# UK government announces major cuts to overseas development aid



In a significant policy shift, the UK government has announced substantial cuts to overseas development aid, reducing spending from 0.5% to 0.3% of the nation’s gross national income, representing a £6 billion decrease. This decision is largely attributed to the need to bolster defence spending, as discussed by Prime Minister Keir Starmer at the United Nations last September when he pledged that the UK would be a “leading contributor to development”.

The implications of this aid reduction have been met with stern criticism from various humanitarian organisations. Dr Alvaro Bermejo, director general of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, stated: “This will cost lives.” The cut is viewed as a betrayal of poorer nations that rely heavily on UK aid for humanitarian assistance, health services, and initiatives aimed at combating the effects of climate change and conflict.

Notably, Anneliese Dodds, the international development minister, resigned in response to this decision, highlighting the contentious atmosphere surrounding UK aid policy. The reduction comes in the wake of similar cuts in the United States under the previous Trump administration, which halted critical funding for various life-saving projects globally, including HIV programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. The overall humanitarian sector is grappling with unprecedented financial challenges as several traditional donor nations—including Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands—also scale back their aid commitments.

Jean-Michel Grand, director of Action Against Hunger UK, remarked on a troubling "radical politicisation of aid" where priorities shift towards national security rather than alleviating poverty. He emphasised that international norms, such as respect for humanitarian law, are at stake.

The UK government’s shift is significant as it marks the lowest level of international aid spending since 1999. Ian Mitchell, senior policy fellow at the Center for Global Development, noted: "The actual amount of non-refugee aid will fall to an all-time low." With the British public still displaying concern for global humanitarian issues, as evidenced by generous donations to organisations like the Disasters Emergency Committee, the aid sector is facing difficult questions about its future role and structure.

Starmer's policy announcement is set to unfold over the next two years, but it has ignited debates about the ethical implications of prioritising “hard power” and defence spending over humanitarian assistance. Helen McEachern, chief executive of Care International UK, described the decision as potentially irreparable harm to the government's reputation and an oversimplified approach that neglects the complexities of international aid, which plays a critical role in ensuring global safety and sustainability.

At the ground level, numerous aid workers have already noted the immediate consequences of funding cuts. In various regions facing humanitarian crises, the cessation of US-funded aid has drastically affected thousands of families and resulted in deep financial and emotional distress. For instance, Joachim Mumba, from the International Federation of Social Workers in Zambia, highlighted how job losses related to the suspension of USAid-funded projects are putting lives at risk due to interrupted access to essential services, including antiretroviral therapy for HIV patients.

The non-profit sector is also expressing deep concern about the cascading effects this policy change may have on global health and security, given that many countries receiving aid face dire challenges in nurturing their own health and humanitarian sectors.

Meanwhile, in domestic policy shifts, Labour appears to be navigating criticism over plans to facilitate home building in green belt areas. Housing Secretary Angela Rayner has unveiled a plan to construct 1.5 million homes in the next five years, aiming to reduce bureaucratic hurdles on certain green belt lands. Critics, including housing experts and local councillors, have alleged that the initiative undermines previous commitments to safeguard these environmentally sensitive areas. Shadow Housing Minister Kevin Hollinrake has accused Labour of prioritising development over rural conservation.

The approach encourages building on "grey belt" land, which includes previously developed areas rather than untouched green spaces. This policy change has prompted responses from environmental advocates such as Chris Packham, who supports the goal of sustainable housing but urges the government to consider alternative methods that respect ecological needs alongside housing demands.

Local communities, particularly in St Albans and Greater Manchester, have expressed their discontent regarding potential housing developments that encroach on valuable green belt land. Residents fear that the loss of green spaces will not only change the character of their towns but may also bring about additional strain on local infrastructures, with little planning or provision for necessary community services and amenities.

As discussions continue at both domestic and international levels regarding aid and housing policies, the outcomes of these developments will likely shape the landscape of UK policy for years to come.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2025/02/25/uk-aid-budget-cuts-threaten-climate-finance-pledge-to-vulnerable-nations-experts-warn/> - This article corroborates the UK's decision to cut its overseas aid budget from 0.5% to 0.3% of national income, which threatens climate finance commitments to developing countries. It also highlights international criticism of this move.
* <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/98/international-development-committee/news/205430/international-development-committee-chair-responds-to-aid-cuts/> - This link supports the announcement by the UK government to reduce its aid budget to fund increased defence spending, with the Chair of the International Development Committee expressing disappointment over the decision.
* <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/breaking-down-prime-minister-starmers-aid-cut> - This blog post explains the implications of reducing the UK's aid budget to 0.3% of GNI, highlighting significant cuts to life-saving programs and the potential for the lowest international aid spending in the G7.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jun/16/uk-aid-budget-cut-could-have-devastating-impact-on-poorest-countries> - Although not directly referencing the current cuts, this article discusses the broader context of UK aid reductions and their impact on global humanitarian efforts, aligning with concerns raised about recent policy shifts.
* <https://www.devex.com/news/uk-aid-budget-cuts-spark-concerns-over-humanitarian-impact-103444> - This article provides insights into the humanitarian implications of UK aid cuts, echoing concerns from various organizations about the potential harm to vulnerable populations worldwide.
* <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-64511134> - This news report covers the UK's plans to increase defence spending while cutting aid, reflecting the broader policy shift and its implications for international development.