

# 10 international development priorities for the UK

Parliamentary briefing



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Founded in 1960, ODI is one of the world's leading think tanks on international development and humanitarian issues.

Our first-class research promotes global progress and prosperity by focusing on improving the lives of the world's poorest people.

We work with partners in the public and private sectors, in both developing and developed countries.



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# 10 international development priorities for the UK

Introduction by Alex Thier, Executive Director	2
01 <b>Leave no one behind</b>	4
02 <b>Champion trade with developing countries</b>	6
03 <b>Manage migration and displacement</b>	8
04 <b>Drive climate action at home and abroad</b>	10
05 <b>Strengthen global leadership on gender equality</b>	12
06 <b>Support economic transformation</b>	14
07 <b>Prevent conflict and sustain peace</b>	16
08 <b>Respond to humanitarian emergencies</b>	18
09 <b>Partner with the European Union</b>	20
10 <b>Adapt to a changing world</b>	22
International development in numbers	24

## Introduction: **champion global development**



**Alex Thier**  
Executive Director

 [@Thieristan](https://twitter.com/Thieristan)

The world has made extraordinary development progress in recent decades: extreme poverty has fallen below 10% for the first time in history, millions of lives are saved every year thanks to access to low-cost prevention and treatments for malaria and HIV/AIDS, and more children than ever are getting an education that will transform their lives.

At the same time, we are also facing the greatest period of uncertainty since the second world war. There have been momentous shifts in politics, markets are volatile, and information and truth are deeply contested. Meanwhile, real-world impacts from climate extremes, conflicts and unequal gains from globalisation are growing.

In this unstable environment, the UK must continue to lead global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and overcome our greatest collective challenges. Britain is part of an interdependent world, facing shared threats to health, prosperity and security that do not respect national boundaries and demand multilateral responses. Britain also stands to gain from the trade and investment opportunities that come with transformative sustainable growth and human development in poor countries.

The case for British leadership in international development must be made and won through public debate. Parliamentarians have a critical role to play in this. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has been pleased to work closely with MPs and peers from all parties to ensure that rigorous, research-based evidence is at the heart of the UK's approach to aid and international development.

This briefing sets out 10 priority areas for international development. You can find more information on our website ([odi.org](https://odi.org)), and our experts would be delighted to discuss any of these issues with you in further detail.

I wish you every success for the parliamentary term ahead and look forward to working with you.

**Alex Thier**  
Executive Director

The UK must continue to lead global efforts to eradicate extreme poverty and overcome our greatest collective challenges

# 01 Leave no one behind

In 2015, every UN member state adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals set the global agenda for eradicating poverty, boosting growth and ensuring environmental sustainability until 2030 and beyond. They include a commitment that no one will be left behind by progress and, for the first time, cover both developing and developed countries, like the UK. Now, the focus is on implementation – particularly at the national level. ODI's research shows that early action is critical to achieving the SDGs and the ambition to leave no one behind, and that it will become far more difficult the longer governments delay.

In every country, the need to achieve these goals is greatest among the poorest and most vulnerable people, and they should be prioritised by leaders.

📖 Read our briefing paper: *The 'leave no one behind' index*

📖 Read our report: *Leaving no one behind: a critical path for the first 1,000 days of the Sustainable Development Goals*

