



## SDG 7: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

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Meeting SDG 7 and improving access to clean and efficient energy is widely seen as a major catalyst to achieving many of the other SDGs. Progress on SDG 7, if met using renewable sources, can deliver huge benefits for billions of people in areas such as health and education, and can at the same time address the triple emergencies of climate change, environmental destruction and poverty. Around 3.6 billion people live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change<sup>116</sup> and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has identified universal energy access as vital to reduce vulnerability and build resilience to the effects of the climate crisis, especially for rural populations.<sup>117</sup>

Those with affordable, clean and reliable energy see improvements in living standards and livelihoods, while those without face many negative consequences. These include health problems and poor medical facilities<sup>118</sup>, loss of income due to a lack of electricity and lighting, an inability to study during hours of darkness or access online learning, missing out on digital infrastructure and communication opportunities, and being unable to access technological improvements and safely refrigerate food and medical supplies. Women and children are disproportionately affected by a lack of access to electricity and clean cooking. For example, in low-income countries women and children

116. IPCC (2022), [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Working Group II contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report](#)

117. Ibid

118. Clean Cooking Alliance (2021), [Air Pollution, Health and Clean Cooking](#)

can spend around 10 hours a week gathering fuel outside of their community, during which time they are more likely to be subjected to violence.<sup>119</sup>

SDG 7 is intrinsically linked with the Paris Agreement's goal to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C through a phase-out of fossil fuels and rapid infiltration of renewables in the global energy mix. To limit heating to 1.5°C, the International Energy Agency (IEA) has made it clear to governments that there must be no new oil, gas or coal development, and the majority of existing fossil fuel use must be phased out by 2050.<sup>120</sup> The transition to clean and reliable energy not only plays a key role in preventing catastrophic climate change, it has the potential to create 38 million sustainable jobs by 2030 and 43 million by 2050.<sup>121</sup>

The importance of reliable and clean energy for all was reinforced by the Covid-19 pandemic. The correlation between health and energy has been laid bare, including the need for refrigeration of Covid-19 vaccines and the functioning of oxygen systems in hospitals. Similar to other sectors, the pandemic has highlighted inequality, laying bare the unequal distribution of energy and the services it provides.

119. Clean Cooking Alliance (2021), [Gender And Clean Cooking](#)

120. IEA (2021), [Net Zero by 2050](#)

121. IRENA and ILO (2021), [Renewable Energy and Jobs – Annual Review 2021](#)



## Target 7.1:

**By 2030, ensure universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services**

Access to electricity has improved over the past decade, particularly in Asia. In 2011 around 1.3 billion people globally were without electricity, by 2017 this had fallen to 853 million. Latest estimates (2019) put this figure at 759 million (78% of those without electricity live in Africa and 20% in Asia). The vast majority of people (99%) gaining access to electricity over this period has been in Asia, primarily India and Bangladesh, due to rapid electrification of densely populated cities. In contrast, Africa has seen an increase in the absolute number of people without electricity, in part due to population growth.<sup>122</sup>

The number of people without access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking reduced from 2.7 billion to 2.6 billion between 2017 and 2019.<sup>123</sup> But this was before Covid-19, and it is estimated that in 2020 15 million people and up to 450,000 enterprises missed out on increased energy access due to the pandemic.<sup>124</sup> It is anticipated that progress on Target 7.1, particularly for the excluded communities, will have slowed in the last two years or even reversed.<sup>125</sup> Covid-19 combined with limited funding slowed the pace of activity in the off-grid sector, where projects are most likely to deliver energy access for rural communities, while on-grid had modest growth in 2020/21.<sup>126</sup> While all low-income countries are hit by energy poverty, nearly half of people living in African countries (46%) still have no access to electricity and 900 million rely on solid fuels for cooking, such as charcoal and firewood (most in Sub-Saharan Africa).<sup>127</sup> We continue to see the grave consequences of this on the climate and environment due to deforestation, and on people's health.

