Bond UK aid cuts briefing – October 2026

Introduction

The UK government's decision to slash the UK aid budget from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI by 2027 to fund an increase in defence spending has undermined Labour's manifesto commitments and its credibility at home and abroad. Most importantly it has forced lifesaving humanitarian and development programmes to close, including in fragile and conflict-affected countries, leaving communities without vital support and all of us more vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis, conflict, inequality and poverty. This briefing is a follow-up to Bond's October 2025 briefing, 'Cuts that cost lives', available to read here.

This briefing sets out:

- How, since 2025, UK aid cuts, which have been compounded by global aid cuts by the US and other major donors, have impacted essential humanitarian, development and climate programmes.
- Bond's calls on the new prime minister and foreign secretary to set out an ambitious agenda for international development.

In brief: the UK aid cuts

The cuts announced in February 2025 constitute the deepest ever cut to UK aid, which in 2025 fell to the lowest level (0.43% of GNI) since 2008. FCDO allocations of the UK aid budget published in March reveal the UK's bilateral aid programme will be cut by 43% from pre-cut levels, with bilateral aid to Africa declining by 56% from 2024/5 to 2028/9. Ten out of the seventeen African countries that received direct ODA support will barely have any budget left by 2028/29 (budgets of around £5m).

Despite the FCDO stating it would prioritise fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), the FCDO's annual report for 2025-26 confirms total UK ODA to FCAS will still fall by 34%. Malawi and Mozambique will see their bilateral UK aid funding fall by 90% by 2029. Rwanda and Sierra Leone will see over 80% cuts, while DRC, which is grappling with its deadliest Ebola outbreak in history, will see a 35% cut. The UK government's own Equalities Impact Assessment states that women and girls, and other marginalised groups, will be affected.

While the many consequences of these cuts are still becoming clear, what is already certain is that marginalised communities, particularly across Africa, will pay the highest price for these political choices.

Recent polling has also found the cuts do not align with Labour supporters' values: 78% of Labour members believe the UK aid cuts have damaged Labour's reputation, with 37% believing the decision had caused "a lot" of damage.

Examples of programmes cut

This is a non-exhaustive list of programmes confirmed as cancelled early or unrenewed due to UK aid cuts, as reported by Bond members and in the media. Further information and stories available on request.

Health programmes

- A total cut to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, which works to end polio in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries, will lead to "heightened risks of disease outbreaks", according to the UK government. Experts have previously warned that 200,000 more children could be paralysed by polio every year unless eradication efforts are adequately financed.
- The Global Health Workforce Programme, which supported development and training for healthcare staff in six African countries including Ethiopia and Malawi, and which UK ministers said would play a vital role in protecting Britain from future pandemic threats, closed in March 2026.
- The Saving Lives in Sierra Leone programme, run by an NGO consortium including Concern Worldwide, which provides lifesaving maternal and newborn health support, has been quietly axed. Funding was reduced without warning from £35m to £1m by 2027 when the programme will close. The decision has already resulted in ambulances running out of fuel.
- King's Global Health Partnerships is now unable to support an initiative for hospitals in DRC to install solar power stations in operating theatres, despite theatres often being brought to a halt by a lack of reliable electricity supply.

WASH

- WaterAid's programme WASH4Health, which focused on systems strengthening and support for women and girls across sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, was cut with just three months' notice.

Humanitarian

- The FCDO's Humanitarian Crisis Reserve has been cut by 12%, from £85m to £75m, leaving less money for rapid support in humanitarian emergencies. This means less emergency food, water, shelter and dignity kits for people affected by conflict and disasters, like Hurricane Melissa in the Caribbean or the earthquake in Türkiye-Syria in 2023.

Disaster Risk Management and Early Warning Systems

- In Nepal, People in Need UK's RAIN programme, targeting marginalised communities at risk of multi hazards in Madhesh and Lumbini provinces, was cut by 61% and reduced in timeframe, leaving over 300,000 people without access to early warning systems.

Women and girls

- IPPF's delivery of the UK's flagship Women's Integrated Sexual Health 2 programme, which brings high quality sexual and reproductive healthcare services to millions of women and girls across West and Central Africa, will see a 22% cut. This is despite the government's own Equality Impact Assessment describing the programme as "relatively protected".
- Save the Children analysis found that 32.8 million women and girls could miss out on family planning support due to a reduction in sexual health programmes and other related programmes. This will have major implications for maternal health, population growth and the spread of HIV.
- The UK government's 2026 Equality Impact Assessment acknowledged that equalities-targeted programmes in DRC and Tanzania may close as a direct result of the cuts. Human Rights Watch has warned that conflict-related sexual violence in eastern DRC is rising, while funding for survivor support and health services is collapsing.
- In Nepal, People in Need UK's Security and Justice Programme (SJP) was cut by 79%, significantly constraining the scale of community-led social norms transformation, GBV prevention and response systems strengthening.

