

International Development Committee

Oral evidence: The FCDO's approach to displaced people, HC 525

Tuesday 3 June 2025

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 3 June 2025.

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Members present: Sarah Champion (Chair); Monica Harding; Noah Law; Alice Macdonald; Brian Mathew; David Mundell; Sam Rushworth; David Taylor.

Questions 128-179

Witnesses

I: Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Minister of State for International Development, Latin America and the Caribbean; Matthew Wyatt, Director, Humanitarian, Migration and Food Security, FCDO; Melinda Bohannon, Director General, Humanitarian and Development, FCDO.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Chapman of Darlington, Matthew Wyatt and Melinda Bohannon.

Q128 Chair: Thank you, Minister, for coming back so soon after the last time you were here. We really appreciate the commitment that you are giving to this Committee. We value your engagement. It really helps us do our job, so thank you very much for that.

We have two sessions with you today on two inquiries that we are currently running. One is on displaced people and the other is on value for money. I will warn you that we are expecting votes either once or twice during the meeting, so we will suspend it when that happens and then come back to you as soon as we possibly can.

Minister, because we have you in front of us, I am afraid I am going to have to take the opportunity to ask you about two topics, and colleagues might have others that they want to bring up. The first is the estimates that came out about your Department's spending, which contained some quite significant changes that we would like to get some clarity from you on. If you are not able to give us the answers right away, it would be deeply appreciated if you could get back to us in writing, because it is something of concern.

The other topic is what is going on in Gaza right now. Personally, I can't cope any more. While I am very grateful that the Government seem to be moving in what I consider the right direction in terms of the actions they are taking to call out what are quite egregious acts, particularly against civilians and civilian infrastructure, I would like to push you a little bit more, starting on one specific thing.

On 19 July, the International Court of Justice gave an advisory ruling on Israel's conduct towards Palestinians across the West Bank and east Jerusalem, saying that it amounts to forcible transfer. What I do not understand is why the Government have still not given an official response to that, particularly as both our Foreign Secretary and our Prime Minister are lawyers and repeatedly say that they respect international law. It is something that you would expect that they would be able to give a formal response to. Why has that not happened?

Baroness Chapman: I recently returned from Israel and the West Bank. Two days before I made the visit, our Prime Minister, Mark Carney and Emmanuel Macron made a very clear statement about what we think is happening: about the displacement of people and the use of food and hunger to move people. We are very clear about that. We have also made a clear statement, alongside 27 other donor countries, about the new plan for the distribution of aid into Gaza, which we said before it started was not going to work, and the things that we were worried about happening are now happening. The reports coming out of Gaza about the use of force and guns around the distribution of food and water, we predicted. I feel exactly the same as you do about what is happening and we are making

that position as clear as we possibly can, privately and publicly. We summoned the ambassador. We have paused negotiations on the trade agreement with Israel, specifically because of that.

Q129 **Chair:** That is the future trade agreement.

Baroness Chapman: Yes.

Chair: That is not the current trade agreement, though, is it?

Baroness Chapman: We do not have an FTA with Israel at the moment. We were negotiating to get one. We have now paused that, because we just do not feel it is appropriate to continue at this time.

Q130 **Chair:** But our trade envoy still went out there last week, I think.

Baroness Chapman: He did. There is still trade, and in the future we want to have trade with Israel. Israel is an ally. We are close to the people of Israel for many reasons. But the Government there at this moment, making the decisions that it is—about aid specifically, from my point of view—we think is wrong, and it felt like an appropriate step to pause those negotiations.

Q131 **Chair:** Minister, I do not want to pre-empt, but you are very aware that this Committee has been working on international humanitarian law, particularly around the killing of humanitarian aid workers. We hope that that report will be coming out imminently. There are many things that the Government could do. While we welcome joint statements, there are joint actions that you could be doing that would be incredibly powerful. For example, working with France and Canada again to look at joint sanctions or joint blocks on arms exports that we could put in place would be much more powerful than a joint statement. But the most important thing, Minister, would be acknowledgement of and a response to the ICJ ruling, because that is what triggers whether or not there are war crimes going on and our legal duties to respond accordingly. Can I ask you again? When are we going to get the Government's statement on that?

Baroness Chapman: I do not have an answer to that today, Chair, but I completely accept what you are telling me about statements, and I agree with you. I would have hoped that a statement such as we made and the actions that we took two weeks ago now, as a response to what we anticipated was about to happen with aid in Gaza and is now happening, would have had more of an impact than they appear to have had on the decisions being made by the Israeli Government. That has not happened, so clearly, we need to keep all other options under consideration. You would not expect me to comment on sanctions—

Chair: I wouldn't mind if you wanted to, Minister.

Baroness Chapman: Well, I do not think we would ever do that ahead of time, but obviously, if what we have done to date has not had the impact that we want it to have, then we need to look at what else can be done. What we see happening in Gaza now, and the failure to get food to people who are hungry, on the brink of starvation—



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Chair: It is a man-made famine that is going on, Minister.

