

A silhouette of a young girl wearing a headscarf, looking out from a doorway. The background is bright and slightly blurred, showing an outdoor setting with wooden structures.

GIRLS IN CRISIS:

**Decreasing International Investment
to End Sexual Violence and Child
Marriage**

INTRODUCTION

Every year, more than one billion children – or half of the world’s children – experience some form of violence. Exposure to violence compromises a child’s mental and social development, hampers educational outcomes, and reduces opportunities for gainful employment. It is estimated that physical, sexual, and emotional violence against children costs societies 3% to 8% of global GDP.¹

Current data indicates that up to 50% of sexual assaults worldwide are committed against girls under the age of 16.^{2,3} Risks are particularly high in conflict-affected countries – globally, at least 72 million children are living among or near armed groups who have a history of perpetrating sexual violence against children.⁴

Sexual violence can cause children immediate physical injuries, psychological harm, and long-term debilitating physical conditions. This may result in lifelong costs of healthcare and loss of quality of life, alongside the possibility of early pregnancy and related lower levels of education.⁵ One of the most invisible and under-reported forms of sexual violence occurs in child marriages, which traps children in situations where they are unable to report or get help when they are sexually abused, and have to face the associated negative implications of sexual violence without support.⁶

There is also evidence that sexual violence against children, and especially child marriage, increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Measures aimed to stem the spread of disease impeded normal child protection and monitoring services, and the widespread closure of schools pushed many girls towards child marriage.⁷ The secondary impacts of the pandemic caused a surge in poverty⁸ and in turn an increase in negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and child labour. This is supported by World Vision’s own field-level data, which shows a 163% increase in child marriages in the first 18 months of the pandemic, compared to the 18 months leading up to March 2020. Reports of other forms of sexual violence, including rape and attempted rape, also increased by 50%.⁹



163%

increase in child marriages in the first 18 months of the pandemic



50%

increase in other forms of sexual violence, including rape and attempted rape

Despite the commitments of donors, the evidence clearly shows that ending sexual violence against children is a seriously underfunded issue, both at national and global levels. This lack of funding and implementation is an increasingly concerning trend,¹⁰ especially given the increase in sexual violence and child marriage during the COVID-19 pandemic and increased income and food insecurity. World Vision warned that the side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic would cause an increase in child marriage and other forms of violence against children, and called for increased funding to protect children, as early as May 2020.¹¹ Instead, funding only decreased. The data in this report shows that Official Development Assistance (ODA) on projects to end child marriage and address sexual violence against children decreased in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

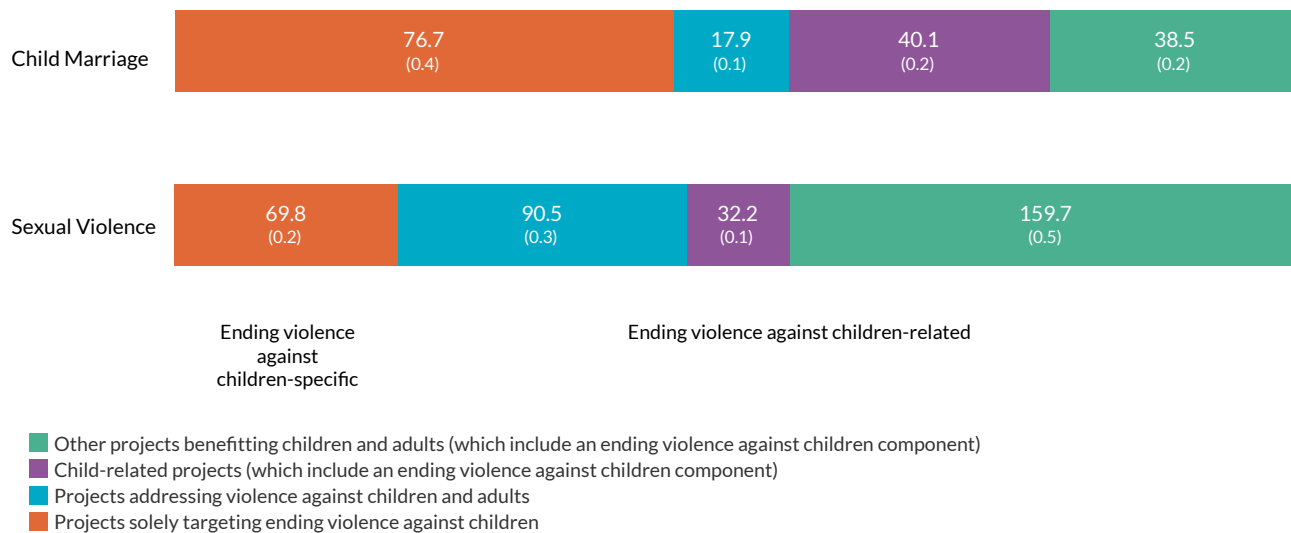
ODA SPEND ON ENDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN AND CHILD MARRIAGE

