



House of Commons  
International Development  
Committee

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**Covid-19 in developing  
countries: secondary  
impacts: Government  
Response to the  
Eighth Report of the  
Committee, Session  
2019–21**

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**Eighth Special Report of Session  
2019–21**

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## The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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The current staff of the Committee are Grace Annan (Committee Specialist), Philip Aylett (Second Clerk), Gordon Clarke (Clerk), John-Paul Flaherty (Second Clerk), Paul Hampson (Committee Operations Officer), Chloe Jago (Senior Media and Communications Officer), Rowena Macdonald (Committee Operations Officer), Emma Makey (Senior Committee Specialist), Leo Oliveira (Committee Operations Manager), Alison Pickard (Committee Specialist), Jack Tennant (Assistant Inquiry Manager–Apprentice).

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# Eighth Special Report of Session 2019–21

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The International Development Committee published its Eighth Report of Session 2019–21, [Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts](#) (HC 1186) on 26 January 2021. The Government response was received on 25 March 2021 and is appended below.

## Appendix: Government Response

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### Introduction

The Government is grateful for the International Development Committee's (IDC) report "Humanitarian crises monitoring: covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts" on the Government's international response to the covid-19 crisis.

In many developing countries, the indirect health, humanitarian, and economic impacts of the pandemic are being felt more strongly than the direct health impacts, particularly as they are exacerbating pre-existing crises and conflicts. They are reversing years of development gains in areas like poverty reduction, gender equality, girls' education, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. We estimate that covid-19 is likely to have resulted in over 140 million additional people living in extreme poverty in 2020—around 2% of the global population—which is a seven-year reversal in progress to reduce poverty.

The UK is at the forefront of the international response, committing up to £1.3 billion of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) to counter the health, humanitarian and economic impacts of covid-19 and to support efforts to equitably distribute vaccines. The Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has also adapted over 300 existing programmes and worked with leading UK institutions such as the Bank of England to provide technical assistance to developing country governments on their response.

The UK has taken a leading role in the covid-19 global health response, both in addressing the direct health impacts, and keeping essential services going throughout the pandemic. Last year, we hosted the Global Vaccine Summit, raising nearly £6.9 billion to support Gavi the Vaccine Alliance's mission to immunise a further 300 million children, including catching up on immunisations interrupted by covid-19. We are a leading donor to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, which has helped save 38 million lives since 2002, and aims to save 16 million more in the next three years. Our £340 million core contribution to the World Health Organisation between 2020–2024 is a significant uplift in support, which will help to reform it and support its work on global public health.

The UK is one of the largest donors to the covid-19 humanitarian response. As part of the £1.3 billion ODA, we have provided £145 million to emergency UN appeals, including £15 million to the World Food Programme. To tackle the growing threat of famine caused, in part, by covid-19, the Foreign Secretary has launched a 'Call to Action' on famine prevention and we have allocated an additional £180 million to provide aid to more than 7 million people, helping to alleviate extreme hunger. Nick Dyer, the UK's Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs is encouraging other donors to step up.

We are fully committed to supporting developing countries recover from covid-19. To help mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic, we are working with and through the International Financial Institutions to ensure governments and businesses can access affordable financing and advisory support, and to urgently establish safety nets to protect the most vulnerable. With UK support, the multilateral development banks have made over \$200 billion available to developing countries. We have also worked with our G20 partners to extend the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, made a leading contribution of £150 million to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, and committed an additional £2.2 billion loan to the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust Fund to finance concessional IMF lending programmes in the poorest countries.

Despite our efforts, the international response does not yet address the scale and breadth of the crisis, particularly for vulnerable countries. Humanitarian needs in 2021 are the largest on record. The indirect impacts of covid-19 will remain severe and variable. We will use our G7 and COP26 Presidencies to drive a green, fair, and inclusive economic recovery; and take forward the Prime Minister's five-point plan for a new approach to global health security, announced at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) 2020.

## **A strategic approach to tackling the secondary impacts of covid-19**

**1. The reduction of UK ODA from 0.7% to 0.5% of annual GNI from 2021 necessitates an approach which ensures that UK ODA is spent in a more strategic and effective way than ever before. This approach should be reflected in the priorities set and the programmes funded by the FCDO in relation to the secondary impacts of covid-19. Drawing the right lessons from the multiple, significant changes since January 2020 is essential to ensuring an effective, long-term response to the secondary impacts of covid-19. We ask the FCDO to tell us how they or the Government decided on which programmes and themes to prioritise, how they assessed the impact of their decisions to cut funding on recipient countries and populations, and how they intend to strengthen their engagement with NGOs and private suppliers during the implementation of the Government's announced reduction of UK ODA to 0.5% of GNI. (Paragraph 8)**

The impact of the pandemic on the UK economy has forced the Government to take the tough but necessary decision to temporarily reduce how much we spend on ODA, moving to a target of spending 0.5% of Gross National Income (GNI), rather than 0.7%. This is a temporary decision, and we will return to the 0.7% target when the fiscal situation allows.

We remain a world-leading donor and based on current GNI forecasts will spend over £10 billion of ODA in 2021. The Government strongly agrees with the Committee's assessment that now, more than ever, it is essential that UK ODA is spent in the most strategic and effective way possible. We are committed to ensuring the maximum impact and value for money from our aid budget. That is why the Foreign Secretary announced a new strategic framework for how aid is spent across government on 25 November, to ensure a more strategic and integrated approach to our allocation of ODA. This will allow us to drive greater impact from our ODA spending, sharpening the focus of our aid on areas where the UK can make the difference to poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's).

In January this year, the Foreign Secretary completed a cross-Government review of how ODA will be allocated against the government's priorities for 2021 and explained the outcomes of this review in a written statement to Parliament on 26 January. The review has sharpened the focus of our ODA on seven core priorities in the overarching pursuit of poverty reduction: climate change and biodiversity; covid-19 and global health security; girls' education; science, research and technology; open societies and conflict resolution; humanitarian preparedness and response; and trade and economic development. These priorities represent the areas where the UK can make the most difference to the world's most important challenges, both for our citizens and our partners.

As made clear in the Integrated Review, published on 16 March, a new international development strategy will build on these seven strategic priorities and will ensure close alignment of UK aid from 2022 onwards with the Government's major national security and international policy objectives, set out by the Integrated Review.

