

Research Briefing

Number 9326

By Philip Loft

9 December 2022

UK aid and Yemen's humanitarian crisis

Summary	1
1 Yemen's continuing humanitarian crisis	2
2 UN appeal for 2022 is underfunded	9
3 UK aid spending in Yemen	9

Summary

For eight years, Yemen has been engaged in a conflict between its internationally recognised Government, backed by a Saudi-led coalition, and the Houthi group, supported by Iran. The UN Development Programme estimates that up to [377,000 people had been killed by the conflict through direct and indirect means](#), to the end of 2021.

Yemen is considered one of the world's [worst humanitarian crises](#). 75% of the population—23.5 million people—[needed assistance in November 2022](#).

Yemen is now divided between the Houthi group in the west, which includes the country's capital, and the internationally recognised Government, which controls much of the south and east. In 2015, a Saudi-led coalition intervened in support of Yemen's government. Until April 2022, this was led by President Hadi, who has now [handed power to a presidential council](#). While a ceasefire [was in place from April to October 2022](#), it has not been renewed.

For a background to the conflict in 2021/22 and attempts to negotiate peace, see the accompanying Library Briefing: [Yemen in 2021/22: Conflict and peace](#).

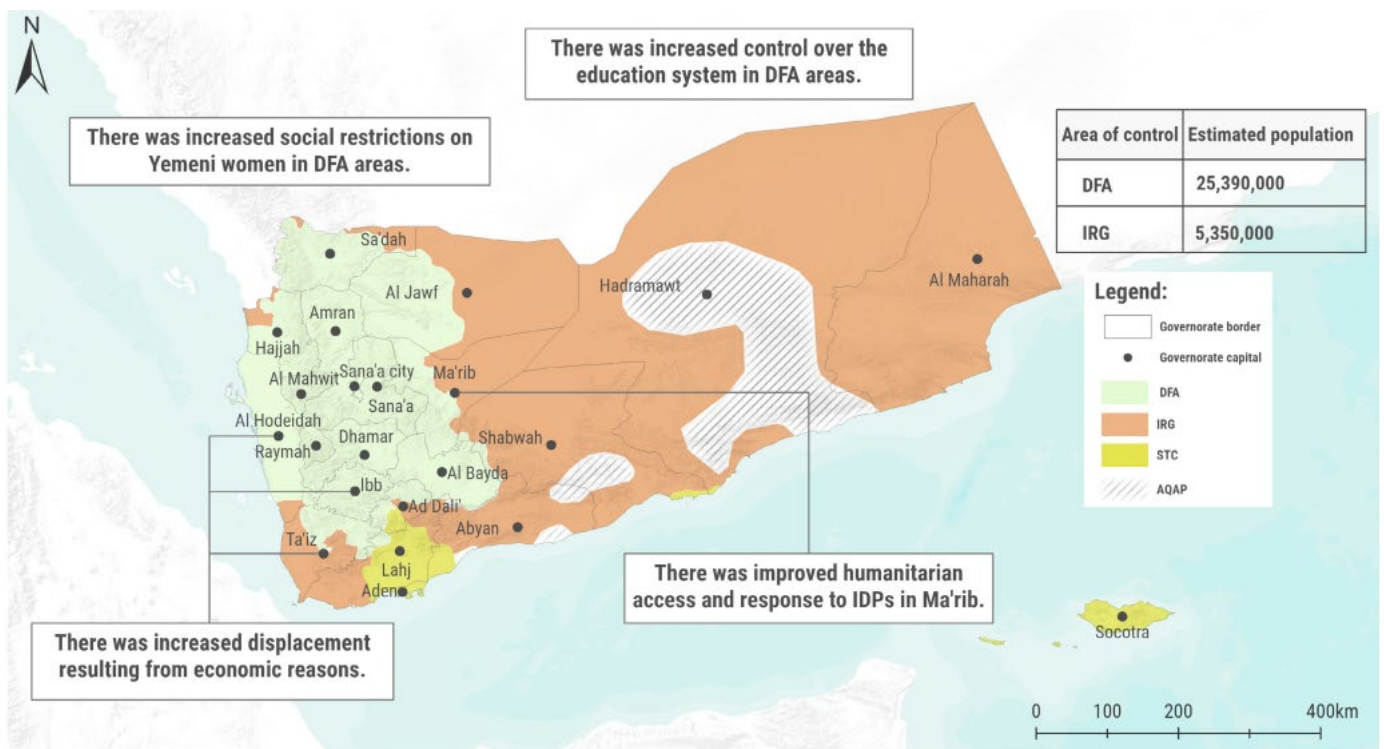
This briefing summarises the humanitarian situation in the country, including the impact of the conflict on civilians and the significance of the conflict in Ukraine on food supplies to Yemen. It also describes the funding shortfalls in UN appeals, and the amount and purpose of UK aid.