Our analysis of development spending by donor governments found that only a small fraction of ODA is targeted at ending sexual violence against children: US\$ 352.2 million or just **0.15%** of total 2020 ODA.¹² The majority of this investment (US\$ 282.5 million) is dedicated to projects that address sexual violence against children as part of a broader set of objectives to end sexual violence against both children and adults (women).

When it comes to funding to end child marriage, the situation is even more concerning - only US\$ 172.2 million, or **0.07%** of total ODA was spent to address child marriage through programmes that focus solely on children or include children as a target category alongside women and other adults.

Total spending on interventions to prevent sexual violence and child marriage

USD million 2020 prices (percentage of total)

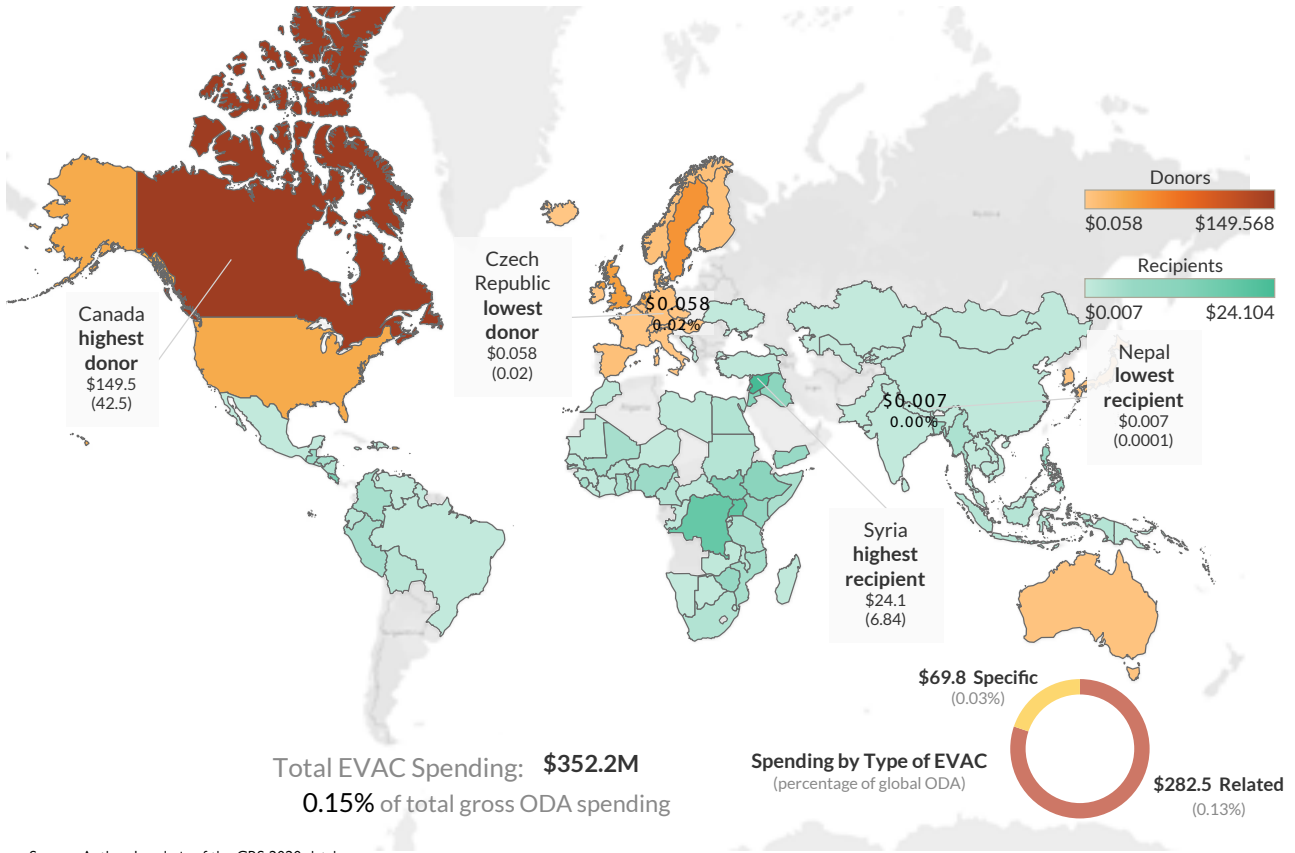


e: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2020 database

Despite children's increased vulnerability to violence over the last two years of pandemic lockdowns, and the specific commitments many governments have made to addressing gender-based violence, funding in this area has steadily decreased. **ODA to end violence against children has decreased by 10% since 2018 and donor investment to end violence against women and girls also decreased by 30% (from US\$ 606 million in 2018 to US\$ 429 million in 2020).**¹³

Map of total ODA to prevent sexual violence by donors and recipient countries, 2020

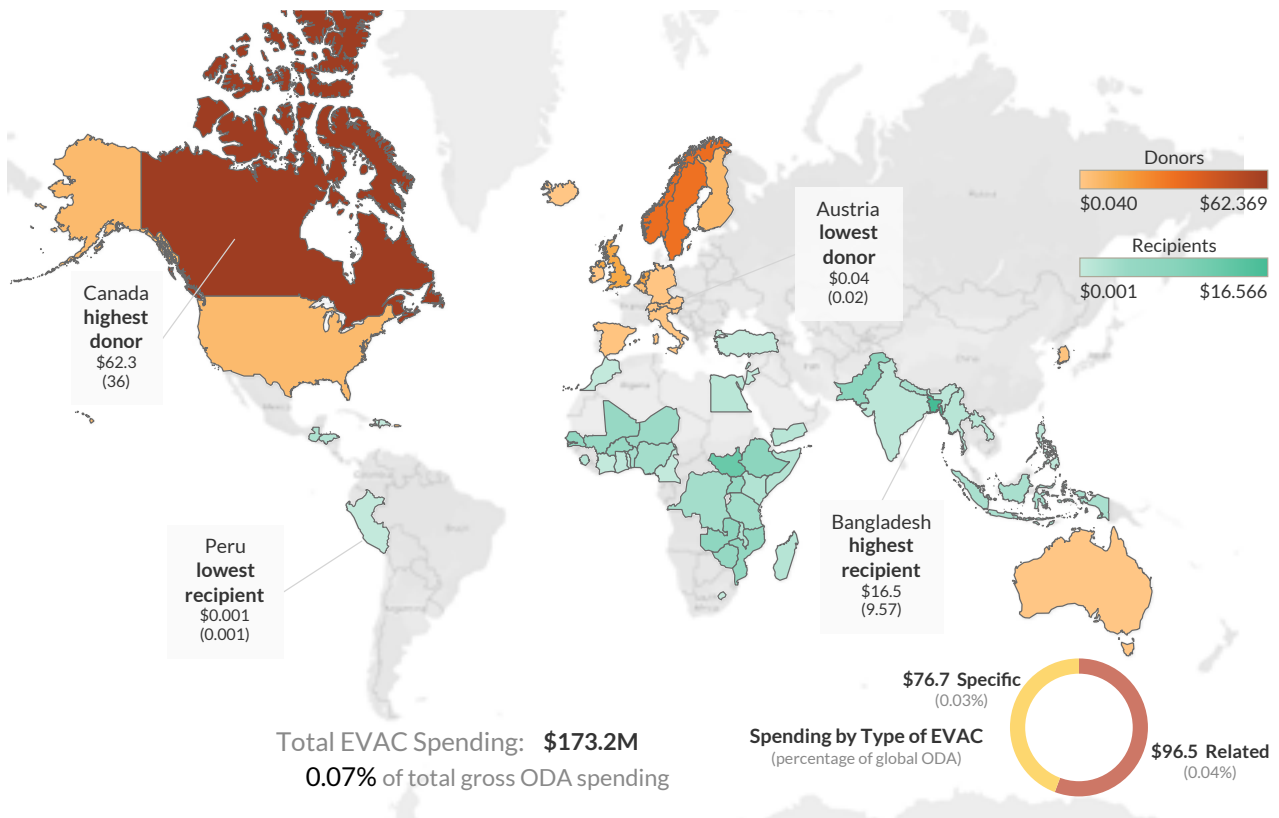
USD million 2020 prices (percentage of total)