## Recommendations

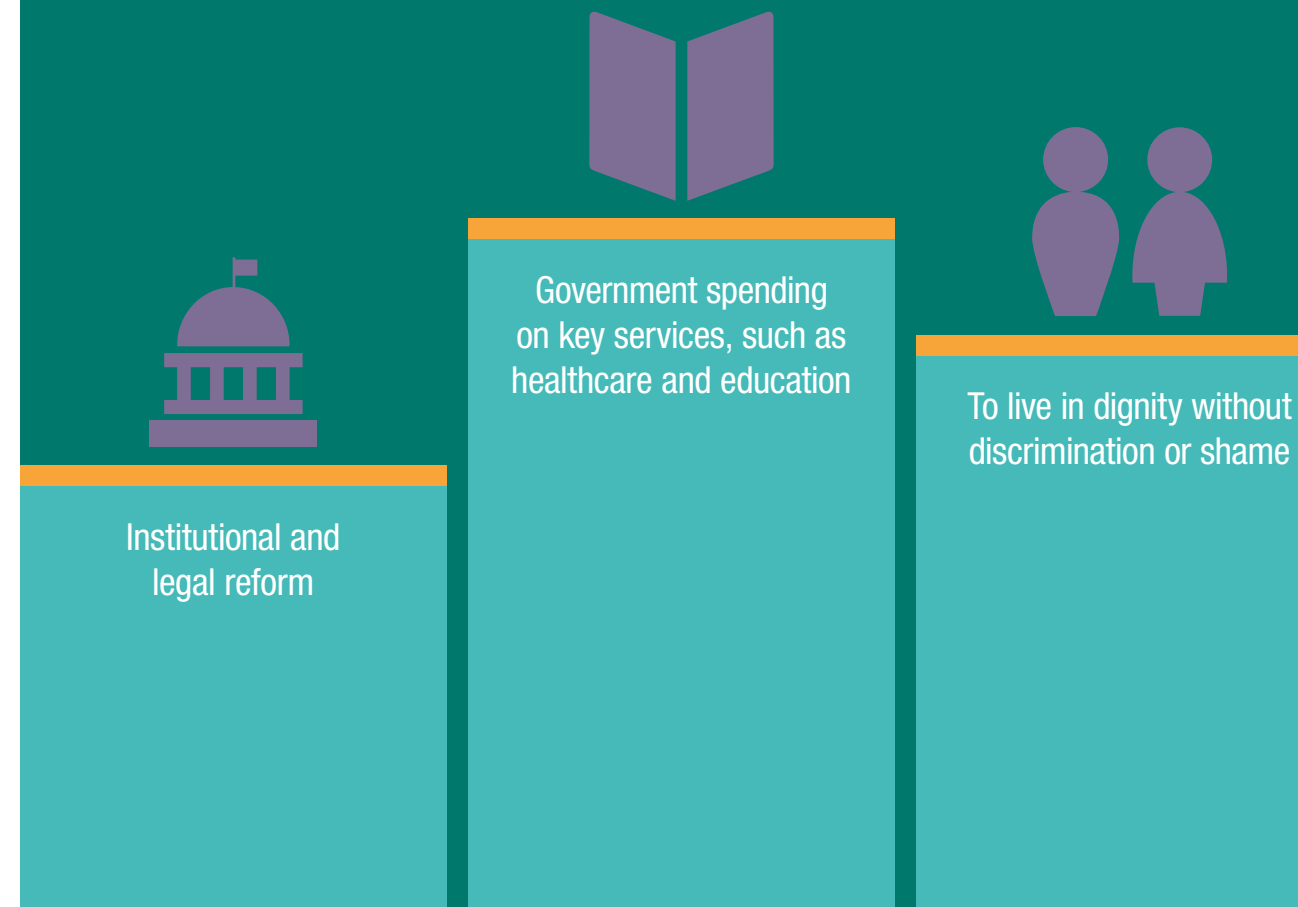
**Ensure** that data collection, policy and financing decisions prioritise the poorest and most marginalised groups

**Report** on the UK's progress towards meeting its commitment to leave no one behind

**Press** for 'national equity targets', aimed at narrowing disparities between social groups in the UK and abroad

**Focus** aid on programmes that combat extreme disadvantage, and ensure that at least 50% of Official Development Assistance goes to least developed countries

## What do people who have been left behind want?



## 02 Champion trade with developing countries

Trade is a key driver of growth and development, as can be seen from the progress made by countries such as Bangladesh, China and South Korea. The UK has contributed to this process by importing on average £45 billion in goods from developing countries each year between 2013 and 2015.

