



SDG 13: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

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“The cumulative scientific evidence is unequivocal: climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health. Any further delay in concerted global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.”

This powerful and urgent statement was signed off by all governments and published in the IPCC’s sixth assessment report in February 2022.²⁷³

The report – described by UN Secretary General António Guterres as “an atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership” – is a stark warning to humankind and a wake-up call to global leaders. It lays bare how human-induced climate change has already pushed our natural and human systems beyond our ability to adapt and led to irreversible impacts for people and planet. These impacts, and the losses and damages they are causing, are happening sooner, faster and are more severe than previously thought, and they are increasing with every fraction of a degree of warming. We are bearing witness to the rapid deterioration of our ecosystems and the sustainability of our planet and way of life.

²⁷³ IPCC (2022), [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#)

The report also provides unequivocal evidence of the injustice of climate change. Inequity and marginalisation linked to gender, ethnicity, disability and low incomes are causing those with the least resources, who have done the least to cause this existential reckoning, to face climate change’s worst impacts. This injustice, and the disparity in the distribution of climate vulnerabilities and impacts, is driven by historical and ongoing patterns of inequity, such as colonialism, unfair governance systems that dominate from the local to the global, and unsustainable development patterns. Nearly 3.6 billion people worldwide are now climate vulnerable.

Bond’s 2019 SDG report

In our 2019 report, we noted that the responsibility for large scale climate mitigation lies with industrialised countries, including the UK, which must rapidly decarbonise their economies. We also stated that the priority focus for low-income countries is to adapt to the changed and changing climate to prevent losses, suffering, and a rolling back of development gains. We noted that climate change is a threat multiplier that exacerbates poverty and inequality, and that development is now harder – and more expensive – to achieve across all sectors due to a changing and more changeable climate.

To that end we called for a considerable step-change in finance for climate action to meet SDG 13 as well as thorough alignment of all official development assistance (ODA) spending, government policies and investments with the Paris Agreement, to ensure that actions to address climate change were not undermined by continued investment in that which is causing harm. Urgent action was also needed to recognise and address loss and damage caused by climate change, and ensure that those suffering the worst consequences of climate change now and in the future, are not left to pay the costs with their lives and livelihoods.



Global trends and progress made

Extreme poverty is rising again after years of decline, driven by the Covid-19 pandemic, conflict and climate change. Catastrophic hunger has been on the rise at unprecedented levels. In early 2021 at least 161 million people faced crisis levels of hunger, a situation that only worsened as the year progressed.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has significantly advanced action on climate change over the last 30 years. However, globally we are not yet on course to collectively meet the Paris Agreement’s goals of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C and providing the finance needed to pursue low-carbon sustainable development, adapt to climate change, and address loss and damage from its impacts.

The UNFCCC’s 26th Conference of Parties (COP26), which took place in Glasgow in November 2021, sought to keep the goal of 1.5°C ‘alive’. In the words of Alok Sharma, UK COP26 President, “We can now say with credibility that we have kept 1.5 degrees alive. But, its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action.”²⁷⁴ In the negotiated Glasgow Climate Pact all countries agreed to revisit their nationally determined contributions (NDC) in 2022 to close the gap to 1.5°C. With the world already at 1.2°C of heating, it remains to be seen whether all countries will live up to this commitment to revisit their NDC this year, and whether enough action will be taken in time to prevent catastrophic overshooting of the 1.5°C temperature limit.



Target 13.1:

Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.

The UK has a good track record on many climate finance issues. The UK Biennial Finance Communication to the UNFCCC, submitted in December 2021²⁷⁵, retained the commitment to 50% UK international climate finance (ICF) for adaptation and committed to provide £11.6 billion between 2021 and 2025. The UK also continues to provide the vast majority of climate finance as grants (89% from 2016 to the end of 2019), and has adopted a new policy to end public fossil fuel investments overseas.

