

International Development Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

International Relations and Defence Committee

House of Lords, London, SW1A 0PW

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

By email

7 February 2022

Gender equality in UK aid spending

Dear Foreign Secretary,

The House of Commons International Development Committee has written to you twice to request that you provide the Committee with a copy of the Equalities Assessment conducted by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in March 2021 in relation to cuts to the UK's ODA budget. We are disappointed that the Committee has not yet been provided with a copy.

This matter was raised at the House of Lords International Relations and Defence Committee's evidence session with the Minister for Africa, but no further information relating to the Equalities Assessment was given.

Evidence taken by both committees has demonstrated the significant scale and impact of the cuts to UK aid spending for people with protected characteristics living in low and middle income countries, not least through significant cuts to programmes tackling gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health.

A core element of our committees' work is to understand how and why decisions to cut these programmes were taken. Without sight of this document, the work of our committees to undertake scrutiny of the cuts to UK aid spending is impaired.

Accordingly, we ask you again to provide us with a copy of the Equalities Assessment of March 2021.

We request a response as soon as possible and no later than Monday 21 February. The Committees intend to publish your response.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Champion MP
Chair of the House of Commons
International Development Committee



The Rt Hon Baroness Anelay of St Johns
Chair of the House of Lords
International Relations and Defence
Committee

International Development Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 1223 Email: indcom@parliament.uk Website: www.parliament.uk/indcom Twitter: [@CommonsIDC](https://twitter.com/CommonsIDC)

From Sarah Champion MP, Chair

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

By email

26 January 2022

Gender equality in UK aid spending

Dear Foreign Secretary,

Thank you for your response of 24 January to my letter on gender equality in UK aid spending. I note that you have declined my request to provide my Committee with a copy of the Equalities Assessment conducted in March 2021. Given the relevance of this document to my Committee's work on scrutinising changes to the UK aid budget, I ask whether you might reconsider your decision.

I would be grateful if I could receive your response as soon as possible and no later than 16 February. The Committee intends to publish your response.

Yours sincerely,

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Sarah Champion MP

Chair of the Committee



**Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office**

The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth
and Development Affairs

King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH

Tel: 0207 008 5000

Email: fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/fcdo

Sarah Champion MP
Chair, International Development Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

24 January 2022

Dear Sarah,

Thank you for your letter of 29 November regarding gender equality in UK aid spending.

I am pleased to be restoring funding to women and girls to pre-ODA-cuts levels after only one year. The FCDO is focused on giving more girls a quality education; ending the harmful practice of female genital mutilation and supporting girls' health; and ending the abhorrent use of sexual violence around the world. I firmly believe that educating girls is one of the smartest investments we can make to fight poverty and save lives.

The Equalities Assessment was a snapshot produced in March 2021 to support internal policy discussions by predicting how spending decisions for 2021/22 would impact protected groups. In line with practice across Government, the FCDO will not formally publish the document. It is my view that if we were to publish all Equalities Assessments, it would have a chilling effect on the candour of advice officials prepared.

However, the fact that the FCDO conducted an overarching Equalities Assessment on planned spending for 2021/22 demonstrates the importance my department places on the equalities impact of ODA spend, and that we have processes in place to ensure we meet our legal obligations. Following the Spending Review in October 2021, decisions on spending allocations and individual programmes will be published in the usual way.

Under my leadership, the FCDO will prioritise investing in honest, reliable infrastructure in developing countries, providing life-saving humanitarian aid, and supporting women and girls across the world. We are pursuing a positive, proactive foreign policy that delivers for people across our great country.

Thank you for both your letter and your commitment to gender equality through our international development work. I look forward to working closely with your committee on this shared ambition.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Secretary

International Development Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 1223 Email: indcom@parliament.uk Website: www.parliament.uk/indcom Twitter: [@CommonsIDC](https://twitter.com/CommonsIDC)

From Sarah Champion MP, Chair

Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP

Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

By email

29 November 2021

Gender equality in UK aid spending

Dear Foreign Secretary,

The UK has long placed gender equality at the heart of its development spending, and I welcome your personal commitment on ensuring that equality for women and girls is a core component of the UK's aid budget. However, this commitment is at odds with the cuts made to gender-focused programmes as part of the broader cuts to the UK's aid budget.

Earlier this year, the then-Foreign Secretary told my Committee that the FCDO had conducted an Equalities Assessment for bilateral allocations and programme budgets, and that:

"It showed no evidence that the programmes targeting those with protected characteristics would be more likely to be reduced than others."¹

However, recent press reports appear to show information to the contrary. They quote the Equalities Assessment written by your officials, which said:

"The proposed scale of reductions to specific gender interventions, including Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) will impact girls' education and wider efforts to advance gender equality."²

This is also contrary to the International Development Act 2014 which states:

"the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of providing development assistance that is likely to contribute to reducing poverty in a way which is likely to contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender".³

Accordingly, I would be grateful if you could answer the following questions:

- How is the decision to cut programmes focused on gender-specific interventions compliant with the provisions of the 2014 Act?
- What assessment have you made of the impact of the cuts made to projects and programmes focused on women and girls?

¹ Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP, 22 April 2021, Q110

² "UK assessment predicted aid cuts would hurt gender equality programs". Devex, 19 November 2021

³ International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014

- On 16 November 2021, you wrote that you have “decided to restore the women and girls development budget to what it was before the Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) cut”. Can you provide more details of this, including: (i) when this restoration will take place, (ii) how much funding this will equate to per financial year, (iii) whether other development areas will see their budgets cut as a result?
- Please provide the Committee with a copy of the Equalities Assessment conducted in March 2021.

I would be grateful if I could receive your response by 20 December. The Committee intends to publish your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'S. Champion', written on a light blue background.

Sarah Champion MP

Chair of the Committee