Education

- SHEFE, a higher education programme aimed at keeping 1 million girls in school across Africa, Asia and the Middle East, has been cancelled just two years after it was announced – despite the former foreign secretary's commitment to prioritise women and girls.
- The tender for the planned Education for All programme in South Sudan was cancelled in September 2025. The programme had been designed to support education for girls and for children with disabilities and foster resilience and peacebuilding in Africa's poorest country.
- AXE-FILLES, an education programme for girls in Kasai, one of the poorest parts of DRC, was cancelled, leaving girls there more vulnerable to gender-based violence, including forced marriage.
- According to UNICEF, global ODA cuts will reduce funding for education by 24%, leaving 6 million more children out of school by the end of 2026. The quality of education for 290 million students will also be harmed.

Disability programming

- A flagship disability rights programme, led by the Inclusive Futures Consortium consisting of Bond members, will not be extended past its original end date, despite exceeding many of its targets and showing strong impact. Impact data shows school enrolment for children with disabilities in Kenya rose 207% due to the project.
- A survey by Humanity & Inclusion UK of 177 Organisations of People with Disabilities across 35 countries found 72% have been forced to cancel or suspend at least one programme or activity. One organisation reports that 9-year-old Amina, who lives in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, is unable to go to school as funding cuts closed the disability-friendly learning centre she had attended.

Climate

- The UK government has gone back on its commitment to the Green Climate Fund in 2023, meaning approximately £815m the GCF expected to receive from the UK will not be provided.
- A climate resilience programme in Bangladesh, led by Practical Action Bangladesh, is being forced to close two years early in September 2026 with "very short notice". The programme has received "far less" than the funding it was allocated. This will damage relationships with isolated communities and local partners.

Bond analysis: the 2025 stealth cut

New analysis from Bond, first published in the Financial Times, has found that an additional "stealth cut" of around £700m was made to the UK aid budget in 2025, beyond the planned £500m reduction set out in the 2025 Spending Review. This means, in 2025, **the UK aid budget faced a cut of at least £1.2bn: more than double the planned cut.**

This was partly due to the government's decision to decouple UK ODA budgets from changes in GNI forecast, meaning they no longer adjust upwards with improvements in GNI projections, and partly due to the end of the FCDO's status as "spender and saver of last resort" which led to an agreement with the Home Office that allows it to keep any underspend on in-donor refugee costs instead of returning it to the FCDO or wider UK aid budget.

What's clear is that effectively the UK no longer has an ODA target. This raises concerns around transparency and even runs the risk that UK ODA spend might slip below the intended 0.3% of GNI by 2027/28 (ICAI). The Independent Commission for Aid Impact has also warned that "there is no evidence of any planning for a return to 0.7% in the spending figures or accompanying government statements".

A more detailed explanation is on the Bond website. If you have any questions, please get in touch.

What the UK needs to do

The prime minister has a valuable opportunity to halt the UK's retreat from its ambitions on international cooperation and re-engage in the shared fight against inequality and poverty. The upcoming Autumn Budget – the new government's first budget – presents an important moment to reset the agenda on the UK's international development policy decisions.

The new prime minister, foreign secretary and chancellor must:

1. **Rule out further UK aid cuts.** Use the Autumn Budget to rule out any further cuts to the UK's ODA budget, and make necessary adjustments to ensure spending is on track to meet the 0.3% of GNI target in 2027/28.

2. **Set out a timeline to begin a phased increase of UK ODA towards 0.7% of GNI.** Ensure that the fiscal tests for such ODA increases are consistent with the government's existing/evolving fiscal rules.

3. **Return in-year savings by ODA-spending departments, including any savings from the Home Office's in-donor refugee costs to the FCDO**. Any savings made by ODA-spending departments must be publicly reported to ensure transparency and enable public and parliamentary scrutiny.

4. **Focus what little remains of the UK aid budget on lifesaving programmes abroad**, particularly those contributing to poverty reduction and humanitarian assistance, including in FCAS where poverty is increasingly concentrated.

Beyond UK aid, the government must also seize the opportunity provided by the UK's upcoming G20 presidency to champion much-needed reforms to the global financial system - including tackling unjust debts, tackling illicit financial flows and implementing fairer tax rules to make the system fairer for all. If you would like to receive a briefing on this, please get in touch.

Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development and humanitarian assistance. For more information on anything covered in this briefing, please get in touch with Jess Salter at jsalter@bond.org.uk or Emily Loynes at eloynes@bond.org.uk