The depreciation of the pound has reduced the value of exports from developing countries to the UK, and Brexit may affect it further with increased uncertainty and disruption to value chains between developing and EU countries.

Brexit also provides an opportunity to implement innovative measures and make UK trade policy as pro-development as possible, including through the free trade agreements that the UK is set to negotiate. This could significantly benefit both the UK and its developing country partners.

📖 Read our briefing paper: *Post-Brexit trade policy and development: current developments; new directions?*

📖 Read our essay series: *The impact of the UK's post-Brexit trade policy on development*

### Recommendations

**Prioritise** the poorest countries in UK trade policy by designing a targeted preferential regime that improves market access for the most vulnerable countries

**Continue** assisting developing countries to improve trade logistics and address non-tariff barriers

**Use** the cultural and historical links within the Commonwealth to promote non-discriminatory trade and development

**Work** with developing countries within the World Trade Organization system for a global trade system that puts poor countries first and promotes 'open trade'

# £45 billion

the value of goods imported to the UK from developing countries each year between 2013 and 2015



Calculation based on COMEXT data for 2013, 2014 and 2015

## 03 Manage migration and displacement

Over 244 million people live in a different country to where they were born, including 20 million refugees. And the majority of these people live in low- and middle-income countries.

This mobility can positively contribute to economic and social change but countries are currently struggling to find effective ways to manage migration, whether voluntary or forced, and to effectively address concerns around integration.

Between 2014 and 2016, Europe spent €17 billion on deterrence. This is costly, ultimately ineffective and forces people to take more dangerous routes. It also goes against governments' global refugee protection commitments.

Action is urgently needed to formulate pragmatic, realistic and sustainable solutions to effectively manage human mobility.

📖 Read our briefing paper: *10 things to know about refugees and displacement*

📖 Read our report: *Europe's refugees and migrants: hidden flows, tightened borders and spiralling costs*

### Recommendations

**Diversify** and expand safe and legal migration routes, to effectively manage and monitor flows

**Promote** and facilitate decent, fulfilling and relevant jobs and livelihoods in source, transit and host countries

**Understand** the links between migration and development, and how it affects the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

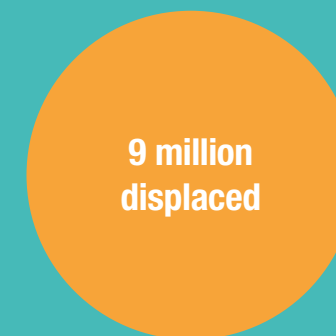
**Engage** the public in an honest, evidence-based debate about the benefits and drawbacks of migration

Once someone is displaced for six months, their exile is likely to be protracted over many years

Only **2.5%** of refugee crises are resolved within 3 years



Nearly **9 million** refugees globally have been displaced for more than **10 years**



No. of years

## 04 Drive climate action at home and abroad

In 2015, 195 governments agreed the historic Paris climate agreement, stating that ‘climate change represents an urgent and potentially irreversible threat to human societies and the planet.’ The question now is how countries will deliver on their climate commitments.

To ensure progress, the UK and others need to scale-up ambition in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and end subsidies for fossil fuel production. Both are critical to pursuing efforts to limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees.

Governments must also ensure that they can adequately adapt to the changing climate, harnessing opportunities, and addressing emerging challenges like climate-induced migration and displacement.

