



House of Commons  
International Development  
Committee

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# **UK aid to Pakistan: Government Response to the Sixth Report of the Committee, Session 2021–22**

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**Third Special Report of Session 2022–  
23**

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## The International Development Committee

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

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

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## Third Special Report

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The International Development Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2021–22, [UK aid to Pakistan](#) (HC 102) on 29 April 2022. The Government response was received on 17 October 2022 and is appended below.

## Appendix: Government Response

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### Summary to response

We are grateful to the International Development Committee for the report on UK aid to Pakistan. The report’s findings reflect the changing context for development assistance, not only in Pakistan, but globally.

The UK has a proud track record of delivering effective development assistance to Pakistan. This investment, made over decades, has advanced both Pakistan’s development, and our own objectives on shared values, including girls and women, inclusion, religious and media freedom and gender inequality. It has also focussed on promoting jobs, growth and trade and supporting climate resilience in one of the countries most affected globally by climate change.

The size of the UK development portfolio has reduced significantly over the last five years in line with Pakistan’s development. The current level of ODA funding reflects Pakistan’s status as a lower middle-income country in transition towards financing its own development. HMG’s objective in Pakistan is to move from a traditional aid relationship to a mature development partnership, working together on shared development priorities. We aim to support Pakistan’s ability to achieve a self-financed exit from poverty.

As we streamline our development approach towards Pakistan, the FCDO will run fewer, smaller, less complex, more flexible, and agile development objectives that will serve HMG’s priorities and respond to Pakistan’s development needs. We will seek to maintain high impact, through switching from direct delivery to influencing Pakistani policy and systems. We will maintain interventions that benefit girls and women, and which focus on marginalised and minority communities. We aim to expand deployment of UK development capital in line with the UK’s International Development Strategy. Increasingly, we will use technical partnerships, linking these with both FCDO and international expertise and institutions, and with UK public sector and academic expertise.

Since August this year, Pakistan has been affected by climate-related flooding with 187% more rain than the 30-year average. Of 160 districts, 82 have been declared “calamity-hit” with over 33 million people impacted.

The Government of Pakistan is leading the humanitarian response, supported by the UN and humanitarian partners. The UN recently revised its humanitarian appeal for Pakistan to \$816 million to respond to the urgent needs of 20 million people. Issues such as food security, water and sanitation, shelter and health and nutrition services remain critical to the response. The UK Government has announced £26.5 million of humanitarian support for Pakistan and is pivoting development programmes to support floods recovery where possible.

Recovery and reconstruction begins now, but it will take a number of years to rebuild infrastructure, public services and livelihoods in the flood affected areas. A comprehensive post-disaster needs assessment to inform reconstruction plans, sponsored by the Government of Pakistan and the World Bank, has been underway over the past month and is expected to issue by mid-October. The Government of Pakistan recognises the need to recover and reconstruct in a way that is adaptive and resilient to potential future climate shocks. Our priority will be to work with Pakistan and international partners, such as the multilateral development banks, to support climate resilient reconstruction.

Before the floods hit, Pakistan narrowly avoided economic crisis due to prolonged failure to get back onto its IMF programme. The government had lost the confidence of the financial markets and acted against some of the required reform actions. Pakistan eventually achieved its prior actions on 31st August 2022 with the IMF Board approval of the 7th and 8th disbursements of its Extended Fund Facility (equivalent to \$1.2 billion). Pakistan has been described as having a narrow economic pathway ahead and adherence to reforms will be critical.

It will be important for the Government of Pakistan to maintain economically responsible policies, working closely with the IMF and the multilateral development banks, in order to ensure the fiscal space for floods reconstruction.

Across our development portfolio, the team have adjusted and adapted work in line with the changed environment and needs on the ground arising from this major disaster. We will continue building on the UK-supported development gains of the last decade, as well as supporting work to address the medium and longer term floods impact.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

Levels of UK ODA funding reflect the development gains Pakistan has made, with UK support, and its progress to lower middle-income country status. UK aid in Pakistan is carefully targeted towards delivering development impact for Pakistan’s most vulnerable groups. Girls and marginalised communities are targeted in development programmes and prioritised within our education and health programmes, and in programmes working on human rights and inclusion issues.

HMG continues to support Pakistan’s growth and development as we transition our development relationship from reliance on bilateral aid, to a broad range of partnerships which will continue to support marginalised groups in Pakistan.