FCDO relies heavily on the capacity, expertise, resilience and flexibility of our supply partners—both in the private and Civil Society sectors. Without them we cannot deliver UK aid. Throughout the pandemic, FCDO has worked with British charities and businesses to help them manage impacts on their organisations and maintain delivery of essential programmes wherever possible. All existing channels through which Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other partners engaged with the former Department for International Development (DFID) have been maintained, including through our supplier relationship programme and through regular roundtables with Civil Society, such as one Lord Ahmad chaired in December 2020. Further meetings are planned in early 2021.

**2. We support the Foreign Secretary's inclusion of key secondary impacts of covid-19, such as famine, in the new Strategic Framework for UK ODA. However, we are concerned that the framework omits other crucial areas, including an explicit commitment to poverty reduction.** (Paragraph 12)

The Integrated Review, representing the most comprehensive articulation of a foreign policy and national security approach published by a British Government in decades, has made clear that the UK will remain a world-leading international development donor, committed to the global fight against poverty and to achieving the UN SDGs by 2030. The work of UK aid to reduce poverty is central to FCDO's mission, and we remain committed to following the international rules on what constitutes aid set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee.

The seven priorities for UK aid articulated in the new Strategic Framework for ODA represent areas where the UK can make the most difference to the world's most important challenges. They are all set in the overarching pursuit of poverty reduction—consistent with section 1 of the International Development Act 2002—and the delivery of the SDG's.

**3. *To strengthen the UK's approach to tackling the secondary impacts of covid-19 in developing countries, the FCDO should design, apply and publish a long-term strategy relating to covid-19 by the end of the financial year. It should then revisit its 'seven global challenges' outlined in the new Strategic Framework for UK ODA and provide us with a written assessment of how the framework will deliver this strategy, and how the framework will be amended accordingly if necessary. At a multilateral level, the***

***UK should advocate for a joined-up recovery strategy to the pandemic, including using its presidencies of the G7 and COP26 to demonstrate global leadership in this area.***  
(Paragraph 13)

We agree with the need to take a strategic approach to tackling covid-19, and to think medium- and long-term about how best to respond to the impacts (both direct and indirect) that we have seen to date, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable people.

Our strategic approach since the crisis first began was to mobilise quickly—taking a “no regrets” approach to our response—and to work with and through the international system in order to achieve the scale of action and coordination needed to overcome this global crisis. Thanks to UK leadership in recent replenishments, the multilateral development banks were already well prepared and resourced to step up their support in response to this crisis and have since made over \$200 billion available to developing countries to bolster their response. Of the £1.3 billion new UK ODA for tackling covid-19, nearly 90% has been committed to multilateral institutions, including £145 million to a number of UN agencies to support the global health and humanitarian effort and £150 million to the IMF’s Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust to support the economic response. In addition, to meet our commitment on global equitable access to vaccines, the UK is a founder of, and one of the largest bilateral donors to the COVAX Advanced Market Commitment, which is the international structure supporting the provision of covid-19 vaccines to developing countries.

Alongside working at scale and at pace through the international system, we have utilised our bilateral resources strategically in support of vulnerable countries and populations most affected by the pandemic. FCDO has flexed more than 300 existing bilateral programmes to support communities affected by covid-19; modified country portfolios by pausing or delaying some programmes in order to re-direct resources; and identified centrally managed programmes which could be used to channel resources to the response. This demonstrates FCDO’s ability to react quickly and adapt to a crisis of almost unprecedented complexity and uncertainty, which is critical to an effective response.

In addition to our funding and programming, the UK has demonstrated global leadership by working across the international system to ensure that there is a coordinated and coherent response, that quickly and effectively channels resources to where the needs are greatest and builds long term resilience to future shocks. We have played a leading role in securing agreement for an ambitious G20 Finance Action Plan and setting up and extending the G20 Debt Suspension Service Initiative. We have utilised our significant influence to help shape the responses of the World Bank, the World Health Organisation and other key institutions; and used our role in global governance structures like Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations to champion vaccine multilateralism.

We will continue to play a leadership role going forward. We recognise that a unified global response is the only way to bring this pandemic under control and build back better from it. Our G7 and COP26 Presidencies this year present a unique opportunity to foster greater international cooperation on a number of issues including ensuring global covid-19 vaccine supply, strengthening global health security and future pandemic preparedness, and driving a green, fair and inclusive economic recovery; and we are fully committed to their success.



Through the creation of the FCDO—uniting our world class diplomacy and development expertise—the Strategic Framework for ODA and the changes we are making through the Integrated Review, the Government is bringing to bear all our international efforts on its priorities including covid-19. As such, there are no plans for a separate covid-19 strategy.

**4. The pandemic is having a particularly detrimental effect upon already vulnerable groups by reinforcing inequalities and discrimination. To counteract this, we recommend that the FCDO take the following steps:**

- *To undertake and publish impact assessments as quickly as possible (and no later than March 2021).*
- *To collect and publish disaggregated data relating to age, disability and gender in order to provide an effective and inclusive response to the secondary impacts of covid-19 which leaves no-one behind.*
- *To embed DFID’s Data Disaggregation Plan and the work of the Data for Development (D4D) team in the covid-19 response in order to increase the scope for meaningful engagement with local NGOs and community workers working with vulnerable groups during and after the pandemic.*

*The UK should use this data to inform future decision-making on UK ODA, and thus increase its value for money by enhancing the effectiveness of UK ODA and facilitating transparency in accounting for it.* (Paragraph 17)

The most vulnerable people—those already facing humanitarian emergencies, or those already marginalised, including women and girls—are facing severe indirect impacts of covid-19. Working with the World Bank, the IMF and other institutions, we are tracking the impact of the pandemic on living standards and poverty, to target our efforts for the greatest effect. FCDO publishes research it funds on the Research for Development webpage on GOV.UK. Partners funded by FCDO have been publishing rapid assessments of the impacts of covid-19, which have given rigorous evidence of how the pandemic is affecting already vulnerable groups by reinforcing inequalities and discrimination.