Current levels of finance for Target 7.1, nearly half of which comes from international flows, fall significantly short of what is needed. Another issue is where finance goes; of the 20 countries most in need, 7 received less than \$100 million a year and only a third of these resources go to power homes.<sup>128</sup> Significantly, off-grid renewables represent only 1% of the overall finance for projects to expand energy access in access-deficit countries.<sup>129</sup> Support for clean

122. IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO (2021) [Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report](#)

123. SEforAll (2021), [Deep Dive Analysis: Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2021 analysis](#)

124. GOGLA (2021), [Global Off-Grid Solar Market Report Semi-Annual Sales and Impact Data](#)

125. SEforAll (2021), [Deep Dive Analysis: Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2021 analysis](#)

126. IRENA and ILO (2021), [Renewable Energy and Jobs – Annual Review 2021](#)

127. IRENA (2021), [The Renewable Energy Transition in Africa](#)

128. SEforAll (2020), [Energizing Finance: Understanding the Landscape 2020](#)

129. IRENA. (2021) [World Energy Transitions Outlook: 1.5°C Pathway](#)

cooking is woefully inadequate and requires a jump from \$31.5 million to \$5 billion a year to meet this target.<sup>130</sup>

Given the above, we are significantly off track to meet Target 7.1. Current projections indicate that 660 million people will lack access to electricity and 2.3 billion will be without clean cooking in 2030.<sup>131</sup> Without significant action the geographical imbalance of energy access will remain, with a substantial proportion of those without electricity and clean cooking expected to be in Africa. Almost all Asian countries have seen improvements and will continue to progress, providing they can reach rural populations. Given the population will increase by 1 billion in sub-Saharan Africa and almost 100 million in Northern Africa by 2050, a focused and rapid scale up is needed in Africa, backed by appropriate levels of finance.

## Target 7.2:

**By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.**

By 2016, 17% of global energy consumption was powered by renewable sources, up from 16.4% in 2010. However, latest figures show a stagnation at around 17.1% - and the figure is only 10.7% when you exclude traditional biomass.<sup>132</sup> Africa has the highest share of renewables in its total final energy consumption at 53.6%, but without traditional biomass this figure is 7.8%. Europe, North America and China have added record levels of renewables to their energy mix in recent years. However, the top 20 energy consuming countries still only have a cumulative total of 16% of their energy coming from renewables.<sup>133</sup> Covid-19 has had a mixed effect on the progress being made to increase renewable capacity, with most of the new capacity being added in China and record amounts being added in the US, while across Europe the picture remains variable and growth has been lacking in Africa. A clear example of this geographical disparity is that, of the 72% of new electricity derived from renewables, less than 2% of it can be attributed to countries in Africa and the Middle East.<sup>134</sup>

Global investment in renewables saw a limited increase of 2% between 2019 and 2020, with the EU and the UK making the largest investments after China.<sup>135</sup> In low- and middle-income countries there was an increase of 6% between 2018 and 2019, but this slowed to only 1% between 2019 and

130. SEforAll (2021), [Deep Dive Analysis: Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2021 analysis](#)

131. IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO (2021) [Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report](#)

132. Ibid

133. SEforAll (2021), [Deep Dive Analysis: Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2021 analysis](#)

134. IRENA (2021), [The Renewable Energy Transition in Africa](#)

135. IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO (2021) [Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report](#)



2020.<sup>136</sup> Around \$14 billion of international public finance has flowed to low- and middle-income countries to support clean energy.<sup>137</sup> However, minimal amounts have been disbursed to support mini-grids, one of the main routes to increasing rural energy access.<sup>138</sup>

