

Statement on ICAI follow-up: UK aid to refugees in the UK

Monday 15 April 2024

Last week ICAI published a follow-up review to their report of 2023 on UK aid funding for refugees in the UK. This report originally found that there was a rise in costs for refugees once they arrive in the UK, which is being recorded as ODA; this has led to “**dramatic reductions in the UK’s bilateral humanitarian aid, at a time of large-scale global displacement crises and humanitarian emergencies.**” This is at the same time where the Government’s own [Equality Impact Assessments](#) of reduced funding unequivocally make clear the disproportionate impacts on women and girls, as well as disabled people. The ICAI report has also called for gender equality principles to be integrated in support services. Their follow up review found the UK’s response to be **inadequate**, with ODA spent on refugees in the UK jumping from 8% to 29% from 2021 to 2022. While there was increased training on safeguarding, approaches to working with refugees were not gender-sensitive nor intersectional.

GAPS has repeatedly condemned and raised concerns about the UK government’s policies on refugees, asylum seekers and migrants as inhumane and undermining its obligations under the Refugee Convention, as well as existing UK policy commitments in their own National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, International Women and Girls Strategy and the recently published White Paper on International Development. In particular, the UK purports global leadership through its flagship Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) and commitments to survivor-centred approaches, yet these commitments appear to flounder in relation to survivors seeking sanctuary in the UK.

The ICAI review spells out that the UK’s current approach is “**untenable**”, with an increasing backlog of asylum cases, while cuts in ODA have a significant impact on women and girls and undermine the important progress made on ending poverty and building peace around the world. The UK NAP acknowledges the importance of policy coherence and domestic applicability of the WPS agenda, but this review demonstrates that when women seek asylum in the UK these principles are abandoned. WPS commitments are also owned and signed up to by the Home Office, a delivery partner of the NAP, and should be applied consistently by them also. The UK must not only start scaling up ODA spend to return to a 0.7% GNI target but also must work to spend it more efficiently and humanely.

The WPS agenda is a cross-border and transnational framework that must have a holistic approach. The findings of the review further erode the UK’s reputation and credibility in multilateral spaces and of the multilateral system itself as the UK advocates for gender equality and respect for human rights while doing the opposite at home. More than that, it causes tangible harm to the women and girls that the UK states are a priority in development and foreign policy, thus undermining its goals and perpetuating colonial and racist practises and power structures. GAPS continues to call for an immediate stop to these discriminatory and dehumanising policies.