**Recommendation 2. The UK Government should direct its bilateral ODA spending in Pakistan strategically towards supporting marginalised groups reach their full potential. (Paragraph 7)**

**Response:**

We welcome IDC's emphasis on inclusion of marginalised groups throughout their report. Please see the response to the committee's related recommendations 22, 34 and 35 for detail.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The recently published International Development Strategy (IDS) sets out the UK's approach clearly. We will convene a series of discussions with UK aid partners in Pakistan to promote the IDS and how it applies to UK aid in Pakistan. This will build upon existing engagement with implementing partners, such as the in-person partner day held in Islamabad on 3 March 2022, where the UK's strategy and priorities were discussed collectively with all our UK aid partners.

**Recommendation 4. Consequently, the FCDO should publish its most up-to-date iteration of the Integrated Delivery Plan for Pakistan. (Paragraph 10)**

**Response:**

The Integrated Delivery Plan covered the periods from 2015 to 2018 and 2018 to 2020. In 2021, following the creation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, and shaped by the outcome of the Integrated Review (IR), the Integrated Delivery Plan was replaced by a new Country Plan that captures the full range of UK activity in Pakistan, including security, economy and trade, consular assistance and political engagement. The Country Plan is an internal document, but the broad direction and priorities have been shared with the government of Pakistan, implementing partners, and international donor partners. The High Commission in Islamabad structure their work around and measure progress against the six campaign goals in the Business Plan. These include Health and Education, Climate and Resilience, and Open Societies, as well as Regional Stability, reducing Threats to the UK, and promoting Prosperity. A light-touch review of the Country Business Plan will take place in the next few months to ensure close alignment of UK aid with the IR objectives, as set out in the International Development Strategy.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The British High Commission in Islamabad works with other donors locally to seek to ensure a joined-up approach, which aligns strategic and sectoral work in all areas of UK aid spending. The UK's strategy is informed by what other donors are doing, and identifies our comparative advantage, ensuring our aid complements others' assistance. We engage

with multilateral donors on the development of their strategies including the World Bank, Asia Development Bank and UN agencies. We actively participate in head of development agency forums and in sector donor groups both at the federal and provincial level in Pakistan to ensure coordination of strategies and approaches. We work closely with other organisations including the Government of Pakistan and multilaterals across all our areas of work, for example on tax system strengthening, macro-economic, stability, climate, education and health, and inclusion.

**Recommendation 7. Long-term aid programmes often represent better value for money than short-term projects, especially in areas such as education. (Paragraph 14)**

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

We recognise the importance of long-term approaches to achieving inclusive and transformative development in Pakistan. Working through programmes, policy interventions and political lobbying, the UK government's efforts aim to tackle structural and systemic issues to deliver sustainable growth, stability and poverty reduction. Decisions on the types of programmes and their duration are based on the best available evidence at the time of design and fit with UK priorities and our overall ODA budget allocation. We are shifting to support the Government to self-finance an exit from poverty through more systems strengthening, technical assistance, influencing/advocacy and supporting the better use of data/evidence. Positive, long-term changes, supported by UK aid, are being achieved across the different thematic areas we work on, for example: supporting over 2 million children to gain a decent education since 2015 while supporting education institutions to ensure these gains are sustained; providing access to financial services to over 800,000 people and strengthening the wider financial sector; and enabling significant efficiency savings and tax collection in provincial governments to ensure Pakistan can self-fund its own development.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

Local organisations and communities are embedded in UK aid programme delivery. There is a strong network of local NGOs in Pakistan which are engaged in programme

implementation, for example; Teach for Pakistan in the Data and Research in Education programme, and Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability (TDEA), working under the 2021/22 Open Societies Programme. TDEA is the secretariat of Free and Fair Elections Network, which is the biggest network of NGOs in Pakistan.

We hold early market engagement fairs at programme design stage to create opportunities for local NGOs to partner with INGOs and other suppliers, for example on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Merged Districts and the Girls and Out of School: Action for Learning programmes.

We remain committed to ensuring that the beneficiaries of all our programmes are involved in their design and delivery, and we are reviewing the mechanisms we have in place to receive first-hand information from the communities to improve and evaluate impact. Any revised mechanisms will continue to be complemented by staff field visits and independent monitoring to give us a greater understanding of the context in which our programmes operate.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The operating space for civil society remains extremely constrained in Pakistan. Organisations are subject to registration requirements and require no-objection certificates (NOC) before undertaking activities. Freedom House (2022) rates Pakistan as ‘Partly Free’, suggesting that there are selective restrictions on civil liberties.