One reason for the lack of progress on SDG 7 – which hampers the wider SDGs – is continued support for fossil fuels. This is demonstrated by G20 members still providing at least three times as much international public finance for fossil fuels than for renewables (\$77 billion versus \$28 billion annually).<sup>139</sup> This is a paradox, given that in almost all cases the cheapest and best option for new electricity generation is renewables.<sup>140</sup> This is no more apparent than in Africa, where public and private finance institutions invested at least \$132.3 billion between 2016 and 2021 in fossil fuel companies and projects (see more in SDG 12).<sup>141</sup>

Projections show that renewables will still only take up 18-20% of global consumption by 2030, meaning we are off track to achieve Target 7.2.<sup>142</sup> Public and private finance for clean energy is significantly short of the levels required to get on track for 1.5°C and for SDG 7. Covid-19 recovery spending represented an opportunity to accelerate a just energy transition. However, Covid-19 recovery allocations (2021-2023) represent only 35% of the level of investment needed to reach net zero by 2050, with 40% of energy spending still going to fossil fuel.

Given Africa's potential to generate renewable energy from current technology is 1,000 times larger than the demand projected for the coming decades, and with renewables the least-cost option in most cases, there is an opportunity for progress to be made.<sup>143</sup> But disparity remains a fundamental challenge, with funding 200 times higher in high-income countries than in low-income countries.<sup>144</sup> The fossil fuel industry plans to invest \$1.4 trillion in exploration and development of new oil and gas in Africa by 2050, which will be primarily controlled by European, Asian and North American companies.<sup>145</sup> It is estimated that an increase in investment from the current \$320 billion to \$850 billion a year is required in the power sector alone to be close to reaching SDG 7 by 2030.<sup>146</sup>

136. REN21 (2021), [Renewables 2021 Global Status Report](#)

137. IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO (2021) [Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report](#)

138. IRENA and ILO (2021), [Renewable Energy and Jobs – Annual Review 2021](#)

139. Oil Change International and Friends of the Earth (2021), [Past Last Call](#)

140. IRENA (2021), [The Renewable Energy Transition in Africa](#)

141. BankTrack, Milieudefensie, and Oil Change International (2022), [Locked out of a Just Transition](#)

142. SEforAll (2021), [Deep Dive Analysis: Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2021 analysis](#)

143. BankTrack, Milieudefensie, and Oil Change International (2022), [Locked out of a Just Transition](#)

144. IISD, Global Subsidies Initiative (29 October, 2021), 'The Data Is in—Governments Must Green Their COVID-19 Recovery to Keep Global Temperature Rise to 1.5°C' [online article, accessed June 2022]

145. Oil Change International (2021), [The Sky's Limit Africa](#)

146. IEA (2021), [World Energy Outlook 2021](#)



### Target 7.3:

**Double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.**

Early improvement has slowed in recent years due to low fossil fuel prices, with both the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) and the International Energy Agency (IEA) predicting further stagnation. The most inefficient countries are within Africa and Asia, particularly those with industry-based economies. Global investments for energy efficiency have also plateaued over the last 5 to 7 years (\$266 billion in 2020) and remain well short of what is needed.<sup>147</sup> In transport, analysis by the IEA suggests that vehicle fuel economy has plateaued in recent years globally; increasing vehicle size and power has eroded as much as 40% of the fuel consumption improvements that would otherwise have occurred thanks to technical advances in vehicles and engines.<sup>148</sup>

### The UK's support of SDG 7

The UK government's contribution to SDG 7 has been varied, with strong rhetoric on climate change leading up to and during COP26 in Glasgow and some leading policy announcements. However, progress has been counteracted by the recent official development assistance (ODA) cuts, the FCDO merger, continued support for domestic fossil fuels, and long delays to the *International Development Strategy* and the *International Climate Finance* (ICF) strategy refresh.<sup>149</sup> The UK's ICF provided 41 million people with improved access to clean energy and installed a cumulative clean energy capacity of 2,400MW between 2011/12 and 2019/20.<sup>150 151</sup> At COP26, there were a raft of energy-related announcements, including £126 million for the Transforming Energy Access platform<sup>152</sup>, and the UK COP26 Presidency garnered global commitments to end the use of coal. Civil society awaits and hopes this does not lead to a dash for gas, and for clarity on what is new or existing UK funding, alongside a full understanding of impacts of the UK ODA cuts on energy programming overseas.