Source: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2020 database

Map of total ODA to prevent child marriage by donors and recipient countries, 2020

USD million 2020 prices (percentage of total)



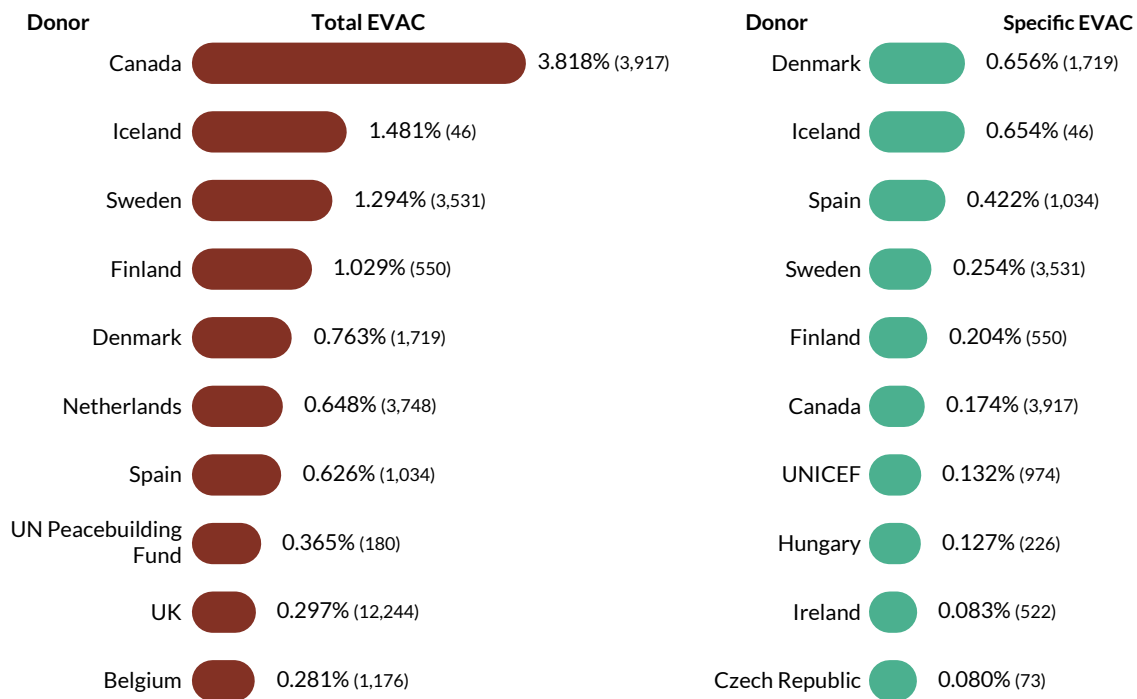
Source: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2017, 2018 and 2020 database

While total ODA increased in 2020, this increase came from International Financial Institutions (IFIs), which are less likely to fund projects to end child marriage and sexual violence against children. The portion of funding from bilateral donors, who do fund these projects, decreased by 26%. **In 2020, only US\$ 4.7 million (less than 0.9%) of the total ODA to end sexual violence against children and child marriage was provided by IFIs.**¹⁴ And of the IFI spending, almost 50% went to a large road building project in Bangladesh, funded by ADB, which included an objective on raising awareness of trafficking - a good example of a way to contribute to efforts to tackle sexual violence and child marriage through an integrated approach, but one that probably causes an inflation of the overall investment figures for ending sexual violence.