Baroness Chapman: It is a decision that has been made by the Israeli Government. This is not a natural disaster. This is not something that could not have been prevented. These are the consequences of choices that are being made by people in positions of authority. For that reason, we will continue to look at what levers we can use to change the situation. It is important that we do what we can as the United Kingdom but also work closely with our allies and partners. We have worked most closely with Canada and France, and we will continue to do that, but the situation is worsening by the day. I would have hoped that the measures we have taken so far would have had more of an impact than they appear to have had, but you are quite right to raise it and remind us just how desperate this is. It is appalling, and day by day we get more and more reports coming out. I fear what will emerge when journalists are eventually allowed to report from Gaza, because at the moment we know that the information we are getting is not complete. It is an appalling situation.

Q132 **Chair:** Minister, I just do not want to be here in a year expressing regret that we did not act further and faster.

Baroness Chapman: I agree.

Chair: But every day that goes by, I do feel that. Last week, Tom Fletcher, the head of UN OCHA, suggested that Israel is withholding food in order to force Gazans to vacate their land to seek food. Do the Government accept that analysis?

Baroness Chapman: I said that myself. I think almost two weeks ago today, I said words to that effect. I, like you, do not want to be here—well, it is not about how we feel, is it?

Chair: No, we are irrelevant in this.

Baroness Chapman: It is completely irrelevant. But we do not want to look back, as the international community, and ask how that was allowed to happen.

Q133 **Chair:** It is allowed to happen because we do not act, Minister, and you are the person in this room who can act, so please do anything you can to stop this slaughter and get the hostages home. I cannot even imagine the horror that their families, let alone the hostages, are going through. We have to use every single tool in our toolbox.

Baroness Chapman: I completely accept that. I was able to meet hostages' families, who are desperate. They can see what is happening. They want their loved ones—or, sadly, in many cases, their bodies—to be returned. The work that is being done by those families, the dignity that they have shown and the coherence with which they have articulated their voice, when inevitably there will be differences of political view and approach—the most important thing is to get those hostages home, where they belong, and then to get aid into Gaza and to prevent what is now clearly a humanitarian crisis.

Chair: One hundred per cent.

Q134 **Monica Harding:** Thank you, Minister, for sharing your distress. I think we all share the same distress, and it is day after day, as you and the Chair said. When we are talking about days, what timeframe are the Government waiting for in order to make their next move?

Baroness Chapman: We are not waiting for anything. If there is something we can do immediately that would have the impact that we all want, then we will be doing it. “Disappointing” is not the right word; it is devastating to see an elected Government consciously choose the decisions that it is, having the impact that we all predicted would happen—that Tom Fletcher and the UN said would happen, and that NGOs waiting on the border with trucks full of supplies said would happen. All the major NGOs, while I was there, were desperate. They do not need to have guns to distribute aid in Gaza; they can do this peacefully, at scale, at speed. They could do it immediately. That is the devastating thing: this is just so avoidable. We are not waiting for something to happen. It has been happening already, for the past two weeks, and the blockade before that. If there was a lever we could pull that would have the impact that we want, this afternoon, then we would be pulling it. The only people, truly, who can change the situation now are the Government of Israel.

Q135 **Monica Harding:** Minister, do you feel that you are pulling every lever?

Baroness Chapman: I think we are, but I think when there is more that we can do—and we are constantly having those conversations internally—then we have to. As the Chair has said, we are accountable for what we do and do not do, and for the choices that we make and the positions that we take. We can all see—perhaps not as closely as we would like, but we can all see what is happening here. Aid is being withheld, and that should not be happening.

Q136 **Monica Harding:** You have talked about the fact that we can see what is going on. It would be very helpful to have independent journalists inside Gaza at the moment. Are the Government calling for the BBC to be allowed into Gaza?

Baroness Chapman: We absolutely think there should be independent reporting. The BBC has responsibility for its journalists, and the safety of journalists is something that matters to us as well. I think this is a question for somebody with more expertise in reporting from these kinds of contexts, but from what I can gather, should the Government there permit this, then there are journalists who feel confident that they could, with adequate safeguards of their own safety, do more than they are able to do at the moment.

Q137 **Chair:** I do not understand, Minister—sorry, I probably should not speculate on this—why it is that Israel has the right to ban journalists from Gaza. I cannot think of any other war situation where that has been allowed to happen, and it is worse than that, because journalists are clearly being targeted. Thank goodness for the brave people who are trying to document what is going on. I do not know whether you heard the



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"Today" programme this morning. We need to have an independent inquiry into just what is going on now. While the Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel said that Israel would do the inquiry, that is not an independent inquiry. Accountability is important, Minister. We know, understand and appreciate that you are doing all you can, but our report will come out, and we have suggestions of some more that you could maybe be doing. I would be really grateful if it could have your attention.