The UK continues to engage with the Government of Pakistan and with Pakistan’s like-minded international development partners to develop a more conducive operating environment for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Pakistan.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The UK maintains an ongoing dialogue with the Government of Pakistan to encourage the space for NGOs and INGOs to undertake their important development work across the country. The UK will continue to engage with the Government of Pakistan and the FCDO will write to the Committee within nine months to update on progress as requested.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The UK continues to engage with the Government of Pakistan to prioritise policy and programme interventions which support open societies and improve opportunities for women, girls and minority groups. This is a priority for the UK as outlined in the International Development Strategy and has been raised by the British High Commission in Islamabad in early meetings with the new Pakistani Government.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The UK Government is in regular dialogue with the Government of Pakistan, promoting the value of an open society, the need for civic spaces, and the importance of religious and media freedom. Discrimination against minorities, including in particular Christians, Ahmadi Muslims and Hindus, is present in education, civic spaces and the public sector.

HMG regularly engages the Pakistan’s National Commission on the Status of Women and Pakistan’s National Commission on Human Rights. The Minister of State for South Asia has a regular dialogue on a broad range of human rights with the Government of Pakistan. In addition, we also engage regularly with the provincial Commissions on the Status of Women in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. We will continue to advocate for greater operational independence and better resourcing of these Commissions.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities in Pakistan and increased the risk of reversals in gains made so far in poverty reduction, gender equality and human rights. In 2020, we spent £88.2 million responding to the Government of Pakistan’s priorities on COVID-19 response.

- £21 million was committed under the Pakistan Multi-Year Humanitarian Programme.
- Our economic growth portfolio pivoted to respond to COVID-19. We provided £139,350 to one of the leading diagnostic chains, Excel Labs, to build their capacity to conduct COVID-19 tests.
- Our education portfolio explicitly addresses catch-up learning for girls and marginalised groups, whose education was impacted by COVID-19.



- Through governance programming we supported the development of an economic stimulus and social protection mechanism to address the impact of COVID-19 worth £778 million in Punjab and a similar package in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) worth £161 million.
- We are collaborating with UNFPA and a local NGO to strengthen multiple government-run helplines for women and marginalised people who experienced or were at risk of stress, abuse and gender-based violence, including due to the pandemic.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Recommendation 18. Consequently, the FCDO should continue to fund programmes which tackle nutrition challenges, such as stunting within Pakistan, especially amongst girls. (Paragraph 38)**

**Response:**

The UK are convenors of the Health, Population, and Nutrition Development Partners Group in Pakistan, and in this role we facilitate health sector policy coordination between donors, multilateral agencies and NGOs, including on nutrition and food insecurity. Other donors are active on nutrition and we have therefore exited bilateral ODA finance of nutrition and prioritised our interventions in other areas.

While we have shifted our bilateral approach to maximise impact through influencing and improving policy for health systems, the UK continues to fund UN agencies that provide specific nutrition policy and services.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

Whilst considerable obstacles remain to providing inclusive education in Pakistan, as a lower middle-income country Pakistan has resources to address key education reforms for inclusion of girls and the most marginalised communities. Our continued support will focus on providing technical expertise to support governments in KP and Punjab, and at the federal level to ensure Pakistan’s own resources are used to achieve maximum impact, improve access to education, and quality of learning with a focus on girls and the most marginalised, as well as supporting catch-up learning post pandemic.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

We continue to advocate the importance of Pakistan making progress both on girls' education and women's economic empowerment. We are bringing together wider UK capabilities, including UK-backed finances through British International Investment (BII), UK Export Financing (UKEF) and ODA financing for Pakistan from other parts of the UK government, to help Pakistan mobilise foreign savings and drive economic growth and job creation, including for women. Through our economic development programmes such as the Enterprise and Assets Growth (EAGR), we have supported development market-enabling institutions and approaches to assist financial institutions in lending to micro and small enterprises, which are predominantly run by women and act as a powerful driver of women's economic empowerment.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

We target interventions carefully to ensure we reach communities most in need with the finite resources available. There are a wide range of UK aid programmes that focus on tackling multi-dimensional exclusion in Pakistan, increasing civic participation and promoting inclusive growth to leave no one behind. For example:

- Supporting stronger legislation and institutions to eliminate gender-based violence, modern slavery, child and forced marriages as well as supporting rights for religious minorities and transgender communities.
- Undertaking interventions at the community level, for example community mediation to reduce violence against women and girls and minority communities.
- Working to increase educational enrolment and retention for girls, as well as supporting other excluded groups such as children with disabilities to access quality education.
- Targeting health and nutrition programmes to some of the most vulnerable segments of society; including maternal, infant health, and access to family planning products and services.
- UK support has played a key role in laying the foundation of Pakistan's national cash transfer programme, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), which benefits women from extremely poor families; and we invested in the data systems which enabled the Government of Pakistan to reach 14.9 million people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please in addition see the response to the committee's related recommendations 34 and 35.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

We welcome IDC’s emphasis on inclusion of marginalised groups throughout the report. Please refer to the related responses to recommendations 22, 34, and 35.