The donor base for investing in ending sexual violence against children and child marriage is very small, with almost all investment concentrated among 13 countries and two UN agencies. The vast majority of ODA for ending sexual violence against children comes from just 10 donors, who account for over 92% of total investment.

Top 10 donors to prevent sexual violence as a proportion of gross ODA disbursement

Percentage of ODA (total ODA disbursement in USD million 2020 prices)

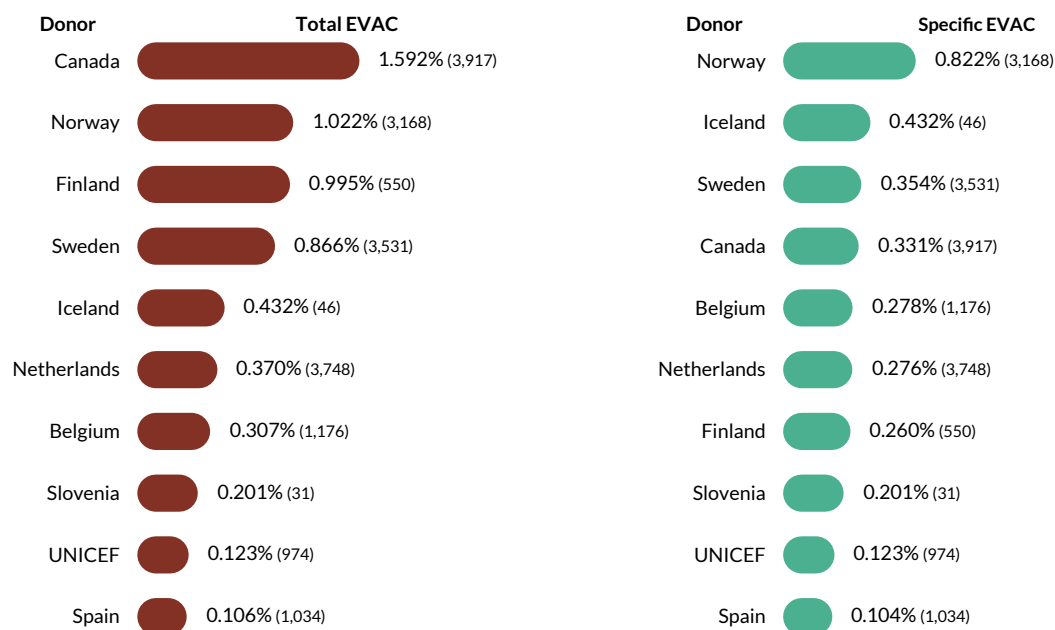


Source: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2017, 2018 and 2020 database

The situation is similar when we look at investment to end child marriage, where 98% of all ODA comes from just 10 donors. Only Canada spends more than 2% ODA on ending sexual violence against children or child marriage.

Top 10 donors to prevent child marriage as a proportion of gross ODA disbursement

Percentage of ODA (total ODA disbursement in USD million 2020 prices)