Baroness Chapman: Absolutely. "Why?" is a very good question. I think we can all speculate as to why, but Israel does control who goes in and who leaves, and even the most tenacious of journalists would fail to get where they would like to be at the moment.

Chair: Thank you. Can we move to the equally important but somewhat drier topic of estimates?

Q138 **Monica Harding:** At first glance, the estimates seem to show a rebalancing away from multilateral aid to bilateral aid. Is that replicated in the priorities?

Baroness Chapman: Are you talking about 2025-26?

Monica Harding: Yes.

Baroness Chapman: Because the decision was made in February, I did not feel comfortable just continuing with our in-year spending as had been budgeted, knowing that at the end of that financial year we were going to face a substantial reduction and then an even more substantial reduction the year after that.

What we decided to do was to try to create headroom this year. We therefore embarked upon a process of saying to posts, "Look, do continue doing things that we are already committed to," because we did not want to walk away mid-programme or mid-contract, "and continue with your humanitarian work, but if you think that you need to continue with other things, then you need to let us know what it is you are continuing with and the reason you think it is important that we do that." That could be around reputational damage, or it could be that they felt that, in order to exit a programme responsibly, there would need to be some additional spend to smooth that out. Posts have been really good about how they have handled that process, but that has meant that we have not stuck to what was originally budgeted for this financial year, because we wanted to create headroom.

We have been reasonably successful at that. I do not yet have the final outcome figures, but that will enable us to plan better. I do not think the network has enjoyed that process especially, but we have all sort of had it out and agreed that, when the Prime Minister says to go line by line, that is what I have to do, and that creating headroom is probably a good idea in these circumstances.

What I want to do next, though, is to work with the network and external stakeholders on how we use that headroom and how we plan from hereon



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in. What I really want to do is to get posts on three-year deals, for want of a better word, so that they can plan, because there will be less money. Everyone has a view about the rights and wrongs of that decision, but there is less money, so the least worst thing we can do is allow posts to plan in a multi-year way so they can get more value—that might be straying into the subject of our next evidence session. That really matters, and I think that has been quite well received and understood by programme managers. It is not ideal to be doing these things mid-year, but because of when the decision to make the cut was made and because we wanted to make sure that we had flexibility, that is the approach we have taken.

Q139 **Monica Harding:** So we should not view this as a harbinger of what is to come, or where the priority is.

Baroness Chapman: No. I inherited a set of budget decisions. The budget then almost halved, so I had to make some pretty quick choices. I have tried really hard to do that collaboratively, with officials and the network. We have not been able to do the consultation that I would like. I want to use the summer to do much more engagement. We have some incredibly talented people working for the Department in posts. I would like to be able to give them more creativity and more control over what happens. Exactly how we do that is one of the things we are going to be talking about over the next few months. I anticipate—and you will hold me to this—being able to come back to you in the autumn with more information about how those three-year arrangements will look. By then, we will also have made announcements on things like Gavi and IDA, so the picture will be far clearer.

Q140 **Chair:** On a geeky detail, do the budgets for the embassies go to the ambassador or to the head of development? In some places, the two are basically on the same salary level, but in some the development role might be on a lesser footing, and they can come from very different positions on development spend.

Baroness Chapman: One of the issues that we have is that the merger has left certain things incomplete. There are people on different terms and conditions and pay. One of the things we are starting to see more and more is that the head of mission is the development director. They came from DFID, as they would have said before Olly Robbins told them to stop saying that.

Chair: They still say it.

Baroness Chapman: They do still say it, but we need to get away from that. As an example, Helen Winterton, in Jerusalem, is former DFID, as is Darren Welch in Addis. These people are now head of mission, and they are leading those posts with a very strong development background. That is the vision. I know there are situations where there are anomalies remaining. It is a bit outside of my remit to get involved in the HR side of things, but it is important that we complete the merger process properly.

Q141 **Chair:** Sorry to push you again. Is it your hope that the most senior



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person in charge of development, or with seniority in development, would be the person in charge of the budget?

Baroness Chapman: In charge of the development budget?

Chair: Yes.

Baroness Chapman: Yes. Well, yes, but it should not be as cut and dried as that, should it? Ideally, our political, diplomatic and development activities are all complementary. I understand that, in the days when we had two separate Departments, different operations would sometimes be acting out of sight of one another, and sometimes cutting across one another. I hope that does not happen any more.

Q142 **Chair:** The flip of that is that I can see that, if you are negotiating a trade deal, you probably do not also want to be negotiating a development deal alongside it, because you do not want to stray into any areas of conflict of interest.

Baroness Chapman: I would hope that there would be sufficient communication and sharing of objectives across the team that that should not be a problem.

