

OFFICIAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE ALLOCATIONS: THE UK COMMITTEE FOR UNICEF (UNICEF UK) PARLIAMENTARY BRIEFING

March 2026

The UK Government's decision to cut Official Development Assistance (ODA) will result in tragic consequences. Without a deliberate and strategic focus on children, these decisions ignore their unique needs and vulnerabilities. While the government's focus on conflict and fragile affected states, where many of the children furthest from their rights live is welcome, children's lives are also being threatened by climate, extreme poverty, national debt, deadly disease outbreaks, and lack of access to vital services.

KEY FACTS

- Progress on reducing newborn and child mortality is stalling. In 2024, **4.9 million children died before their 5th birthday** - almost half in their first month of life.
- **Children represent 60% of people living in extreme poverty**, and 40% of children (nearly 900 million) face multidimensional poverty.
- A better future for everyone is not possible without investing in children. **Every £1 invested in children through UK ODA leads to £10 in benefits to their community.**

HOW ODA ALLOCATIONS IMPACT CHILDREN

ODA allocations published this month reveal the consequences of cuts to aid on children. The FCDO's own Equalities Impact Assessment outlines the negative impact of cutting funding to GPEI, the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, to social protection, health and education for children in some of the most vulnerable parts of the world including Malawi, Sierra Leone, Somalia and South Sudan. **All will mean children lose access to essential services and put their lives at risk.**

Investing in children has one of the best returns on investment. Vaccinated children who are in education, well-nourished and protected from conflict and climate shocks are more likely to grow into adults who contribute to society, drive economic growth, and support a more stable world.

Whilst the full detail of how allocations will be spent is yet to come, the budget for the new Human Development directorate in 2026/27 (which includes health, education and protection) is half of that for education and health compared to last year. The prioritisation of fragile and conflict affected states is a necessity - **1 in 5 children are living in conflict, and these children have the highest rates of under-5 mortality.**

The commitment to applying a gender lens is positive. But with **children twice as likely as adults to live in extreme poverty**, the lack of any strategic focus on children is a major shortfall in any attempt to channel ODA where it is needed the most.

The announced spending on international climate finance is a critical indicator of the UK's continued commitment to global efforts to prevent climate change. But the **overall reduction in aid will still impact millions of children who are experiencing more severe, frequent and deadly floods, droughts and heat.** Going forward, children must become a priority in the UK's approach, with every effort made to ensure climate finance reaches the children who need it most.

The Government cannot continue to justify using the ODA budget to cover in-donor refugee costs when we are at the point at which they are choosing between vaccinating children against polio or sending them to school. The government should **commit to scrap spending ODA in the UK**, with the savings returned to FCDO budget.

WHAT UNICEF UK IS CALLING FOR

Children suffer first and suffer most in the face of conflict, climate change and extreme poverty. We call on the UK Government to spend at least **25% of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget on the vital, basic services children need** like healthcare, nutrition and education.

To find out more about UNICEF's work, please contact Zhané Edwards, Senior Political Affairs Adviser, at ZhaneE@unicef.org.uk