For example, recent research on rural households in Kenya found declining employment opportunities, especially for young people, with one-third of agricultural small- and medium-sized enterprises surveyed saying they hired less labour due to covid-19. Findings also highlighted a worsening gender gap as the increase in unpaid care responsibilities and school closures have pushed women out of the productive economy, erasing decades of advancement in women’s economic empowerment. There are further implications for the ability of rural economies to effectively recover from the covid-19 crisis, risking eroding years of progress in improving access to finance, services, and markets for farmers. Drying revenue streams and capital markets have led to a cash crunch, negatively impacting the innovative business models that have fuelled progress in this area.

FCDO is implementing a proportionate and strategic approach to monitoring, evaluating, and learning from our covid-19 response, with the primary aims of public accountability, learning to inform ongoing decisions and longer-term learning about how to respond effectively to emergencies. We are working with donors, multilaterals and other partners

to support their own independent evaluations of relevant streams of work, as well as initiating our own evaluative activity, including programme evaluations, light-touch thematic and process evaluations and cross-cutting strategic evaluations.

FCDO will continue to invest in collecting data which allows us to understand the differential impacts of the pandemic, enabling us to design and monitor responses which are relevant, inclusive and effective. FCDO has recognised, from the outset, the need for disaggregated data on the social and economic impact of the pandemic. A new FCDO programme, led by the Institute for Development Studies, supports a portfolio of rapid data collection and analysis activities to provide us with insights (both quantitative and qualitative) into how the pandemic is affecting poor and marginalised groups, including people with disabilities.

In addition, FCDO supported the World Bank Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building, which is a multi-donor fund established to strengthen the capacity of statistical systems in developing countries. It aimed to improve the capacity of developing countries to produce and use statistics to support effective decision-making for development and has committed \$1.2 million to support two areas—high-frequency phone surveys and use of alternative data sources—that address urgent covid-19 impacts. The projects are monitoring the direct and indirect impacts of covid-19, especially on poor and vulnerable populations in a timely and cost-effective manner.

Regarding the impacts on women and specifically on violence against women, FCDO is supporting the UN women-led flagship programme on gender data, Making Every Woman and Girl Count and the joint UN Programme on Violence Against Women data. These programmes are working with developing country governments to improve the production, availability, accessibility and use of quality data and statistics on gender equality and violence against women and girls. The former is supporting rapid assessment surveys to understand the gendered impacts of covid-19 across a number of countries.

FCDO has specific internal guidance on inclusive data in our covid-19 response and recovery, noting both the importance of disaggregating data and some of the methodological challenges for data collection presented by covid-19. This complements internal guidance on meaningful engagement with local NGOs and community workers working with vulnerable groups through our Beneficiary Engagement Smart Guide which provides key practical tips and considerations for quality beneficiary engagement.

In addition to building inclusive data practices and community engagement across our portfolio, we are also using the data and research discussed above to help target our programmes towards the local organisations and community workers that work with, or represent, groups being particularly impacted by covid-19. For example, from the data and research FCDO has funded, we know that the covid-19 pandemic is increasing domestic violence, maternal mortality and the burden of care on women.

Local women's rights organisations have been, and continue to be, among the first responders on the front line and are able to reach vulnerable women and girls. That is why we have provided long-term support to women's rights organisations on the frontline through our contribution to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women. In September 2020, the UK announced an additional £1 million to this UN Trust Fund on top of our existing £21 million contribution for the new covid-19 Crisis Response Window.



Emerging evidence supports the assumption that people with disabilities face particular vulnerabilities with respect to both the direct and indirect impacts of covid-19. Through our new Disability Capacity Building Programme (April 2020 to 2024), we aim to support the capacity of the disability movement to be more inclusive and have a greater ability to hold governments to account. One of the programme partners—the Disability Rights Fund—has a dedicated pot of funding for disabled persons’ organisations to help them advocate for the rights of people with disabilities within covid-19 responses.

FCDO’s increasing engagement with local actors during covid-19 is delivering dual benefits: a) strengthening the local organisations’ capacity to use data—critical for evidence-based policy for responding to the pandemic; and b) enabling FCDO to reach communities impacted by covid-19 that it would not be able to otherwise.

**5. We welcome the Government’s intention to reduce the number of expensive mega-contracts for the delivery of UK-ODA funded projects. *To ensure that NGOs are able to continue essential work with vulnerable communities, the FCDO should replenish funds used by NGOs to tackle the impact of covid-19 in place of other activities. Furthermore, the FCDO should ensure that it provides more direct funding for local, frontline NGOs and its partner organisations as part of the greater flexibility in designing projects mentioned in the Foreign Secretary’s letter to us on 2 December 2020. We urge the Government to increase the effectiveness of development programmes by incentivising delivery partners to include local NGOs in the planning, co-ordination and decision-making on the covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, we ask the FCDO to update us on the lessons it learned from its programme “Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP) Innovation Labs” which ran from 2014–2019 and aimed at improving responsiveness to communities through direct engagement with local NGOs.*** (Paragraph 26)

NGOs have played a critical role in the humanitarian response to the pandemic. We have allocated significant funding directly to international and UK-based charities since the start of the pandemic, to fulfil their critical role in supporting vulnerable communities with the humanitarian impact of the covid-19 virus. This includes:

- £18 million through the Rapid Response Facility to charities who have supported the basic needs of some of the world’s most vulnerable people, including in Yemen, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Mali, Somalia, Chad, Niger and CAR.
- £10 million to match donations from the British public to the Disasters Emergency Committee’s Coronavirus Appeal, funding the work of 14 UK aid agencies to tackle covid-19 among displaced people including Rohingya in Bangladesh.
- An additional £1.6 million for the Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) Network to support humanitarian organisations to manage covid-related information, build their capacity to respond to the crisis, and communicate facts to communities.
- £4.2 million through UK Aid Direct round 5, which has been specifically earmarked to rapidly respond to covid-19. The rest of the money allocated through this funding round is planned to have a strong focus on the longer-term impacts of covid-19.

- Through our hygiene partnership with Unilever, over £25 million has been allocated to UK and international charities, including WaterAid and Action Aid, to deliver important hygiene messages to vulnerable communities.

In addition, the UK is the largest donor to the Start Fund, a UK-based and NGO-managed pooled fund for humanitarian response. The UK contributed £3.3 million to the dedicated Start Fund covid-19 in April 2020, which provides rapid funding to NGOs to address neglected or underfunded aspects of the broader covid-19 crisis at a local level.