In addition, the UK’s Gender Equality Act and the Public Sector Equality Duty require us to consider the needs and impacts of all UK aid programmes on women and girls and marginalised groups. Women and girls are also a priority in the International Development Strategy.

We have made good progress on targeting women and girls and other marginalised social groups (see the examples set out in our response to recommendations 22, 34, and 35). For example, the Aawaz II programme has used a vulnerability index to select hard-to-reach communities in 45 districts. It has directly supported 44,490 individuals, including marginalised women and girls, transgender people, persons with disabilities, and religious minorities, to access social protection and other government services. Similarly, our provincial education sector programmes in Punjab and KP prioritised girls and children in hard-to-reach areas and communities.

We remain committed to targeting future aid to marginalised groups. We have developed a Pakistan Network Gender Strategy (2022–27) to increase our focus on women and girls, including those who experience multiple vulnerabilities due to disability, faith, poverty or protected characteristics. However, it is important to recognise the challenges associated with collecting data, as minorities may not wish to identify themselves as belonging to minority communities. In particular, shrinking civic space may also limit our ability to work on sensitive human rights issues.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Recommendation 25. The FCDO should continue its work on family planning in Pakistan and reconsider cuts to UK aid programmes in this area. (Paragraph 53)**

**Response:**

Family planning is recognised as one of the ‘best buy’ investments in development, providing a highly cost-effective way of giving women agency and control over their reproductive health. Increasing family planning has a direct correlation with a reduction in maternal and child deaths. Whilst the budget of our family planning programme has reduced, this remains a priority for the UK and we remain one of the largest donors in this sector in Pakistan. Between April 2021 and March 2022 our programmes reached about 1.7 million people, mostly women and girls belonging to rural and marginalised communities.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

We are implementing the FCDO’s inclusion and rights strategy in Pakistan. We work with government and implementing partners to emphasise the need for, and right to, access for those with disabilities into our programme and policy work. For example, in girls’ education this entails ensuring scholarships have quotas for those with disabilities and advocating for the Pakistan 2007 Building Code to have accessible ramps in all new schools. The Punjab Education Sector Programme II (PESP II) included an inclusive education project to improve access of people with disabilities (PWDs) to mainstream schools. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenge faced by PWDs in Pakistan. We retained the focus on mitigating vulnerabilities arising from disability and gender-based violence. As part of the Aawaz II programme, UNFPA has worked with a local partner to provide psychosocial counselling to 350 PWDs facing violence and abuse. The British Council has worked at community level to facilitate 4,417 PWDs to obtain disability certificates and other documents that are necessary for accessing government services.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The new FCDO Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy 2020–2030 was launched in February 2022. The strategy reaffirms the UK’s commitment to act as a global leader on disability inclusion and sets out FCDO’s approach towards 2030. In Pakistan we intend to build on the legacy UK aid programmes in this area and ongoing work on human rights. We will maintain a focus on women and girls, including those with disabilities.

We will implement across the portfolio in line with the new strategy. While specific decisions on scale and programming are contingent on ODA resource allocation, we are committed to acting at multiple levels:

- Using our diplomatic efforts to advocate for disability rights legislation at the federal and provincial level.
- Tackling stigma, violence and discriminatory practices through ongoing inclusion programming such as Aawaz II.
- Broadening our engagement with more diverse network of organisations of persons with disabilities (PWDs).
- Maintaining emphasis on disaggregation of data by disability and mainstreaming this agenda in education and other programmes. We will strive to promote the use of Washington Group questions for better data.

- Considering ways to improve diversity and access within the British High Commission for persons with disabilities.

**Recommendation 28. LGBT+ people continue to face challenges in Pakistani society, including the criminalisation of same-sex relationships, and discrimination and violence. (Paragraph 59)**

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The UK Government is fundamentally opposed to all forms of discrimination. We continue to champion the rights of LGBT+ people and urge the international community, including Pakistan, to address discrimination, including on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, and to promote diversity and tolerance.