📖 Read the report: *Cutting Europe's lifelines to coal: tracking subsidies in 10 countries*

📖 Read our briefing paper: *Six development finance proposals to expand climate investment*


### Recommendations

**Scale** up the ambition of UK climate commitments ahead of 2020. Demonstrate that growth and climate action are compatible, and encourage increased global ambition

**Lead** global negotiations to agree the first ever Global Goal on Adaptation, drawing on the UK's significant expertise in adaptation planning

**Phase** out fossil fuel subsidies and tax breaks by 2020, and participate in a G20 fossil fuel subsidy peer review

**Reduce** dependency on oil, gas and coal, starting by meeting the UK government's commitment to phase out coal-fired power by 2025



The UK has committed to phase out fossil fuel subsidies by 2025.  
The UK continues to provide fiscal support to fossil fuels of  
**£13.3 billion per year\***

\*Annual average between 2014 and 2016. The UK has made the commitment as part of the G7. Fiscal support includes budget support, tax breaks, and price and income support to the production and consumption of fossil fuels.

Phase-out 2020: monitoring Europe's fossil fuel subsidies.  
Read more: <https://www.odi.org/publications/10939-phase-out-2020-monitoring-europes-fossil-fuel-subsidies>

## 05 Strengthen global leadership on gender equality

The UK has made important strides to put women and girls at the heart of its development assistance. In the current global political context, it is more important than ever that the UK strengthens its leadership role in tackling the marginalisation, exploitation and abuse of the world's most vulnerable women and girls.

ODI's research shows that policies and programmes that promote girls' education, health and well-being and women's economic and political empowerment can reap important dividends for families, communities and economies.

Targeting interventions at critical stages in the lifecycle, including for the 1.2 billion adolescents in the world today, offers a unique opportunity to accelerate progress.

📖 Read our briefing paper: *Family planning: the adolescent imperative*

📖 Read our briefing paper: *Women's economic empowerment: parliamentary briefing*

### Recommendations

**Fulfil** funding pledges made at the 2017 Family Planning Summit, and advocate for transparent and robust monitoring systems to ensure these donor and country commitments are met

**Accelerate** efforts to tackle gender-based violence, and discriminatory social norms and practices to help end early and forced marriage, FGM and other harmful traditional practices

**Invest** in women's economic empowerment, extend and improve care-related labour market policies and promote more integrated approaches to social protection

**Empower** and listen to women and girls, and invest in high-quality, disaggregated data – including on those who are 'hardest to reach'

## Factors affecting young women's development

42%

of women (15-24) are underemployed



25%

of women (15-64) are underemployed



850 million

people alive today were married as children



16 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth each year



Women's economic empowerment: navigating enablers and constraints  
Read more: [odi.org/publications/10483-womens-economic-empowerment-navigating-enablers-and-constraints](https://odi.org/publications/10483-womens-economic-empowerment-navigating-enablers-and-constraints)  
Family planning: the adolescent imperative  
Read more: [odi.org/publications/10853-family-planning-adolescent-imperative](https://odi.org/publications/10853-family-planning-adolescent-imperative)



## 06 Support economic transformation

The quality of economic growth matters. The kind of growth that leads to poverty reduction requires economic transformation. This means shifting resources to higher-productivity uses, including diversification of developing countries' output and exports. It also means establishing an environment that enables the private sector to increase its productivity and create jobs.

Growth in many low-income countries over the last two decades has failed to involve significant economic transformation. The risk now is that growth based on commodity exports alone will not last. This would put poverty reduction on hold as growth is needed to pay for improvements in health and education.

📖 Read our briefing paper: *Smart industrialisation through trade in the context of Africa's transformation*