As mentioned earlier, we took the decision to commit much of our initial support for the covid-19 response through the multilaterals, but much of this work was delivered on the ground by expert NGOs. In addition, we have worked with them to ensure that funding is channelled to NGOs and their other recipients as quickly as possible. We are pleased that, following our lobbying, agencies such as UNICEF are simplifying their funding processes.

We recognise the unique role of local NGOs and their partner organisations as they are attuned to community needs and able to respond quickly to these needs on the ground. A key aim of our funding for Civil Society is to support the capacity of local and national NGOs so that they can be strong, self-reliant and powerful development actors. Recent examples of our commitment to working with local NGOs include: a 10-year partnership with Comic Relief focused on building the capacity and sustainability of locally led NGOs in Ghana, Zambia and Malawi; our Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience Programme Facility in Myanmar; and community partnership, capacity development support and impact grants to local organisations through UK Aid Direct.

The department monitored and assessed the Disasters and Emergencies Preparedness Programme (DEPP) throughout its lifetime, including through Annual Reviews that are publicly available, an external evaluation conducted by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, and through an internal DFID review. As with all innovative programmes, the DEPP has demonstrated some strengths and weaknesses. The key strengths included tackling pertinent issues such as capacity building of local preparedness actors. However, there were some issues, including long delivery chains with high administrative costs due to the complexity of the programme.

## Non-covid related healthcare

**6. Covid-19 has affected healthcare systems in developing countries negatively. The urgency with which countries have had to respond has diverted already scarce resources towards covid-related care at the expense of other essential healthcare. This has caused disruption to routine vaccinations and treatments and is storing up years of future problems as well as a potential reversal of hard-won gains in global health. *The FCDO should show global leadership in its commitment to global health, as outlined in the Strategic Framework for ODA, through maintaining its existing commitments to routine immunisation programmes and other essential healthcare across developing countries. It should further tell us how it assesses the impact of covid-19 on healthcare and decides to mitigate it. Our interim findings report recommended that the Government should publish a multi-year, cross-departmental global health strategy, to map out how UK policy can deliver a strategic and integrated approach to strengthening global health. In the midst of a pandemic, this is needed more than ever, and we reiterate our previous recommendation. Furthermore, this global health strategy should set out how the UK***

*intends to use levers at multilateral and bilateral levels to achieve its aims, how this ensures progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and how the strategy will reach the most marginalised and vulnerable communities. Whilst we commend the Government’s response to covid-19, we are concerned that several of the measures listed in the FCDO’s submission in October 2020—the £80 million commitment to the Global Financing Facility and the £400 million commitment to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative—pre-date the outbreak of covid-19 and ask the FCDO to provide us with an updated list, which sets out the Government’s funding for healthcare since the outbreak of covid-19.* (Paragraph 36)

The UK has played a leading role in the global health response. Our support aims to balance the demand of responding to direct health impacts of the pandemic whilst also maintaining the delivery of, and access to, affordable essential services for health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. This is critical for ending preventable deaths of mothers, new-borns and children by 2030.

To assess the impact of covid-19 on healthcare, FCDO commissions and synthesises the latest evidence from academia, development agencies and NGOs to help inform decision making. This includes monthly commissions for data on nutrition services, regular reviews of data on health service availability, utilisation and disruption, and regular updates of the latest evidence of the impact on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

While the Government has no immediate plans to publish a global health strategy, we will continue to review our approach and consider how it should evolve in light of lessons from the pandemic and the outcomes from the Integrated Review. The Government remains committed to driving progress on global health, including through this year’s G7 Presidency; its commitments on ending preventable deaths of mothers, new-borns and children by 2030; leading the way in eradicating Ebola and malaria; and the Prime Minister’s five-point plan to strengthen global health security.

Global health remains one of the UK’s priorities, focusing on supporting healthier and more resilient populations in developing countries and overcoming covid-19. The breakdown of 2020 spend on global health will be published this autumn in the UK Statistics on International Development Aid Spend final publication and the provisional 2020 UK Aid Spend will be published this spring.

**7. At a time of heightened need, it is more important than ever that healthcare is provided in a way that uses stretched resources as efficiently as possible through integrating responses to multiple health challenges. As part of a global health strategy, the FCDO should work with developing countries to reduce financial barriers to accessing healthcare for communities, prioritising low-cost approaches to lifesaving treatments and incorporating the feedback of communities more effectively into their response. Furthermore, the FCDO should advocate for the integration of the various streams of healthcare provision even more in its work with partner organisations to help accomplish an effective response to other diseases alongside covid-19 during the pandemic.** (Paragraph 45)

The covid-19 pandemic has exposed weaknesses in health systems globally. This highlights the importance of the UK’s continued commitment to achieving Universal Health Coverage as part of our manifesto commitment to end preventable maternal, new-born

and child deaths, and to protect people from health threats. This includes our support to strengthening health systems to provide quality essential services for all without financial hardship. We work to increase coordination around health system strengthening at the global and country level through UK positions on Global Health Initiatives and multilateral boards.

Our work supports countries to identify opportunities to raise more domestic resources for health and tackle inefficiencies and inequity within the health sector. For example, our investments to the Global Financing Facility, the World Health Organisation, the World Bank and the Global Health Initiatives enable technical assistance to countries to implement health financing reforms. To ensure coordination by multilateral organisations on health financing, the UK is engaged with the health financing accelerator as part of the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Wellbeing.

The UK also advocates for and takes an integrated approach to strengthening health systems and ensuring efficient use of resources. For example, our funding to the Global Financing Facility supports multisectoral investment cases in partner countries, focused on strengthening essential health services, tackling malnutrition, and increasing the amount and efficiency of health funding. In some countries, such as Bangladesh, this has also included links to girls' education. The Global Financing Facility is now planning new grants for essential services which will work alongside the rollout of covid-19 vaccines. The grants will be linked to World Bank loans for vaccine rollout but will be focused on strengthening the broader health systems required, coordinated by the ACT- Accelerator.

The UK's investments include approaches to incorporate community feedback. For example, support for community systems and responses is a key component of the Global Fund's work on HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria, aligning community systems and responses with formal health systems to maximise impact and to build resilience.