But there are critical areas where the UK has gone backwards since 2019. Of most concern are the recent ODA cuts, which undermine efforts towards the sustainable, just and resilient

future envisaged in the Paris Agreement and the SDGs. In the face of the climate crisis, a global pandemic, loss of nature and growing inequality, insecurity, and poverty, now is not the time for the UK to step back from this vital commitment, particularly given the links between poverty, nature and climate change and the need to ensure that the climate crisis is addressed in a way that leaves no one behind. Reducing ODA – while at the same time drawing on it as the only source of climate finance – will inevitably harm people who have been the most marginalised, pushing huge numbers (back) into poverty.

Faced with a climate emergency not of their making, low-income countries have a reasonable expectation of extra support, and under the UNFCCC countries, including the UK, committed to provide this. Yet cuts to ODA represent a double cut in support to countries that have not received new and additional climate finance, and now will receive both climate finance and other development support from the same, much smaller pot. Climate finance was not meant to come at the cost of other critical ODA areas. But this is now the case as the UK fulfils its climate finance commitments from a budget that it has chosen to significantly cut, and which has also shrunk due to declining GNI.

In the context of rising levels of hunger, escalating loss and damage from climate change impacts, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and cuts to the UK ODA, the need for new and additional sources of climate finance is more pressing than ever.

Annual adaptation investment needs in low- and middle-income countries are currently estimated to be in the region of \$70 billion and are expected to reach \$140–300 billion by 2030 and US\$280–500 billion by 2050. The UK must play its part in identifying new sources of grant-based public climate finance to ensure that climate change support does not come at the expense of vital ODA spending in other areas, and does not increase the debt burden on countries on the frontline of the climate crisis. It is clear that ODA alone will not be sufficient to meet rising climate finance costs alongside other critical development needs.

Despite the five-year ICF spending commitment, adaptation programming was cut when UK ODA was reduced in 2021. This wasted taxpayers money by closing quality programmes mid-way through implementation before outcomes had been reached. Climate action is most effective when frontloaded, given the urgency and scale of the climate crisis, yet this is now the second five-year ICF commitment in which spending has been put off until later in the period. This undermines the urgent need to provide adaptation investment now and makes sustainable and high-quality spending harder to achieve. The UK left itself with a heavy uplift in ICF spending in 2020 to achieve its last five-year commitment, which was then compounded by the challenges of a global pandemic.

Lessons must be learnt to manage spending more evenly year-on-year moving forward. However, given the cuts to adaptation programming in 2021, and the strain on the

274. UNFCCC (2021) [COP26 keeps 1.5c alive and finalises Paris Agreement](#) [web page, accessed June 2022]

275. HM Government (2020) [United Kingdom Biennial Finance Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#)



ODA budget as a result of the war in Ukraine, there is a fear that ICF spending will continue to be 'put off' until the last moment, and risk being missed or of poor quality. The UK's ICF strategy update has also been delayed for many years. It is crucial that an effective, robust, science-based strategy, one that fulfils the International Development Committee's (IDC) 2019 recommendations²⁷⁶, is published and implemented with urgency.

COP26 finally brought global attention to the loss and damage being suffered by least developed countries (LDCs) small island developing states (SIDS) as a result of insufficient climate action. Loss and damage refers to the impacts of climate change on people and nature, where adaptation has not occurred or is not sufficient to withstand the impacts. Loss and damage has been recognised in the UNFCCC negotiations since the early 1990s, and it is enshrined in Article 8 of the Paris Agreement as an area of climate action alongside mitigation and adaptation. Despite the devastating loss and damage being suffered around the world, little progress has been made on this vital area of climate action.

Climate change is costly and deadly. It hits hardest those who are least responsible for causing it, and undermines progress on every other SDG. The Climate Vulnerable Forum estimates that low- and middle-income countries could face financial losses of US\$4 trillion per year by 2030. Low-income countries are exposed to some of the most severe climate impacts. They have the least capacity to adapt, and find it hardest to recover from the loss and damage caused by devastating floods, droughts, heatwaves, cyclones and rising sea levels.