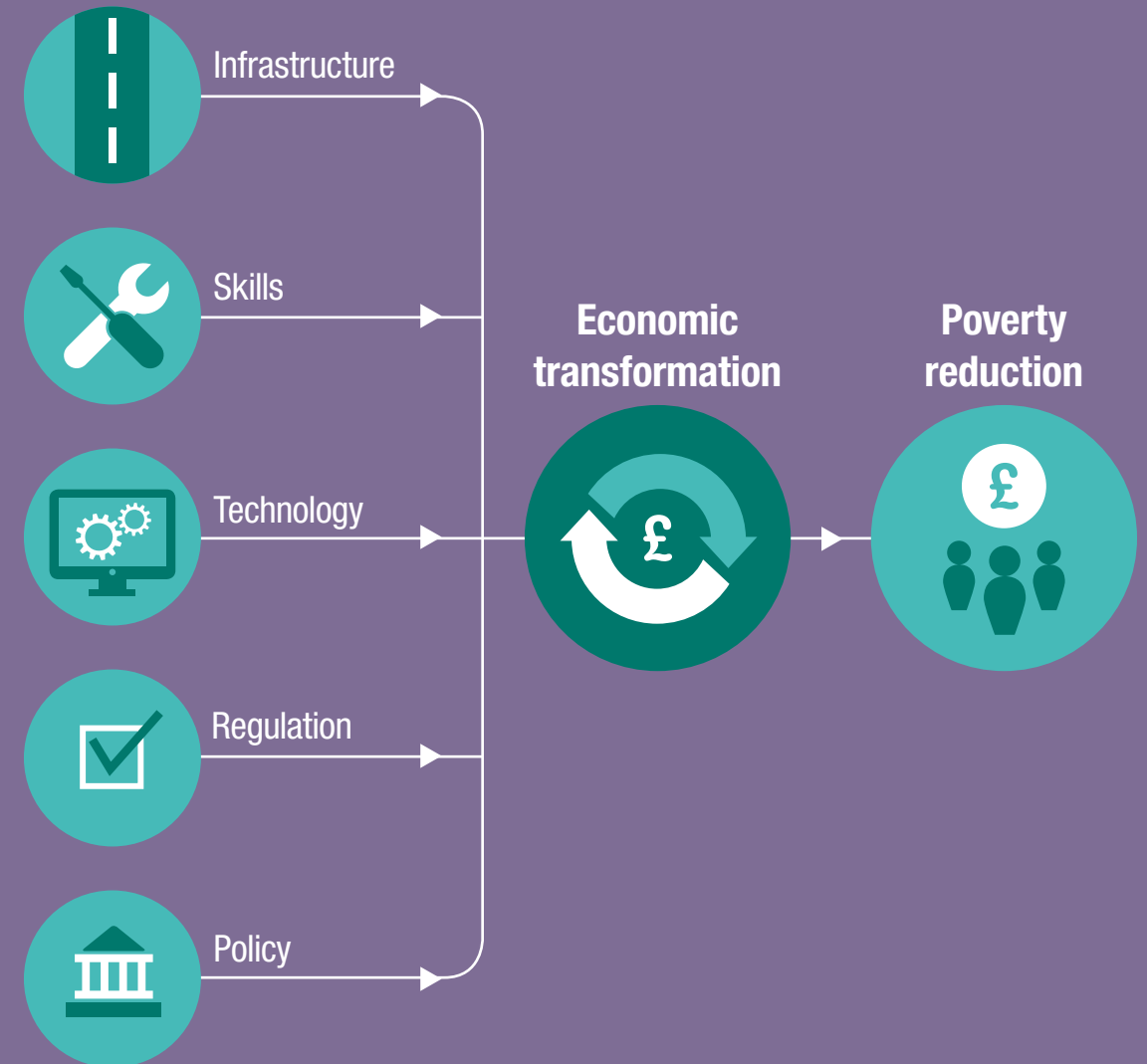
📖 Read our briefing paper: *Supporting economic transformation: an approach paper*

### Recommendations

**Review** donor portfolios through an economic transformation lens, and support investment in skills, infrastructure, trade, industrial policy, special economic zones and state-business relations

**Align** UK government departments – including those responsible for trade, finance and the environment – more closely with economic transformation in poor countries. The UK's trade policy and the City of London can both contribute significantly to growth in poor countries

**Encourage** both UK and developing country businesses to be more transformational in their economic development contributions to ensure they deliver poverty reduction. CDC can be a key component in supporting job creation in poor countries



## 07 Prevent conflict and sustain peace

Violent conflict is destructive, persistent and costly. From Syria to South Sudan, millions of civilians have been displaced, injured or killed. Conflict devastates lives, undermines development gains and weakens the global economy.