To enable low-cost approaches to lifesaving treatments, the UK has supported work on market shaping to unlock price reductions and speed up the rollout of new health products. Since 2010, market shaping interventions have delivered at least a halving in the price of polio and pentavalent vaccines, antiretrovirals for HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria medicines and contraceptive implants.

Our international covid-19 response has sought to balance the demands of responding to the pandemic while maintaining quality delivery of existing essential health services, including for disease prevention and control efforts on malaria. Funding to the Global Fund and Gavi the Vaccine Alliance keeps essential activities going, such as bed net distribution and immunisation. Examples of programmatic adaptations to mitigate the impact on other diseases include bed-nets to protect against malaria being distributed door-to-door to minimise the need for people to travel to central distribution points. Our country-based health experts have supported governments to adapt the delivery of essential services and make them covid secure.

## Economy and livelihoods

**8. We welcome the UK's role in extending the G20's Debt Service Suspension Initiative to 30 June 2021, the measure to temporarily suspend debt service payments for the poorest countries. As the majority of these outstanding debts are governed by English**

**law, the UK Government is in a unique position to send a global message on debt service payments by suspending or cancelling repayments. We urge the Government to extend the Debt Service Suspension Initiative beyond June 2021 and to use its influence to persuade private lenders to join this scheme. Furthermore, the Government should consider options for the cancellation of debt and provide this Committee with the rationale behind its decisions on debt relief versus debt cancellation for low- and middle-income countries.** (Paragraph 51)

The Government is deeply concerned about the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the finances of developing countries, especially its effect on debt levels. The UK has worked closely with G7, G20 and Paris Club partners to agree an unprecedented response from official bilateral creditors. The G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), launched in May 2020, is available to 73 of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries. So far, 45 countries have requested to access the DSSI and over \$5.7 billion of repayments have been suspended, creating vital fiscal space and enabling them to increase support to their citizens and economies. The UK has led by example, implementing suspensions for 11 countries under the G20 DSSI and making a leading contribution of £150 million to the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, which provides relief on debt payments due to the IMF from eligible countries.

In November 2020, the G20 agreed to examine the need for a further extension by the time of the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in April 2021. The UK will work with G7 and G20 partners to take a coordinated view on a further extension of the DSSI, drawing on the advice of the IMF and World Bank.

While the DSSI has provided vital fiscal space for the poorest countries to respond to the pandemic, the UK has recognised, alongside other G20 countries, that where countries face an unsustainable debt situation, a more comprehensive debt treatment may be required. Therefore, in November 2020, the G20 and Paris Club agreed a historic "Common Framework for Future Debt Treatment beyond the DSSI", which for the first time brings together traditional Paris Club creditors and emerging G20 creditors to deliver coordinated debt treatments on a case-by-case basis. The first countries have already submitted requests to benefit from debt restructuring under the Common Framework, and we will work closely with our international partners to support timely and comprehensive debt resolutions in these cases.

The terms of any restructuring under the Common Framework, including whether relief is provided via debt cancellation or debt rescheduling, will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the collective assessment of creditors, informed by the Debt Sustainability Analysis carried out by the IMF and World Bank. In cases where the UK is a creditor, Her Majesty's Treasury follow the advice of the IMF and World Bank and draw on the expertise of FCDO's and UKEF's networks of economists to take a view on the level and terms of debt relief required. The UK Government recognises the benefits of debt cancellation for developing countries and is willing to cancel debts where required in order to restore debt sustainability.

The Chancellor and other G20 Finance Ministers have repeatedly called for private sector creditors to participate in the DSSI on a voluntary basis and subject to requests from borrowers. For example, when launching the DSSI, G20 Finance Ministers called on private creditors, working through the Institute of International Finance, to participate



in the initiative on comparable terms. The Institute of International Finance subsequently developed “Terms of Reference for Voluntary Private Sector Participation in the G20/Paris Club DSSI”, with the aim of facilitating voluntary suspension of repayments where requested. However, only three borrowers have made requests to private sector creditors for debt service suspensions and no payments have been suspended thus far.

Private creditor participation under the DSSI was always intended to be voluntary, in order to protect market access for eligible countries. However, under the Common Framework, countries that benefit from restructuring their debts to bilateral creditors are expected to secure comparable treatment from their private sector creditors. To support developing countries to engage with their creditors, the FCDO has committed £1 million to the African Legal Support Facility, which specialises in helping African countries to negotiate with creditors on a level playing field.

The DSSI and Common Framework are open to 73 of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable countries. In cases where countries that are not eligible for these initiatives seeks to restructure their bilateral external debts, the usual Paris Club process remains available.

**9. Livelihoods in developing countries have been devastated by the pandemic. Workers in economically precarious sectors, such as agriculture, are especially vulnerable to the economic shock and instability caused by covid-19. We believe that protecting these jobs is central to enabling people to lift themselves out of poverty. We request that the FCDO write to us on a quarterly basis, outlining how the Government’s economic and trade interventions which form part of the Strategic Framework for ODA will strengthen the economic resilience of low-income groups in developing countries. We ask the Government to fund long-term, multi-year programmes, designed to foster employment opportunities, and ask the FCDO to work closely with recipient countries, aid partners and local NGOs in identifying those activities which have the greatest, long-term beneficial impact on the livelihoods of vulnerable people, and to allocate resources accordingly to support such activities.** (Paragraph 62)

The pandemic has exacerbated an already worsening global picture, where progress on growth and poverty reduction had slowed. The indirect impacts of covid-19 have been severe for the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people, with the effect most marked on the poorest and most vulnerable. As the Committee notes, this is particularly marked in agriculture where almost two-thirds of the world’s poorest people work. The pandemic has also contributed to a worsening of the gender poverty gap. The newly poor are more urban, likely to work in informal sectors, and also live across middle income countries in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

FCDO has taken a number of steps to mitigate this impact. We agree that, in determining the design and implementation of these ODA-funded programmes, we should work closely with recipient organisations, aid partners and local NGOs. We have taken this approach wherever appropriate as indicated in the examples below.