The UK has provided more than [£1 billion in aid to Yemen since 2015](#). However, partly reflecting the wider reduction in UK aid spending from 0.7% to 0.5% of Gross National Income, [UK assistance has fallen from a peak of £260 million in 2019 to £114 million in 2021](#). For 2022/23, the UK has [pledged £88 million](#) compared [to £87 million in 2021/22](#). At the UN pledging conference in March 2022, the UK [was the fourth largest donor to the country](#).

1 Yemen's continuing humanitarian crisis

Yemen is divided between the internationally recognised Government (IRG), which controls much of the south and east, and the Houthi group in the west that also controls the capital, Sana'a. The IRG has the backing of a Saudi-led coalition while the Houthis are backed by Iran. The IRG is also in coalition with the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which is close to the UAE.

Zones of control in Yemen, November 2022



Disclaimer: The boundaries, names, and designation provided on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ACAPS.

Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA(19/04/2022); ISW (accessed 10/11/2022)

Notes: DFA “De-facto authority”, meaning Houthis; IRG “Internationally recognised government,” STC “Southern Transitional Council” in alliance with the IRG, AQAP “Al Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula,” IDPs “Internally displaced persons.”

Source: ACAPS, [Yemen: Events with social implications between July- September](#), November 2022 (PDF), p2. [Copyright CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](#)

Overall civilian casualties

Between the beginning of the conflict in 2015 and December 2021, the UN Development Programme estimates that around [377,000 people have died in Yemen](#), due to a mixture of direct violence and indirect causes such as lack of food, health services and damage to infrastructure.¹

Civilian casualties were high in 2021

One in five reported civilian casualties in 2021 was a child

Around 2,500 civilians were killed or injured by armed violence in 2021, up 20% compared to 2020. One in five recorded civilian casualties was a child. The total for 2021 was lower than the annual peak of 4,836 in 2018.²

Since December 2017 airstrikes have been responsible for the highest number of recorded civilian deaths: around 5,000 compared to 4,500 by shelling.³

The ceasefire in 2022 saw casualties fall

Civilian deaths fell to an average of 200 per month during the truce

A ceasefire was in place from April to October 2022 but was not renewed. The UN has said it will continue talks to either renew the ceasefire or arrange a negotiated peace. For more, see section 3.1 of the Commons Library briefing, [Yemen in 2021/22: Conflict and peace](#).

The ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) estimates that the number of civilian casualties from April to October 2022 [fell to around 200 reported deaths per month from organised political violence](#), down from an average of 1,750 per month from January 2015 to March 2022.⁴

The ceasefire also allowed the reopening of Sana'a airport, the country's capital currently controlled by the Houthis, and increased flows of fuel and aid through the disputed Hodeidah port. Since the ceasefire has ended, there have been reports of increased attacks by the Houthis against oil terminals but there has not been a return to full-scale conflict.⁵

¹ UN Development Programme, [Assessing the impact of war in Yemen: Pathways for recovery](#), 23 November 2021, p32. Sources accessed 30 November and 1 December 2022 unless stated.