Q143 **Alice Macdonald:** I want to clarify the process, Minister. You said that the different missions were looking at what they would stop. When will that detail be published? The estimates say that there is an uplift for the World Service budget, which is obviously welcome. The British Council is also waiting. I want to understand why the World Service budget has been announced already, just so that I understand that process, but also when we will get the detail of what has been stopped. Will that be after the spending review?

Baroness Chapman: We could publish some of it now, I suppose, because there are decisions that have already been taken. I do not think that we have made any choices about that. There are sensitivities around some of that, with particular countries, and we do not want to present that in a thoughtless way. Some posts have been faster at doing things than others. On when we will publish that, I do not know. I do not want to give you a date and then miss it.

Q144 **Chair:** Minister, could I lead you? The Home Office has shared, through the estimates process, that its ODA budget is £2.3 billion. It seems odd that the FCDO has not shared its ODA budget, and we are being told that we have to wait until the breakdown that comes at the end of July. If there was a way that you could speed that up, that would be extremely helpful and would help us all with our scrutiny.

Baroness Chapman: I am really happy to look at that.

Chair: That would be great. I will briefly suspend the session for a Division.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—



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Q145 **Chair:** Minister, can we ask you a couple more questions on estimates? First—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, there is the bell again. I am not convinced that we are voting on this one, so I will ask the question, but we might have to shoot off.

In the last couple of years, the FCDO has been making guarantees on a lot of quite high-risk projects. It is now up to £4.8 billion, I think, in the current estimates, which, as a lot of them are in conflict zones, is quite a risky strategy. Do you have some sort of policy or approach in place if one of those guarantees goes belly-up? That could literally take out the whole of the FCDO budget, if not more.

Baroness Chapman: Well, guarantees are a very good way of us being able to use our position to support investment. *[Interruption.]* You are voting?

Chair: Yes—sorry. Give us the—

Baroness Chapman: I think guarantees are great. I will keep it really succinct: guarantees are good because they get investment where it needs to be, and they are essential because, if we did not have them, the cost of investment would be far higher, or the project or whatever it is we are trying to do would not be investable, and the thing would not happen—

Q146 **Chair:** Yes, we agree with the principle. What happens if one goes wrong?

Baroness Chapman: And we would end up having to use ODA or grants in order to get the outcome that we want. Guarantees are good.

We are very mindful of risk. We spread our risk so that if something did go wrong, it would be contained, and so that we feel confident that we would be able to withstand it without impacting the rest of our programming.

Chair: Thank you. Noah, do you want to ask your question quickly, and then we will move on to displaced people when we come back?

Q147 **Noah Law:** Yes, very briefly. Priorities for the main estimates are, I trust, hot-off-the-press new. Do they provide a good indication of the overall direction of travel for development policy? If so, how do they interact with our wider development goals?

Baroness Chapman: We have said that the priorities going forward will be our humanitarian work, and then health and climate as well. I explained at the beginning of the session that the decisions that we have made for 2025-26 do not quite reflect that because they are amendments to a budget that was set before the decision to reduce the ODA budget was made. Therefore, they are, for want of a better word, a bit messier, and they have had to be made quite quickly.

That is not how we would ideally like to be making decisions; we have had to invent a whole process around that, and it has been done at speed, but, to the credit of officials, it has been done incredibly well. We await the NAO's verdict, of course, but I feel that we have done as good a job as we could have in the circumstances. The alternative would have been to



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continue as we were, not create the headroom, and then leave ourselves with far harder decisions to make in the future. We are now working closely with posts, and the intention is to be able to put them on longer-term arrangements by the end of the year.

Chair: Brilliant. Minister, I am afraid that we are going to have to suspend the session. We will be back as soon as we possibly can.

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

On resuming—

Chair: Thank you so much for your patience, Minister. We have one last question on estimates from David Mundell.

Q148 **David Mundell:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, I know it happened just before you arrived in post, but there was a proposal for the FCDO personnel located in Abercrombie House in East Kilbride to move to a new campus in Glasgow. That decision was reversed, and the decision was made to remain in Abercrombie House, but when we met FCDO civil servants, they advised us that Abercrombie House was not fit for purpose and would require adjustments if it was to continue to be the second headquarters of the FCDO. While the estimates include provisions to upgrade Lord Mandelson's residence in Washington, there is no provision to spend any significant funds on Abercrombie House. Given that we were told that, without investment, it would not be able fully to perform all the functions that would be wanted there, I wonder whether you can provide an explanation for that.

Baroness Chapman: In following the golden rule of never attempting to answer questions about which you know absolutely nothing—as you say, this was a decision taken before I was appointed—I will defer to one of my colleagues, who will hopefully be able to provide some more information.

Melinda Bohannon: You are absolutely right. The plan was to invest in a site in Glasgow, and we were in discussions on a contract for a building in central Glasgow. Through several rounds of conversations with the Treasury, it became clear that that would not be economically viable—that, in effect, the cost was too great—so that plan fell away. Now, the question is, how do we remain fit for purpose in the Abercrombie House site for the foreseeable future—

Q149 **Chair:** Melinda, I am really sorry, but in the interests of time, are you making capital investments to make the site fit for purpose?