We note that the Committee welcomed the Vulnerable Supply Chains Facility (VSCF), which seeks to enable vulnerable people and supply chains to recover from and remain resilient to the economic and social impacts of covid-19, by leveraging the reach and influence of responsible businesses through partnerships in the agriculture and garments



sector, including with NGOs. VSCF interventions are tailored to meeting the needs of women through health awareness and gender-based violence programming, ensuring a safe and sustainable future for the female garment workers. VSCF is also an example of fashion retailers working with suppliers to address the impact of covid-19 in their supply chains.

In food and agriculture, we have adapted many of our programmes to address covid-19 impacts, including supporting smaller agribusinesses to stay in the market, protect jobs along supply chains, diversify production, reduce costs and use new digital platforms and technologies. For example, our Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness programme has worked with Small and Medium Enterprises in Uganda and Nepal to digitise parts of their value chains in sesame, beans, vegetable and dairy. This has helped them to cope with the immediate effects of covid-19 related interruptions and drops in business activity and demand, as well as leapfrogging innovations. The programme has also helped dairy value chain businesses in Nepal to access local financial support to survive the economic shock and supported them to rapidly develop new products, for example ones with longer shelf lives.

The UK-supported Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) has helped the All-Bangladesh Farmers' Society national network to set up 57 call centres between farmers, input dealers and traders and keeping food supply chains open, and farm gate prices fair. About 30,000 small-scale farmers have benefitted (46% women), with the potential to reach many more through other projects that are replicating the approach. GAFSP has also stepped up in highly fragile contexts and has helped some of the most affected people cope better, shored up livelihoods and connected farmers sustainably to markets.

UK support is also helping businesses survive and respond to the crisis by increasing understanding of the opportunities of producing covid-19-related goods, such as where demand is coming from, as well as where to source the necessary inputs. In Ethiopia, our support to removing bottlenecks for five companies succeeded in existing jobs being saved and unlocking production capacity of 100,000 face masks and 24,000 litres of sanitiser per day.

FCDO is currently reviewing its spending plans for financial year 2021/22, including its support to strengthening the economic resilience of low-income groups through multi-year programmes.

**10. *While we welcome the appointment of a Special Envoy for Famine Prevention and Humanitarian Affairs and the £119 million aid package to support food security, we ask the FCDO to update us on a quarterly basis on the performance and achievements of its measures to counter food insecurity. We also recommend that the UK Government renew its nutrition commitments, which expired at the end of 2020, as a matter of urgency. We further ask the Government to expand funding for programmes addressing malnutrition and food insecurity, especially those addressing the issues through cash transfers as they can help different groups to respond effectively to the secondary impacts of covid-19 according to their individual needs.*** (Paragraph 71)

Since the IDC inquiry, as part of the Famine Prevention ‘Call to Action’, FCDO has pledged further UK aid, bringing the total additional funding pledged since September to £180 million. This funding is focused on tackling food insecurity and helping other critical life-saving sectors, providing aid to more than 7 million vulnerable people including populations in Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, the Central African Republic, the Sahel and Sudan. The Special Envoy Nick Dyer continues to be active in raising additional funds for the most severe crisis and engaging in diplomatic lobbying to unlock humanitarian access constraints. Since the IDC hearing in late November, the Special Envoy has visited north east Nigeria to meet communities at risk of famine; Saudi Arabia to meet Government counterparts and engage particularly on the Yemen crisis; supported the co-launch of the Global Humanitarian Needs Overview in London with Mark Lowcock, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; and external events and engagement in New York and Geneva.

Over the next couple of months, the Special Envoy will be focusing on driving Call to Action objectives of raising additional funds for the most severe crisis, and humanitarian diplomacy on protection and access constraints which cause food insecurity and famine, through a number of platforms. These platforms include the Foreign and Development Track of the UK’s G7 Presidency, where food insecurity and famine prevention are key themes. Our UNSC Presidency included a focus on accountability for access violations which cause hunger and we continue to use our permanent seat in the UNSC and elected position in the UN Human Rights Council to drive this agenda. Food insecurity will also be part of the UK’s COP26 Presidency.

The Foreign Secretary’s ‘Call to Action’ on Famine Prevention deploys FCDO’s diplomatic and humanitarian expertise together to address the most acute food insecurity crises where there is significant famine risk as a result of the current perfect storm of conflict, covid-19 and climate change. This complements existing work by FCDO on chronic food insecurity and livelihoods aimed at responding to longer-term, underlying causes.

In addition to the Famine Prevention Call to Action, the Department remains committed to supporting resilience and early action through existing development programmes in the most fragile, vulnerable and food insecure geographies. We have led the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP) to commit all available funding to an immediate food security response to covid-19 secondary effects. GAFSP supports the poorest and most affected countries. In Yemen, despite the extraordinarily challenging environment, the GAFSP-supported project has reached more than 106,000 rural

households with support including inputs and livestock to help resume crop and livestock production. The project has resulted in increased production, incomes and self-reliance, improved access to services and strengthened social cohesion in targeted communities.

We agree with the IDC’s recommendations that cash transfers can help different groups to respond effectively to the secondary impacts of covid-19 according to their individual needs. Cash transfers have a strong evidence base supporting their use as a more cost-effective intervention and the UK has a long-standing focus on cash within our humanitarian policy. Cash can link humanitarian assistance to national social protection systems, bringing humanitarian cash into more harmonised, coordinated, predictable and efficient approaches to protracted crises, and is an important way we can support people in addressing impacts of covid-19. The UK committed at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 to “more than double its use of cash-based approaches in crisis situations from current levels.” In financial year 19/20, over £338 million of UK funding was spent on cash and voucher assistance in humanitarian crisis, and over £250 million on emergency cash grants to affected people alone.

Prevention and treatment of malnutrition remains important for our work to improve global health. The Department is undertaking an internal review in response to the spending review announcement. We will update as soon as is feasible on the implications of this for any new commitment to nutrition.

