

## **RCN Briefing: International Development Committee Session - Global Health Challenges and the UK - How are aid cuts impacting the future of Global Health?**

*With a membership of over half a million registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the United Kingdom and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world.*

### **1. Official Development Assistance**

- 1.1 The RCN is concerned about the impact that cuts to Official Development Assistance (ODA) will have on global health. In 2020, the previous UK Government announced a temporary reduction in ODA from the UN target of 0.7%<sup>i</sup> of gross national income (GNI) to 0.5%. This was then further reduced earlier this year with the current Government announcing a reduction of spending on ODA to just 0.3% of GNI by 2027,<sup>ii</sup> bringing the UK below half of the UN target.
- 1.2 Globally, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that ODA fell by 9% in 2024, with a larger decrease expected in 2025.<sup>iii</sup> The Centre for Global Development have suggested that US cuts to global health and humanitarian funding have put 1 million lives at risk.<sup>iv</sup>
- 1.3 Cuts to the UK's aid spending have serious consequences for the health of people in many low- and middle-income countries, many of whom are also facing the impacts of climate change and conflict. The modern nursing profession arose during conflict and disaster and nursing staff continue to have an unparalleled role to play at every step of the disaster management process, from planning to emergency to recovery. Stronger health systems, with nurses at their centre, reduce instability make us less vulnerable to the global health threats of the future.

### **2. Global health workforce shortages**

- 2.1 These cuts to aid are compounded by severe shortages in the global health workforce. The World Health Organisation (WHO) predict a global shortage of 11 million health workers in 2030, with shortages concentrated in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>v</sup>
- 2.2 Despite representing more than half (57%) of the global health workforce, there remains a shortage of 5.8 million nurses and the global distribution and density of nurses is highly uneven. The WHO has found that the main barrier to growing the workforce in low- and lower-middle income countries is the insufficient fiscal space to provide paid jobs in the health system to graduates.<sup>vi</sup>
- 2.3 These inequalities have real impacts. For example, in 2024, only 74% of births were attended by a medical doctor, nurse or midwife in the WHO African Region, compared with 99% in the European Region.<sup>vii</sup> In addition, global nursing shortages and the unequal distribution of nursing staff leave health systems critically exposed to disasters and undermines effective responses. The

most significant factor in predicting how health systems will respond to emergencies is their capacity to deliver high-quality health care before a disaster occurs.

### **3. Impact of ODA cuts on workforce development**

3.1 In late 2024, the RCN conducted its own analysis of cuts to UK bilateral ODA, investigating the impact on global health systems and on countries with the most pressing health workforce shortages.<sup>viii</sup> RCN analysis found that had the UK maintained its spending target for ODA at 0.7% of GNI, an additional £12.4 billion would have been made available to much needed development projects around the world between 2021 and 2023. Cumulatively, these cuts cost global health projects £1.3 billion over three years.

3.2 RCN analysis of UK ODA spending between 2020 and 2023 uncovered the devastating impact of cuts on those countries which require funding most. The decision to cut aid to 0.5% resulted in an 83% reduction of bilateral ODA for health workforce development in 55 countries identified by the WHO as facing the most pressing health workforce challenges related to universal health coverage. Only 7 of these countries received UK bilateral ODA for projects dedicated to health personnel development in 2023. Further cuts to ODA announced by this Government in February will only worsen the situation.

### **4. Suggested questions for Ministers**

4.1 What assessment has been made of the impact of the UK's decision to cut official development assistance, particularly against a backdrop of significant cuts from the United States and other countries?

4.2 Can the Minister confirm what work the department is undertaking to tackle the global nursing workforce shortage?

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<sup>i</sup> [OECD temporary archive](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [UK to reduce aid to 0.3% of gross national income from 2027](#)

<sup>iii</sup> [Financing for development: Global aid landscape 2025](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [A Million Lives at Risk? | Center For Global Development](#)

<sup>v</sup> [State of the world's nursing report 2025](#)

<sup>vi</sup> [State of the world's nursing report 2025](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [World health statistics 2025: monitoring health for the SDGs, sustainable development goals](#)

<sup>viii</sup> [UK ODA Cuts | Royal College of Nursing](#)