² Civilian Impact Monitoring Report, [Yemen: Annual reports](#), accessed 17 March 2022 (now archived)

³ Civilian Impact Monitoring Project, [Yemen: Homepage](#), accessed 17 March 2022 (now archived)

⁴ ACLED, [Violence in Yemen during the UN-mediated truce: April-October 2022](#), 14 October 2022

⁵ UN Media, [The situation in the Middle East: Yemen](#), 22 November 2022

Most people require humanitarian assistance

75% of the population need assistance

In November 2022, around 23.5 million people (75% of Yemen's 31.2 million population) needed humanitarian assistance and protection. The UN expects this to fall to 21.6 million in 2023, though notes increased conflict as the ceasefire has now ended may drive this higher. Food insecurity will remain high.⁶

In addition to the direct effects of conflict, other drivers of need include the weakening of social security systems, damaged infrastructure, and natural disasters such as flooding and drought.⁷

The number of internally displaced people has risen

As of November 2022, the UN estimates 4.5 million people have been displaced, including 234,000 in 2022. This is up from 3.6 million in 2020 and represents around 15% of the population.⁸

Humanitarian access is constrained

10.1 million live in areas aid agencies find hard to access

For 2021, the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that half of those in need, approximately 10.1 million people, were in "hard to reach" areas. Humanitarian agencies reported 2,900 access incidents when attempting to deliver aid. 90% of these related to bureaucratic constraints imposed by parties to the conflict.⁹

Humanitarian access issues continue to be reported: From April to June 2022 the same agency said the period saw a decline in impediments but there were still 532 access incidents affecting 5.5 million people.¹⁰

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has previously reported that [both sides to the conflict disrupt aid](#).¹¹

⁶ UNOCHA, [Humanitarian action: Yemen](#), 30 November 2022

⁷ UNOCHA, [Humanitarian action: Yemen](#), 30 November 2022

⁸ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, [Yemen](#), accessed 30 November 2022

⁹ UN OCHA, [Yemen: Annual humanitarian access overview 2021](#), 20 April 2022

¹⁰ UN OCHA, [Yemen: Access snapshot—April to June 2022](#), 10 August 2022

¹¹ HRW, [Yemen: Aid obstruction puts millions at risk](#), 14 September 2020,

54% of people are experiencing acute food insecurity

The World Food Programme has reduced rations due to funding shortfalls

The population is experiencing high levels of food insecurity. This ranges from mild insecurity (having uncertainty in finding enough to eat) through to moderate food insecurity (compromising on quality or quantity) to high levels of insecurity (going without food for a day or more).¹²

Even prior to the conflict, around half of Yemen's population was food insecure. This was due to instability, weaknesses in infrastructure, and the effects of natural disasters and climate change.¹³

There has been a substantial increase in food prices since the beginning of the conflict: wheat prices rose 246% from 2014 to 2021 and rice 239%. This inflation is primarily caused by a weakening Yemeni Riyal, linked to falling remittances (money earned abroad) and shortages of foreign currency.¹⁴

From October to December 2022, the World Food Programme estimates:

- 17 million people are experiencing high levels of food insecurity: 54% of the population.
- 2.2 million children under five suffer from moderate acute malnutrition
- 1.3 million pregnant and lactating women are acutely malnourished

The WFP has a funding shortfall for Yemen, standing at around US\$1 billion short of its US\$1.98 billion requirements for 2022.¹⁵ As a result, in both December 2021 and June 2022 the organisation has said it has been forced to reduce the rations it provides.¹⁶

The situation for women and girls

Increasingly, women and girls have struggled to access services, including for sexual and reproductive health and protection. In addition, around 75% of those displaced are women and children.¹⁷

¹² Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, [Hunger and food insecurity](#)

¹³ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, [Alert 73: Yemen](#), September 2022

¹⁴ Unicef and Government of Yemen, [Food price developments: Analysis in Yemen](#), 28 March 2022, pp11, 15

¹⁵ WFP, [Yemen emergency dashboard](#), 22 November 2022

¹⁶ WFP, [WFP forced to cut food assistance in Yemen, warns of impact as hunger rises](#), 22 December 2021 and WFP, [Yemen situation report 6](#), 21 July 2022

¹⁷ UNFPA, [2022 UNFPA humanitarian response in Yemen](#), April 2022

Child marriage rates in Yemen are also high: In 2021, Unicef reported that 73% of girls are married before they reach 18.¹⁸

Only 20% of the country's remaining health services provide a functioning maternal and child health service.¹⁹ The maternal mortality rate in Yemen has increased from five women a day in 2013 to 12 women a day in 2019 (meaning 1 in every 260 women die in pregnancy or childbirth).²⁰