International actors remain unable to find political solutions to major crises. They spend too much time and resources responding to emergencies and too little on preventing them. Programmes that aim to support transition out of conflict often ignore the crucial role of non-state actors and fail to combine national initiatives with local activities.

The UN Secretary General has prioritised sustaining peace and preventing crises. The UK government must play a pivotal role in this, investing political capital and energy in preventing violent conflict, and helping end it where it occurs.

Read the article: *Delivering the UN 'sustaining peace' agenda*

Read our report: *Understanding trajectories of radicalisation in Niger*

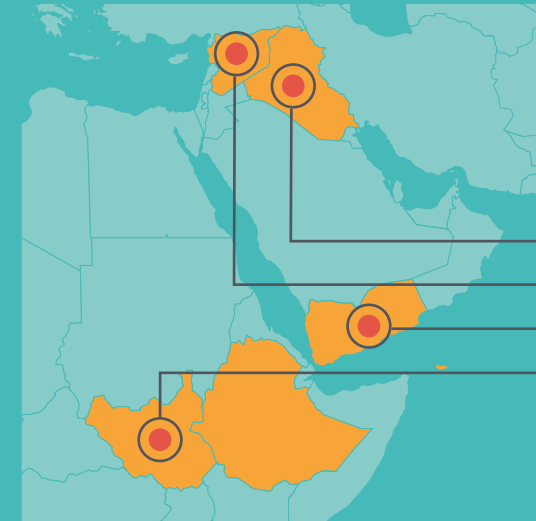
### Recommendations

**Coordinate** between departments to ensure that UK foreign policy and commercial interests do not undermine humanitarian principles

**Commit** to long-term, flexible funding to scale up activities that help sustain peace – such as targeted institutional development and private-sector investment in fragile states – and respond effectively when crises do hit

**Ensure** UK programmes align with the latest thinking on how to work in complex conflict environments, piloting new approaches and working in gender-sensitive ways

**Lead** new, evidence-based approaches to understanding radicalisation and extremism



In 2016, four out of the top five recipient countries of global humanitarian funding were affected by violent conflict:

- Iraq
- Syrian Arab Republic
- Yemen
- South Sudan
- Ethiopia

### Conflict has become more protracted

Average length of conflict (years)



Calculated based on The Global Peace Index 2016, Institute for Economics and Peace and the Financial Tracking Service, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs  
Time to let go: A three-point proposal to change the humanitarian system  
Read more: [odi.org/hpg/remake-aid](http://odi.org/hpg/remake-aid)

## 08 Respond to humanitarian emergencies

With more than 164 million people in need of humanitarian assistance – as crises fuelled by conflict, disasters and displacement grow in complexity and cost – the UK's support to international emergency response is critical.

For 50 years, the UK has exerted its influence to help create and uphold the values and principles that underpin much humanitarian action globally. It is the third largest donor to emergencies and a country to which others look for policy leadership.

Faced with new and protracted global crises, the UK is well positioned to promote the standards that safeguard humanity and support international humanitarian aid priorities.

■ Read the report: *UK foreign policy and humanitarian action*

■ Read our policy briefing: *Protection of civilians in armed conflict: bridging the gap between law and reality*

### Recommendations

**Call** for increased monitoring of international humanitarian law compliance through the UN Security Council and appointment of a UN Special Representative to investigate violations

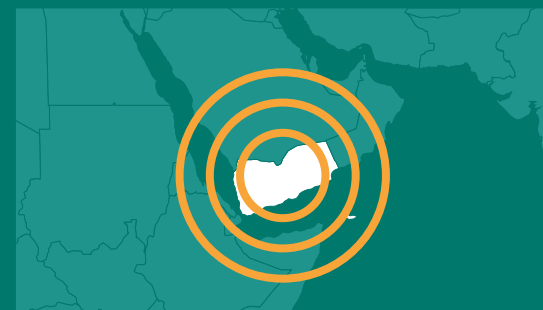
**Promote** an initiative to push the five UN Security Council permanent members to suspend use of their veto in cases of mass atrocities

