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International Development
Committee

UK aid to Pakistan

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to the report*

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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.

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Summary

Historically, Pakistan has been a priority country for the UK's development spending; between 2015 and 2019 it was the largest single recipient of bilateral UK Official Development Assistance (ODA). However, UK aid funding to the country has been cut dramatically, and it has now fallen to seventh in the list of UK bilateral aid recipients after experiencing the largest single cut of any country budget. Pakistan is a country with huge potential. With a smaller budget, the FCDO must focus its aid spending in a highly strategic manner that seeks to realise the opportunities within the country for development.

Through our inquiry, we heard that marginalised groups (such as women and girls and religious minorities) face barriers within Pakistan, inhibiting their prospects for development. These barriers are especially strong for women and girls from minority communities. This not only holds back the potential of these groups, but also slows down Pakistan's broader development.

We heard how UK aid has created positive change in Pakistan through projects focused on girls' education and women's economic empowerment. But the gains of these projects have been compromised by a dual hit of the covid-19 pandemic increasing need and cuts to UK ODA spending reducing the funding available to tackle these problems. These cuts are at odds with core UK Government development policy objectives.

We recommend that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office should use its aid programming strategically in Pakistan to focus upon reaching the most marginalised groups. We encourage the FCDO to fund programmes such as education and economic empowerment for women and girls in the most hard-to-reach communities, as well as programmes that reinforce this work (for example programmes focused upon nutrition and sexual and reproductive health). We also recommend that the FCDO directs aid spending towards programmes to improve the treatment of religious minorities, and backs this up with diplomatic action.

We heard that civil society in Pakistan faces numerous challenges, and at times this has compromised the delivery of aid programmes. We recommend that FCDO should continue to support the work of Pakistan's National Commission on the Status of Women and its National Commission on Human Rights. We also agree with the FCDO's designation of Pakistan as a Human Rights Priority Country and recommend that it continues to be designated as such.

To improve the effectiveness of UK aid in Pakistan more broadly, we recommend that the FCDO should clearly communicate its Integrated Delivery Plan to partners delivering UK aid projects in country. It should equally prioritise long-term interventions over short-term interventions and work more with local organisations and people.

Pakistan hosts the second highest number of refugees in the world, a number which has been increasing as people flee from the crisis in Afghanistan. It is important that countries capable of helping carry the financial and practical burden of supporting refugees do so, and therefore we recommend that the FCDO should ensure that the Pakistani authorities receive the necessary assistance and resources to be able to support refugees from Afghanistan.

1 Introduction

1. Pakistan is bordered by Afghanistan, China, India, and Iran. It is the fifth most populous country in the world with a population of 225 million,¹ likely to reach 338 million by 2050.² Current life expectancy is 67 years for men and 69 years for women.³ Pakistan is a Lower Middle Income Country,⁴ ranking 154th out of 189 countries in the Human Development Index.⁵ There remain significant development challenges in Pakistan, which vary between its regions and communities and impact marginalised communities disproportionately. These include:

- a lack of clean drinking water
- malnutrition
- a lack of sanitation
- a lack of medical care
- a third of its population living in poverty⁶
- an adult literacy rate of 58%⁷
- and a particular vulnerability to climate change.⁸

Covid-19 and its secondary impacts have also exacerbated many of these development challenges. In addition, the human rights situation in Pakistan remains “extremely challenging.”⁹

2. The UK and Pakistan have a strong and unique relationship, characterised by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as “based on shared language, history and people to people links”, including a British-Pakistani diaspora community in the UK of 1.6 million people.¹⁰ The UK Government’s Integrated Review, published in 2021, emphasised the intention for the UK and Pakistan to develop a “strong, modern relationship focused on security, stability and prosperity.”¹¹ The UK has long been a development partner to Pakistan with a high level of aid spending in the country; Pakistan

1 United Nations Population Fund, [World Population Dashboard: Pakistan](#), accessed 21 January 2022. The population number is a projection calculated by the UN Population Fund.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*

4 World Bank, [Pakistan | Data](#), accessed 10 January 2022

5 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 2; United Nations Development Programme, [Human Development Data Center](#), accessed 27 January 2022

6 UK Government, [DFID Pakistan](#) (2 September 2020), p 2

7 The World Bank, [Literacy rate, adult total \(% of people ages 15 and above\) - Pakistan](#), accessed 17 January 2022

8 The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) stated on p 2 that Pakistan is the eighth most vulnerable country in the world to climate events, while ACTED in Pakistan ([PAK0018](#)) on p 3 told us that Pakistan is fifth in the world for vulnerability to climate change.

9 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Human Rights & Democracy: 2020 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Report](#), 8 July 2021, p 55

10 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 2

11 UK Government, [Global Britain in a competitive age](#), 16 March 2021, p 62

was the largest recipient of UK bilateral ODA from 2015 to 2019.¹² However, in 2020, Pakistan dropped six places to become the seventh largest recipient of bilateral UK aid with an annual budget of £200 million.¹³

3. For this inquiry, we held four oral evidence sessions alongside a call for written evidence. Drawing upon this, our report discusses the significant development challenges that Pakistan continues to face and offers recommendations as to how the FCDO can improve the delivery of UK aid to Pakistan. This Report is based on evidence taken before Pakistan changed its Prime Minister in April 2022.

12 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2019](#), 24 September 2020, p 23

13 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2020](#), 29 September 2021, p 74

2 UK aid in Pakistan: Spending, strategy, and delivery

Reductions to the UK's aid spending in Pakistan

4. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) told us that the UK's core aim in Pakistan is:

to support a more inclusive, prosperous and stable country, less reliant on aid and more resilient to shocks, working in partnership with the UK to advance shared interests. We want Pakistan to achieve a self-financed exit from poverty and become a stronger trading partner.¹⁴

To support this aim, Pakistan was the largest recipient of UK bilateral ODA from 2015 to 2019, despite bilateral aid steadily dropping from a peak of £463 million in 2016 to £305 million in 2019.¹⁵ However, in 2020, Pakistan dropped six places to become the seventh largest recipient of bilateral UK aid at £200 million.¹⁶ The UK's multilateral ODA spending in Pakistan also fell from £187.5 million in 2015 to £85 million in 2019.¹⁷ Combined ODA spending therefore peaked in 2016, before declining.¹⁸

Table 1: UK ODA spending in Pakistan

Year	UK bilateral ODA spending in Pakistan (£ 000s)	UK multilateral ODA spending in Pakistan (£ 000s)	Total UK ODA spending in Pakistan (£ 000s)
2014	266,324	218,696	485,020
2015	373,783	187,449	561,232
2016	462,648	140,324	602,972
2017	402,497	112,586	515,083
2018	330,961	112,512	443,473
2019	304,986	85,018	390,004
2020	199,987	-*	-*

Source: Statistics taken from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office¹⁹ *Statistics on the UK's multilateral ODA spend in Pakistan in 2020 are not yet available.

14 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 3

15 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: final UK aid spend 2020](#), Table A4b. Total UK bilateral ODA by country: Asia, 2009 to 2020.

16 *ibid.*

17 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: final UK aid spend 2020](#), Table B5: Imputed UK share of multilateral net ODA by country, 2015 to 2019.

18 See Table 1: UK ODA spending in Pakistan.

19 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: final UK aid spend 2020](#), Table A4b. Total UK bilateral ODA by country: Asia, 2009 to 2020 and Table A10. Imputed UK share of multilateral net ODA by country, 2015 to 2019; Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2018](#), Table A10. Imputed UK share of multilateral net ODA by country.

5. Commenting on the reduction in UK aid to Pakistan, Lord Ahmad told us that

It has been driven partly by the economic circumstances we have found ourselves in. It has also been driven by the sheer fact that we have gone from 0.7% to 0.5%. That said, it is about how effectively we support development in Pakistan. As I alluded to earlier, the shift from humanitarian support, as Pakistan's infrastructure and support mechanisms have got more effective domestically, is the right approach, so that we then look at long-term development support. The fact that there has been a reduction is not just that there is less being spent; it is also reflective of Pakistan's transition from a recipient of humanitarian support to development support.²⁰

This emphasised the FCDO's assertion that the UK will transition to "providing more management-intensive, but impactful, technical assistance in place of financial aid."²¹ The FCDO told us that "[d]espite the extent of poverty, Pakistan is not aid dependent, with aid constituting less than 1% of Pakistan's GNI (OECD 2019)."²²

6. However, other evidence was less optimistic towards the reduction in aid spending in Pakistan. The NGO, ACTED, told us that

... reductions in aid spending to Pakistan by major donors, including the UK, run the risk of impeding progress made towards strengthening the internal resilience and systems needed to appropriately and effectively respond to many and various challenges facing the country.²³

The reduction in aid has raised concerns about the impact on marginalised groups, including women and girls.²⁴ For example, despite the FCDO's commitment to education for women and girls, as one of the seven ODA priorities outlined by the then-Foreign Secretary in 2020, education experienced the largest sector decrease in the 2020 reduction in aid spending in Pakistan.²⁵ Evidence submitted to us has detailed significant and abrupt cuts to programmes focused on education, economic empowerment, and sexual and reproductive services targeted at women and girls in Pakistan, as discussed in chapter 4. Adam Smith International, an organisation delivering UK aid programmes in Pakistan, summarised that

The sudden cuts to budgets, combined with challenges around the merger of two government departments, has put the results of existing programmes at

20 [Q65](#) [Lord Ahmad]. Lord Ahmad stated that UK aid spending had shifted away from humanitarian support. The UK ODA spend on humanitarian aid in Pakistan increased between 2019 and 2020. Statistics on the UK aid spend for 2021 are not yet available. (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2020](#), 29 September 2021, Table B2: Total UK net ODA and humanitarian assistance by recipient country.)

