



## DEBATE PACK

CDP-0109 (2020) | 19 October 2020

# Transparency of the Integrated Activity Fund

Westminster Hall

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Debate led by David Linden MP

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# 1. Background

## 1.1 The Fund

The Integrated Activity Fund was created in 2015, taking over some projects that had previously been funded through the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund. The then Middle East Minister Alistair Burt described the fund in [answer to a 2018 Parliamentary Question](#):

The Gulf Integrated Activity Fund (IAF) was introduced in the 2015 Spending Round and spending commenced in Financial Year 16/17 to enable activity when funding from core departmental, or other sources, cannot be made available to service the British Government's Gulf Strategy. It is intended to support the delivery of flexible, cross-cutting and sustained investment in the region.

The IAF provides funding in support of a range of programmes across the Gulf Region. These include, but are not limited to, activities focusing on aquaculture, sport and culture, healthcare and institutional capacity building. We are not able to disclose information related to IAF programmes in greater detail as we have a duty to maintain the confidence and confidentiality of our partners. All of our work is in line with international standards and aims to share the UK's expertise and experience.

The CSSF itself was the subject of [criticism by the Independent Commission on Aid Impact](#) (ICAI) in 2018. The Integrated Activity Fund has also raised questions about transparency and effectiveness.

Human rights groups and others have made several Freedom of Information Act requests about the fund, especially after allegations that money had been used to work with Bahraini justice institutions that proceeded to impose death sentences on opposition activists.

The Government has refused [Fol requests](#) about the Integrated Activity Fund on the grounds that the information involves the security services, something described in the press as [invoking "the spy clause"](#).

## 1.2 Expenditure transparency

The Government publishes very little data on the spending of the Integrated Activity Fund. Although its funding allocation is reported in the FCO's [departmental Estimates](#) and its [Annual Report and Accounts](#), it is always included only as part of the funding for other programmes. Spending on the Fund has been moved between various parts of the Estimate in different years and is never listed by itself, even after being renamed as the Gulf Strategy Fund, so no breakdowns of spending are produced. We therefore have to rely on PQs for more detailed information.

## Funding allocations and spending

The Integrated Activity Fund has had the following funding allocations and actual spending:

<b>Funding and spending of the Integrated Activity Fund</b>		
£ millions, not adjusted for inflation		
	<u>Funding allocation</u>	<u>Spending</u>
2016-17	20	10.5
2017-18	20	13.9
2018-19	20	17.08
2019-20	20	12.4
2020-21	8.4	-

Source: PQ [103608](#)

This shows that although its funding allocation has until recently been a steady £20 million per year, it has generally significantly underspent this allocation (no spending data is yet available for the current year). None of this spending counted as official aid ('Official Development Assistance').

## Who spends the money and where?

Several Government departments spend money from the Fund. According to [a PQ in May 2020](#), the list for 2019-20 was as follows:

- Crown Prosecution Service
- Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs/Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
- Department for International Trade
- Department of Health/Public Health England
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- HM Revenue and Customs
- the National Economic Crime Centre in the National Crime Agency

We do not have a breakdown of the amount spent by each department.

All of the Fund's spending takes place in the Gulf, specifically in the Gulf Cooperation Council states: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. We do not have a breakdown of the amount spent in each country – [a PQ from January 2020](#) explains that this is because many projects cover the whole region.

There is also no full list of the projects that the Fund supports, despite a [PQ asking for such a list](#). We do know from that PQ's answer that the types of projects funded include those covering "aquaculture, sport and culture, healthcare and institutional capacity building".

## 2. Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

**[Bahrain is holding my family hostage – and the UK is abetting them](#)**

The Independent  
Sayed Alwadaei  
29 December 2019

**[Bahraini men tortured and convicted in mass trial at imminent risk of execution](#)**

Relieve  
26 July 2019

**[Britain invokes spy clause to cover up payments to Bahrain](#)**

The Times  
Catherine Philp  
22 September 2018

**[British government accused of funding human rights abuses in Bahrain](#)**

The Guardian  
Karen McVeigh  
17 May 2018

### 3. PQs

#### Overseas Aid

**19 Oct 2020 | 103608**

**Asked by: David Linden**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what the (a) spend and (b) allocated budget has been of the Integrated Activity Fund to date, by financial year, since the start of the program in 2015.

**Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The Integrated Activity Fund was allocated £20m each year from 2016/17 to 2019/20. Actual expenditure was £10.5m in 2016/17, £13.9m in 2017/18, £17.08m in 2018/19 and £12.4m in 2019/20.

£8.4m has been allocated for 2020/21 to deliver programme activities in the Gulf.

#### Bahrain: Technical Assistance

**19 Oct 2020 | 102834**

**Asked by: Brendan O'Hara**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Answer of 22 May 2018 to Question HL7775 on Bahrain: Technical Assistance, if he will place in the Library copies of those Government responses to freedom of information requests which contain updates on the Integrated Activity Fund programme.

**Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

I have asked officials to deposit in the Library of the House of Commons copies of responses to freedom of information requests held by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office which contain updates on the Integrated Activity Fund programme.

#### Overseas Aid

**16 Oct 2020 | 102832**

**Asked by: Brendan O'Hara**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how many activities delivered through the Integrated Activity Fund (a) were and (b) were not subject to an Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment in the 2018-19 financial year.

**Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

During the 2018-19 financial year the Integrated Activity Fund delivered 44 projects, 13 of which were covered by Overseas Security and Justice Assistance assessment.

**Overseas Aid: Disclosure of Information**

**16 Oct 2020 | 102831**

**Asked by: Brendan O'Hara**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, for what reason the Government has not disclosed its evaluations and Overseas Justice and Security assessments of activities delivered through the Integrated Activity Fund; and what assessment he has made of the implications of that decision for Government policy on transparency of public spending.

**Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The FCDO's general policy is to not publish OSJA assessments or the information contained in these assessments. This ensures that officials are able to be fully candid in their assessments and accurately assess the risks associated with the proposed assistance.

**Gulf States: Overseas Aid**

**16 Oct 2020 | 102830**

**Asked by: Brendan O'Hara**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, with reference to the Answer of 3 July 2018 to Question 157711 on Gulf States: Overseas Aid, if he will set out (a) the activities and (b) the cost of each those activities delivered through the Integrated Activity Fund exclusively within (a) Saudi Arabia, (b) Bahrain, (c) Kuwait, (d) Oman, (e) Qatar and (f) United Arab Emirates in financial year 2019-20.

**Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The Integrated Activity Fund supported a range of non-ODA programmes and projects across the Gulf. These included, but were not limited to, activities focusing on culture, healthcare, youth engagement, economic diversification and institutional capacity building. Activities were funded in all six Gulf Cooperation Council states: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Many of the projects and programme activities were delivered regionally, so it is not possible to provide a breakdown by beneficiary state.

**Bahrain: Capital Punishment****20 Jul 2020 | 73749****Asked by: Andy Slaughter**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, with reference to the decision by Bahrain's Court of Cassation to uphold death sentences against Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa on 13 July 2020, if the Government will take steps to increase transparency on the use of UK funding allocated to Bahrain under the Integrated Activity Fund.

**Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

We are deeply concerned that the death penalty verdicts imposed on Mohammed Ramadhan and Husain Moosa by Bahrain's Court of Cassation have been upheld. Lord Ahmad, who is the Minister of State responsible for human rights, reinforced this position in his tweet of 14 July. We have raised both cases at senior levels with the Government of Bahrain. The Bahraini Government is fully aware that the UK opposes the death penalty, in all circumstances, as a matter of principle.

Our assistance is designed to support Bahrain-led reform in areas including human rights. It is provided in line with international standards and fully complies with our human rights obligations and the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance process. Programmes are routinely monitored by officials and evaluated, by officials, on a regular basis to ensure that they are on track for delivery.

**Gulf States: Overseas Aid****02 Jul 2020 | 65183****Asked by: Preet Kaur Gill**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, which projects received funding from the Integrated Activity Fund in each of the last 5 years.

**Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Integrated Activity Fund was introduced in Financial Year 16/17 and supports a range of programmes and projects across the Gulf.