Melinda Bohannon: Once we have our spending review—our final budget—confirmed, we will make a decision about whether to submit plans for capital to make AH fit for purpose.

Q150 **David Mundell:** But the core there is that it is not fit for purpose currently.

Melinda Bohannon: The core is that there are aspects of the site that mean that not all staff, if we were to have an FCDO split site, could do



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their work securely, and that matters particularly for those who need to work on the high side. That was behind the “not fit for purpose” comment. That is where the investment would be required, yes.

Q151 **David Mundell:** And that matters in the context of it being the FCDO’s second headquarters, because it would not be capable of fulfilling that function.

Melinda Bohannon: Correct.

Q152 **Chair:** That is quite a scary limbo, but you think that by next Wednesday we will know the answer.

Melinda Bohannon: No, I do not think we will know by next Wednesday. We will know what our final spending review settlement is and be able to work on the basis of understanding our capital allocation and how we want to allocate it, but we will not have confirmed plans for AH by next week.

Q153 **Chair:** Minister, the people working for the FCDO up in Scotland have been in limbo for a number of years now. We went and saw the site in the previous Parliament. It was not fit for purpose then, and it was very much limiting the sorts of roles that they could do. If you could expediate this and give them that clarity, it would really be appreciated.

Baroness Chapman: Happy to do that.

Q154 **Chair:** Thank you. We now turn, an hour and seven minutes in, to the session we were meant to be having on displaced people. It is an ongoing inquiry. Minister, you will be very aware that displacement is at its highest level in the modern era. At the end of June 2024, more than 120 million people worldwide remained forcibly displaced, and that number has been going up every year for pretty much the last decade. One in 67 people around the world is displaced, which is quite a shocking figure. It is a priority for this Committee for many reasons. Minister, does the FCDO have an overarching strategy for how to prevent and respond to displacement?

Baroness Chapman: We do, and it starts, as you indicated, with prevention. We understand that conflict is one of the principal drivers of displacement, and we see that in the biggest displacement crisis there is right now, in Sudan. We work where we can to try to use all our levers to prevent conflict and prevent displacement from occurring in the first place, but when that has not been avoided, we work to protect those populations that find themselves in the most desperate of situations, and then we need to find long-term solutions.

One of the things that I have learned since coming into this post is that now, becoming a refugee or finding yourself living in a camp or being displaced in some other way is unlikely to be a very short-term thing to happen to you. You find yourself living in those conditions, with your life on hold, and your access to basic services either very limited or provided in ways that none of us would wish, for a very long period of time. We are having to work with host Governments—to a large extent, places like Jordan, Lebanon, Chad and South Sudan—to try to make sure that they



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are able to do what we would all wish to see provided for those populations, whether that is food and water, healthcare or education for their children.

We work with agencies such as the UNHCR to support people to return when they are ready and when it is right. There was one conversation that struck me when I went to visit Syrian refugees who were living in a camp in Jordan. They had been there for many years; not everybody wanted to return, but many did. I tried to talk to them about what they needed to give them the confidence to do so, but a lot of it will come down to how we are able to support Syria, how successful the Government in Syria is, how stable the country becomes and whether it is safe for those people to make that journey. They will make their own judgments about safety for themselves and their families.

It is complicated. There are many different aspects. The framework we apply is prevention, protection and longer-term support, but it is very different in different contexts.

Q155 Chair: The last time you were here, you outlined your priorities. Where do displaced people fit within those priorities? There does not seem to be a natural home for them.

Baroness Chapman: The majority of the work that we do for displaced people would fall into the humanitarian priority. There is also healthcare, however, and the climate is exacerbating some of the conditions in which displaced people find themselves: we know that Jordan is under huge pressure with water and drought, as is Chad. The things that we would put in place to support people in the longer term would fall into those categories, but in terms of where the money goes, the majority would be in the humanitarian priority.

Q156 David Taylor: Does the FCDO have strategies in place to strengthen the private sector within fragile states as a form of stabilisation? In Syria, for example, there has been an urgent need, given the years of oppression under Assad, to rebuild a very broken country and get the economy going again. If you could speak to that, that would be fantastic.

Baroness Chapman: Syria is a really interesting example, because we took some tough sanctions decisions—as did many other countries, for very good reasons—against Assad and his regime. They are gone now, and there is no future for Syria without a stable Government that is properly representative of the population and can grow its economy. Without that economic growth, we are not going to see the public services that are needed. If people cannot support themselves and make a living, they will not take the risk of returning. We were one of the first to remove the sanctions on the regime, and the Americans followed very quickly. That is fine, but there is a lot more that we need to do, and we want to work in as many ways as we can to bring that about.