## Women and girls

**11. We are concerned by the likely increase in gender inequality following the outbreak of covid-19 and its potential impact upon programmes promoting gender equality. In its response to this report, the FCDO should set out how they have implemented their “Smart Rules”, their operating framework for better and gendered programme delivery. We further recommend that the FCDO refresh DFID’s Strategic Vision for Gender Equality to form a consistent and coherent policy context for all relevant initiatives. In particular, the FCDO should convene an external panel of experts to challenge its performance on the Strategic Vision as announced by its predecessor DFID when it launched the initiative. We further ask the Government to review the role of the Gender Equality Delivery Board in holding the Department to account for the implementation of the Strategic Vision, and to appoint a successor Special Envoy on Gender Equality and align that role with the Strategic Vision and the work of Delivery Board. The Government should further tell us if their covid-19 response incorporates measures to counter the rise in unpaid care by promoting gender-responsive trade and investment policies which protect public investment in childcare, health, education and water and sanitation facilities.** (Paragraph 79)

We are also concerned that the impact of covid-19 on women and girls has been disproportionate and that the crisis has exacerbated many of the challenges that they already faced. FCDO is working to ensure the needs and priorities of women and girls are central to every aspect of our response. For example, we provided an additional £10 million to UNFPA as part of our wider support to the UN Humanitarian Response Plan, to address reproductive health supply shortages caused by the pandemic, and help scale up reporting, protection, and support services for women and girls affected by the surge

in gender-based violence. This contributed towards UNFPA reaching an estimated 10 million women and 5 million young people in 52 countries with services, information and supplies.

We also know that success will depend on putting women's rights organisations at the heart of our response. That is why we have provided long-term support to women's rights organisations on the frontlines, including through our contribution to the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women. As mentioned earlier, in September last year, the UK announced an additional £1 million to the UN Trust Fund for the new covid-19 Crisis Response Window, which is placing survivors at the heart of the pandemic response. Furthermore, the UK Government put £18 million towards the Rapid Response Fund's response to covid-19, which launched on 7 April 2020, calling for proposals, and incorporated two key principles: (1) Inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalised, to leave no one behind and that (2) protection, gender and safeguarding should be mainstreamed across all programmes. Proposals were selected based on their inclusion and whether they aimed to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups, including prevention and response to gender based violence.

The UK continues to highlight in international fora the increased care burden faced by women and girls due to covid-19. We are also promoting the role the private sector can play to support its workers, and have produced a [report](#) in which the 'Work and Opportunities for Women' Programme presents an overview of current knowledge about unpaid care in the sector, and shares findings from primary research conducted with garment workers in 2019. This report is based on pre-covid-19 research but our ongoing work with the private sector will build on this to incorporate a covid lens.

FCDO sponsored the GenderSmart Investing Summit which had 'Investing for Resilience and Recovery' as one of its key themes. The summit held a session on investing in the care economy, noting that the pandemic has highlighted the importance of investment in this sector, which is now being recognised as a lifeline for the wellbeing of all. The session explored the spectrum of care economy solutions (for-profit, non-profit, low-tech, high-tech, requiring debt, equity, or blended capital) and focused on what good looks like in the ever-growing landscape of investable ventures.

We continue to champion the role of investors and corporates in tackling unpaid care, recognising that investment in this sector has huge growth opportunities alongside human development benefits.

Social protection is a core part of FCDO's response to address the indirect impacts of the covid-19 crisis. Social protection can reduce women's and girls' vulnerability to shocks and prevent negative coping strategies and can be effective in delivering gender equality objectives. Through our Gender Responsive Social Protection programme and our dedicated covid-19 advisory facility (co-funded with German Development Cooperation) the "Social Protection Approaches to covid-19: Expert Advice Helpline"— we are providing expert advice to the FCDO country network, governments and partner organisations on how social protection systems can be better at delivering gender equality and disability inclusion objectives. An integral part of this is how social protection can better support women and girls, including mitigating the impacts of women's increased unpaid care responsibilities resulting from the covid crisis.

As part of the merger, FCDO will retain and build on the Strategic Vision, taking full advantage of our diplomatic and development levers and reflecting new challenges—including covid-19—and opportunities. The Strategic Vision, together with the National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security, continues to reflect and respond to the UK government’s ambitions on gender equality, and we do not see its core ambitions changing. The challenges of advancing girls’ education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, women’s political and economic empowerment, and ending violence against women and girls are as acute now, if not more so, as when we published the strategy in 2018.

Following the merger, FCDO is developing a new Programme Operating Framework. This will include a new rule that all programmes and policies will consider the impact of their interventions on gender equality, disability inclusion and other excluded groups. This will build on our legal commitment to consider gender equality in all UK development assistance, under the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014. The Equality Act’s [Public Sector Equality Duty](#), applies to all FCDO functions, and requires public authorities to have “due regard” for the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimization and advance equality of opportunity.

Alicia Herbert has been appointed Director of the FCDO’s new Education, Gender and Equality Directorate and Special Envoy for Gender Equality. This role covers all aspects of FCDO gender equality policies as well as supporting and amplifying the Government’s domestic and international work. She will also work to promote the inclusion of a gender perspective across FCDO strategy, policies and programmes, ensuring accountability for delivery including on the Strategic Vision. Alicia will chair the G7 Working Group on Gender Equality and Women’s and Girls’ Empowerment, which will bring together director-level counterparts from across the G7 to negotiate the proposed gender equality language and outcomes for the Foreign & Development Track, ahead of the ministerial meeting.

**12. Gender-based violence has increased during the pandemic, with the risk especially acute for groups such as adolescents, migrants, refugees and displaced people. At the same time, access to support services has become more difficult. Therefore, it is disappointing that a specific commitment to the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence is absent from the FCDO’s revised framework for UK ODA. We recommend that the FCDO use the UK’s presidency of the G7 and COP 26, as well as its co-presidency of the Generation Equality Action Coalition, to publish a list of objectives which it will seek to achieve in combatting gender-based violence during its tenure and to set out how it will monitor progress on achieving them. It should also ringfence existing funding commitments to projects which seek to tackle gender-based violence. The FCDO should ensure that delivery partners administering programmes against gender-based violence can account for how their work is reaching survivors of gender-based violence and their support systems.** (Paragraph 85)

We are proud that the UK is recognised as a global leader in tackling gender-based violence, including pioneering approaches through our What Works to Prevent Violence programme that have shown reductions in violence of around 50%. The Government is deeply concerned about the surge in gender-based violence around the world during the covid-19 pandemic and remains steadfast in its commitment to prevent violence and support survivors.



