to reduce under-five mortality.

Gavi, the vaccine alliance was identified as a primary vehicle for delivering the UK's objectives.<sup>9</sup> Government literature across the review period presented vaccines as a UK success story, with Gavi related case studies often featured in key development strategy documents. For example, the UK's 2022 International Development Strategy highlighted a partnership between UK aid and Gavi supporting the Government of Ghana to use Zipline drones for vaccine delivery and coronavirus test sample collection, showcasing how UK investment in Gavi enabled innovative health solutions.<sup>10</sup>

Immunisation was framed as 'best buy', and vaccine-focused multilateral partnerships were a key delivery mechanism – the 2016 Multilateral Development Review<sup>11</sup> rated Gavi as a top-performing organisation. Gavi's continued high performance and communication of results further validated and reinforced UK investment, with its most recent estimates indicating that 18.8 million lives have been saved since 2000.<sup>12</sup>

The sustained nature of the UK's support to Gavi across the review period enabled Gavi to plan, innovate, and deliver impact at scale across multiple disease areas. A powerful example of this long-term approach is the HPV vaccine programme, made possible because of the reliable funding by donors

like the UK. Gavi rolled out vaccines across 38 countries between 2014 and 2023, leading to the full immunisation of over 27 million girls against human papillomavirus (HPV).<sup>25</sup> For these girls, access to the HPV vaccine means growing up protected from cervical cancer, providing them with a better chance to focus on the lives they choose to build. This is a tangible demonstration of how UK investment in multilateral vaccine partnerships translates into individual life outcomes.

## 3.2 Health security framing following Covid-19

Following the COVID 19 pandemic, immunisation was increasingly framed not only as a humanitarian imperative but also as a strategic tool for pandemic preparedness and health security.

The phrase “no one is safe until everyone is safe,” first coined by WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, was widely adopted by UK politicians, including then Prime Minister Boris Johnson, to champion new investments in vaccines, particularly through the COVAX Facility.

In 2020, then International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan captured this emphasis on vaccines as both a global good and a national interest, stating:

*“The coronavirus pandemic shows us now more than ever the vital role vaccines play in protecting us all. By supporting Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, we are helping stop the spread of infectious diseases, saving millions of lives and keeping Britain safe.”*<sup>13</sup>

The 2023 Global Health Framework<sup>14</sup> formalised this shift, committing the UK to the rapid development and deployment of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics. UK leadership in the G7-led 100 Days Mission, alongside sustained investment in CEPI and Gavi, further underscored the central role of immunisation in the UK’s global health strategy – anchoring its dual focus on saving lives and strengthening domestic health security.

The overwhelming message therefore was that UK investment in immunisation achieved life-saving impact while advancing UK influence and interest. This strategic coherence helped protect vaccine funding even during periods of overall aid contraction.

The heightened emphasis on this framing during and after the COVID-19 pandemic presented both opportunities and challenges for MNCH. The pandemic reinforced the global importance of vaccines, not only as a tool for saving lives but also for protecting economies and stabilising health systems. This helped elevate immunisation as a central pillar of global health and pandemic preparedness.

However, the increased focus on vaccines as instruments of pandemic response also shifted attention toward outbreak-related threats, at times reducing the visibility of routine childhood immunisation in health security focused policy documents. Childhood specific immunisation, while financially supported, received less explicit focus in some strategic and policy narratives. This presents a challenge because when viewed primarily through a security lens, essential services like routine immunisation, which are critical for long term child survival but less immediately associated with outbreak containment, risk being deprioritised within global health agendas.

## **4.0 UK FINANCING APPROACH**

### **4.1 Investing in strategic partnerships**

The UK's work on immunisation during 2016-2023 was characterised by a commitment to highly coordinated partnerships. This multilateral approach enabled rapid, coordinated responses to health crises, exemplified by the successful measles outbreak intervention in Madagascar (see Case Study 1). The UK backed high-impact mechanisms like IFFIm and match funding initiatives that unlocked broader international funding, reinforcing a collective global effort rather than acting in isolation. These approaches demonstrated financial innovation and risk-sharing, rather than simply large-scale donations.

Several longstanding partnerships, remained central to the UK's contribution during 2016 -2023:

- **Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance**

The UK played a leading role in the founding and funding of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. Since its creation in 2000, UK funding to Gavi amounts to approximately £4 billion. Gavi has used this funding to support the immunisation of 1.1 billion children globally. The contribution of British taxpayers alone has helped to immunise approximately 245 million children and avert more than four million deaths since Gavi's inception.<sup>15</sup>

Investment in Gavi remained strong through the review period - the UK committed £1 billion for 2016–2020, and £1.65 billion for 2021–2025 – then the largest single donor pledge.<sup>16</sup>

The UK also used its convening power to support Gavi fundraising. It hosted The Global Vaccine Summit in 2020 which secured \$8.8 billion USD in pledges. This was the largest amount ever raised for immunisation in a single day.