The way in which we approach the task will vary enormously. Sadly, we are nowhere near being able to take that kind of approach in Sudan, where conflict is raging. The leadership that the Foreign Secretary has



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shown, the conference that we held here—all those things will help in time, but are we at the stage where we can have discussions about returning with refugees living on the border in Chad? That is not what is happening. It varies enormously, depending on the context.

Q157 Brian Mathew: You have set out that tackling climate change is one of your priorities. To what extent is climate-induced displacement an aspect?

Baroness Chapman: For most people who are displaced, it has to do with conflict—we know that. Climate is making it harder. In some places, it is making it harder to make a living; in other places, it is making it harder for host communities to do what they want to do, and it is putting pressure on resources.

Water is probably the best example. A host community know that their supply of water is under pressure; they then see many thousands of refugees putting demands on services. That is not a recipe for stability. Some of the work we need to do is to make sure there are those services available for the whole community. Climate is a huge concern for us with this. While we do not see people arriving in the UK as refugees principally because of climate—it is mostly about escaping conflict—it is something that is increasingly having an impact on people's movement and on our ability to support them in region.

Q158 Brian Mathew: The situation you were mentioning was in Syria, and many of those refugees are in Jordan. What is happening now in terms of helping those refugees who went to Jordan to come back to Syria? Is that part of the programme?

Baroness Chapman: Yes, but they are not being forced to return. Some are choosing to return. We are encouraging the Government of Jordan to do visits for families who may have been in Jordan, living in a camp, for some time. Many refugees in Jordan are not living in camps at all; they are in the community. They then have the ability to return to where they grew up in Syria and see the conditions they would be living in, to make an assessment. Some of them said to me, "My mother is on regular medication. I want to know she can get healthcare support if we return, that my child can be educated in the way that I want them to be, and that my house is still there. There is a community that I live among now. I want to know what my community links are going to look like should I return." All of that is completely understandable.

There are also issues about the amount of possessions that people are able to take in a way that is supported by agencies, and whether that is sufficient. All these conversations are being had. It is quite a pragmatic, practical approach that we have to take to this. I think most people would like to be able to return, but the confidence they have to do that is dependent on exactly where in Syria they came from and what the conditions are like for them now.

Q159 Brian Mathew: I guess the many other pressing problems around the world at the moment will also be part of that. Going back to the issue of the climate, can you share any examples of climate adaptation



programmes that the UK funds in order to prevent displacement?

Baroness Chapman: In Chad, I visited an example of where we have supported an agricultural project. One of the good things about it is that it was joint between refugees and the local host community. With our support, they were able to work on some irrigation ponds. That is quite basic stuff really, but in such a water pressure area it is making the difference between them being able to sustain themselves and being able to have surplus crops and to trade and support a community. That means that those people are able to stay and build a life there, and they do not feel the need to move.

Our understanding is growing about displaced people. You do not just start off in Sudan and find yourself in Tunisia. You are going to South Sudan. You are going back to Sudan. You are going to Chad. People move in region far more than they do inter-regionally. Being able to support a community like that, close to the border of Sudan, using initiatives that can alleviate the pressure, is really important. Chad is one of the most climate pressured countries in the world. To be able to support that community is really important.

Q160 **Brian Mathew:** The Chinese have done a lot on de-desertification in China, but there are also some works in the Sahel. Presumably we could be doing more there to help people to survive the changes?

Baroness Chapman: The de-desertification work is really interesting. One of the reasons we put together our Sahel fund is to be able to do that work, which is on a regional basis. We are not just working operationally with our teams in Chad but actually looking across the whole region. Projects like that I think would be suited very well.

Q161 **Sam Rushworth:** You are articulating very well the challenges of resettling displaced people after conflict, and the tensions that can exist in those communities. The UK in the past has been a funder of many social programmes on the ground doing just that. Given the cuts to bilateral aid that we know are coming, there presumably are going to be projects that will be cut. Have the Government done any impact assessment of the likely effect on displaced people? Are we likely to see, for example, an increase in displacement because of the tensions that will exist because of the programmes that we are going to cut?

Baroness Chapman: We are trying to protect as much as we can our work on humanitarian programmes, but on your question about an impact assessment, unless you think that around 40% of what we have been programming and funding had no impact, was not beneficial, and did not protect vulnerable groups, there is going to be a detrimental impact. That is just the truth of it. That means we have to understand what the impact will be, and where we can mitigate it, limit it and work with partners, we have to do so.

There are programmes that are paused, like some of the cash that we have given, because we think we have to do programmes that really only Governments can do, and work with Governments, and not do things that

might be better delivered by philanthropists. We are making decisions like that: we are going to pause things and work in a different way, which we think will have a better long-term impact. This is sort of straying into the next panel on value for money.

