

TIME TO TURN AROUND II:

REBUILDING UK CONFLICT PREVENTION LEADERSHIP

In 2016, the UK spent a greater percentage of its aid budget on civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution than any other donor.

However, by 2023, spending had fallen below that of other major donors despite numerous commitments to invest in tackling the causes of conflict and instability. See [Time to Turn Around; The Decline in UK Peacebuilding](#) for additional details.

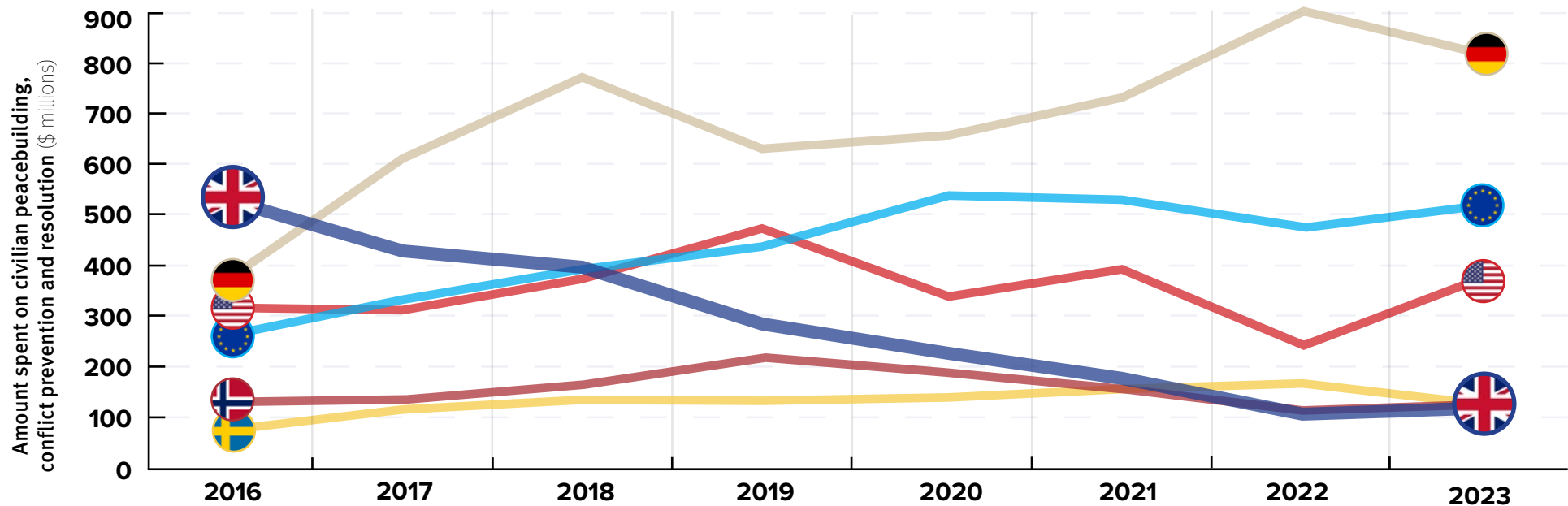
Official development assistance (ODA) for peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution in fragile states by OECD DAC members is at a [record low](#), while humanitarian spending in fragile contexts is at a record high.

This decline in spending takes place within a context of rising conflict that is increasingly protracted, international, and which is driving unmanageable humanitarian needs. **There are currently more active conflicts than at any time since the end of the Second World War.** At the same time, [recent polling](#) indicates that the British public rank 'Preventing war and promoting peace' as the biggest foreign policy priority for the UK government.

Conflicts create challenges that impact the UK: from costing [13.5 percent of the world's economic activity](#) (IEP) and disrupting critical supply chains, to [forcing displacement of over 117 million people](#) (UNHCR), exacerbating impacts of the climate and nature crisis, driving gender inequality, increasing corruption, and creating conditions for transnational crime and armed groups to thrive.

UK spending on peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution has plummeted from 4% of the UK aid budget in 2016 to just over 1% in 2023

This is a reduction of USD\$400 million, decreasing from \$514 million in 2016 to \$128 million in 2023.



'the business case for prevention is strong' but 'development partners have not yet embraced crisis prevention or conflict prevention at scale' [OECD States of Fragility, 2022.](#)

Addressing the root causes of conflict: another story of decline

Multiple UK strategies have committed to addressing the root causes and issues driving conflict, including corruption, poor governance, injustice and unequal access to services and opportunities. **Yet the proportion of the UK aid budget spent on tackling these issues through ‘core and secondary peacebuilding’ declined from over 21 per cent in 2008 to 6.2 per cent in 2023.**

“Core and secondary peacebuilding” is an alternative measure of peacebuilding spending to the narrower OECD code ‘civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution’ and includes spending on 18 programming areas that contribute to peace, including anti corruption, gender equality, public administration, human rights and media freedom ([OECD 2023](#)).

Navigating climate change, environmental destruction and conflict

Despite contributing the least to climate change, **the world’s ten most fragile states received \$269 million in climate adaptation financing in 2022, less than one per cent of total flows.** While climate adaptation funding is finally increasing, the proportion going to fragile and conflict-affected settings has not. **The UK only spent 3.7% of its climate change adaptation ODA in the world’s 15 most fragile countries in 2022.** It is no longer adequate to address conflict and climate shocks separately. In order for climate action to be effective, addressing conflict dynamics must be part of the picture.

Armed conflict and insecurity impede communities’ capacity to adapt to and manage the impacts of climate shocks and stressors, while also causing direct environmental damage and obstructing progress towards achieving net zero. At the same time, the destabilising effects of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution intensify vulnerabilities, fuel conflict, and undermine efforts to foster peace, stability and sustainable development.

It is the most vulnerable and marginalised groups who bear the brunt of climate change impacts, including women, indigenous peoples, gender and sexual minorities, the elderly, people living with disabilities, and ethnic minorities.

The road back to UK leadership on conflict prevention

In May 2024, [ICAI found](#) that there were solid foundations for the UK to rebuild its conflict prevention capabilities, reporting ‘notable improvements in cross-[Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office] and cross-government work on peacebuilding, more attention to learning, and the use of expertise and the internal challenge function’.

The follow up to ICAI’s report on peacebuilding found that the UK needed to improve in several areas, including:

- **long-term funding** that allows for building trust in tense conflict situations
- increasing **accountability to communities** where UK peacebuilding takes place

Recommendations:

- 1** Prioritise high-level peace and conflict prevention objectives within future foreign policy, development and national security strategies.
- 2** Return the proportion of UK ODA spending on ‘Civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention and resolution’ to 4 per cent, from just over 1 per cent in 2023, over the course of the next spending period.
- 3** Increase longer-term, flexible and more locally designed and implemented funding that addresses conflict drivers in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- 4** Increase the proportion of climate adaptation funding for fragile and conflict-affected settings, to address the growing gap between needs and financial flows.
- 5** Ensure that other UK interventions, including defence, diplomacy and development, do not undermine peace or inadvertently do harm and drive conflict.



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