LGBT+ issues are highly sensitive in Pakistan and we carefully manage our interventions to ensure that we use diplomatic engagement and programme interventions carefully and in collaboration with communities and likeminded partners so as to avoid doing harm. We regularly engage members of the Pakistani transgender – Khawaja Sera – community to understand the challenges they face and ensure that we are designing appropriate interventions based on need.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Recommendation 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)**

**Recommendation 32. Religious minorities face obstacles in freely practising their religion and continue to face discrimination and violence within Pakistan society. (Paragraph 73)**

**Response:**

It is deeply concerning that blasphemy laws in Pakistan are frequently misused, including to settle personal disputes and to target religious minorities. We raise this issue privately with the Government of Pakistan at the highest levels to avoid the risk of doing harm given this is a sensitive subject. We press for speedy and fair trials for those accused and urge the Pakistan authorities to ensure the safety of those released.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

We recognise that religious minorities face obstacles in freely practising their religion and continue to face discrimination and violence in Pakistan. We consistently advocate for minority rights and provide direct support through programming and welcome any steps taken by the Government of Pakistan to address persecution, promote respect for all religions and increase tolerance for religious minorities.

We assess that there are significant safeguarding risks for religious minority groups or communities associated with programming explicitly focussed on these issues. Therefore, we take a proportionate, and where necessary, a discreet approach, as advised by the minority organisations themselves, and only in situations where we have the expertise and capability to understand and manage those risks. In 2021, the Chevening scholarships, for example, made an explicit effort to encourage and support applications from minority groups. UK aid has helped thousands of children from religious minorities to attend school and gain skills. Our Aawaz II programme works directly with religious minorities to advance their rights and promote social tolerance in Punjab and KP.

We routinely assess how to ensure the principles of inclusion (including religious diversity) can be taken into account across all programmes, both during programme design and implementation. This may not be possible in all programmes given that beneficiaries may not overtly identify themselves as members of a minority group.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

Since the IDC published its report on Pakistan, the Pakistan Network Gender Strategy (2022–27) has been adopted and makes specific commitments for targeting women and girls who face intersecting vulnerabilities due to disability, religion or other protected characteristics.

In addition, please see the response to the committee’s related recommendations 22 and 35 for detail on relevant programme interventions.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

We welcome the IDC’s recognition of the vulnerability of women and girls, minorities, and marginalised groups in Pakistan, and of the challenges associated with working on

these intersecting vulnerabilities. Impact assessment work across our portfolio helps to ensure that the needs of marginalised groups are considered and included. Our diplomatic engagement raises the results of these assessments to the highest levels of government. Through specific programmes such as the Aawaz II programme, as well as policy advocacy and diplomatic engagement, human rights work is targeted to support the most marginalised – women and girls, transgender, religious minorities and persons with disabilities. We target resources specifically to marginalised groups and closely monitor implementation.

**Recommendation 36. In addition, multiple challenges remain for civil society and marginalised groups. (Paragraph 78)**

**Response:**

The UK Government prioritises the targeting of marginalised groups, especially women and girls, as referenced in our response to recommendations 22, 34, and 35. We maintain dialogue with those communities who face multiple challenges, such as women and girls and the transgender community belonging to religious minorities. (see our response to recommendations 28 and 29). We continue to advocate for the rights of these communities and explore programming that will target and benefit these particular groups.

**Recommendation 37. As such, the FCDO should continue to designate Pakistan as a human rights priority country. (Paragraph 78)**

**Response:**

Pakistan is a FCDO Human Rights priority country. The list is reviewed periodically, taking into account the human rights situation, the trajectory of change, and the UK's ability to make a positive difference in each country.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

The UK is working with other donors to support Pakistan and UNHCR to protect and support Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Pakistan has also received World Bank IDA 18 forced displacement funds which are now being spent in refugee hosting areas by the government.

**Recommendation 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)**

**Response:**

Since late 2021, the UK has provided £7 million to WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR and IFRC to support preparedness and response for the arrival of new refugees from Afghanistan to Pakistan in the wake of the Taliban's takeover. In addition, the UK is a member of 'The Core Group' of donors which aims to provide sustained engagement and solidarity with the Afghan refugee situation and includes those who intend to make concrete commitments

to support Pakistan's Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees (SSAR). The SSAR seeks to find solutions to support voluntary repatriation, sustainable reintegration and assistance. One of its key aims is to ensure that services for refugees are integrated into Pakistan's development and service delivery.

The SSAR has helped provide support for Pakistan to verify the existing refugee population and provide new ID cards to over 1.2 million long-term refugees, giving them access to health and education services. Two thematic working groups have been established to support education and livelihoods initiatives for both the refugee and host populations in conjunction with the Government of Pakistan.

The UK is currently supporting Governance work in KP which hosts the majority of refugees in Pakistan – supporting KP to spend federal funds on development activities in the province. The UK also supports the Girls Education Challenge fund and Education Cannot Wait programming in the refugee hosting areas of Balochistan and KP which will include both Pakistani and Afghan refugee children.