You are right that we need to look really closely at the effect of the choices that we make. We understand that if you are doing something that is going to reduce support for displaced people, what are those people going to do? We need to understand that and plan for it.

Q162 Sam Rushworth: I just wonder what the increased costs will be down the line. They could be more than you will save.

Baroness Chapman: That is one of the impacts that we would have to understand, isn't it?

Chair: Let me bring Noah in at this point.

Q163 Noah Law: Very briefly, before turning to a different topic, I think these are very interesting times that we live in if we are saying that we want to make greater use of, say, development finance and financial tools for development, while at the same time we are arguing that we need to be doing increased work around tackling irregular migration and putting this emphasis on displacement. It is a very tricky thing to do, so I would love to hear perhaps more in writing, following up on David's question on the example of Syria. It is definitely easier said than done, getting those mechanisms to work in countries where sanctions have only just been lifted. I would love to hear a few more examples of what you see as potential success stories in doing that.

Turning to a different topic, what does the FCDO define as climate finance today?

Baroness Chapman: Broadly, it is our development spend that is geared towards combating climate change or mitigating its impact. I do not know whether there is a more technical explanation.

Melinda Bohannon: That is right. We use the OECD DAC climate markers to assess the extent to which a programme supports mitigation or adaptation, and the totality of that supports our overall climate finance target.

Q164 Noah Law: When we pressed your predecessor on the much talked about £11.6 billion, which I have certainly heard a lot about from my constituents, I think we received a perhaps equivocal answer on whether that was truly new money or whether it was programmatic money already part of the UK's development programming. Is that commitment still there, and is there any new money to go towards climate finance?

Baroness Chapman: I think the search for new money at the moment is going to be pretty fruitless, to be completely straightforward with you, but we are committed. The climate is one of our priorities. We are working through exactly how that looks and what money is going to be allocated to what at the moment. The spending review will help to shed some light on



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that, but the classification of ICF is internationally agreed, and in the way that we count that, we will make sure that we comply with the way that our international partners do it. You will be able to scrutinise and challenge, and you will be able to see what we are allocating as climate and what we are counting towards that tally, but, completely honestly, is there going to be any new money for climate in a world where we have just gone from 0.5% to 0.3%? I think you can probably work that out.

Q165 Noah Law: Lastly on this topic, are there things that we can do that do not involve investing or spending huge amounts of money to promote the goal that you have identified in the estimates memorandum of restoring the UK's leadership on climate and nature finance?

Baroness Chapman: ODA is one tool, isn't it? The positions that we take, the decisions we make domestically about our energy mix—you have to show not tell with some of this stuff. We work a lot with our technical assistance in countries and support work on grids and renewable energy. There are many things we can do that are not just about programming. We are going to be talking to BII about their next strategy. It would be good to see climate feature more in the work that they do as well, but that is another thing that is ongoing. There is a lot more that the UK can and should do—and does do—in terms of climate leadership globally than our ODA allocations.

Q166 David Mundell: Minister, what do you see as the role of multilateral institutions, alone or in partnership with the UK, in preventing and responding to displacement?

Baroness Chapman: Multilaterals, particularly IDA, have a key role to play. We get so much more return on our investment if we work through our multilateral partners. All these things go together, don't they? We know that conflict causes displacement, but we know that economic instability can lead to conflict and political instability, and all these other things that all fit together. The work that we can do with our multilateral partners on trying to get that economic stability piece right in the long term is one of the best things we can do in terms of preventing displacement.

We work more on supporting people in region with our partners at the UN and through those agencies, and from what I have seen they do an incredible job, in the most difficult circumstances, of supporting people and making sure they get the services that they need, but that is not a long-term answer. I keep coming back to just how long people are left in these circumstances and what we ought to be doing to prevent them from having to be displaced in the first place and to enable them to rebuild their lives, whether in the host country or, where possible and if they want to, when they return.

Q167 David Mundell: Do you think that our influence across these multilateral organisations will be maintained with cuts in contributions?

Baroness Chapman: Yes, I do. I am not sure that we have always been as clear or demanding as we could have been, because there has been



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more money. Now that the money is reduced, not just from the UK but from others as well, everybody that I meet internationally is saying that we need change and the multilateral system needs reform. Everybody agrees with this. What there is not sufficient clarity on yet, although we are getting there, is exactly what that needs to look like.

Q168 **David Mundell:** I was going to ask you about that. Do you have specifics in mind, or is that something that is evolving?

Baroness Chapman: It is evolving. I have spoken to Tom Fletcher about the changes that he wants to make, and we are supportive of the UN80 process. We have got Financing for Development coming up in Seville very shortly, and we need to have a very clear position on how we want things to change there as well. There are multilateral events coming up shortly where I want to see the UK representation arguing for reform and change alongside partners in a way that is clear and deliverable, and that is not just part of some mushy, "Oh, we need to do things more efficiently." Everyone agrees that there is duplication and that there is efficiency to be found. The UK needs to use its position—it is still a major donor—to exert that influence.