The UK also placed a strong emphasis on sustainability during this period and actively encouraged implementing countries (low-income and lower-middle-income countries that receive Gavi support) to create fiscal space within their own budgets to gradually increase domestic investment in health. As part of

this approach, the UK championed Gavi's transition model, which supports implementing countries in moving from donor support to full self-financing as their economies grow. By 2022, 19 countries had successfully transitioned to fully self-financing their national immunisation programmes.<sup>17</sup> This was an important milestone in strengthening country ownership and long-term sustainability and should be seen as a success story for UK investment.

### ■ **The International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm)**

In 2006 the UK supported the establishment of IFFIm as an innovative financing mechanism to support delivery of Gavi programmes. IFFIm issues 'vaccine bonds' backed by long-term pledges from donor governments, allowing Gavi to access funds immediately rather than waiting for donations over time.<sup>18</sup> This approach has enabled Gavi to provide more life-saving vaccines faster, enhancing its ability to respond to health crises such as the Ebola outbreak and the COVID-19 pandemic. Its long-standing success makes it a cornerstone of global health financing.

Other major partnerships were created or significantly advanced during the review period, with strong UK support:

### ■ **Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)**

Launched in 2017, CEPI accelerates vaccine development against emerging infectious diseases and played a central role in COVID-19 vaccine R&D.

CEPI contributes to improving maternal, newborn and child health by reducing the health and systemic impacts of infectious disease outbreaks. It also plays a key role in expanding access to vaccines by deliberately integrating paediatric populations including infants, children and pregnant women into its vaccine research and development programmes. For example, CEPI has supported vaccine trials for diseases such as Chikungunya<sup>19</sup> and M-pox<sup>20</sup> that include children and pregnant women, helping to ensure that vaccines can be safely authorised and used in these vulnerable groups.

In March 2022, the UK hosted CEPI's Global Pandemic Preparedness Summit in London, raising over \$1.5 billion in support of CEPI's 100 Days Mission. The UK government committed £160 million (US \$211 million) at the summit, constituting a critical early and catalytic contribution.<sup>21</sup>

### ■ **COVAX**

The UK played a leading role in championing the establishment of COVAX and was a major funder of the initiative to ensure equitable global access to COVID-19 vaccines.

In September 2020, the UK announced at the UN General Assembly it would match every \$4 pledged by others to the COVAX AMC with £1 in UK funding, up to a maximum of £250 million.<sup>22</sup> By early January 2021, the UK had fulfilled



this matchfunding-pledge, bringing its total contribution to the COVAX AMC to £548 million. This £548 million commitment made the UK the largest financial donor to the COVAX AMC as of early 2021, mobilising over \$1 billion from global donors to support vaccine procurement.<sup>23</sup>

UK investment enabled vulnerable groups such as pregnant women to access vaccines in low- and middle-income countries and supported the continuity of essential health services, including those critical to maternal, newborn and child health, which were under severe strain at the peak of the pandemic.

#### ■ **Immunization Agenda 2030 (IA2030)**

Launched in 2021 by WHO, UNICEF, Gavi, and partners, IA2030 sets a global strategy for vaccines through 2030, focused on equity, country ownership, innovation, and life-course vaccination. A core principle of IA2030 is to leave no one behind, with a specific target to reduce by 50 percent the number of zero dose children.<sup>24</sup> These are children who lack access to or are never reached by routine immunisation services. They are operationally measured as those who did not receive their first dose of DTP, a vaccine containing diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis. UK support to Gavi, CEPI, COVAX, and WHO aligns closely with IA2030's strategic priorities, positioning the UK as a core enabler of its goals.

## **4.2 Investment in UK life sciences driving vaccine innovation**

The UK's life sciences sector has been instrumental in advancing vaccine technology. Supported by both bilateral and multilateral investments, this work has resulted in major product breakthroughs that protect and advance health outcomes for children around the world.

In 2023, the UK invested a record £5.5 million in malaria vaccine research, ranking third globally in funding. This investment built on longstanding support for development of two UK malaria vaccines that are now approved by the World Health Organization – RTS,S (developed by GSK) and R21 (developed by the University of Oxford).