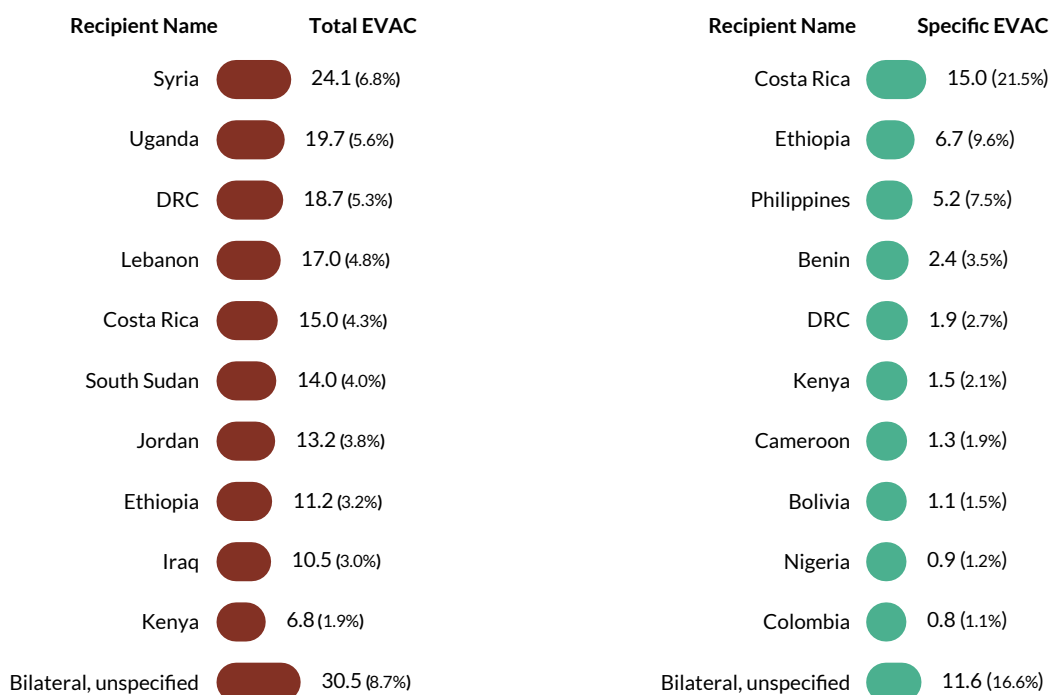


Source: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2017, 2018 and 2020 database

Among the top ten donors for both issues are countries who have made specific commitments to address gender-based violence, violence against women and girls, or child marriage, including as part of a feminist foreign policy agenda. However, this means that boys – who are also at risk of or experiencing sexual violence – fall through the cracks. In all of these countries, investments are spread across humanitarian and development contexts. When it comes to sexual violence, over 50% of the investment goes to ten conflict-affected countries. This is not surprising given that some top donors (the USA and Canada, for example) have made specific commitments to end gender-based violence in conflict.

Top 10 recipients of ODA total and specific EVAC for sexual violence

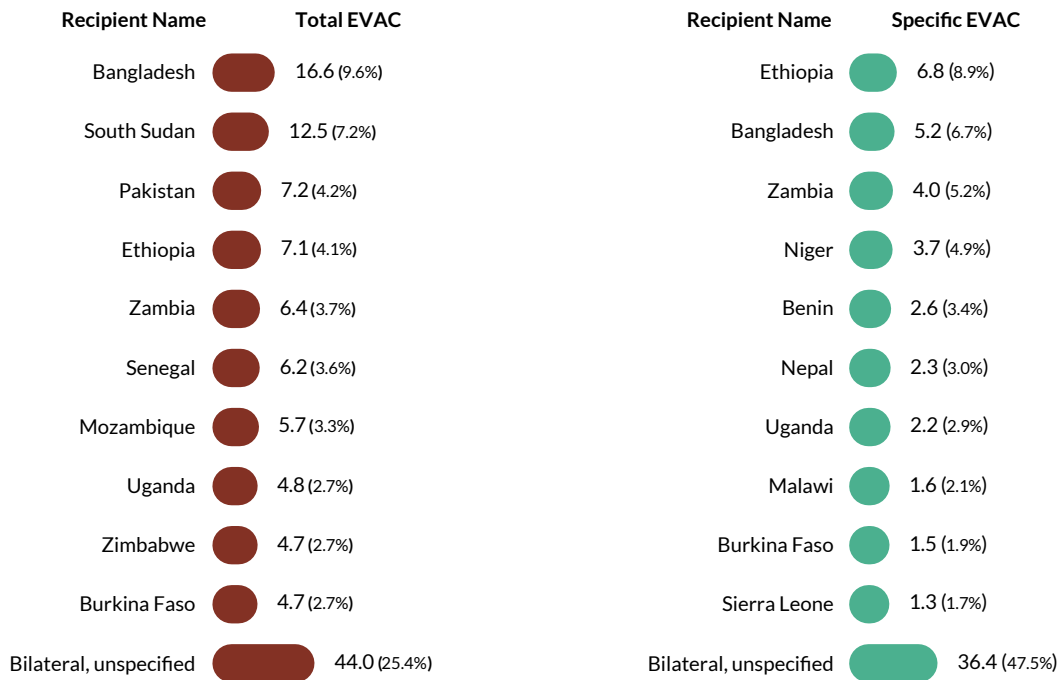
USD million 2020 prices (percentage of total)



