

Healthcare for everyone must prioritise women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, says UK at UN General Assembly

The International Development Secretary, Alok Sharma, has announced new funding that will provide millions more women and girls with access to family planning – a sign of the UK's commitment to women and girls' rights around the world.

There are women in the developing world who are unable to exercise their rights over their body because they can't access contraception. Speaking at an event at the United Nations General Assembly, Alok Sharma said the world cannot achieve universal health coverage without prioritising universal sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) access for women and girls.

With this programme and other ongoing DFID-funded family planning programmes, such as WISH, UK aid is collectively going beyond the ambition set out at the 2017 Family Planning Summit of reaching 20 million women a year.

The programme announced today will provide £600 million over 2020-2025 and will buy family planning supplies for millions more women and girls in the world's poorest countries each year. This includes those affected by humanitarian crises, such as Syria, Yemen and Cox's Bazaar in Bangladesh – helping to fulfil that unmet need and save the lives of tens of thousands of women. It will also give them access to life-saving medicines in hospitals, which can help prevent death in childbirth.

The new funding represents a significant uplift in the UK's already world-leading support for family planning and will transform access to it.

International Development Secretary Alok Sharma said:

The UK has been at the forefront of global efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights for women and girls living in the world's poorest countries.

Between April 2018 and March 2019 alone, UK aid reached at least 23.5 million women and girls. But there are still millions more who are being denied their rights to decide what is right for them.

This UK aid will help give millions of women and girls control over their bodies, so they can choose if, when and how many children they want. That is a basic right that every woman and girl deserves.

Over the next five years, this new UK aid support (£600 million from 2020-2025) will:

- give over 20 million women and girls access to family planning per year. This is 5 million more women per year than the UK's previous reproductive health supplies programme
- prevent more than 5 million unintended pregnancies per year
- prevent at least 1.5 million potentially-fatal unsafe abortions per year
- save an estimated 9,000 women's lives per year from complications in pregnancy or childbirth.

Notes to editors

This package includes a renewed investment in UNFPA Supplies, which operates in 46 countries, representing those with the highest rates of maternal mortality and lowest rates of modern contraceptive use.

The UK has been at the forefront of global efforts to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for women and girls living in the world's poorest countries.

- From 2013-2020, the UK invested £356 million in a reproductive health supplies programme, which provided family planning for 15 million couples a year.
- In 2018, the UK announced our flagship comprehensive SRHR programme – Women's Integrated Sexual Health (WISH) – will ensure six million couples can reliably gain access to life-saving voluntary contraception and the full spectrum of sexual and reproductive health care in 24 countries in Africa and 3 countries in Asia, every year of the programme.

Since 2012, millions more women and girls have access to modern contraception, in large part thanks to the work of UK aid. Between April 2018 and March 2019 alone, UK aid reached at least 23.5 million women and girls, preventing millions of unsafe abortions and saving thousands of women's lives.

Every day at least 20,000 adolescent girls become pregnant. There are at least 38 million adolescent girls in developing countries who are sexually active but want to avoid or delay pregnancy, only 15 million of whom are using modern contraception. Providing adolescent girls with access to the contraceptive choices they want would prevent 6 million unintended pregnancies and 1.9 million unsafe abortions, saving 6,000 maternal lives each year.

Family planning is one of the best investments in development. According to the Copenhagen Consensus, family planning is among the most cost-effective interventions – long-term benefits accrue from avoiding unintended pregnancies and unsafe abortions, and averting infant and maternal deaths.

Every \$1 invested in meeting the unmet need for contraceptives in the long-term can yield up to \$120 in accrued annual benefits.