**Bahrain: Overseas Aid****16 Jun 2020 | 57298****Asked by: Martyn Day**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 23 January 2020 to Question 5454 on Gulf States: Overseas Aid, how many projects and programme activities have been funded by the Integrated Activity Fund solely for Bahrain during (a) 2018-19 and (b) 2019-20; which Departments applied for the funding to implement those projects and programme activities; and how much

money was spent from the Integrated Activity Fund on those projects and programme activities.

**Answering member: James Cleverly | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

Overall spend from the Integrated Activity Fund (IAF) in 2018/19 financial year was £17 million, and £12 million in 2019/20. The IAF funded activity in all six Gulf Cooperation Council states: Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman. Many of the projects and programme activities were delivered regionally, and final expenditure is subject to Departmental audits.

**Gulf States: Overseas Aid**  
**20 May 2020 | HL4189**

**Asked by: Lord Scriven**

To ask Her Majesty's Government which Government departments applied to the Integrated Activity Fund for funding during the 2019–20 financial year; and which of those applications were granted.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Crown Prosecution Service, Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs/Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, Department for International Trade, Department of Health/Public Health England, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, HM Revenue and Customs, Home Office and the National Economic Crime Centre in the National Crime Agency all successfully applied for Integrated Activity Funding in 2019/20.

**Gulf States: Overseas Aid**  
**03 Feb 2020 | 9712**

**Asked by: Chris Law**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 23 January 2020 to Question 5457, how the decision to extend the Integrated Activity Fund budget for 2020-21 was reached; when that decision was authorised; and which Minister of his Department authorised that decision.

**Answering member: Dr Andrew Murrison | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The budget for the Integrated Activity Fund for 2020-21 was agreed as part of the 2019 Spending Round which was presented to Parliament by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in September 2019.

**Saudi Arabia: Military Aid****22 Jul 2019 | HL17002****Asked by: Lord Scriven**

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon on 8 July (HL16673), whether they have assessed training provided to the Saudi Arabian military financed by the Integrated Activity Fund since the Court of Appeal ruling that the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia was unlawful.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

All IAF-funded project work undergoes assessment and review. We are not able to disclose information related to particular IAF projects in greater detail as we have a duty to maintain the confidence and confidentiality of our partners.

**Gulf States: Overseas Aid****11 Jul 2018 | 161131****Asked by: Jonathan Edwards**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the Answer of 3 July 2018 to Question 157709, on what date the Gulf Integrated Activity Fund transferred from the Cabinet Office to his Department.

**Answering member: Alistair Burt | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Gulf Integrated Activity Fund transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at the start of the 2018-2019 financial year. It remains a cross Whitehall fund.

**Gulf States: Overseas Aid****04 Jul 2018 | HL8867****Asked by: Lord Scriven**

To ask Her Majesty's Government which department is responsible for managing the Integrated Activity Fund.

**Answering member: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign and Commonwealth Office**

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is responsible for the overall management of the Integrated Activity Fund. Applications for funding are received from other government departments. Individual projects and programmes are managed by departments according to their individual governance requirements.

## 4. Early Day Motions

### Funding human rights abuses in Bahrain

**EDM 1266 (session 2017-19)**

**15 May 2018**

**Jonathan Edwards**

That this House notes with dismay that human rights abuses are commonplace in Bahrain; further notes that 14 civilians were placed on death row in 2017; condemns that forced confessions through torture are often accepted as evidence when sentencing civilians; deplores that several Bahraini human rights defenders and their families have been wrongly sentenced and imprisoned; notes that the Government is providing £5 million of technical assistance to the Bahraini regime and a further £1.5 million is to be spent in the financial year 2017-18; notes that this funding has been spent on supposedly bipartisan institutions that are responsible for handling allegations of torture, but to which the UN Committee Against Torture has referred to as not independent and not effective; believes that the refusal of the Cabinet Office to disclose any information about the Foreign and Commonwealth's Integrated Activity Fund in a recent freedom of information request is an unprecedented development in the history of technical assistance which signifies that the Bahraini funding programme is now less transparent than ever before; and calls on the Government to publish details of the Integrated Activity Fund as a matter of urgency and to categorically confirm that the Integrated Activity Fund is not being used to undermine human rights in Bahrain.

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