**Uphold** the UK's commitments to critical international agreements, particularly the Arms Trade Treaty and the 1951 Refugee Convention

**Press** for reform of the humanitarian financing architecture to enable preventative action and sustainable and flexible funding for longer-term crises

**Champion** solutions to counter the impact of counter-terrorism measures that deter charities from operating effectively in humanitarian contexts and restrict remittances to conflict zones

## The humanitarian situation in Yemen



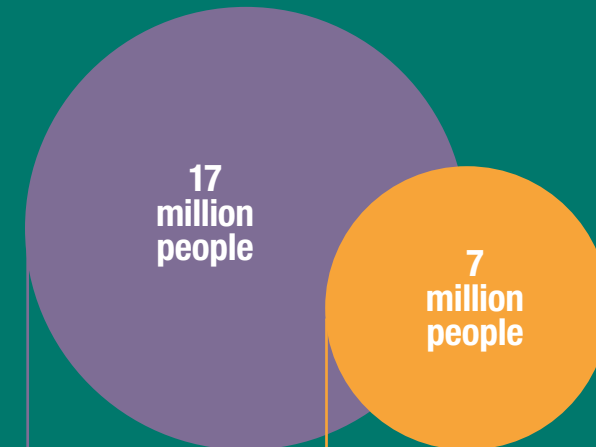
Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the Middle East, ranks **168<sup>th</sup> out of 188** for human development



**76%** (18.8 million people) of the population is in need of humanitarian assistance



Only **43.4%** of the humanitarian response is funded (£962.5 million shortfall)



Food insecure

Severely food insecure

## 09 Partner with the European Union

The UK has been a core contributor to EU development funds and has held considerable influence over EU and member states' development policies.

Brexit will affect the development landscape and developing countries, and a move away from EU-wide development cooperation would limit UK leadership in this field. Aid volumes may dip, resulting in cuts to effective EU programmes, and the pressure on EU members to meet their aid commitments could be reduced.

Brexit should not be the end of the UK's development partnership with the EU. Shared norms, principles and objectives, and established practical joint working in developing countries provide a strong basis for enduring cooperation on international affairs.

➤ Explore ODI on Brexit: [odi.org/on-bexit](https://odi.org/on-bexit)

📖 Read our report: *Our collective interest: why Europe's problems need global solutions and global problems need European action*

### Recommendations

**Ensure** the UK continues to collaborate closely with the EU post-Brexit in light of shared international development goals

**Acknowledge** how working through the EU has benefited the UK so far. Many states of strategic interest to the UK, such as Commonwealth countries, are supported through EU development cooperation and receive little or no UK bilateral aid

**Bolster** UK engagement at the OECD, UN and International Financial Institutions so it can continue to shape the international agenda and promote development policy coordination

**Continue** working closely with the EU on peace, security and development in fragile states and maintain joint programming arrangements to increase effectiveness and reduce fragmentation



## 10 Adapt to a changing world

Despite the significant global progress that has been achieved, development and humanitarian challenges remain formidable.

Aid fatigue is growing, alongside a rhetoric that privileges national interest over global engagement and multilateralism. The international system is struggling to help the poorest and most vulnerable, and the humanitarian system is failing to meet the needs of people living with conflict and affected by disasters.

In response, donors must be prepared, responsive and politically smart. Standard formulas and templates for aid are not achieving sustainable progress; development is not only a technical problem but a deeply political process. We urgently need development approaches that are grounded in political realities and engage with social, political and economic dynamics, as well as local power relations.