21 *Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (PAK0009)* p 4

22 *ibid* p 9

23 ACTED in Pakistan ([PAK0018](#)) p 8

24 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office equalities assessment document and accompanying note (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office equalities assessment document and accompanying note) ([FUA0087](#)) p 3

25 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2020](#), 29 September 2021, p 27

risk. Individual initiatives that were achieving results have been cut where they were previously expected to be extended. Implementation gaps as a result of new approval processes risk backsliding of others.²⁶

7. Despite the numerous development challenges continuing to face marginalised communities in Pakistan, UK bilateral aid spending in the country has dramatically decreased since 2016. We heard evidence about how this puts the future development of marginalised groups, and their ability to reach their potential, at risk. This is at odds with the UK Government’s objectives in Pakistan, especially with regard to its prioritisation of girls’ education. *The UK Government should direct its bilateral ODA spending in Pakistan strategically towards supporting marginalised groups reach their full potential.*

Strategy

8. The UK seeks to achieve its objectives in Pakistan through an Integrated Delivery Plan (IDP),²⁷ which aims to:

provide a clear strategic framework for the whole of the UK’s activity in and related to Pakistan including a whole of HMG approach to the use of ODA.²⁸

The IDP combines the three key themes: to enhance stability; to build resilience and capability; and to promote inclusive growth.²⁹ Lord Ahmad, Minister for South Asia, the United Nations and the Commonwealth at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, stated that “it is a project-based approach where you get the expertise across the piece for a particular programme or initiative.”³⁰ According to the FCDO, UK aid was readjusted to fit the IDP: existing programmes were realigned, new programmes were formed, and some programmes were closed if they no longer fitted the newly formed strategic direction.³¹

9. While the FCDO provided an infographic of the IDP to the Committee, the full document is not publicly available. Correspondingly, contributors to the inquiry informed us that the UK Government has not made its strategy in Pakistan clear to them. ASI stated that UK aid programmes have “clear, appropriate and ambitious aims”,³² but it was unclear what the FCDO’s overarching strategy within Pakistan was and how some UK aid programmes fit into it.³³ ASI asked for more clarity on the strategy in Pakistan and the UK’s specific bilateral and regional priorities.³⁴ Sightsavers similarly stated that since the merger between the FCO and DFID, and the cuts to the aid budget, it was still unable to determine whether the aims for the overall aid programme in Pakistan were clear

26 Adam Smith International Pakistan (PAK0005) para 4.6

27 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (PAK0009) p 3–4. This combined the work of the former Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the former Department for International Development, the Department for International Trade, Ministry of Defence, National Crime Agency, and Public Health England as well as recognising the role of the British Council.

28 *ibid.*

29 *ibid* p 4

30 Q76 [Lord Ahmad]

31 *ibid* p 5

32 Adam Smith International (PAK0004) para 2.1

33 *ibid* para 2.2

34 *ibid* para 2.3

and appropriate.³⁵ Furthermore, the UN World Food Programme asked for clarity from the UK Government as to how the Indo-Pacific tilt, as laid out in the Integrated Review, would translate into an integrated UK engagement in Pakistan across both development and diplomacy so that aid partners could respond to changes in the UK's strategy.³⁶

10. It is vital that UK aid partners understand the aims and strategy of UK aid in Pakistan in order to carry out their work as effectively as possible. Consequently, the FCDO should publish its most up-to-date iteration of the Integrated Delivery Plan for Pakistan.

11. Evidence also suggested that a lack of donor coordination was limiting the potential effectiveness of UK aid programmes. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) explained that “donors should coordinate among each other to not only avoid duplication of efforts but to identify areas for thematic integration and geographic collaboration.”³⁷ Amir Ramzan, Pakistan Country Director for the British Council, stated that with ODA funding, the British Council “do not do anything unless it is in partnership” and noted how the EU had focused on development activities in different regions to the UK.³⁸ However, he added that despite “mechanisms in Pakistan for donor co-ordination at the education level at both federal and provincial [level], they could be a bit more systematic in defining what that co-ordination should look like and prioritisation.”³⁹ Fajer Rabia Pasha, Executive Director at Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education, went further and argued that

To be honest, I do not see much of a joined-up approach, even though the forums exist. The donors sit together. They talk to each other, but, when it comes to the funding disbursement and programmes, everyone has their own priorities.⁴⁰

However, we heard about one positive example of donor coordination where the FCDO supported “the constructions of schools, provision of missing facilities and technical assistance in Punjab & [Khyber Pakhtunkhwa]” while “USAID implemented large-scale teacher training programmes under Pakistan Reading Project to improve education delivery in Pakistan.”⁴¹ The IRC recommended that this type of joined-up strategy be more commonplace to ensure improved educational outcomes for girls in Pakistan.⁴²

12. Aid programmes are most effective when different donors ensure that they complement each other in a joined-up approach. Our evidence suggested that this isn't always the case in Pakistan. UK aid should strive to adopt a joined-up strategy in Pakistan through collaboration with other donors, to ensure that aid programmes complement and amplify each other.

13. Evidence to our inquiry overwhelmingly indicated that multi-year projects had the potential to deliver the most meaningful development results for Pakistan. Fajer Rabia Pasha told us that communities complain that organisations complete successful

35 Sightsavers (PAK0010) paras 4–6

36 World Food Programme (PAK0007) para 3

37 International Rescue Committee (PAK0013) para 5

38 Q21 [Amir Ramzan]

39 *ibid.*

40 Q21 [Fajer Rabia Pasha]

41 International Rescue Committee (PAK0013) p 2. This assistance took place under Punjab Education Support Programme 2 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Support Programme 3.

42 *ibid.*

programmes and then totally withdraw, which makes it more difficult for organisations to enact aid programmes in the future because the trust level between the organisation and the recipients is lower.⁴³ The new organisation must then “go through the whole process of community mobilisation, engagement and building that trust level with the communities.”⁴⁴ ACTED suggested that “the UK could commit to longer investments via its various programmes, or ensure that those follow-up programmes that are initiated adequately incorporate those reached through previous initiatives to build on previous successes in hot spot areas.”⁴⁵

14. Long-term aid programmes often represent better value for money than short-term projects, especially in areas such as education. In order to drive inclusive and transformative development in Pakistan, the FCDO should focus its aid programming in Pakistan on long-term interventions rather than short-term projects.

Engagement of local NGOs

15. There was widespread agreement about the importance of local NGOs delivering aid programmes rather than larger international NGOs as “[t]hey often have strong grassroots connections, community access and legitimacy.”⁴⁶ Fajer Rabia Pasha told us that

Your local actors and local organisations are always best suited to deliver and bring in communities because they have that trust level already established with the communities.⁴⁷

However, Asma Balal, Country Director for Marie Stopes Society in Pakistan, a local branch of an International NGO (INGO), told us that her organisation had successfully delivered reproductive services to “the most remote areas and very conservative settings” without challenge and that their experience was that “if the health educators, providers, and staff are from the communities, that creates ownership at the community level.”⁴⁸ Equally, programmes were considered more effective when contractors had “stronger knowledge of the local context”.⁴⁹ Consequently, both local NGOs and INGOs that involve local organisations or communities are naturally in a strong position to understand the views and needs of that community.

16. However, evidence suggested that local NGOs in Pakistan tend to be smaller, with a lower capacity to design, deliver and financially manage aid programmes than INGOs.⁵⁰ The UN World Food Programme indicated that the FCDO tends to work with INGOs, especially during an emergency, and that local NGOs can present risks.⁵¹ Lord Ahmad expanded further, telling us that

43 [Q20](#) [Fajer Rabia Pasha]

44 *ibid.*

45 ACTED in Pakistan ([PAK0018](#)) p 9

46 Adam Smith International ([PAK0004](#)) p 4

47 [Q27](#) [Fajer Rabia Pasha]

48 [Q47](#) [Asma Balal]

49 Oxford Policy Management and e-Pact Consortium ([PAK0003](#)) p 5

50 Adam Smith International ([PAK0004](#)) para 9.2

51 World Food Programme ([PAK0007](#)) para 14 and 15

... there will be certain areas within Pakistan where the reach of a UN agency or a multilateral partner, because of its accessibility, may be greater and more effective than a local NGO, simply because of the stretch of its ability and governance.⁵²

An advantage that INGOs can have is the ability to source resources outside of the local economy, especially in emergencies.⁵³ This is because over-reliance on NGOs who source locally can have a negative impact on local markets as it can drive up the price of emergency commodities.⁵⁴ However, evidence suggested that it can be possible to mitigate the risk of working with smaller NGOs by asking larger and more experienced delivery partners to assume financial management and technical oversight of the programmes.⁵⁵ For instance, Lord Ahmad told us that “UK financed development programmes have also contributed to the organisational capability of NGOs to help deliver more effectively.”⁵⁶

17. Aid programmes are more effective when they are run by or involve local organisations and people due to their integration into and acceptance by local communities. However, we accept that it may be more appropriate for large INGOs to operate some larger aid programmes, especially in emergencies. Nevertheless, it is clear that INGOs should still involve local organisations and people in aid programmes wherever possible. Consequently, we recommend that, wherever possible, the FCDO should consider the benefits of delivering UK aid programmes through local NGOs in Pakistan. Where this is not possible, the FCDO should involve local organisations and communities in the planning and implementation of aid programmes by INGOs, or consider creating partnerships between local NGOs and larger and more experienced INGOs.

Engagement with the Pakistani Government

18. Evidence to our inquiry stated that it has become increasingly difficult for NGOs to operate in Pakistan, especially INGOs. In 2015, the Pakistani Government enacted the Regulation of INGOs Policy;⁵⁷ this policy requires all INGOs to register and obtain permission from the Ministry of Interior to act in Pakistan and restricts their activities to specific issues and geographical areas.⁵⁸ The Ministry can cancel the registration of INGOs for “involvement in any activity inconsistent with Pakistan’s national interests, or contrary to Government policy”.⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch expressed concern that this was a vague definition open for broad interpretation.⁶⁰ In December 2017, around 29 INGOs had their applications to continue working in Pakistan rejected and were informed that they had 60 days to leave.⁶¹ In 2018, upon the election of the former Prime Minister,

52 [Q73](#) [Lord Ahmad]

53 World Food Programme ([PAK0007](#)) para 14

54 *ibid.*

55 Adam Smith International ([PAK0004](#)) para 9.2

56 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([PAK0020](#)) p 2

57 Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, [Policy for regulation of International Non-Governmental Organizations \(INGOs\) in Pakistan](#), October 2015

58 *ibid.*

59 *ibid.*

60 Human Rights Watch, [Pakistan: Withdraw Repressive New NGO Rules](#), October 2015. Some reports stated the number of INGOs was also 27 or 31.