The health system is damaged

Only 50% of health facilities are functioning

The health system in Yemen has been severely damaged: only 50% of health facilities were fully functional in 2021. This has affected immunisation campaigns, maternal and child health, and rates of communicable disease.²¹

In 2021, the UN said 67 of Yemen's 333 districts (20%) had no doctor and that health worker density was 10 per 10,000 of population. This was less than half the World Health Organization's (WHO) benchmark of 22 per 10,000.²²

Incidence of some diseases has risen

In February 2021 the UN Refugee Agency argued that "Yemen cannot even afford to worry about the coronavirus" [due to the risk of famine and other communicable diseases](#).²³ Due to the conflict, damage to infrastructure and high numbers of displaced people, vaccination rates against Covid-19 remain low.

To November 2022, 1.2 million vaccine doses have been administered for a 31.5 million population (under 4%).²⁴

The WHO states there have been increases in cases of several vaccine-preventable diseases during the conflict:

- Diphtheria: After a decade of no reported cases, there were around 4,600 cases from 2018 to 2021

¹⁸ Unicef, [Education disrupted: Impact of the conflict on children's education in Yemen](#), July 2021 (PDF), p15

¹⁹ UNFPA, [Free maternal services are a lifeline to expectant mothers in Yemen](#), 24 March 2022

²⁰ Unicef, [One woman and six newborns die every two hours \[...\]](#), 14 June 2019

²¹ World Bank, [Health sector in Yemen—policy note](#), 14 September 2021

²² UN OCHA, [Humanitarian needs overview: Yemen \(PDF\)](#), February 2021, p69

²³ UN, [First person: Yemen "cannot even afford to worry about the coronavirus."](#) 28 February 2021,

²⁴ WHO, [Covid-19 dashboard: Yemen](#)

- Measles: 10,600 cases were reported in 2018—up from an average of 450 in the previous five years.²⁵

The outbreak of Cholera in Yemen from 2016 was also one of the worst in recent history. To April 2021, there were 2.5 million suspected cases and 4,000 deaths.²⁶ However, the outbreak has since weakened, partly due to a vaccination drive.²⁷

Education has been disrupted

The UN Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that primary school enrolment has fallen from 100% prior to the conflict to 75%, and secondary enrolment from 50% to 28% in 2021.²⁸

Around two million children are out of school, with girls particularly negatively impacted, and 2,500 schools have been damaged.²⁹

The impact of the war in Ukraine

Ukraine and Russia are collectively responsible [for around a third of the world's cereal exports](#).³⁰ The WFP has warned that rising food and energy prices due to the conflict in Ukraine from February 2022 will likely affect vulnerable people in humanitarian crises, including Yemen.

Around 50% of Yemen's wheat supply [comes from Russian and Ukraine](#).³¹ The WFP said in March 2022 that:

- A kilo of wheat flour costs 800 rials compared to 146 rials before the crisis
- The cost of its operations increased by US\$10 million in a month.³²

During 2022, Russia has blockaded Black Sea ports, impeding grain shipments from Ukraine. However, following negotiations grain ships were

²⁵ WHO, [Immunisation data—Yemen](#)

²⁶ WHO, [Cholera situation in Yemen. April 2021](#), 1 August 2021

²⁷ Unicef, [Yemen humanitarian situation report](#), 13 April 2021

²⁸ UNDP, [Assessing the impact of war in Yemen: Pathways for recovery](#), 23 November 2021, p33

²⁹ Unicef, [Education disrupted: Impact of the conflict on children's education in Yemen](#), July 2021 (PDF), p12

³⁰ Reuters, [UN agency warns Ukraine war could trigger 20% food price increase](#), 11 March 2022

³¹ UN Conference on Trade and Development, [The impact on trade and development of the war in Ukraine](#), 16 March 2022, accessed 18 March 2022, p5

³² WFP, [Yemen: Millions at risk as Ukraine effect rocks region](#), 14 March 2022, accessed 18 March 2022

allowed to leave in August 2022. This included a WFP ship for Yemen, with a month-worth of flour for four million people.³³

Russia paused participation in the UN-administered grain export corridor in October, citing drone attacks on Crimea, but re-joined a few days later.³⁴

Projections of need, 2022-30

Prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the ceasefire in Yemen in 2022, in November 2021 the UNDP [published a report on the impact of the war and the prospects for recovery](#). It assessed a range of scenarios for Yemen.