March 2021 saw the implementation of a UK policy which should prevent future support of fossil fuels overseas.<sup>153</sup>

147. SEforAll (2021), [Deep Dive Analysis: Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2021 analysis](#)

148. IEA (2021), [Vehicle fuel economy in major markets 2005-2019 GFEI Working Paper 22 GFEI Working Paper 22](#)

149. ICAI (2021), [UK aid's alignment with the Paris Agreement A rapid review](#)

150. FCDO UK Government (2021), [2021 UK Climate Finance Results](#)

151. Note: the Government methodology has changed, so figures are not comparable between years

152. UK aid/TEA (November 2021), [UK government announces £126 million of scale-up funding for the Transforming Energy Access platform](#) [online article, accessed June 2022]

153. UK Government, BEIS (2021), [Aligning UK international support for the clean energy transition](#)



However, some loopholes remain, including support for gas power, where this is deemed to be aligned with national climate plans, and funding for carbon capture, storage and utilisation technologies, which are yet unproven at scale. This policy will guide the UK's 'voice and vote' at the multilateral development banks, where it is a shareholder on energy lending, but it won't – on its own – prevent these institutions, which receive UK ODA, from continuing to invest in fossil fuels. Ahead of COP26, the International Development Select Committee told the UK government it should close all loopholes that allow the British International Investment (formerly CDC Group) and Private Infrastructure Development Group to operate outside of the policy and continue to finance fossil fuels (the two organisations are estimated to have exposure to fossil fuels worth over £1bn).<sup>154</sup>

Positively, and somewhat quietly, the UK leveraged its overseas fossil fuel policy at COP26 to garner a group of 39 countries and institutions (including Germany, USA, the European Investment Bank and Agence Française de Développement) to pledge to end support of unabated fossil fuels overseas by 2022 and increase their support for the clean energy transition.<sup>155</sup> If fully implemented, this could shift up to \$24.1 billion a year out of fossil fuels and into clean energy.<sup>156</sup> Notably, the list of signatories did not include major funders like Japan and the World Bank. Unfortunately, the commitment also retains loopholes, particularly around gas power and application of the term 'unabated fossil fuels', which need to be addressed. Given the recent nature of these policies, their impact on SDG 7 progress remains to be seen.

### To achieve SDG 7, the UK government should:

1. End UK public finance for fossil fuels to deliver on the UK's commitment to 1.5°C by
  - a) closing the 'exemptions' in the UK's overseas fossil fuel policy
  - b) leading current signatories to agree to close loopholes in the Glasgow Joint Statement on international fossil fuel support, and expanding the number of signatories to ensure greater financing of renewables in low-income countries
  - c) ending support for new fossil fuels domestically, and substantially increasing support for renewables to tackle the cost-of-living crisis
  - d) using the UK's ongoing role as COP26 President to ensure an agreement on ending fossil fuel support by the world's biggest polluters ahead of COP27.
2. Increase UK finance, and promote international finance, going to low-income countries, in particular, excluded communities. This financing should be used for decentralised renewable energy solutions that tackle energy poverty and enable adaptation to climate change, while supporting the transition to low-carbon mobility.
3. Place 'do no harm' solutions for clean cooking and energy access at the heart of UK's ODA priorities for energy programming.

154. House of Commons International Development Committee (2022), [Global Britain in demand: UK climate action and international development around COP26: Government response to the Committee's Second Report](#)

155. UN Climate Change Conference UK 2021, COP26 (4 November, 2021), [Statement On International Public Support For The Clean Energy Transition](#) [online, accessed June 2022]

156. Oil Change International (12 November, 2021), [France joins commitment to end international oil, gas, and coal finance by 2022](#) [online media release, accessed June 2022]