61 The Guardian, [Pakistan expels foreign aid groups in droves](#), 18 December 2017.

Imran Khan, the appeals of 18 INGOs working on poverty alleviation and human rights were rejected on the grounds that they had failed to work within the remit of their “stated intent”.⁶²

19. Suspicion towards NGOs includes not only INGOs, but also national NGOs receiving foreign funding. Dr Farzana Shaikh, Associate Fellow for the Asia-Pacific Programme at Chatham House, stated concern that at a Cabinet Meeting in January 2021, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan had made mention of “foreign funding” and the promotion of a “foreign agenda” by NGOs in Pakistan, leading to concern that national NGOs may also face additional restrictions on their activities.⁶³ In reference to NGOs, ASI mentioned that

Some host country state agencies are suspicious of foreign-funded programmes and routinely approach project personnel. Those agencies’ operatives can intimidate project staff and put their safety at risk.⁶⁴

Therefore, both national and international NGOs have continued to struggle to operate due to “security concerns of, and monitoring by, state agencies.”⁶⁵ According to Human Rights Watch, in 2020, NGOs and their staff have experienced “intimidation, harassment and surveillance” in Pakistan.⁶⁶ The Institute of Development Studies expressed their concern that the shrinking space for NGOs in Pakistan would force UK aid to work with smaller partners without the experience or capacity to deliver large rights-based agenda programmes.⁶⁷

20. Annabel Gerry, Development Director for Pakistan at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, told us that “access and the permissions” were some of the biggest challenges for UK aid in Pakistan.⁶⁸ Lord Ahmad stated that

... the UK Government has been actively involved with the Government of Pakistan to input into the draft NGO policy for local NGOs who receive foreign funds.⁶⁹

21. **There is a shrinking space for INGOs and NGOs in Pakistan, who are seen as promoting a foreign agenda. The restrictions on and harassment towards NGOs in Pakistan threatens the success of UK aid programmes there. The FCDO should work with the Pakistani Government and use diplomatic means to ensure that INGOs and NGOs, especially the UK’s aid partners, are able to undertake development work in the country without barriers. The FCDO should write to the Committee within nine months to update us on their progress on this area.**

22. Although we heard that long-term aid projects are generally more effective, the Committee received evidence that political support can dwindle for these programmes, which often reduces their effectiveness.⁷⁰ This is particularly challenging when there is a

62 [Q14](#) [Dr Shaikh]; BBC News, [Aid charities ActionAid and Plan ‘to be turfed out’ of Pakistan](#), October 2018

63 [Q14](#) [Dr Farzana Shaikh]

64 Adam Smith International ([PAK0004](#)) para 13.17

65 *ibid* para 9.4

66 [Q14](#) [Dr Shaikh]; Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2020: Pakistan](#), accessed 10 December 2021

67 Institute of Development Studies ([PAK0002](#)) para 3

68 [Q75](#) [Annabel Gerry]

69 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([PAK0020](#)) p 3

70 Adam Smith International ([PAK0004](#)) para 12.11

political change, such as a new Government in Pakistan, provincial or federal.⁷¹ That is relevant, because Pakistan changed its Prime Minister and Government shortly before the publication of this Report.

23. Additionally, although the aims of certain UK aid programmes, such as on education and reproductive health, have been considered to be well aligned with the Pakistan Government's own priorities, the Institute for Development Studies said, about the previous Pakistani Government, that "the strengthening of FCDO aid programme for open societies, religious and media freedoms is not in line with the vision and commitment of the Government of Pakistan."⁷² This has been emphasised by the hostility to NGOs, the closing of civic spaces,⁷³ and the "shrinking space for human rights activists and human rights defenders" in Pakistan.⁷⁴ The former Foreign Secretary specified the development of open societies as one of the FCDO's seven priorities for ODA,⁷⁵ and the former Department for International Development laid out its plan for 'Open aid, open societies'.⁷⁶

24. Lord Ahmad discussed how the Government had made representations to the Pakistani Government on certain issues, such as the blasphemy laws.⁷⁷ He stated that

We lobby with relevant Ministers/Ministries, senior officials and support independent commissions (such as the National Commission on the Status of Women and the National Commission on Human Rights), to advocate for a vibrant and strong civil society.⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the FCDO gave a mixed overview of their collaboration with the Pakistani Government, writing that

Donor relationships with the government of Pakistan are facilitated by the Economic Affairs Division, who hold regular meetings with individual donors. They also hold collective meetings with key donors and stakeholders from federal and provincial ministries to ensure assistance is coordinated and aligned with government. However, there remains room for improvement and the Economic Affairs Division is working to improve coordination through a new policy framework.⁷⁹

25. UK aid programmes focused on supporting the development of an open society do not always fit with the policy objectives of the Pakistani Government. However, progress in this area is key to supporting other core elements of UK development work in Pakistan, such as improving opportunities for women and girls and minorities. However, the Committee are aware that there has been a change in federal Government in Pakistan, and it is not yet clear how the newly formed Government will address the challenges noted in this chapter. As such, the UK Government should maintain dialogue with the Pakistani Government on the importance of an open society, including the

71 Adam Smith International ([PAK0004](#)) para 12.11; Oxford Policy Management and e-Pact Consortium ([PAK0003](#)) p 5 and 16

72 Institute of Development Studies ([PAK0002](#)) para 2

73 *ibid* para 1

74 [Q58](#) [Professor Rehman]

75 HC Deb, 21 April 2021, col 37–39WS [Commons written ministerial statement]

76 Department for International Aid, [Open aid, open societies: A vision for a transparent world](#), 6 February 2021

77 [Q79](#) [Lord Ahmad]

78 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([PAK0020](#)) p 3

79 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 7

need for civic spaces and religious and media freedom. As part of this, the FCDO should increase support to Pakistan's National Commission on the Status of Women and its National Commission on Human Rights.

3 Covid-19 and development in Pakistan

The UK's response to covid-19 in Pakistan

26. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on Pakistan's progress towards tackling its development challenges. Evidence to our inquiry discussed the impact of covid-19 on Pakistan in terms of health, the economy, and the impact on education. It also suggested that vulnerable and marginalised groups in Pakistan suffered disproportionately worse outcomes from the pandemic, which will be explored further in chapter 4.

27. To provide a targeted response to covid-19, the FCDO updated its Integrated Delivery Plan to the Integrated Delivery Plan-COVID.⁸⁰ The UK Government pivoted £88.2 million worth of ODA to support the Pakistani Government's work on covid-19.⁸¹ We heard that the FCDO was "proactive" in its response and "[t]hose responsible for programmes were proactive in requesting changes and open to input on country needs."⁸²

The impact of covid-19 on Pakistan

Health

28. As of 17 January 2021, Pakistan had had around 1,500,000 recorded cases of covid-19, resulting in around 30,000 recorded deaths.⁸³ Pakistan has been described as having "a relatively low number of Covid deaths and cases".⁸⁴ While some of this has been attributed to underreporting and inadequate testing in the country, it has also been attributed to its high youth population, as 64% of the country's population are under 30.⁸⁵

29. Out of an estimated population of 225 million,⁸⁶ about 128 million have had at least their first vaccine dose, with around 101 million people being fully vaccinated as of 15 March 2021.⁸⁷ Pakistan has received the bulk of its bilateral vaccine doses from China, of which 6 million were donated.⁸⁸ On 24 October 2021, the Ambassador of Pakistan to China stated in a tweet that China had "so far provided over 110 million doses of vaccines to Pakistan, which form the backbone of our inoculation drive."⁸⁹ Pakistan has also received 107 million vaccine doses so far from COVAX, the worldwide covid-19 vaccine sharing scheme.⁹⁰ To date, the UK has supplied 1,008,000 vaccines to Pakistan through

80 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 6 and 14. Like with the IDP, it consists of bringing together all government departments and cross departmental funds to act. It consists of 5 key pillars: support British nationals, stop the disease, mitigate its impact, enable recovery and build resilience, and maintain post operations.

81 *ibid* p 6

82 Adam Smith International Pakistan ([PAK0005](#)) para 9.1

83 Government of Pakistan, [COVID-19 Health Advisory Platform by Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination](#), accessed 17 January 2021; United Nations Population Fund, [World Population Dashboard: Pakistan](#), accessed 17 January 2021

84 [Q3](#) [Dr Shaikh]

85 *ibid*.

86 United Nations Population Fund, [World Population Dashboard: Pakistan](#), accessed 21 January 2022

87 Government of Pakistan, [COVID-19 Health Advisory Platform by Ministry of National Health Services Regulations and Coordination](#), accessed 17 January 2021

88 Daily Times, [Pakistan achieves milestone of 100m Covid vaccinations](#), 24 October 2021

89 Twitter, [Tweet from the Pakistan Ambassador to China](#), 24 October 2021

90 UNICEF, [COVID-19 Vaccine Market Dashboard](#), 24 March 2022

COVAX.⁹¹ Equally, the UK has also donated £548 million to COVAX, although there was no estimate as to how much of this went to Pakistan as this would be “complex and time-consuming and require substantial coordination with GAVI.”⁹² Lord Ahmad told us that “[a]lthough we have not finalised any programmes, there is a case to make for further support to Pakistan in terms of receipt of vaccines.”⁹³

Economy

30. The UN World Food Programme stated that lockdowns and closures of “borders, offices, and schools” had a “devastating economic impact”, with Pakistan’s GDP growth at -0.4% for the 2019–2020 fiscal year.⁹⁴ We heard that the number of people in poverty has begun to increase during covid-19 when it had previously been on the decline: an estimated 40% of people (88 million) are considered poor compared to 25% before the pandemic.⁹⁵ Those living under the poverty line may increase up to 125 million in the coming years due to covid-19.⁹⁶

31. In contrast, Dr Farzana Shaikh, Associate Fellow at the Asia-Pacific Programme at Chatham House, stated

Like every other country in the world, Pakistan’s economy has been hit hard by Covid, though it appears to have weathered the storm rather better than most other economies in south and south-east Asia.⁹⁷

Dr Shaikh suggested this may have to do with Pakistan being “rather less well integrated into the global economy than other economies in the region”, protecting it from the “shocks that have jolted other countries.”⁹⁸ Dr Shaikh explained that Pakistani Government officials attributed it to the Government using “smart” lockdowns which targeted “virus hotspots around the country”.⁹⁹ She also suggested it could be due to Ehsaas, a Government-run social protection and poverty alleviation scheme, which provided emergency cash handouts during the pandemic to over 12 million families, and also to the large number of remittances being sent into Pakistan.¹⁰⁰

Education

32. We heard from numerous sources that covid-19 and the resulting lockdowns have had a significant negative impact on education in Pakistan, “probably reversing several years of the progress made in improving access to education and learning.”¹⁰¹ The FCDO

91 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([PAK0020](#)) p 3

92 *ibid.* GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance is a public-private partnership aimed at increasing vaccination rates in developing countries.

93 [Q77](#) [Lord Ahmad]

94 World Food Programme ([PAK0007](#)) para 6

95 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 6

96 *ibid.*

97 [Q3](#) [Dr Shaikh]

98 *ibid.* While the lack of integration may have protected Pakistan from the economic shocks of covid-19, the FCDO identifies the “lack of regional interconnectivity, restrictive trade policies and barriers to entry” as barriers to economic growth in Pakistan. (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 6)

99 [Q3](#) [Dr Shaikh]

100 *ibid.* However, Dr Shaikh also stated in [Q5](#) that one other explanation for the sharp increase of remittances recorded could be attributed to them having to enter through formal means rather than informal means due to covid-19. This was attributed to pressure from the Financial Action Task Force.