If war continues to 2030, 24 million will be in poverty

If the conflict continues to 2030, it estimated:

- The number of people living in extreme poverty (US\$1.50/day) will rise from 20 million in 2021 to 24.8 million in 2030
- The number of malnourished children would rise from 3.1 million to 4.3 million
- US\$422 billion would be lost in GDP—up from US\$126 billion by 2021. The country has a GDP of around US\$24 billion.³⁵

Every day of peace would save an estimated 60 lives

The conflict would therefore result in a lost decade of growth and social development. However, if there is a fragmented recovery, where conflict declines but recovery is slow and significant challenges remain:

- It would still take Yemen from 2021 to 2023 to reach its pre-conflict annual GDP growth
- 10 million fewer people would live in extreme poverty
- Every day of peace would save 60 lives (based on patterns of deaths due to direct and indirect causes): 442,000 lives from 2021 to 2030.³⁶

Resources on Yemen's humanitarian situation

- UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), [Yemen: Situation reports](#). Describes the UN's work in the country, humanitarian assistance and key statistics in short "flash" reports.
- ACAPS, [Yemen's complex crisis](#), provides information on humanitarian access and assistance. ACAPS is an NGO project.

³³ WFP, [WFP vessel leaves Ukraine with grain for humanitarian response in Yemen](#), 30 August 2022

³⁴ European Council on Foreign Relations, [Grain of truth](#), 10 November 2022

³⁵ UNDP, [Assessing the impact of war in Yemen](#), November 2021, pp32-3

³⁶ As above, pp34-5

2

UN appeal for 2022 is underfunded

UN appeals for Yemen have typically been large, but also underfunded. The March 2022 appeal saw the UN request the largest amount for Yemen since the start of the conflict, at US\$4.3 billion.³⁷

As of November 2022, this is 54% funded, at US\$2.3 billion.³⁸ For 2022, both the US and European Commission pledged more than in 2021, at US\$585 million and US\$173 million, respectively. The UK pledged £1 million more than in 2021 (at £88 million, or US\$115 million—see below).³⁹

The UNOCHA estimates similar financial requirements for 2023.⁴⁰

3

UK aid spending in Yemen

3.1

Pledged amounts

UK bilateral ODA to Yemen (£)

	Amount	% to Asia
2015	82.1m	3.9%
2016	126.8m	5.4%
2017	204.9m	8.8%
2018	166.4m	7.4%
2019	260.4m	10.5%
2020	221.1m	11.2%
2021	114.4m	8.6%

Note: Figures for calendar years.

Source: FCDO, [Table A4b. Total UK bilateral ODA by country-Asia](#), November 2022

From the beginning of the conflict in 2015 to October 2022, the UK has provided over £1 billion in Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Yemen. However, spending pledges have reduced in recent years.

Spending peaked at £260 million in 2019 and stood at £114 million in 2021—the lowest since 2015. Yemen was the fifth largest bilateral ODA recipient in both 2020 and 2021.⁴¹

ODA is aid intended to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries and is reportable to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Bilateral ODA is that committed to a particular country or purpose.

£88 million pledged for 2022/23

Future spending is pledged in financial years. In response to the UN funding appeal in March 2022, the UK Government [pledged “at least” £88 million for 2022/23](#), up slightly from its £87 million pledge for 2021/22. The FCDO Minister, Amanda Milling, said that the funds would:

³⁷ European Commissions Director-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, [Yemen—High level pledging event for the humanitarian situation in Yemen](#), 17 March 2022

³⁸ UNOCHA, [Financial tracking service: Yemen 2022](#), accessed 30 November 2022

³⁹ Devex, [Saudi, UAF pledge nothing at Yemen fundraising summit](#), 16 March 2022

⁴⁰ UNOCHA, [Humanitarian action: Yemen](#), 30 November 2022

⁴¹ PQ 53267 [[Yemen: Humanitarian aid](#)], 11 October 2022

Help feed at least two hundred thousand people every month. It will provide lifesaving health care for 800,000 women and children and treat 85,000 severely malnourished children.