More and more people are facing significant and frequent impacts of climate change, which are reversing development gains. The biggest impacts are being felt by people in low- and middle-income countries who are the most marginalised and economically deprived. There are certain characteristics, such as disability, age and gender, which increase vulnerability to climate change and the cycle of poverty. The human costs of climate change include increased hunger and poverty, reduced access to water, and climate-induced migration and displacement which makes people vulnerable to trafficking and modern slavery. With limited available options, those people and countries least responsible for the climate emergency are forced into even greater indebtedness to address the losses and damage suffered, thus exacerbating the cycle of poverty.

Despite climate-vulnerable countries and civil society elevating this issue to a level never before seen or heard within the debating halls of a COP, under the UK presidency the priorities of high-income nations were allowed to dominate and block a proposal by the majority world for a loss and damage finance facility, leaving millions of impacted people without the justice and support they deserve. It is now in the hands of COP27 in November 2022 to deliver this much needed finance facility.

276. International Development Committee (2019) [UK aid for combating climate change](#)

 **Target 13.a:**
Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the UNFCCC to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100bn annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalise the Green Climate Fund (GCF) through its capitalisation as soon as possible

The global commitment to provide \$100 billion a year by 2020 in climate finance has not been delivered. This was off course before the pandemic and continues to remain unfulfilled. While the actual scale of finance needed by low-income countries for climate action far dwarfs this figure, delivering on this commitment made under the UNFCCC process remains crucial to restoring and building trust with low-income countries and providing some of the finance that is urgently needed.

The UK used its presidency of COP26 to advance progress on climate finance through the development of a \$100 billion delivery plan and by brokering a commitment to double adaptation finance (although this still falls short of the \$50 billion a year expected under the \$100 billion commitment). The UK must use its remaining time as COP President to work with countries to deliver on the commitments to concretely demonstrate increased adaptation finance flows by COP27 and robust implementation plans.

The findings in February 2022 of the IPCC six assessment report on impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability²⁷⁷ are timely and must inform the discussions begun this year on a new, collective, quantifiable climate finance goal to replace the \$100 billion target from 2025 onwards. Those discussions must now be anchored in the realities and urgency laid bare by the IPCC. The UK Presidency should work with parties to reframe climate finance discussions away from top-down, contributor country-led negotiations, to instead be needs-, science- and justice-based and undertaken in recognition of solidarity and historic responsibility. The IPCC report must be formally recognised in the proceedings and serve as a basis for those finance discussions, with specific subgoals for mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage to avoid a repeat of the failures of the \$100 billion goal to meet the needs people who are the most climate vulnerable.

The UK has played an active role in developing and strengthening the Global Climate Fund, and has committed to channelling £1.44 billion of UK ICF via the fund over a four-year period from 2019.

277. IPCC (2022) [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#)



To contribute to SDG 13, the UK government should:

1. Revisit and strengthen its NDC in 2022 in line with the Glasgow Climate Pact, which the UK presided over, by increasing the target reduction to at least 75% by 2030. This would recognise the UK's historic responsibility for climate change, as the country that led and financially benefited from the industrial revolution and the continued carbon-based economy.
2. Restore UK ODA to 0.7% GNI and establish additional sources of public finance to fulfil the UK's responsibilities under the UNFCCC to provide new and additional climate finance for climate action overseas.
3. Conclude the UK's COP26 Presidency role by demonstrating concrete progress on implementation of the \$100 billion delivery plan and the COP26 commitment to double adaptation finance, with measurable increases in climate finance flows in 2022.
4. Urgently publish an effective, robust, science-based ICF strategy that fulfils IDC's 2019 recommendations, manages portfolio spending in a consistent and high-quality way over each five-year commitment period, and catalyses transformational climate action in low-income countries.
5. Broker a deal as COP26 President in 2022 to establish and resource a loss and damage finance facility at COP27 in support of the calls of those hardest hit by the climate emergency not of their making, and provide new and additional UK finance specifically for addressing loss and damage.
6. Ensure all UK policies, investments and trade agreements support efforts to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C, are consistent with the Paris Agreement, and enable countries to pursue inclusive, low carbon, climate resilient development.
7. Catalyse a just transition to a future of work that contributes to sustainable development. In doing so, apply an intersectional lens to domestic and international climate action that facilitates the inclusion, through meaningful consultation and engagement, of those who have been the most marginalised.