These vaccines have now been integrated into immunisation programmes across 17 African countries, facilitated by Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, and UNICEF. By early 2024, over 12 million doses had been delivered, marking a significant step in combating malaria in regions bearing approximately 70% of the global malaria burden.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond health impacts, investments in malaria R&D have bolstered the UK's economy. This is expected to generate over £2 billion in GDP, create more than 4,000 British jobs, and unlock over £4 billion in private sector investment.<sup>26</sup>

These efforts underscore the UK's leadership in life sciences and its commitment to global health, demonstrating how strategic investments can yield both health and economic benefits.

### **4.3 More than just a donor – pairing finance with deep policy engagement**

The UK's financial contributions reflect a strategic approach designed to maximise impact by leveraging additional funding, supporting long-term sustainability, and enabling rapid, coordinated responses to global health challenges.

The UK also engaged in the day-to-day work of governance and policy engagement, across key institutions that it supported financially. For example, the UK held a seat on Gavi's Board and actively engaged in policy and strategy committees throughout this period. Through its active role in Gavi's governance, the UK was able to influence strategic direction and promote alignment with its own development priorities. Equity was a particular focus, with the UK encouraging Gavi to strengthen national immunisation systems that reach the most marginalised, including zero-dose children who are often at risk of being excluded and may contribute to future outbreaks. The UK also pressed for greater investment in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, contributing to increased support for countries such as Syria and the Central African Republic.<sup>27</sup>

This strategic engagement was widely recognised. In a civil society survey conducted for this review, the UK's role in Gavi was cited as a model for multilateral leadership.

As Rafa Vilasanjuan, Gavi Board member for Civil Society, noted:

**"The UK contribution was never just about funding. The UK amplified concerns around equity and gender-related barriers. Their presence reminded us that global health isn't charity; it's shared responsibility."**

By pairing bold financial commitments with deep policy engagement, the UK positioned itself as a global health leader, ensuring immunisation remained central to its international development and MNCH efforts, even during periods of broader aid uncertainty.



## **Case study 1. Measles outbreak in Madagascar (2018–2019): Strong multilateral response**

In 2018-2019, Madagascar faced a severe measles outbreak, with over 135,000 cases and 1,300 deaths, primarily among children. Notably, more than half of the reported cases (51%) were in individuals who had not been vaccinated or had unknown immunisation status, highlighting the critical gaps in vaccination coverage.

Compounding the crisis, Madagascar had the highest proportion of malnutrition among children under five in Africa, with 47% affected. Malnutrition significantly increases the risk of severe complications and death from measles infection<sup>28</sup>.

In response, the Government of Madagascar, with support from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and other partners, launched a nationwide emergency vaccination campaign.

The UK's significant funding to Gavi, including its support for the International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm), enabled rapid mobilisation of resources for the campaign. This financial flexibility was instrumental in facilitating the swift response to the outbreak.

More than 7.2 million children were vaccinated over several months, reaching even the most remote areas. Cold-chain infrastructure was expanded, tens of thousands of health workers were trained, and community engagement efforts helped rebuild trust in vaccines. Within six months, measles incidence fell by over 95%, and the campaign laid a stronger foundation for routine immunisation across the country.

## 5.0 UK PROGRAMMATIC APPROACH

UK-supported vaccine programmes had significant reach and impact on MNCH across both emergency and long-term development settings.

In humanitarian and emergency contexts, the UK stepped up with time-bound interventions that delivered rapid results through trusted partners:

- In Yemen, during the 2018 cholera outbreak, the UK funded 25% of the first phase of the mass vaccination campaign's costs, covering 113,750 doses delivered in just nine days. The campaign ultimately protected over 450,000 people, with delivery led by UK supported organisations including Gavi, UNICEF, and WHO.<sup>29</sup>
- In Syria, between April and September 2019, UK aid provided 365,000 vaccines as part of broader humanitarian health support.<sup>30</sup>
- Following the 2022 floods in Pakistan, UK-backed partners mobilised quickly. With support from Gavi, UNICEF repaired and replaced cold chain equipment, trained vaccinators, mobilised communities, and expanded outreach to restore immunisation services in 45 flood-affected districts.<sup>31</sup>

Alongside these emergency efforts, the UK has also invested in long-term, sustainable development programmes that provide predictable support to national health systems:

- With support from the UK, Gavi has helped over 75 countries expand access to critical vaccines, including those for measles, pneumonia, diarrhoea, polio, and other life-saving diseases. Since 2000, UK-backed initiatives have contributed to the immunisation of more than 1.1 billion children and the prevention of nearly 19 million deaths worldwide.<sup>32</sup>
- UK funding through Gavi has also enabled the introduction of new vaccines, such as those for HPV and malaria, allowing partner countries to remain at the forefront of immunisation delivery and innovation.
- Through UK backed investments, Gavi has helped implementing countries strengthen their health systems in tangible ways beyond vaccine delivery, including expanding cold chain infrastructure, training health workers, and enhancing data systems to support more effective planning and delivery. For example, 47 countries have installed more than 67,000 cold chain equipment (CCE) units procured by the UNICEF Supply Division through Gavi's Cold Chain Equipment Optimization Platform (CCEOP). This included 5,200 units installed in 2023 alone.<sup>33</sup> Such investments are tailored to country needs and have helped improve vaccine coverage, particularly in hard-to-reach communities.

## 6.0 CONTRADICTIONS AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES SUMMARY

Though overall policy commitment and vaccine investments remained high, there were some notable setbacks:

### ▪ **Cuts to Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) funding**

In 2019, the UK announced a £400 million commitment to polio, pledging to *'help vaccinate more than 750 children a minute against polio' and 'support 20 million health workers and volunteers.'* At that time international Development Secretary Alok Sharma warned: *'If we were to pull back on immunisations, we could see 200,000 new [polio] cases each year in a decade.'*<sup>34</sup> Yet by 2021, the UK announced that its contribution would be reduced by 95%, from £100 million to just £5 million.<sup>35</sup> Although a partial reinstatement of £50 million was announced in late 2022, the total commitment still represents a 50% reduction.

There has been no systematic review of the impact of these funding cuts, but they occurred at a time when major barriers such as insecurity, weak campaign coverage, and mobile populations were already hampering efforts to reach every child with polio vaccines. These challenges have contributed to continued wild poliovirus transmission in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and low immunity in parts of Africa and Asia has triggered outbreaks of vaccine-derived polio. Volatile funding from a major donor like the UK poses serious risks to both eradication goals and the broader health systems strengthened by GPEI investments. Evidence shows that the GPEI programme has delivered major gains in surveillance, supply chains, data systems, and community outreach. Abrupt, unplanned cuts put these historic achievements at risk.<sup>36</sup>

### ▪ **Equity and access issues**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK supported global initiatives aimed at improving access to Vaccines, such as COVAX, and joined its G7 partners in publicly committing to vaccine equity. In the May 2021 "Equitable Access and Collaboration" statement, G7 Foreign and Development Ministers pledged to "enable equitable access globally for safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics and reliable diagnostics necessary to end the acute phase of the pandemic and control future outbreaks."<sup>37</sup> But at the same time the UK also received heavy criticism relating to vaccine dose hoarding,<sup>38</sup> delivery delays, and lack of transparency in bilateral deals.

By September 2021, over 78% of Covid vaccines had been administered in high- and upper-middle-income countries, despite representing only 48% of the global population.<sup>39</sup> In many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the delayed access to vaccines strained already fragile health systems, forcing the diversion of limited resources away from essential services. While the global

COVID-19 response involved many complex and evolving policy choices, unequal access to vaccines was a contributing factor to widespread disruptions in routine immunisation, child health services, and maternal care. In 2021, 25 million children missed out on one or more doses of DTP through routine services. This was the largest decline in over three decades. This number was 2 million more than in 2020 and 6 million more than in 2019.<sup>40</sup>

Aid budget cuts in 2021 further undermined stated immunisation equity goals. The UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee warned in its *Global Health, Global Britain* report that the Government was "squandering opportunities" in global health security, by making "*ill-considered cuts to some global health programmes*."<sup>41</sup>

## **7.0 CONCLUSION**

### **UK vaccine leadership should be a blueprint for future engagement in MNCH**

These findings highlight how sustained UK investment in vaccines produced far reaching benefits. The UK's long-term commitment to global immunisation delivered exceptional value for money. It not only saved lives and advanced health equity but helped build more resilient systems capable of responding to both pandemics and protecting future generations. As global health challenges evolve, the UK's track record in vaccine investment offers a blueprint for an effective, high impact contribution to global MNCH.

Looking ahead, the UK has an opportunity to build on this legacy by maintaining leadership in multilateral partnerships such as Gavi, championing equity in access to vaccines, and continuing to support innovation in delivery and financing. Ensuring that routine immunisation is protected alongside pandemic preparedness will be essential to safeguarding maternal, newborn and child health.

By prioritising predictable funding, deep policy engagement, and a continued focus on reaching the most vulnerable, including zero dose children, the UK can continue to shape a global health landscape that is more inclusive, more resilient, and better prepared for future crises.

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