

International Development Committee Submission – Royal College of Nursing (RCN)

In 2020, the previous UK Government announced a temporary reduction in Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the UN target of 0.7%ⁱ of gross national income (GNI) to just 0.5% of GNI.ⁱⁱ The RCN recommends the International Development Committee investigate the impact of ODA cuts on global health workforce development.

Nurses are central to achieving universal health coverage (UHC), making up almost half of the global health workforce.ⁱⁱⁱ The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that the world will face a shortage of 4.5 million nurses by 2030^{iv} and low and lower-middle income countries currently face the worst shortages^v. Investment in nursing is required to meet the Sustainable Development Goals^{vi} (SDGs) and UHC.

The RCN suggests that the Committee's investigation includes an assessment of the impact of ODA cuts on 'red list' countries. These are countries identified by the WHO as having the lowest density of nurses, doctors, and midwives and a UHC service coverage index less than 55.^{vii} The WHO identifies these 55 countries as targets for investment and bans active recruitment of health personnel from these countries.

The RCN has conducted an analysis¹ of ODA based on data published in the UK Government's Statistics on International Development Final UK ODA Spend 2023.^{viii} RCN analysis finds:

- Cuts to UK bilateral ODA between 2021 and 2023 have cost global health projects £1.3 billion.
- In 2020 health-related bilateral ODA to countries on the 2023 'red list' was nearly £484 million. In 2023 this amount fell by 63% to £181 million.
- Bilateral ODA for projects aimed at growing the health workforce in countries on the 2023 'red list' has decreased by 83% between 2020 and 2023.
- Only 7 countries on the 2023 'red list' received bilateral ODA for projects dedicated to health personnel development in 2023.

There is a need for improved reporting of UK ODA spending. It is not feasible to analyse the UK's spending on nursing workforce projects, as the nurse workforce does not have a specific code in data publication, as doctors do.

¹ RCN analysis of ODA utilises data from the health sector budget identifier code, specifically focusing on personnel development for population and reproductive health and Health personnel development.

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With just over five years to meet the SDGs, this inquiry would come at a critical time for the future of global health, as improvements are dependent on a strong global health workforce. There has been a worrying lack of progress in this area and successive governments have failed to address this. An inquiry by the Committee could help turn the dial and hold Ministers to account.

For a full data briefing please contact international@rcn.org.uk

ⁱ [OECD temporary archive](#)

ⁱⁱ [The 0.7% aid target - House of Commons Library](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [WHO, State of the World Nursing Report \(2020\)](#)

^{iv} [Nursing and midwifery \(who.int\)](#)

^v [WHO, State of the World Nursing Report \(2020\)](#)

^{vi} [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)

^{vii} [WHO health workforce support and safeguards list 2023](#)

^{viii} [Statistics on International Development: final UK ODA spend 2023 - GOV.UK](#)