➤ Explore Donor resilience index: [odi.org/donor-resilience-index](https://odi.org/donor-resilience-index)

📖 Read our report: *Time to let go: remaking humanitarian action for the modern era*

### Recommendations

**Ensure** ODA spending from all government departments contributes to poverty reduction and sustainable development

**Do** development differently. Programmes and projects should be politically smart and locally led

**Understand** how different risks – from cyber security to climate change – increase vulnerability and affect development progress

**Recognise** and invest in research-based evidence to inform effective policy and practice

**Pursue** a coherent cross-governmental approach whereby the UK's defence, diplomacy and development policies are aligned



# International development in numbers

**12,000 jobs** in the UK were created by UK direct bilateral development assistance in 2014



Currently, women earn **54%** of what men earn



**1.7 billion** people will gain electricity by 2030 on current trends



**1 in 3 women** are affected by gender-based violence globally



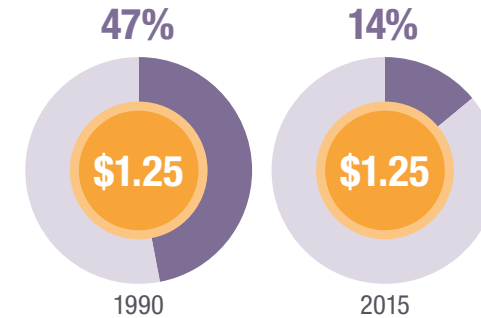
There are **9 million** long-term displaced refugees worldwide



**59 million** deaths from malaria, measles and tuberculosis have been averted since 2000



People in developing countries living on less than \$1.25 a day



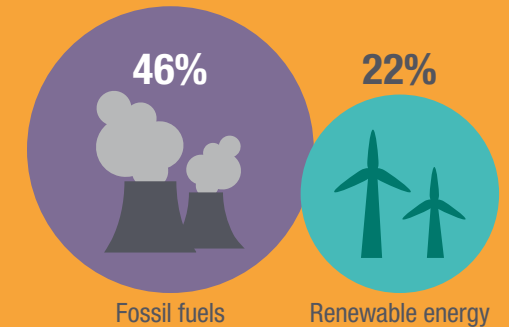
**60%** of the world lack access to a sanitation system that safely captures and manages waste

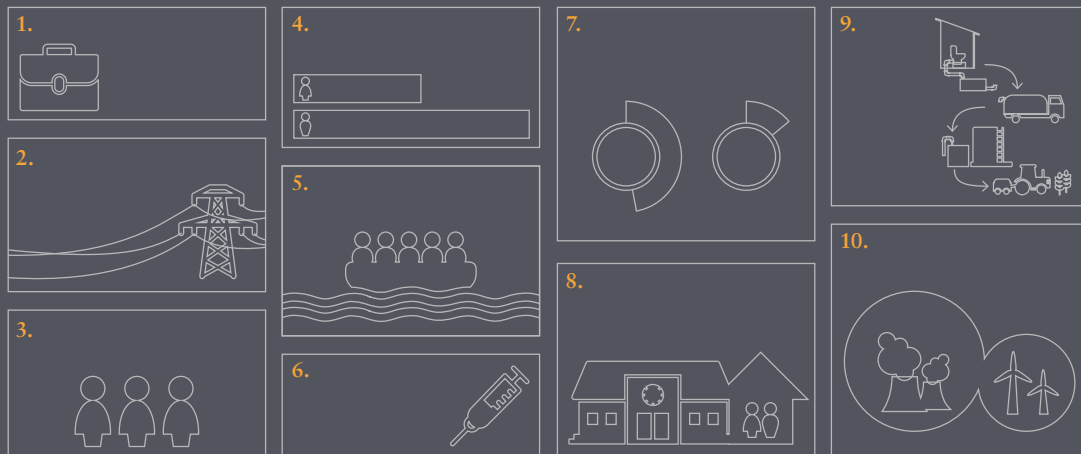


**75%** more countries have equal numbers of boys and girls attending school than in 2000



UK financial support for energy in developing countries





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