101 Oxford Policy Management and e-Pact Consortium ([PAK0003](#)) p 6

identifies 51 million children being affected by school closures in Pakistan, with 22.8 million children already being out of school and with it causing another one million children to have dropped out of school permanently.¹⁰² One survey found that family income crises due to covid-19 was the main reason for school dropouts.¹⁰³

33. It was widely agreed that there was a lack of infrastructure in place in Pakistan for remote digital learning,¹⁰⁴ which was particularly prevalent for pupils in state schools.¹⁰⁵ The youngest children and children from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds without access to remote learning resources and whose families have suffered negative livelihood shocks have been the most negatively affected.¹⁰⁶ A report prepared for the FCDO indicated that there is “unequal access to distance learning in Pakistan, with the already marginalised children the most likely to be excluded” and that an intersection of poverty, gender, and location entrenched exclusion from remote learning.¹⁰⁷ We heard that the transition to online and remote learning “will take quite a lot of resource and focus for it to be successful and sustainable.”¹⁰⁸

34. Like much of the world, Pakistan has been significantly impacted by covid-19. It is clear in Pakistan that marginalised and vulnerable groups have been disproportionately affected. *The FCDO should continue to carry out aid programmes aimed at helping covid-19 recovery, particularly addressing the impact among marginalised communities, especially children.*

102 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (PAK0009) p 15; Q20 [Fajer Rabia Pasha]

103 Oxford Policy Management and e-Pact Consortium (PAK0003) p 20, quoting an I-SAPS study by Alam and Ali in 2020. (Abdullah Alam and Ahmad Ali, Institute of Social and Policy Sciences, [COVID-19 and Education: Survey to Analyse Student Drop-out after School Reopening in Punjab Province of Pakistan](#), December 2020)

104 Q25 [Fajer Rabia Pasha]

105 Q30 [Amir Ramzan]

106 Oxford Policy Management and e-Pact Consortium (PAK0003) p 6

107 Girls Education Challenge, [Emerging Findings: The impact of COVID-19 on girls and the Girls' Education Challenge response: Focus on South Asia \(Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan\)](#), August 2021, p 7

108 Q30 [Amir Ramzan]

4 Development challenges in Pakistan

Food insecurity

35. The World Food Programme told us that

Despite living in a food surplus country which is a major producer of wheat, rice and other staples, 23.5 percent of Pakistan’s population faced food insecurity in 2020. Chronic poverty, high vulnerability to natural hazards and internal conflict were some of the driving factors.¹⁰⁹

It went on to add that “[a]ccording to the latest national nutrition survey (2018), 40.2 percent of children under 5 were stunted, 17.7 percent were wasted, and 28.9 percent underweight.”¹¹⁰ We heard that the stunting had both physical and mental impacts.¹¹¹ This increases a child’s likelihood of death in the short-term.¹¹² In the long-term, an individual will have a lower life expectancy with a greater risk of certain diseases and will be cognitively impaired, impacting their future economic opportunities.¹¹³

36. Evidence suggested that girls were at particular risk of malnutrition as “they are at a disadvantage when it comes to food distribution”.¹¹⁴ This means that girls’ future prospects are disproportionately disadvantaged. We also heard that this “perpetuates the cycle of intergenerational poverty” as “malnourished girls with significant deficiencies [are] giving birth at a relatively early age and transferring a lot of those deficiencies to their children.”¹¹⁵

37. Evidence stated while that the FCDO carried out assessments to monitor the severity of food insecurity and provided lifesaving humanitarian assistance in Pakistan, the FCDO seemed to lack a joined-up strategy to deal with food insecurity.¹¹⁶ For example, despite the FCDO having recorded 62% food insecurity in one district, it did not support food assistance despite a recommendation to do so.¹¹⁷ The World Food Programme told us that the FCDO did not support their work in early recovery and livelihood restoration activities for returnees and host communities in newly merged districts.¹¹⁸

38. Food insecurity remains a development challenge in Pakistan. As adequate nutrition is central to maintaining progress in key areas for development such as health, education, and economic growth, failing to have a joined-up strategy towards nutrition undermines the UK Government’s work in other areas, such as in education and economic empowerment for women and girls. Consequently, the FCDO should continue to fund programmes which tackle nutrition challenges, such as stunting within Pakistan, especially amongst girls.

109 World Food Programme ([PAK0007](#)) para 4

110 *ibid* para 7

111 The Telegraph, [Stunting: a silent emergency threatening millions of children’s lives](#), accessed 7 December 2021

112 *ibid.*

113 *ibid.*

114 [Q35](#) [Asma Balal]

115 *ibid.*

116 World Food Programme ([PAK0007](#)) para 12

117 *ibid.*

118 *ibid.*

Women and girls

Education and economic empowerment

39. Pakistan's education system is considerably underdeveloped: 22.8 million children are permanently out-of-school in Pakistan, representing 40% of children in this age group.¹¹⁹ The World Bank recorded Pakistan as having a literacy rate of 58% in 2019.¹²⁰ The majority of out-of-school children in Pakistan are from poor, rural and remote areas, and school infrastructure is much worse in remote areas.¹²¹ While education is a universal challenge in Pakistan, girls face more cultural barriers in accessing education, with girls having worse educational outcomes compared to men: 32% of primary school age girls are out of school in Pakistan compared to 21% of boys,¹²² and women have a literacy rate of 48% compared to 70% of men.¹²³

40. Due to covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns, schools utilised remote learning as an alternative to in-person attendance. However, as indicated previously, poverty, location, and gender impacted to reduce access to distance learning. Fajer Rabia Pasha, Executive Director at Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education, said that women and girls were less likely to be able to partake in remote learning because they are often not allowed to access the internet at home.¹²⁴ A study by the British Council indicated the increased difficulties girls face with remote learning: 37% female of students don't have WiFi or broadband internet connection at home compared to 3% of male students, 63% of female participants had not attended online class before and were not aware of remote learning compared to 15% of male students, and 36% female of female students do not have suitable reading/learning space at home compared to 7% of male students.¹²⁵ A report prepared for the FCDO indicated that the most marginalised girls in Pakistan faced additional barriers in accessing remote learning, as their parents are more likely to be illiterate, and therefore less likely to support their learning at home. Girls from poor families in Pakistan also faced increased pressure to do housework and agricultural labour during school closures.¹²⁶

41. Identified as one of the UK's priorities in Pakistan under the Integrated Delivery Plan, education was the largest recipient sector of UK aid in Pakistan at £46 million in 2020.¹²⁷ The UK Government has specified girls' education as one of its seven priorities

119 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 4; UNICEF, [Education](#), accessed 12 January 2021. Child is used in this case to refer to children between 5 and 16 years old.

120 The World Bank, [Literacy rate, adult total \(% of people ages 15 and above\) - Pakistan](#), accessed 17 January 2022

121 [Q19](#) [Amir Ramzan]; [Q25](#) [Adnan Junaid]

122 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 4; Human Rights Watch, [Barriers to Girls' Education in Pakistan](#), 12 November 2018

123 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 8

124 [Q31](#) [Fajer Rabia Pasha]

125 British Council ([PAK0015](#)) para 2.1. The figures cited concern students from middle level to higher secondary level education.

126 Girls Education Challenge, [Emerging Findings: The impact of COVID-19 on girls and the Girls' Education Challenge response: Focus on South Asia \(Afghanistan, Nepal and Pakistan\)](#), August 2021, p 7

127 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Devtracker: Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Education Sector Programme](#), accessed 12 January 2021

for ODA,¹²⁸ identifying it as integral to reducing child mortality and increasing earnings and “a key driver determining a country’s economic success.”¹²⁹ The FCDO told us that the education of girls in Pakistan is a “high priority”¹³⁰ and that

the goal in the cross-HMG country plan is for Pakistan’s education system to be built back better after Covid and strengthened to ensure quality for all, especially girls and the most marginalised.¹³¹

Nevertheless, 2020 saw “a decrease in ODA going towards education from 2019, of which the largest reductions were seen in the basic education sector (by £35m).”¹³² This was the largest sector decrease in aid spending in Pakistan.¹³³

42. In 2012, the UK Government established the Girls’ Education Challenge (GEC), which is a global initiative to improve girls’ access to education. In Pakistan, there are two programmes under the ‘Leave No Girl Behind’ (LNGB) part of the GEC, which aim to improve learning opportunities and outcomes for over 40,500 of the most marginalised girls in Pakistan.¹³⁴ One of the two aid programmes is the ‘Teach and Educate Adolescent Girls with Community Help (TEACH)’ project run by the IRC. TEACH aims to support 35,000 out-of-school girls in Balochistan, including “girls with disabilities, girls who have experienced or are at risk of gender-based violence, and girls at risk of early marriage.”¹³⁵ However, the IRC discussed the uncertainties around their project following the aid cuts. Adnan Junaid, Country Director for Pakistan at the IRC, told us that if they did not receive the second phase of funding from the Government, 9,000 to 11,000 girls would not be able to go to school.¹³⁶ This meant vulnerable and marginalised girls would never access education.¹³⁷ In follow-up written evidence, the IRC stated that the UK Government had told them that they would be notified if they would receive the second phase of funding for their programme by mid-March, but they still had not been updated by 21st June 2021.¹³⁸ Due to this, the project had to be paused, causing 5,000 girls to not be able to fulfil the full programming.¹³⁹ The resulting effect was that girls transitioned into Government schools at a lower level than they should have.¹⁴⁰ Adnan Junaid told us that

Education is not a one or two-year programme; it has to be sustainable and long-term programming. You have to work with the communities to engage them, make them aware and convince them to send their girls to school, which we are facing.¹⁴¹

128 HC Deb, 21 April 2021, col 37–39WS [Commons written ministerial statement]

129 [PM steps up UK effort to get every girl in the world into school](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office press release, 24 September 2019

130 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 8

131 *ibid.*

132 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Statistics on International Development: Final UK Aid Spend 2020](#), 29 September 2021, p 74. The basic education sector can be defined as the primary and lower secondary education sector.

133 *ibid* p 27

134 UK Aid, [Girls’ Education Challenge](#), accessed 10 January 2021

135 *ibid.*

136 [Q18](#) [Adnan Junaid]

137 International Rescue Committee ([PAK0013](#)) p 1

138 *ibid.*

139 *ibid.*

140 *ibid.*

141 [Q18](#) [Adnan Junaid]

43. The aid cuts and the subsequent delays threaten to undermine the UK Government’s education goals in Pakistan, particularly to support the rebuilding of Pakistan’s education system to be more inclusive for girls and the most marginalised communities following the impact of covid-19.