Source: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2017, 2018 and 2020 database

Top 10 recipients of ODA total and specific EVAC for child marriage

USD million 2020 prices (percentage of total)

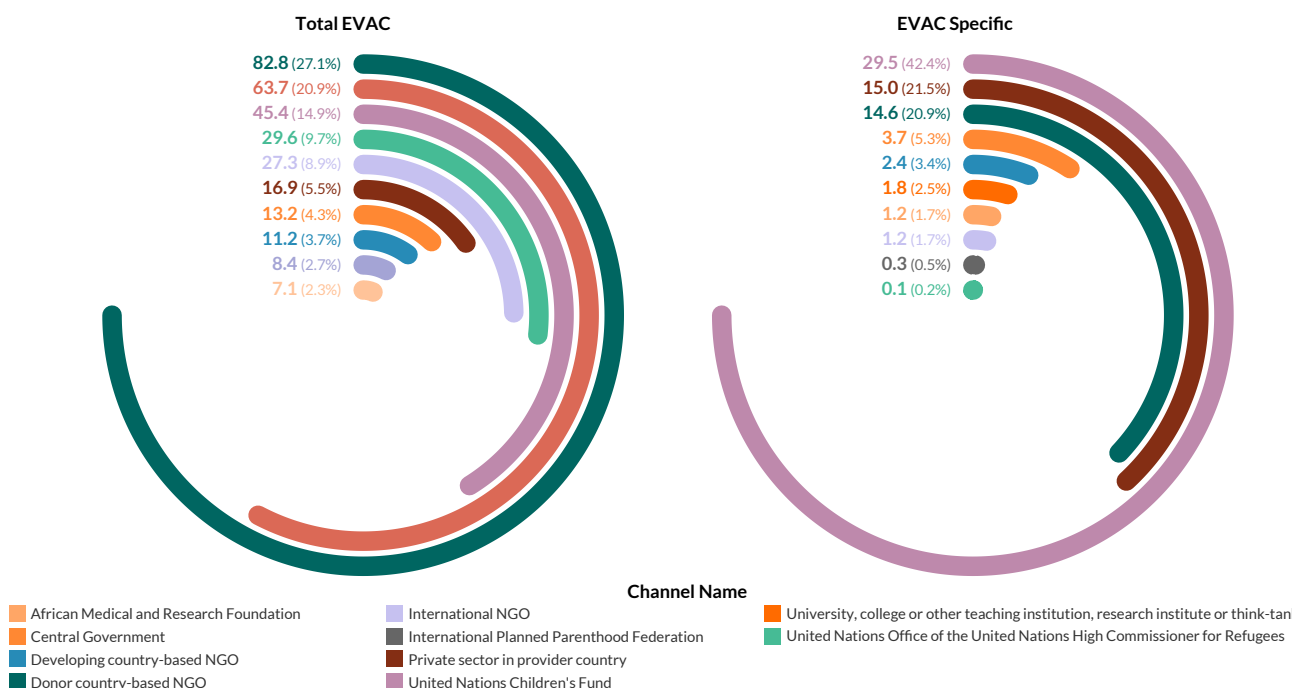


Source: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2020 database

In contrast, most funding to end child marriage is allocated to the countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage. While that is understandable, it also has its limitations given the specific vulnerability of girls to child marriage in humanitarian crises. Funds are mainly channelled through UNICEF and UNFPA due to donor commitments to their joint programme to address child marriage. This is also in contrast to investments to end sexual violence, where most of the funding is channelled through local NGOs.