Matthew Wyatt: One very concrete example is that the World Bank is looking at its fragile states strategy at the moment. We are engaging really closely with them to try to ensure that what comes out of that process is something that we think is really worthwhile and addresses many of the issues that Members have mentioned today, including climate resilience, the private sector in fragile states and so on, all of which can help not only adapt to climate change, but reduce the drivers that force people on displacement. That is one concrete thing that we are using the position that we have on the board to influence.

Q169 **Monica Harding:** What forms of data does the FCDO collect on the displaced people who interact with your programmes?

Matthew Wyatt: I suppose there are different ways to answer that. I can give one concrete example of where we have used data to try to improve things. We have a programme with the Somali Government that has been helping to identify where IDPs are, using things like satellite data to identify things that look like IDP settlements and so on, and using software to identify them, and then putting that together with our partners, which in this case were the International Rescue Committee and Gavi, to find ways to make sure we are able to vaccinate children who have never been vaccinated before. We are using the data that is coming from that to identify where the people are, and then using that to design the programmes and the supply chains and so on to get vaccinations to people. I do not know if that is what you were getting at, but that is a concrete example.

Q170 **Monica Harding:** That is useful, but what about the people that interact with your programmes at the other end? How do you collect that data? As far as I understand it, you are looking down and seeing, "They need some help. We'll design a programme around them," but what about collecting



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data about the people you have helped? What data do you collect on that?

Chair: Do you know if they are coming from a particular minority group, region, age or ability? How do you know where your money is going?

Melinda Bohannon: All our programmes are required to have disaggregated data when we do monitoring and evaluation, and that tries to look at gender but also age and ability. I do not think it looks at ethnicity or geographic location.

Q171 **Chair:** Religion?

Matthew Wyatt: No.

Melinda Bohannon: It does look at religion. We try, where we can, to look at religion and belief.

Q172 **Chair:** I am just thinking about how we can know if there might be a particularly persecuted group and target programmes accordingly, or if people with particular disabilities are just not turning up, and whether that means they cannot physically get where they need to for help.

Melinda Bohannon: That is why we try to go as far as we can when we can get good data, which is rare in many of these circumstances, to get right down to the granular level. We can write to the Committee on the extent to which that reaches the question of persecution and displacement.

Q173 **Monica Harding:** Did you say that it does cover gender?

Melinda Bohannon: Yes.

Q174 **Monica Harding:** And down to adolescent girls?

Melinda Bohannon: It should—age and gender, yes.

Q175 **Monica Harding:** Will the Department implement the resilience and adaptation funding that was announced in the previous Government's White Paper?

Baroness Chapman: We are looking at all our spending commitments at the moment. We are in a difficult situation, aren't we, but—

Melinda Bohannon: One of the conversations that we have had with the Minister is on the resilience and adaptation funding. We have just been through a process that makes an allocation for that in 2025-26. The details of that will be released as part of the full estimate.

Q176 **Monica Harding:** The previous Government announced that the FCDO would scope a separate fund of up to 15% of FCDO bilateral humanitarian provision. Is that the kind of figure you are looking at?

Baroness Chapman: I do not think we can answer that today, can we?

Chair: When you can answer it, could you answer it, please?

Baroness Chapman: Yes.



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Q177 **Alice Macdonald:** Building on the last question about disaggregated data, women and girls are 50% of displaced people, and there are a lot of girls within that amount. We spoke last time about women and girls, and when Nick Dyer was here, he said that you would be publishing impact assessments in June or July. Have impact assessments been done on the impact of any cuts to the programmes for displaced women and girls that you have been running?

Baroness Chapman: I do not think we have made cuts to those programmes as yet, because they would be in our humanitarian project. I imagine that most of those would be delivered through our partner organisations, in any case. Certainly, we stand by the commitment that we made to do the impact assessments and to share as much as we can with you.

Q178 **Chair:** "Share as much as we can" is a step back from sharing with us.

Baroness Chapman: I feel quite relaxed about being maximalist in our approach to all of this.

Chair: And you are the Minister, so we will take that answer. Thank you.

Baroness Chapman: I am unclear as to why we do not ordinarily do this. Without being clear about that, I am slightly reluctant to commit to definitely publishing everything, but as someone who has been in your situation asking these questions, I would have pulled me up on that as well. Let me see what we can do, because I do think it is right that when we are making these decisions—and we are not in a place where we are pretending that you can cut 40%-plus of the budget and there will not be a detrimental impact. That is not what this Department is doing.

Q179 **Chair:** Minister, all I will say is that in the last Parliament and the last round of cuts, we were not allowed that information. We found a way to get that information and put it in the public domain, which was not a good look for the previous Government, and I am sure we are better than that.

Baroness Chapman: We are better than that. I am aware of what happened.

Chair: Thank you.