



Cuts that cost lives: Why the UK's retreat on international development must end

Bond briefing, October 2025

Introduction

The UK government's decision to cut UK aid from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI by 2027, to fund an increase in defence spending has come with serious consequences. It has damaged our reputation as a trusted global partner, while impacting the lives of marginalised communities. With 20-25% of UK aid planned to be spent on costs associated with refugees in the UK over this period, the volume of UK aid available for overseas activity will fall to just 0.24% of GNI in 2027/28 – a cut of nearly two thirds since 2020.

Given increasing global instability and inequality, this drastic step back by the UK's global commitments and withdrawal of support to some of the most marginalised communities in the world must stop here. The concerning impacts of the cuts to US aid programmes will undoubtedly be compounded by the cuts to the UK aid budget.

This briefing sets out the impact of UK aid reductions on affected communities and examples of programmes and funding that has already been confirmed as cut or is at risk. It also includes examples of the areas impacted by the USAID cuts. The briefing details:

1. Initial impacts of the UK aid cuts - with examples of programmes that the government has already confirmed cut and examples provided by Bond members of programmes at risk.
2. An overview of the impact of the US cuts provided by Bond members.
3. The positive impact of UK aid.

1. Initial impacts of UK aid cuts

A range of impacts of the UK aid cuts are already being felt in low- and middle-income countries, including:

- **Cuts to lifesaving GAVI programmes** - The UK's pledge to the global vaccine alliance (GAVI), announced in June 2025, was £1.25 billion for the 2026-2030 period, a reduction of about 24% from its previous £1.65 billion pledge for 2021-2025. This reduction could lead to more than 400,000 fewer deaths averted.
- **Ending of vital bilateral partnerships in Africa** – As a result of the UK aid cuts, we're hearing that the UK government is considering ending its UK aid partnerships with a number of countries in Africa, including Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe. These countries are home to around 60 million people living in extreme poverty, putting efforts to end extreme poverty and diplomatic relationships at risk.
- **Ending of UK aid programmes supporting marginalised communities** - The government's [Equality Impact Assessment](#) for the 2025/26 ODA cuts highlights the impacts on education and health programmes in African countries such as, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, DRC, Mozambique, Nigeria and Zimbabwe. It also highlights that cuts to peace and security programmes including a centrally managed programme on Women Peace and Security which may result in up to 50 fewer new women-peacebuilding organisations supported in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

Examples of programmes cut (provided by Bond members)

This is a non-exhaustive list of some programmes at risk of cuts, based on reports from Bond members. If you have any examples to add, or would like further detail please reach out to Jess Salter, jsalter@bond.org.uk

Health programmes

- Programmes designed to strengthen health systems across countries like Sierra Leone and Somalia are at risk, which could mean an increase in deaths and the loss of livelihoods in healthcare and nutrition.

One health programme in Somalia might have to close, which will result in an entire region not having access to basic health care.

- Programmes that provide access to sexual and reproductive health services across Africa including; the Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) led by MSI and IPPR which will increase the number of women dying unnecessarily – [more info here](#).
- The FCDO will likely scale back of sight and disability support to children in Kenya and Zambia.

Humanitarian and emergency response

- Funding likely to be cut to programmes across Africa and Asia that focus on large scale humanitarian response – particularly cash and voucher response, emergency response, displacement, peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and good governance, building resilience to conflict and climate.

Climate and food insecurity

- A Bond member has heard that the impact from the FCDO cuts would deepen challenges across various contexts particularly regarding food insecurity.

Education and gender equality

- An education project in Syria receives £2.5 million in funding indirectly from the FCDO which is now at risk. Approximately £1.5 million of that goes towards education projects, and the rest goes towards services like livelihoods, WASH, and healthcare.
- We've also heard direct funding from FCDO to NGOs providing programming on girls' education and gender equality is at risk.

2. The impacts of US aid cuts around the world

UK aid cuts will affect an [estimated 55 million people](#), especially impacting women and girls. This will add to the devastating impacts of the significant cuts to USAID programmes since the start of 2025. Examples include:

- **Health** - One of Frontline AIDS's partners in Southern Africa, was forced to suspend all US-funded activities, leading to 30,000 girls and young women and 26,000 orphans and vulnerable children, having HIV services withdrawn.
- **Gender based violence and child protection** - In Ethiopia, a Bond NGO member has been forced to suspend GBV/child protection case management and safe spaces for children and women, affecting 16,808 people.
- **Basic needs in conflict contexts** - In South Sudan, IRC closed a project providing access to quality health care and nutrition services to more than 115,000 people and closed 90 communal kitchens in Khartoum which served more than half a million people.
- **Water, sanitation and hygiene** - In DRC, the discontinuation of a WASH programme halted critical progress in expanding water and sanitation services, just ahead of an Ebola outbreak being declared in the country. One organisation operating in Mali was also forced to close its field offices leaving 270,000 people without critical access to WASH, protection, and health services.
- **Humanitarian** - One organisation was forced to close 10 field offices in high-risk areas, and halt access negotiations for humanitarian aid trucks to reach besieged cities in Sudan.

3. The achievements of UK aid and what is at stake

If anyone can share any updates positive figures and stories, please email jsalter@bond.org.uk

UK aid is vital to efforts to reduce poverty, meet humanitarian needs and provide basic services across the world. During 2015-20 UK aid, helped 15.6 million to gain a decent education, reached 33.7 million people with humanitarian assistance (food aid, cash and voucher transfers); helped 74 million children get vaccinated against preventable disease (2015-18).

Other successes include the Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) programme, which has transformed access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services for the poorest women and girls across 27 countries in Africa and Asia. Reaching over 6 million women and girls since 2018, it has averted nearly 37,000 maternal deaths, prevented 3.85 million unsafe abortions, and helped 300,000 girls and young women stay in school. The Supporting Adolescent Girls' Education (SAGE) programme in Zimbabwe is another successful example, which brought gender-transformative change to 13,200 highly marginalised, out-of-school adolescent girls, many of whom were already married or mothers.

What the UK needs to do

The UK can begin to rebuild its development agenda by pledging at least £1 billion at the Global Fund's 8th replenishment round in November 2025 (which the UK is co-hosting), matching its previous commitment. This contribution is essential to sustaining global progress against HIV/AIDS, malaria, and TB.

With the deepest UK aid cuts still to be implemented, the government must also direct the limited UK aid budget to the countries and communities that need it the most, which will help to promote the eradication of poverty, the legal objective of UK aid. Decisions on programme allocations for 2026/27 onwards must also be informed by impact assessments of potential cuts and spending options.

The UK must urgently establish an ambitious development agenda across all areas of finance and policy to rebuild its global reputation and diplomatic relationships, which have been significantly damaged by years of stepping back from international commitment.

If you would like to meet discuss this briefing, please get in touch with Gideon Rabinowitz, Director of Policy and Advocacy, grabinowitz@bond.org.uk

***Bond** is the UK network for organisations working in international development. Bond unites and supports a diverse network of over 350 civil society organisations from across the UK, and allies to help eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice.*

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