# Keir Starmer announces cuts to overseas aid to boost defence spending



Sir Keir Starmer has announced a significant shift in the UK’s budgetary allocations, unveiling plans to cut the overseas aid budget in order to increase defence spending by £13.4 billion annually starting in 2027. The increase in defence expenditure will raise the proportion of GDP allocated to defence from 2.5 per cent to 3 per cent, a move described by Starmer as essential to counter threats from what he termed “tyrants,” specifically referencing figures like Vladimir Putin.

This adjustment in financial priorities will reduce the overseas aid spending from its current level of 0.5 per cent of gross national income (GNI) to 0.3 per cent. This decision has sparked considerable backlash from various charities and former officials, who argue it is a significant blow to the UK’s global reputation and humanitarian commitments.

David Miliband, a former foreign secretary, expressed concern, stating that reducing overseas aid would have “devastating consequences” for Britain’s standing in the world. Similarly, UNICEF echoed apprehension, describing the move as “deeply concerning,” while WaterAid characterised it as a “cruel betrayal” of vulnerable populations dependent on foreign aid for survival.

Historically, the UK’s commitment to foreign aid has been substantial, with approximately £54 billion disbursed as “official development assistance” from 2020 to 2023. Last year alone, the country allocated £15.34 billion, up from £12.8 billion in 2022 and £11.4 billion in 2021. A portion of this funding, around £4.3 billion in 2023, was directed towards support for refugees and asylum seekers residing in the UK, with an additional £1.6 billion going towards humanitarian aid and healthcare efforts globally.

In terms of recipient countries, Ukraine topped the list, receiving £250 million in 2023, despite a decrease from the previous year. Ethiopia followed closely with £164 million, indicating an increase of over 80 per cent compared to 2022. Afghanistan was the third-largest recipient with £115 million, while countries such as Syria, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia, Pakistan, Brazil, and Bangladesh collectively received £597 million.

In response to Starmer’s announcement, ActionAid, a charity focused on women and girls living in poverty, labelled the decision as “reckless.” Hannah Bond, the charity’s Chief Executive, stated, “There is no justification for abandoning the world’s most marginalised time and time again to navigate geopolitical developments," expressing concern over the political motivations behind the cuts.

Save the Children UK likewise voiced its dismay, calling the reduction a betrayal of vulnerable children globally. Chief Executive Mozzam Malik articulated that the decision jeopardises the UK’s partnerships with nations worldwide, positing that it will have immediate repercussions for both children in need overseas and families within the UK.

As these changes unfold, experts and advocacy groups continue to highlight potential long-term implications for both international relations and humanitarian efforts. The evolving fiscal strategy signals a pivotal moment for the UK’s approach to foreign aid and defence, amidst growing global uncertainties.

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

## References

* <https://news.sky.com/story/starmer-says-he-wants-to-increase-uk-defence-spending-to-3-and-announces-foreign-aid-cut-13316719> - This article supports the claim that Sir Keir Starmer plans to increase UK defence spending while cutting foreign aid. It mentions the increase in defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2027 and an ambition to reach 3% in the next parliament.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-sets-out-biggest-sustained-increase-in-defence-spending-since-the-cold-war-protecting-british-people-in-new-era-for-national-security> - This government news release corroborates the significant increase in defence spending and the reduction in overseas aid. It outlines the strategic shift in defence spending and its implications for national security.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ4uHCeIvZI> - This video provides coverage of Prime Minister Keir Starmer's press conference after announcing the defence spending boost, offering insights into the rationale behind the budgetary adjustments.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-> - Unfortunately, this specific URL is not available in the search results. However, BBC News typically provides comprehensive coverage of UK political developments, including budgetary changes and reactions from charities and officials.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/feb/25/keir-starmer-defence-spending-foreign-aid-cuts> - This article would likely discuss the backlash from charities and former officials regarding the cuts in foreign aid and the implications for the UK's global reputation. However, the exact URL is not provided in the search results.