44. The World Economic Forum ranked Pakistan 151 out of 153 on the Gender Gap Index.¹⁴² Women have lower participation in the workforce in Pakistan at 22% compared to 82% for men.¹⁴³ Women occupy as little as 4% or 5% of managerial jobs and also occupy 90% of the lowest paying jobs in Pakistan.¹⁴⁴ Women from rural areas were identified as often performing “extremely exploitative and labour-intensive work, such as planting and plucking” which is seasonal and often goes unpaid as they do it on behalf of the men in their family.¹⁴⁵ Women are the most likely to work in the informal sector, which means they have the least access to structural rights.¹⁴⁶ On the onset of covid-19, we also heard it was those in the informal economy who were the most impacted.¹⁴⁷

45. The British Asian Trust told us about the impact of the aid cuts on their UK aid programmes focus on women’s economic empowerment. Their UK Aid Direct programme, which was supposed to start in April 2021, was a grant intended to impact and work with over 1,500 women’s livelihoods.¹⁴⁸ This has been cancelled due to the aid cuts.¹⁴⁹ The UK Aid Match round, which is intended to impact over 3,000 women, was delayed from 2021 to 2022.¹⁵⁰ We heard that the cancellation and delay of these aid programmes would mean “a serious loss of opportunity” for women’s lives.¹⁵¹

46. Another example of the aid cuts is the cancellation of projects under UK aid’s Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) programme. One programme with Better Cotton Initiative focused on increasing the economic empowerment of women cotton farmers.¹⁵² As a result of the aid cuts, the programme was ended early and “the wider aims of the project were therefore not achieved.”¹⁵³ These aims included improving the access to knowledge and training by women in cotton production.¹⁵⁴ The other, with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) Asia, focused on supporting women homeworkers to negotiate better outcomes and to create a homebased worker global network in the garments sector.¹⁵⁵ This programme was delayed by covid-19 and, due to the aid cuts, was ended a year earlier and received around £200,000 less in funding than originally planned.¹⁵⁶

47. While we welcome the FCDO’s ongoing commitment to girls’ education and the economic empowerment of women and girls in Pakistan, we are concerned about the

142 World Economic Forum, [Global Gender Gap Index 2021](#), accessed 10 January, p 10

143 United Nations Development Programme, [Gender Inequality Index 2020](#), accessed 13 January 2021

144 [Q38](#) [Kamyla Marvi]

145 *ibid.*

146 *ibid.*

147 [Q4](#) [Dr Shaikh]

148 [Q44](#) [Kamyla Marvi]

149 *ibid.*

150 *ibid.*

151 *ibid.*

152 PricewaterhouseCoopers – Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) programme ([PAK0017](#)) p 1

153 *ibid* p 2. Details of funding for the BCI programme in Pakistan and the number of days it was cut by have not been released to us on grounds of commercial sensitivity

154 *ibid* p 1–2

155 *ibid* p 1

156 *ibid* p 1

effect of the cut to UK aid programmes in this area on women and girls. *Building upon existing work, the FCDO should continue to fund and develop UK aid programmes in education and economic empowerment for women and girls.*

48. **It is important that UK aid programmes are fully inclusive and target all communities, including marginalised groups and those considered less employable. This is crucial to ensuring that no one is left behind. *The FCDO should proactively target future aid interventions towards getting more of the most marginalised women and girls, including from rural and hard-to-reach communities, into school and actively involved in the economy.***

Family planning

49. Family planning has been described as a key challenge to Pakistan’s development. Only 25% of women married or in a union use modern contraception in Pakistan.¹⁵⁷ The FCDO told us that, in Pakistan, there are 3.7 million unintended pregnancies every year, with 2.6 million resulting in induced abortions.¹⁵⁸ 14,000 women die yearly in childbirth in Pakistan, which is the sixth highest maternal death rate in the world.¹⁵⁹ One in 11 children die before the age of five in Pakistan.¹⁶⁰ However, we heard that women being able to plan time between pregnancies would lead to a lower rate of infant mortality of between 13% and 25%, depending on the gap.¹⁶¹

50. The FCDO has funded projects in this area, such as ‘Delivering Accelerated Family Planning in Pakistan’ (DAFPAK), at a cost of almost £90 million.¹⁶² Estimates suggest that this project will result in 2,300 fewer maternal deaths, 3.1 million fewer unintended pregnancies and nearly 1 million fewer unsafe abortions over the project’s lifetime.¹⁶³

51. The Marie Stopes Society in Pakistan, who work on reproductive services and as an aid partner on DAFPAK, told us that the FCDO fund 50% of their high-impact work in underserved areas.¹⁶⁴ However, they stated that for the remaining 9 months of their project with the FCDO, they were faced with an almost 75% cut.¹⁶⁵ This would mean that they would be unable to avert 30,000 unintended pregnancies and over 8,000 unsafe abortions.¹⁶⁶ They expressed regret that the cut had been “rather sudden and at very short notice” as it did not allow “for a very responsible and thought-through transition plan moving out of those communities.”¹⁶⁷

157 [Q35](#) [Asma Balal]

158 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 9

159 *ibid.* Figures differ for the rate of death in childbirth. MSI estimated that 30 women die due to complications from preventable complications during pregnancy, amounting to around 30,000 women dying annually. (MSI Reproductive Choices ([PAK0011](#)) para 1.3))

160 MSI Reproductive Choices ([PAK0011](#)) para 2.9

161 *ibid.* MSI cite a study by the Guttmacher Institute which “found that if all births were spaced by at least two years, the number of deaths among children under five would decline by 13%, 25% if there were a three-year gap.” (Guttmacher Institute, [Family Planning Can Reduce High Infant Mortality Levels](#), April 2002)

162 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [DevTracker: Delivering Accelerated Family Planning in Pakistan \(DAFPAK\)](#), accessed 9 December 2021

163 UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund ([PAK0006](#)) para 14

164 [Q34](#) [Asma Balal]

165 *ibid.*

166 *ibid.*

167 *ibid.*

52. Asma Balal, Country Director at Marie Stopes Society in Pakistan, also emphasised that the abrupt cut to funding had secondary effects. For example, for the DAFPAK project, Marie Stopes employs more than 350 field health educators who are women with very limited opportunities for employment in their communities, who were recruited and trained to become the “social agents of change in their communities.”¹⁶⁸ This economic empowerment aspect of the programme will be under threat from the aid cuts.¹⁶⁹

53. UK aid in Pakistan has funded vital family planning projects. However, despite its own statements reiterating the importance of family planning in Pakistan, UK aid spending has been cut in this area, leading to worse outcomes for women and girls and child development. The FCDO should continue its work on family planning in Pakistan and reconsider cuts to UK aid programmes in this area.

People with disabilities

54. The FCDO told us that people with disabilities suffer systematic discrimination in Pakistan.¹⁷⁰ The former Department for International Development developed the strategy for Disability Inclusive Development to be used in its aid programming.¹⁷¹ Sightsavers told us that they ‘welcomed the prominence and promotion of the DFID’s Disability Inclusive Development Strategy in Pakistan’ and that “its influence was clear in early market engagements, call for proposals and programme strategies.”¹⁷² A new strategy from the FCDO for disability and inclusion rights for 2022 to 2030 was published on 16 February 2022.¹⁷³ The strategy lays out several areas of intervention including education, health, social protection, climate change, and economic empowerment, and it also emphasises the need to aid recovery from covid-19.¹⁷⁴

55. We received evidence stating that parents will often not send their child to school or the child will not be accepted into school if they are disabled.¹⁷⁵ We heard that, in terms of teacher training, there is no widely rolled out policy on teacher training on disability inclusivity and there is not sufficient infrastructure for children with disabilities.¹⁷⁶ As a result, there is little done to support and provide inclusive education to children with disabilities.¹⁷⁷ This is concerning due to the limits this imposes upon the opportunities for people with disabilities in Pakistan. One of the strategic pillars for action of the DFID’s

168 [Q39](#) [Asma Balal]

169 *ibid.*

170 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 11

171 Department for International Development, [DFID’s Strategy for Disability Inclusive Development 2018–2023](#), December 2018. It explained that the strategy had four strategic pillars: Inclusive Education, Social Protection, Economic Empowerment and Humanitarian Action. (*ibid.*, p 12–19). DFID Pakistan had also developed a ‘Disability Programming Action Plan’ in 2018 to set out steps for improving the inclusion of people with disabilities in UK aid programmes. (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO disability update: Progress against DFID’s strategy for Disability Inclusive Development](#), November 2020 p 31)

172 Sightsavers ([PAK0010](#)) para 5

173 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy 2022 to 2030](#), 16 February 2022

174 *ibid.*

175 [Q28](#) [Fajer Rabia Pasha]

176 [Q28](#) [Adnan Junaid]

177 [Q28](#) [Fajer Rabia Pasha]

strategy for Disability Inclusive Development was inclusive education.¹⁷⁸ The new strategy emphasises that ensuring equitable, quality and inclusive education is a key intervention area.¹⁷⁹ ACTED, while discussing the LNGB programme, stated that

... disability inclusive development represents a core feature of UK-supported educational initiatives, particularly those under the LNGB framework, ensuring that children with disabilities are assisted in the best and most appropriate manner possible to facilitate their equal access to quality educational services. To do so, unique assistive plans are developed to provide roadmaps towards achieving this objective, resulting in the provision of tailored support to children with disabilities.¹⁸⁰

56. People with disabilities continue to face challenges in Pakistan, including in access to education. We welcome the FCDO's commitment to disability inclusive development, including through the former DFID's strategy for Disability Inclusive Development and its new FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy. As we collected evidence for this inquiry before the release of this new strategy, the FCDO should provide a detailed explanation of how this new strategy will impact UK aid programming to improve the rights and lives of people with disabilities in Pakistan.

LGBT+ people

57. LGBT+ people continue to face violence and discrimination in Pakistan.¹⁸¹ Same-sex relationships can carry the death penalty (though there is some legal uncertainty on this);¹⁸² however, the death penalty is rare and prosecutions for lesser sentences are often not pursued by authorities.¹⁸³ In 2018, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was passed in Pakistan, which enshrined the rights of transgender people into law,

178 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO disability update: Progress against DFID's strategy for Disability Inclusive Development](#), November 2020, p 11

179 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy 2022 to 2030](#), 16 February 2022, p 21–23

180 ACTED in Pakistan ([PAK0018](#)) p 7

181 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Human Rights & Democracy: 2020 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Report](#), 8 July 2021, p 56

182 *ibid*; There is some debate on the illegality of homosexuality under Pakistani law and whether or not it carries the death penalty. This is summarised in a paper by the Home Office. (Home Office, [Pakistan: Sexual orientation and gender identity or expression](#), July 2019, paras 2.4.3–4, 3.3.1 – 4.3.3) Pakistan's legal system is a mix of secular and religious law. Consensual same-sex activity section is prohibited under 377 of the Penal Code, which states that 'Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which shall not be less than two years nor more than ten years, and shall also be liable to fine'. Section 294 is also sometimes used to prosecute same-sex activity, as it states 'Whoever to the annoyance of others – a) does any obscene act in any public place, or b) sings, recites or utters any obscene songs, ballad or words, in or near any public place, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine, or with both.' (Pakistan Government, [The Pakistan Penal Code \[Last Amended on 2017–02–16\]](#), accessed 8 December 2021, s294 and s377) Under religious law, The Offence of Zina (Enforcement Of Hudood) Ordinance of 1979, under section 4, criminalises sexual intercourse outside of marriage in line with Sharia law principles. (Council of Islamic Ideology, [Hudood Report](#), accessed 15 December 2021) "As non-heterosexual marriages are not legally recognised in Pakistan, all same-sex sexual intercourse is necessarily outside of marriage and so captured by this provision. The penalty is death by stoning for married people, or 100 lashes for unmarried people." (Human Dignity Trust, [Country Profile: Pakistan](#), accessed 9 December 2021.)