The UK was the [fourth largest donor at the conference](#), behind the US, European Commission and Germany.⁴²

The Minister reiterated the Government's position that only a ceasefire and sustainable peace could end the humanitarian crisis.⁴³

3.2 What does UK aid focus on?

UK ODA for Yemen is dominated by humanitarian projects, which represent an average of 79% of annual ODA spending from 2018 to 2021 (totalling £605.5 million).

However, both as a cash figure and proportion of ODA, humanitarian aid to Yemen has fallen since 2019.

In 2021, spending fell on all thematic areas other than meeting the administrative costs of donors, which more than doubled to £2.2 million. The FCDO's statistics categorise this as "Development-related administrative expenditures" and "aid-related frontline diplomacy in support of aid flows to Yemen."⁴⁴

Subject breakdown of UK ODA in Yemen (£)								
	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Headline ODA	% ODA	Headline ODA	% ODA	Headline ODA	% ODA	Headline ODA	% ODA
Humanitarian aid	147.8m	88.8%	219.2m	84.2%	158.7m	71.8%	79.9m	69.8%
Other social infrastructure and services (e.g. social protection)	12.0m	7.2%	29.9m	11.5%	52.2m	23.6%	25.6m	22.4%
Government and civil society (e.g. civilian conflict resolution)	5.6m	3.4%	9.1m	3.5%	6.1m	2.8%	4.5m	3.9%
Economic infrastructure and services	-	-	-	-	2.0m	0.9%	0.8m	0.7%
Administrative costs of donors	0.1m	0.1%	0.9m	0.3%	1.0m	0.4%	2.2m	1.9%
Multisector/Cross-cutting	0.5m	0.3%	0.8m	0.3%	0.9m	0.4%	1.1m	1.0%
Education	0.3m	0.2%	0.4m	0.1%	0.3m	0.1%	0.4m	0.3%
Total	166.4m		260.4m		221.1m		114.4m	

Source: Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO), [Data underlying the SID publication](#), November 2022

⁴² UNOCHA, [Yemen conference 2022](#), 16 March 2022

⁴³ FCDO, [2022 hybrid UN Yemen humanitarian pledging conference: UK statement](#), 16 March 2022

⁴⁴ FCDO, [Data underlying the SID publication](#), November 2022

See the FCDO's [DevTracker page](#) for more on UK aid projects in Yemen

Primarily spent via multilateral bodies

Around 67% of UK bilateral funding from 2018 to 2021 was spent via multilateral bodies: £517.4 million of £762.4 million.

These include UN Agencies such as the WFP, UN Refugee Agency, Unicef, and UNOCHA.⁴⁵

Food insecurity

The UK's Food security safety net programme plans to spend £250 million over five years from 2021/22 to provide cash transfers for up to 1.5 million people to purchase food each year. This has the aim of reducing the risk of famine and food insecurity.⁴⁶

The FCDO's "Responding to the nutrition crisis" programme in Yemen also ran from 2018 to September 2022. It had around £150 million of funding. From 2018 to March 2022, it contributed to the treatment of 784,000 children under five for severe acute malnutrition and the provision of safe drinking water for five million people.⁴⁷

Aid to support peace and security

Yemen also receives UK aid through the [Conflict, Stability and Security Fund \(CSSF\)](#).

In 2020/21, around £10 million of funding was spent supporting the peace process in the country, economic stabilisation, responding to the pandemic, and strengthening maritime security (eg, working with coastguards).

Support for the UN-led peace process will include ensuring women play a prominent role and discussions occur on an inclusive basis.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ FCDO, [Data underlying the SID publication](#), November 2022

⁴⁶ FCDO DevTracker, [Yemen food security safety net programmes](#), updated 10 October 2022

⁴⁷ FCDO DevTracker, [Responding to the nutrition crisis in Yemen: annual review \(3\)](#), December 2021

⁴⁸ FCDO, Ministry of Defence, and Department for International Trade, [Yemen programme summary 2020 to 2021](#), 15 July 2021

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)