This year, the UK is further stepping up our international leadership on gender-based violence, which we recognised as a priority due to the worrying surge in violence brought about by the covid-19 pandemic. As co-leader of the Generation Equality Action Coalition on gender-based violence, the UK is working with our co-leads to develop ambitious actions and targets that will deliver real change over the next five years. These will be published at the Generation Equality Forum in June, alongside leaders' commitments and an accountability framework to track progress.

The UK remains a committed partner of the Call to Action on Protection from gender-based violence in Emergencies, a multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2013 to fundamentally transform the way gender-based violence is addressed in humanitarian contexts. The UK is in the process of setting new ambitious commitments to support implementation of the new 2021–2025 Call to Action Roadmap, launched at UNGA in September 2020, and we continue to play a leading role as co-chair of the States and Donors Working Group.

We have reoriented FCDO's programmes during the pandemic so that survivors of gender-based violence can continue to access support. For example, in Kenya, we are supporting the State Department for Gender to increase the capacity of the national helpline and support a coordinated approach to services for survivors; and in Nepal, we are financing Women and Children Service Centres across the country.

As mentioned earlier, the impact of the global pandemic on the UK economy has forced us to take the tough but necessary decision to temporarily move to a target of spending 0.5% of GNI on ODA, rather than 0.7%. We are now working through the implications of these changes for individual programmes. The Foreign Secretary has set out seven core priorities for the UK's aid budget, of which girls' education is one. As a key barrier to girls' education and a widespread human rights violation in itself, gender-based violence will remain a priority for FCDO.

**13. Access to sexual and reproductive health services is an essential element of healthcare, providing lifesaving services to women and girls and empowering them to make choices about their futures. *The FCDO should publish an assessment of the effectiveness of current UK-funded programmes on the provision of sexual and reproductive health services in developing countries and should ringfence funding for the provision of reversible contraception to women and girls. It should also explicitly integrate the pledge to end preventable deaths of mothers, new-borns and children by 2030 into the list of global challenges in its new Strategic Framework for UK ODA.***  
(Paragraph 90)

We regularly review all UK-funded programmes, including sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes, and make annual reviews available publicly via the Development Tracker website.

FCDO takes an integrated approach to our programming on sexual and reproductive health and rights in order to meet a wide range of women's reproductive health needs—for example providing a woman with holistic care for gender-based violence, HIV, post-abortion care and family planning. Ringfencing funding for specific contraceptive methods could provide unnecessary limitations of choice for women and decrease integration between services. Our approach is evidence-based and seeks to give women



control over their own bodies and lives. Our investment in sexual and reproductive health and rights includes programmes that aim to increase access to quality voluntary family planning information, services and supplies.

Global health remains a strategic priority. As part of our approach to global health, we will build on our existing efforts to end the preventable deaths of mothers, new-born babies and children by 2030. The ODA strategic framework highlights the importance of transformative global health investments, greater international collaboration, and stronger health systems. These are all vital to our efforts to end preventable deaths.

**14. We welcome the FCDO’s continued commitment to prioritising girls’ education in UK ODA funding. However, we are concerned that the pandemic will push back progress in this area, with rising poverty levels forcing girls out of school and remote teaching techniques unable to reach key cohorts of girls of school age. *To ensure that this commitment leads to high-quality education for girls, the FCDO should base future funding decisions upon data disaggregated by gender and age to assess impact. They should further ensure that their measures are adapted sufficiently to support girls who are hard to reach and at risk of leaving education permanently, including through close work with local NGOs to identify effective, local approaches for educating marginalised girls.*** (Paragraph 97)

FCDO works to ensure decisions are evidence-informed, data-driven, and equitable, prioritising the most marginalised children, especially girls wherever possible. The UK champions the right of all girls to 12 years of quality education, prioritising key stages in learning, such as the transition from primary to secondary education. We will continue to do so with respect to covid-19, the impacts of which will adversely affect girls, with millions of girls from pre-primary to secondary school at risk of not returning to school once the crisis has passed.

The UK has set out two ambitious global targets: 1. to see 40 million more girls into primary and secondary education and 2. a third more girls able to read by the age of 10, in low- and middle-income countries by 2025. These two objectives are complementary and mutually reinforcing. We know that girls are far more likely to transition to, stay in and benefit from secondary school if they have mastered ‘foundational’ skills including basic literacy and numeracy by the end of primary school. By tackling literacy skills at primary level, we can also help reduce the high drop-out rates we see at secondary level. We are using our G7 presidency to rally the international community to get behind these goals. Both targets will be disaggregated by gender, and, where data is available, by age, location, disability and other markers of marginalisation. It is not always possible to disaggregate data by age—for instance, because some children do not have a birth certificate—and proxies, such as education level or grade, are used instead.

We aim to design and deliver programmes that tackle intersectional disadvantage, using available data to inform and adapt interventions. FCDO’s research portfolio has generated data showing the gendered differential effects of the covid-19 pandemic. For example, Young Lives, a longitudinal study that utilised phone-based surveys during lockdown, found that families are turning to traditional gender roles in times of stress, with young women bearing the brunt of increased household duties, as well as experiencing a clear digital divide which exacerbates existing inequalities. Evidence prior to the pandemic further highlights that girls drop out of school more frequently if they are not learning

and that schooling combined with learning has multiplier benefits for girls. Our Education Policy, Get Children Learning, underscores that improving government systems is key for long-term progress in education.

As a result, and in response to covid-19, our bilateral programmes have adapted to support girls who are hard to reach and at risk of leaving education permanently. This has included a focus on addressing the safety, wellbeing and learning of marginalised children. FCDO technical assistance to partner governments is supporting the reopening of schools when it is safe to do so and to build back better through inclusive and targeted back to school campaigns and catch-up initiatives.

We are also working closely with local NGOs to identify effective, local approaches for educating marginalised girls. For example, through our flagship Girls' Education Challenge programme, we have been supporting up to 1.5 million marginalised and highly marginalised girls to benefit from a quality education. Delivering through local NGOs is a key part of this approach, including the community-based education support provided by Girls Education Challenge to the most marginalised girls. In adapting to covid-19, projects have ensured remote teaching techniques reach key cohorts of school age girls using no-tech or low-tech learning packs, and local NGOs are maintaining contact with at-risk girls through socially distanced home visits.