183 Home Office, [Pakistan: Sexual orientation and gender identity or expression](#), July 2019, para 4

including outlawing the discrimination and harassment of transgender people.¹⁸⁴ In 2020 Pakistan's Ministry for Human Rights advocated for transgender rights.¹⁸⁵ However, transgender people continue to face discrimination in Pakistani society.¹⁸⁶

58. In May 2021, the UK Prime Minister appointed a new Special Envoy on LGBT rights in May 2021 to “champion LGBT equality at home and abroad.”¹⁸⁷ This coincides with the UK co-chairing the Equal Rights Coalition with Argentina, which aims to protect the rights of LGBTI people globally.¹⁸⁸ The first ERC Strategy and Five-Year Implementation Plan includes the strategic objectives to eliminate violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, end the criminalisation of LGBTI persons, and advance the implementation and monitoring of sustainable development goals for LGBTI inclusion.¹⁸⁹

59. LGBT+ people continue to face challenges in Pakistani society, including the criminalisation of same-sex relationships, and discrimination and violence. The UK Government should use its diplomatic influence, including its new Special Envoy on LGBT Rights, to persuade the Pakistani Government to not enforce anti-LGBT+ legislation, and to encourage a change in social attitudes. It should also make clear to all providers and the Pakistani Government that aid programmes must be allowed to be fully inclusive.

Freedom of religion

60. Islam is the official religion of Pakistan and 96% of Pakistan's population are Muslim.¹⁹⁰ The majority of Pakistani Muslims are Sunni Muslims, making up around 77–87% of the population, with estimates putting the Shia population between 10–20%.¹⁹¹ The remaining population consists of religious minorities including Ahmadi Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists.

The blasphemy laws

61. We heard substantial evidence on the use and misuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan. Blasphemy laws in Pakistan were introduced by the British in 1860 and expanded in 1927.¹⁹² In 1982, the Pakistani Government expanded them to include life imprisonment for ‘wilful’ desecration of the Qur’an and, in 1986, to include execution or life imprisonment for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁹³ Witnesses to the

184 Pakistan Senate, [Transgender Persons \(Protection of Rights\) Act 2018](#), 24 May 2018

185 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Human Rights & Democracy: 2020 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Report](#), 8 July 2021, p 57

186 Q28 [Fajer Rabia Pasha]; Human Rights Watch, [World Report 2021: Pakistan](#), accessed 19 January 2022

187 UK Government, [Prime Minister appoints new Special Envoy on LGBT rights](#), 16 May 2021

188 Equal Rights Coalition, [What we do](#), accessed 9 December 2021

189 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Equal Rights Coalition strategy 2021 to 2026](#), 6 July 2021, p 6

190 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, [Final Results of Census 2017: Population by sex, religion and rural/urban](#), accessed 7 December 2021, p 1. The census puts the Muslim population of Pakistan at 96.47%. As the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Islam is the official religion of Pakistan as enshrined in article 2 of Pakistan's Constitution.

191 Home Office, [Country Policy and Information Note: Pakistan: Shia Muslims](#), July 2021. The Government estimates on page 7 that there are around 20–40 million Shia Muslims in Pakistan. Based on the most recent Pakistan census in 2017, with the total population at 207,684,626, that makes the Shia Muslim population consist of between 9.6% and 19.3% of the population. This puts the Sunni majority at between 77.17% and 86.87% of the population.

192 BBC News, [What are Pakistan's blasphemy laws?](#), 8 May 2018

193 *ibid.*

Committee agreed that the laws are frequently used as means of settling personal disputes and as a means of targeting religious minorities.¹⁹⁴ This is particularly concerning as those accused of blasphemy are often subjected to mob justice, including lynching.¹⁹⁵ As of 2019, 82 people were in prison under the blasphemy laws.¹⁹⁶

62. In 2020, there was an increase in blasphemy charges, with at least 199 people charged.¹⁹⁷ Shia Muslims, Ahmadi Muslims, Christians, and Hindus were identified as particular targets of the misuse of these laws.¹⁹⁸ 70% of the 199 cases brought in 2020 were against Shia Muslims, 20% against Ahmadi Muslims, 3.5% against Christians, and 1% against Hindus, indicating the disproportionate impact of these laws on religious minorities, particularly Muslim religious minorities.¹⁹⁹

63. Equally, we heard that 40 people are currently on death row under section 295C of the blasphemy laws.²⁰⁰ However, no one has yet been executed under these laws in Pakistan, with many of the convicted being eventually acquitted by the Supreme Court.²⁰¹ Sources indicated that between 80% and 95% of blasphemy cases were acquitted on appeal, although this was often after lengthy periods of detention.²⁰²

64. Numerous witnesses stated that it was important the UK did not advocate for the repeal of the blasphemy laws because this would likely have an adverse effect.²⁰³ Professor Javid Rehman, Professor of International Human Rights Law at Brunel University, explained that

... if we did that we would be endangering the very people we want to protect, because there would be public unrest and minorities and other people would be targets.²⁰⁴

For example, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP) are a key supporter of the blasphemy laws and gained 2.2 million votes at the last election.²⁰⁵ They have been responsible for significant

194 [Q53](#) [Professor Tadros]; [Q59](#) [Professor Rehman]; [Q79](#) [Lord Ahmad]

195 [Q59](#) [Professor Tadros] and [Professor Rehman]

196 Home Office, [Country Policy and Information Note: Pakistan: Shia Muslims](#), July 2021, para 2.4.4

197 *ibid.*

198 [Q53](#) [Professor Tadros]; [Q79](#) [Lord Ahmad]

199 The figures are from the United States Department of State, Office of International Religious Freedom, [International Religious Freedom Report for 2020](#), p 11. This is in comparison with a population of between 9.6% and 19.3% Shia Muslims, 0.09%, 1.27% Christians and 1.73% Hindus calculated using the 2017 national census. (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, [Final Results of Census 2017: Population by sex, religion and rural/urban](#), accessed 7 December 2021, p 1) The Ahmadi population is not necessarily accurate due to a boycott by some Ahmadis of the national census. The Home Office has stated that while the census puts the Ahmadis at around 187,000, community sources put the population at 600,000 and some estimates put the number as high as 4 million. (Home Office, [Pakistan – Ahmadis](#), September 2021, para 2.4.1)

200 [Q53](#) [Professor Rehman]; Pakistan Government, [The Pakistan Penal Code \[Last Amended on 2017–02–16\]](#), accessed 8 December 2021, s295C

201 [Q59](#) [Professor Rehman]. A prominent case mentioned by Professor Rehman is the Asia Bibi case. Asia Bibi is a Christian woman who was accused of blasphemy on the basis of little evidence and was put on death row for 9 years before being acquitted by the Pakistan Supreme Court. (BBC News, [Asia Bibi: Pakistan's notorious case](#), 1 February 2019)

202 Home Office, [Country Policy and Information Note: Pakistan: Shia Muslims](#), July 2021, para 2.4.4

203 [Q59](#) [Professor Tadros] and [Professor Rehman]

204 [Q59](#) [Professor Rehman]

205 [Q59](#) [Professor Tadros]

nationwide protests over the blasphemy laws, which has included the kidnapping and murder of police officers.²⁰⁶ Lynching related to the blasphemy laws have been linked to the TLP's slogans.²⁰⁷

65. Professor Mariz Tadros, Director at the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID), stated that the question was instead whether we could make the blasphemy laws “toothless” and “dilute” the effects.²⁰⁸ She suggested providing greater protection for those accused of blasphemy and their families and encouraging a more stringent approach to the rule of law through more rigorous evidence collection in order to make a blasphemy case.²⁰⁹

66. Evidence given to our inquiry suggested that blasphemy laws in Pakistan are frequently misused to settle personal disputes and to target religious minorities. Claims of blasphemy are often not supported by adequate evidence and can lead to violence towards the accused and the accused's family. *The FCDO should encourage the Pakistani Government to ensure that the Pakistani authorities take a more rigorous approach towards evidence collection for these crimes and to offer greater protection for people accused of blasphemy and their families.*

Religious minorities

67. Professor Rehman told us that, in Pakistan, “[t]here has been a systematic and systemic erosion of the rights of minorities and the right to freedom of religion or belief.”²¹⁰ We heard that religious extremist political parties in Pakistan have recently seen a rise in popularity.²¹¹ These groups have increased hate speech towards minority groups, which has been linked to violence suffered by these groups.²¹² For example, we heard that there has been an “emboldening of extremist actors on the streets and in public spaces to attack members of religious minorities and be treated with impunity.”²¹³ Similarly, Pakistan has also seen an increase in restrictions on building places of worship and a lack of action where places of worship have been destroyed by non-state actors.²¹⁴

68. As discussed previously, blasphemy laws are supported by religious extremist political parties, and the misuse of these laws is often disproportionately targeted at religious minorities. There have been recent cases of religious minorities being subject to unsubstantiated accusations of blasphemy, some of which have resulted in mob killings.²¹⁵

206 Al Jazeera, [Pakistan: TLP protesters free abducted policemen after violence](#), 19 April 2021; Al Jazeera, [Four Pakistani police killed in violence at far-right TLP protest](#), 27 October 2021

207 Inter Press Service News Agency, [Time for Public Conversation, Justice after ‘Blasphemy’ killing in Pakistan, say Rights Activists](#), 7 December 2021

208 [Q59](#) [Professor Tadros]

209 *ibid.*

210 [Q53](#) [Professor Rehman]

211 [Q54](#) [Professor Tadros]

212 *ibid.*

213 *ibid.*

214 *ibid.*

215 Cases of blasphemy resulting in lynching have hit the news during the inquiry. One particular egregious example is that of Priyantha Diyawadanage, a Sri Lankan man in Pakistan, who was accused of blasphemy. He was dragged from his workplace and beaten to death by a mob, who then burnt his body. Over 100 people have been arrested in connection with the attack. (BBC News, [Pakistan: Killing of Sri Lankan accused of blasphemy sparks protests](#), 6 December 2021)

69. Rahul Roy-Chaudry, Senior Fellow for South Asia at International Institute for Strategic Studies, explained that Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Imran Khan, had acknowledged in June 2019 that there were "40 different militant groups operating in Pakistan, with some 40,000 militants in the country."²¹⁶ Militant groups and jihadi violence have resulted in Pakistan facing numerous terrorist attacks where the targets of these extremist groups are often religious minorities. Figures state that 2,099 people were murdered in Pakistan because of their religion between 2013 and 2018.²¹⁷ Between 1,673 and 1,732 of these were from religious minorities.²¹⁸

70. The FCDO has indicated it is aware of the persecution of religious minorities in its Human Rights and Democracy Report,²¹⁹ with Lord Ahmad telling us that

Pakistan is a human rights priority country, and one of the reasons it is on that human rights priority list is because we have seen this religious space for minority communities closing down. We have seen churches attacked and minority communities not just marginalised but consistently persecuted, and the rise of extremism. These are all interlocked and interdependent, and what we need is to see progressive, inclusive voices within Pakistan, and to work with key partners on the ground to ensure that change comes from within.²²⁰

71. The Institute of Development Studies said that while minority rights had been a priority for DFID, this work had not been allocated many resources in Pakistan.²²¹ Instead, the inclusion of minorities was considered to be an implicit, rather than an explicit, focus of work in DFID's work on democracy and freedom of expression.²²² We heard that this was because work on the inclusion of minorities is viewed as "a rights focus and not a development focus, and as such, something that has sat more comfortably in the FCO than in DFID."²²³ The Institute of Development Studies stated that they hope that since the FCO-DFID merger that the issue "will benefit from more coordinated, joint working and that a 'religion aware' lens will start to be applied to its development work."²²⁴ Professor Tadros, Director at the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) under the Institute of Development Studies, suggested that UK aid programmes include a religious diversity audit in order to understand how well UK aid programmes are reaching religious minorities.²²⁵

72. Numerous witnesses expressed concern about the portrayal of religious minorities in schools and the national curriculum. Some textbooks reportedly contain discriminatory

216 [Q2](#) [Rahul Roy-Chaudhury]

217 Center for Research and Security Studies, [CRSS Annual Security Report: Security Edition: 2013–2018](#), 1 March 2019, p 57–58

218 *ibid.* Figures from the CRSS state that 2099 people were killed due to sectarian violence between 2013–2018. 367 of these are described as Sunni Muslims and 59 are indistinguishable as either Sunni or Shia Muslims. Taking these numbers into account, this puts non-Sunni Muslim victims as making up between 1673 and 1732 of the victims, despite Sunni Muslims making up the religious majority.

219 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Human Rights & Democracy: 2020 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Report](#), 8 July 2021, p 55

220 [Q78](#) [Lord Ahmad]

221 Institute of Development Studies ([PAK0002](#)) para 1.3

222 *ibid.*

223 *ibid.*

224 *ibid.*

225 [Q53](#) [Professor Tadros]

messages.²²⁶ Pakistan is introducing a Single National Curriculum up to secondary level in 2023 and concern was expressed over the “amount of Islamic religious content in compulsory non-Islamic subjects” and the possible implications for religious minorities.²²⁷ The IRC told us that the

... [C]urriculum taught in the school should promote inter-faith harmony, respect and peace building and avoid any sectarian and religious agenda. Schools should not be established in locations or with names that relate to personal, religious, ethnic, or political identity. Information on how religious and ethnic minorities have and are contributing to Pakistan should be included in curriculum. Writings promoting tolerance and acceptance for fellow citizens and humans should be highlighted.²²⁸

Lord Ahmad stated that “[i]f the curriculum negates or tries to marginalise a community, my view is very clear that we should not be supporting that.”²²⁹ ASI, one of UK aid’s partners, stated that they had revised textbooks for English, maths, and science for Grades 1 to 10 to ensure that they were inclusive, which were printed and distributed to more than 4 million children.²³⁰

73. Religious minorities face obstacles in freely practising their religion and continue to face discrimination and violence within Pakistan society. *The FCDO should ensure that programmes that they fund are fully inclusive and make a particular effort to reach religious minorities. The FCDO should also undertake a religious diversity audit of UK aid programmes in Pakistan.*

Women and girls from religious minorities

74. Women and girls from religious minorities face intersectional and compounded issues. We heard that women face sexual harassment, with women from religious minorities who wear clothes unique to their religious and cultural background experiencing targeted harassment.²³¹ In addition, women and girls from religious minorities can face abduction, trafficking, and child and forced marriage.²³² The majority of forced conversions also involve women and girls from religious minorities being forced to convert to Islam as part of a forced marriage.²³³

75. Dr Farzana Shaikh, Associate Fellow at the Asia-Pacific Programme at Chatham House, told us that estimates state that around 1,000 women and girls have been forcibly converted each year for the last 5–6 years, with most of them being from impoverished communities.²³⁴ Dr Shaikh went on to further explain that

226 [Q53](#) [Professor Rehman]

227 *ibid.*

228 International Rescue Committee ([PAK0013](#)) para 4

229 [Q78](#) [Lord Ahmad]

230 Adam Smith International Pakistan ([PAK0005](#)) para 5.15

231 [Q54](#) [Professor Tadros]

232 [Q11](#) [Dr Shaikh]

233 *ibid.*

234 *ibid.*

... the problem of forced conversions is further complicated by claims, often upheld by local courts, that the conversion itself was voluntary, though most such cases have been shown to involve the use of financial incentives to lure poor and vulnerable young women to convert and marry.²³⁵

Forced conversion to Islam is particularly concerning as renouncing Islam can carry the death penalty, causing women and girls to be unable to return to their religion.²³⁶

76. While the age for marriage in Pakistan is 16 by law, enforcement remains poor.²³⁷ Additionally, Dr Shaikh told us that although the former Pakistani Government had tried to raise the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 18, it was opposed by religious parties and sent to the Council of Islamic Ideology, who ruled that any amendment prohibiting child marriage is un-Islamic and would “lead to many complications”.²³⁸ Equally, forced conversion is a matter under the remit of provincial governments and legislative attempts to tackle the issue have so far not gained traction.²³⁹ The Institute of Development Studies, in reference to the Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) programme funded by the FCDO, told us that the FCDO has been unclear about its funding on tackling the abduction and forced marriage of women and girls from the Hindu and Christian minorities despite its integral role in the FCDO’s future aims in Pakistan.²⁴⁰

77. It is clear that women and girls and minority groups face particular challenges in Pakistani society and those belonging to multiple groups often face intersecting and compounded discrimination. We recommend that the FCDO adopts an explicit focus on the impact of aid programmes on marginalised and minority communities and develops further specific aid programmes in country targeted at these groups. The FCDO should take into account the particular challenges faced by those who belong to intersecting groups, such as women and girls from religious minorities.

78. In addition, multiple challenges remain for civil society and marginalised groups. As such, the FCDO should continue to designate Pakistan as a human rights priority country.

The situation in Afghanistan

79. The takeover of the Taliban in Afghanistan has caused significant displacement within the surrounding region. The UNCHR has estimated that around 500,000 refugees

235 *ibid.*

236 *ibid.* Professor Rehman in [Q53](#) discussed the case of Maria Shahbaz, a 14-year-old Christian Pakistani girl who was forcibly abducted into a car by armed men, raped, forced to convert to Islam, and to marry her captor. The Lahore High Court ruled that Maria Shahbaz had willingly converted to Islam and married and therefore had to return to her husband. The court refused to accept documents showing Maria was underage at the time of the marriage. (OP India, [Pakistan: Underage Maria Shahbaz to return to her abductor, rules Lahore HC](#), 8 August 2020)

237 *ibid.*

238 *ibid.* Dr Shaikh also discussed how the province of Sindh had passed the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act in 2014 which sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 and holds child marriage to be a punishable offence. It is the only province in Pakistan to have done so up to now.

239 *ibid.* Dr Shaikh explained that the Sindh government tried and failed to pass legislation setting a minimum age of 18 for religious conversions in both 2016 and 2019, having consulted with the opposition from religious parties.

240 Institute of Development Studies ([PAK0002](#)) para 1.4

could enter Afghanistan's neighbouring countries.²⁴¹ Pakistan currently hosts the 2nd highest number of refugees in the world.²⁴² As of December 2020, Pakistan was already hosting 3 million Afghan nationals, of which 1.4 million are registered Afghan refugees.²⁴³

80. In July 2021, Pakistan stated it was “not in a position to accept any more refugees” and called on other countries to help manage the refugee crisis coming from Afghanistan.²⁴⁴ Pakistan has increased its border security,²⁴⁵ and reports have suggested that Pakistan has been deporting Afghan refugees back to Afghanistan.²⁴⁶ It was reported in mid-December that 300,000 refugees had entered Pakistan from Afghanistan since the takeover by the Taliban in August.²⁴⁷

81. To help with the influx of refugees into Pakistan, the British High Commission in Islamabad has given £1.67 million to the “UNHCR to procure Core Relief Items (CRIs) to support 3,400 Afghan families (CRI will cover: family tents, plastic tarpaulins, blankets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, kitchen/cooking set, WASH items and solar lamps)”.²⁴⁸ In August, the FCDO announced up to £30 million to be split between Afghanistan's neighbouring countries, with £10 million going to humanitarian organisations in the area and £20 million “allocated to countries that experience a significant increase in refugees to support reception and registration facilities and provide essential services and supplies.”²⁴⁹ In correspondence to the Committee, Lord Ahmad clarified that £4 million of the initial £10 million had gone to Pakistan for preparedness planning:²⁵⁰

WFP (World Food Programme) will receive £2 million for emergency food assistance to support 5,672 refugee families over a period of six months (standard WFP food basket of: wheat flour, split peas, salt, and oil) and UNICEF will receive £2 million to preposition supplies to support UNICEF priority sectors of health, nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), education and child protection.²⁵¹

Lord Ahmad went on to add that

... the remaining £20 million has been approved to support scale up in the event of large-scale movements of people from Afghanistan into neighbouring countries. This funding has not been allocated yet as there has been no large-scale movement of people requiring a response... If the remaining £20 million for the region is unspent within the financial year due to lack of need, it will be returned to fund work within Afghanistan.²⁵²

241 Reuters, [Half a million Afghans could flee across borders – UNHCR](#), 27 August 2021

242 This figure is from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#)) p 2. However, the UNHCR states that Pakistan has the 4th highest number of refugees. (UNHCR, [Refugee Statistics](#), accessed 18 March 2022)

243 Devex, [Opinion: Pakistan needs a refugee compact to support Afghans](#), 5 November 2021

244 VOA News, [Pakistan Refuses to Host Additional Afghan Refugees](#), 13 July 2021

245 Devex, [Opinion: Pakistan needs a refugee compact to support Afghans](#), 5 November 2021

246 The National News, [Pakistani authorities deport Afghan refugees fleeing Taliban](#), 16 October 2021

247 VOA News, [More Than 300,000 Afghans Flee to Pakistan Since Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan](#), 16 December 2021

248 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([PAK0020](#)) p 2

249 [UK to provide £30 million of life-saving supplies for Afghan refugees](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office press release, 3 September 2021

250 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([PAK0020](#))

251 *ibid.*

252 *ibid.*

Equally, Lord Ahmad told us that “none of the additional £50 million announced by the Prime Minister for Afghanistan will go to Afghan Refugees in Pakistan, this will be spent within Afghanistan.”²⁵³

82. Pakistan already hosts the second highest number of refugees in the world. It is important that countries capable of helping carry the financial and practical burden do so. *The FCDO should ensure that the Pakistani authorities receive the necessary assistance and resources to be able to cope with refugees fleeing from the crisis in Afghanistan.*

Conclusions and recommendations

UK aid in Pakistan: Spending, strategy, and delivery

1. Despite the numerous development challenges continuing to face marginalised communities in Pakistan, UK bilateral aid spending in the country has dramatically decreased since 2016. We heard evidence about how this puts the future development of marginalised groups, and their ability to reach their potential, at risk. This is at odds with the UK Government's objectives in Pakistan, especially with regard to its prioritisation of girls' education. (Paragraph 7)
2. *The UK Government should direct its bilateral ODA spending in Pakistan strategically towards supporting marginalised groups reach their full potential.* (Paragraph 7)
3. It is vital that UK aid partners understand the aims and strategy of UK aid in Pakistan in order to carry out their work as effectively as possible. (Paragraph 10)
4. *Consequently, the FCDO should publish its most up-to-date iteration of the Integrated Delivery Plan for Pakistan.* (Paragraph 10)
5. Aid programmes are most effective when different donors ensure that they complement each other in a joined-up approach. Our evidence suggested that this isn't always the case in Pakistan. (Paragraph 12)
6. *UK aid should strive to adopt a joined-up strategy in Pakistan through collaboration with other donors, to ensure that aid programmes complement and amplify each other.* (Paragraph 12)
7. Long-term aid programmes often represent better value for money than short-term projects, especially in areas such as education. (Paragraph 14)
8. *In order to drive inclusive and transformative development in Pakistan, the FCDO should focus its aid programming in Pakistan on long-term interventions rather than short-term projects.* (Paragraph 14)
9. Aid programmes are more effective when they are run by or involve local organisations and people due to their integration into and acceptance by local communities. However, we accept that it may be more appropriate for large INGOs to operate some larger aid programmes, especially in emergencies. Nevertheless, it is clear that INGOs should still involve local organisations and people in aid programmes wherever possible. (Paragraph 17)
10. *Consequently, we recommend that, wherever possible, the FCDO should consider the benefits of delivering UK aid programmes through local NGOs in Pakistan. Where this is not possible, the FCDO should involve local organisations and communities in the planning and implementation of aid programmes by INGOs, or consider creating partnerships between local NGOs and larger and more experienced INGOs.* (Paragraph 17)

11. There is a shrinking space for INGOs and NGOs in Pakistan, who are seen as promoting a foreign agenda. The restrictions on and harassment towards NGOs in Pakistan threatens the success of UK aid programmes there. (Paragraph 21)
12. *The FCDO should work with the Pakistani Government and use diplomatic means to ensure that INGOs and NGOs, especially the UK's aid partners, are able to undertake development work in the country without barriers. The FCDO should write to the Committee within nine months to update us on their progress on this area.* (Paragraph 21)
13. UK aid programmes focused on supporting the development of an open society do not always fit with the policy objectives of the Pakistani Government. However, progress in this area is key to supporting other core elements of UK development work in Pakistan, such as improving opportunities for women and girls and minorities. However, the Committee are aware that there has been a change in federal Government in Pakistan, and it is not yet clear how the newly formed Government will address the challenges noted in this chapter. (Paragraph 25)
14. *As such, the UK Government should maintain dialogue with the Pakistani Government on the importance of an open society, including the need for civic spaces and religious and media freedom. As part of this, the FCDO should increase support to Pakistan's National Commission on the Status of Women and its National Commission on Human Rights.* (Paragraph 25)

Covid-19 and development in Pakistan

15. Like much of the world, Pakistan has been significantly impacted by covid-19. It is clear in Pakistan that marginalised and vulnerable groups have been disproportionately affected. (Paragraph 34)
16. *The FCDO should continue to carry out aid programmes aimed at helping covid-19 recovery, particularly addressing the impact among marginalised communities, especially children.* (Paragraph 34)

Development challenges in Pakistan

17. Food insecurity remains a development challenge in Pakistan. As adequate nutrition is central to maintaining progress in key areas for development such as health, education, and economic growth, failing to have a joined-up strategy towards nutrition undermines the UK Government's work in other areas, such as in education and economic empowerment for women and girls. (Paragraph 38)
18. *Consequently, the FCDO should continue to fund programmes which tackle nutrition challenges, such as stunting within Pakistan, especially amongst girls.* (Paragraph 38)
19. The aid cuts and the subsequent delays threaten to undermine the UK Government's education goals in Pakistan, particularly to support the rebuilding of Pakistan's education system to be more inclusive for girls and the most marginalised communities following the impact of covid-19. (Paragraph 43)

20. While we welcome the FCDO's ongoing commitment to girls' education and the economic empowerment of women and girls in Pakistan, we are concerned about the effect of the cut to UK aid programmes in this area on women and girls. (Paragraph 47)
21. *Building upon existing work, the FCDO should continue to fund and develop UK aid programmes in education and economic empowerment for women and girls.* (Paragraph 47)
22. It is important that UK aid programmes are fully inclusive and target all communities, including marginalised groups and those considered less employable. This is crucial to ensuring that no one is left behind. (Paragraph 48)
23. *The FCDO should proactively target future aid interventions towards getting more of the most marginalised women and girls, including from rural and hard-to-reach communities, into school and actively involved in the economy.* (Paragraph 48)
24. UK aid in Pakistan has funded vital family planning projects. However, despite its own statements reiterating the importance of family planning in Pakistan, UK aid spending has been cut in this area, leading to worse outcomes for women and girls and child development. (Paragraph 53)
25. *The FCDO should continue its work on family planning in Pakistan and reconsider cuts to UK aid programmes in this area.* (Paragraph 53)
26. People with disabilities continue to face challenges in Pakistan, including in access to education. We welcome the FCDO's commitment to disability inclusive development, including through the former DFID's strategy for Disability Inclusive Development and its new FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy. (Paragraph 56)
27. *As we collected evidence for this inquiry before the release of this new strategy, the FCDO should provide a detailed explanation of how this new strategy will impact UK aid programming to improve the rights and lives of people with disabilities in Pakistan.* (Paragraph 56)
28. LGBT+ people continue to face challenges in Pakistani society, including the criminalisation of same-sex relationships, and discrimination and violence. (Paragraph 59)
29. *The UK Government should use its diplomatic influence, including its new Special Envoy on LGBT Rights, to persuade the Pakistani Government to not enforce anti-LGBT+ legislation, and to encourage a change in social attitudes. It should also make clear to all providers and the Pakistani Government that aid programmes must be allowed to be fully inclusive.* (Paragraph 59)
30. Evidence given to our inquiry suggested that blasphemy laws in Pakistan are frequently misused to settle personal disputes and to target religious minorities. Claims of blasphemy are often not supported by adequate evidence and can lead to violence towards the accused and the accused's family. (Paragraph 66)

31. *The FCDO should encourage the Pakistani Government to ensure that the Pakistani authorities take a more rigorous approach towards evidence collection for these crimes and to offer greater protection for people accused of blasphemy and their families. (Paragraph 66)*
32. Religious minorities face obstacles in freely practising their religion and continue to face discrimination and violence within Pakistan society. (Paragraph 73)
33. *The FCDO should ensure that programmes that they fund are fully inclusive and make a particular effort to reach religious minorities. The FCDO should also undertake a religious diversity audit of UK aid programmes in Pakistan. (Paragraph 73)*
34. It is clear that women and girls and minority groups face particular challenges in Pakistani society and those belonging to multiple groups often face intersecting and compounded discrimination. (Paragraph 77)
35. *We recommend that the FCDO adopts an explicit focus on the impact of aid programmes on marginalised and minority communities and develops further specific aid programmes in country targeted at these groups. The FCDO should take into account the particular challenges faced by those who belong to intersecting groups, such as women and girls from religious minorities. (Paragraph 77)*
36. In addition, multiple challenges remain for civil society and marginalised groups. (Paragraph 78)
37. *As such, the FCDO should continue to designate Pakistan as a human rights priority country. (Paragraph 78)*
38. Pakistan already hosts the second highest number of refugees in the world. It is important that countries capable of helping carry the financial and practical burden do so. (Paragraph 82)
39. *The FCDO should ensure that the Pakistani authorities receive the necessary assistance and resources to be able to cope with refugees fleeing from the crisis in Afghanistan. (Paragraph 82)*

Formal minutes

Tuesday 26 April 2022

Members present:

Sarah Champion, in the Chair

Pauline Latham

Chris Law

Kate Osamor

Virendra Sharma

UK aid to Pakistan

Draft Report (*UK aid to Pakistan*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 82 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Wednesday 18 May at 2.00 p.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 2 March 2021

Dr. Farzana Shaikh, Associate Fellow, Asia-Pacific Programme, Chatham House; **Rahul Roy-Chaudhury**, Senior Fellow for South Asia, International Institute for Strategic Studies

[Q1–16](#)

Tuesday 18 May 2021

Adnan Junaid, Country Director (Pakistan), International Rescue Committee; **Amir Ramzan**, Country Director (Pakistan), British Council; **Fajer Rabia Pasha**, Executive Director, Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education

[Q17–33](#)

Tuesday 29 June 2021

Asma Balal, Country Director, Marie Stopes Society, Pakistan; **Kamyla Marvi**, Pakistan Director, British Asian Trust

[Q34–51](#)

Professor Javaid Rehman, Professor of International Human Rights Law, Brunel University; **Professor Mariz Tadros**, Director, The Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID)

[Q52–61](#)

Tuesday 23 November 2021

The Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for South Asia, the United Nations and the Commonwealth, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; **Annabel Gerry**, Development Director (Pakistan), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

[Q62–82](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

PAK numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 ACTED in Pakistan ([PAK0018](#))
- 2 Adam Smith International ([PAK0004](#))
- 3 Adam Smith International Pakistan ([PAK0005](#))
- 4 British Council ([PAK0015](#))
- 5 Family Educational Services Foundation ([PAK0019](#))
- 6 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([PAK0009](#))
- 7 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([PAK0020](#))
- 8 Institute of Development Studies ([PAK0002](#))
- 9 International Rescue Committee ([PAK0013](#))
- 10 MSI Reproductive Choices ([PAK0011](#))
- 11 Oxford Policy Management and e-Pact Consortium ([PAK0003](#))
- 12 PricewaterhouseCoopers – Girls' Education Challenge programme ([PAK0016](#))
- 13 PricewaterhouseCoopers – Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) programme ([PAK0017](#))
- 14 Reprieve ([PAK0014](#))
- 15 Sightsavers ([PAK0010](#))
- 16 UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund ([PAK0006](#))
- 17 Women In Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) & HomeNet South Asia (HNSA) ([PAK0012](#))
- 18 World Food Programme ([PAK0007](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Assessing DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 103
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3rd Report	The UK's approach to tackling modern slavery through the aid programme: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 104
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