Spending per top 10 channels on sexual violence

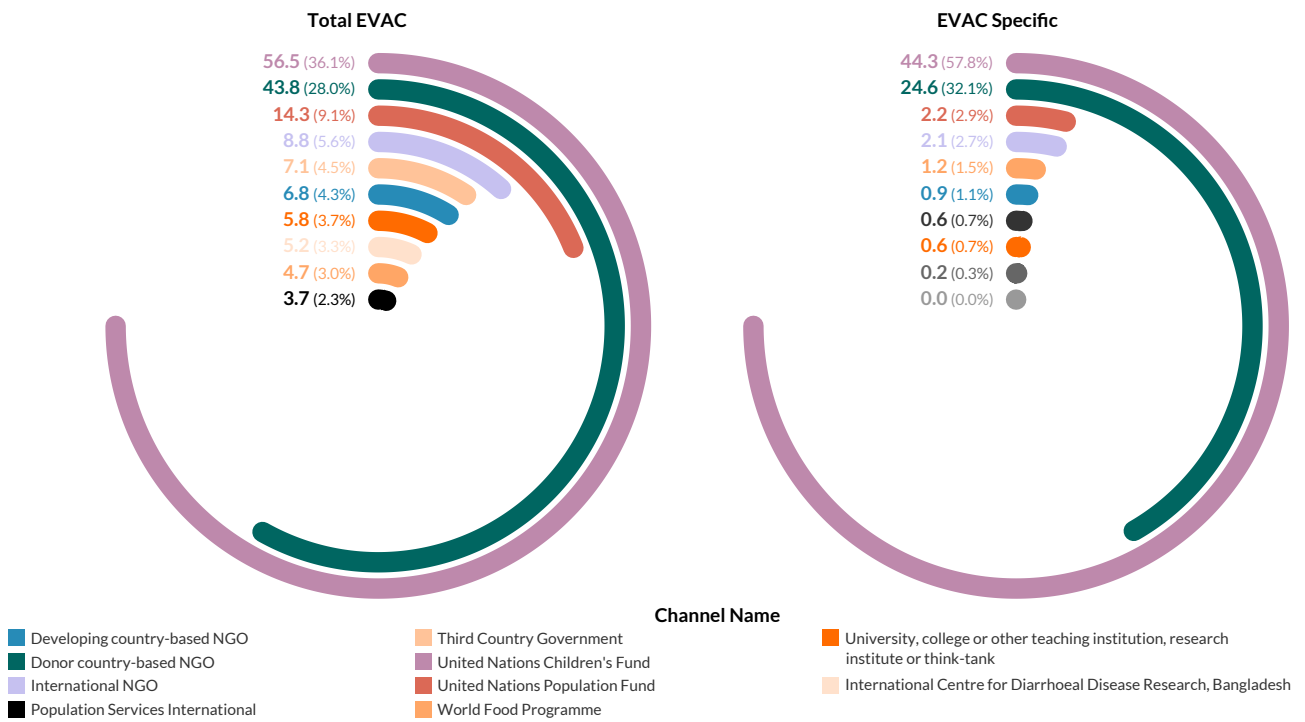
USD million 2020 prices (percentage of total)



Source: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2020 database

Spending per top 10 channels on child marriage

USD million 2020 prices (percentage of total)



Source: Authors' analysis of the CRS 2020 database

Most of the funding for both issues is allocated to strengthen governments' policies and infrastructure, as well as to strengthen national civil society organisations. Significant funding also goes towards addressing sexual and reproductive health for both issues, and supporting girls' education, specifically linked to reducing child marriage. It is important to note the multisectoral nature of the investment in ending both sexual violence and child marriage, which is essential to address the complex drivers and multiple negative impacts of these two issues.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

The combined impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict, and climate change have exponentially increased the risks of sexual violence against children and child marriage.¹⁵ Despite these risks, however, ODA allocated to these issues decreased in 2020. While all ODA has been impacted by a shift in donor priorities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, directing funding away from ending sexual violence against children and child marriage can have disproportionately severe consequences.

Although official data for 2021 and 2022 ODA has yet to be published, we can see from public announcements that some of the largest donors continue to prioritise the issues of sexual violence against children and child marriage. However, the total funding is still a drop in the bucket compared to the scale of the issues, and other countries must also invest to protect the future of further generations.

The large social and economic dividends generated by investments to end child marriage and sexual violence against children must not be underestimated. While the primary responsibility for addressing sexual violence in childhood and child marriage lies with national governments, ODA can still play a significant catalytic role in removing barriers to girls and boys achieving their health, educational and economic potential, especially in low-income countries.¹⁶

This dividend resonates into the future, improving livelihoods and economies for many generations. The benefits of ending violence against children have already started to pay in countries where there has been a significant decrease in child marriage over the last decade.¹⁷ This is the moment to ensure that the dividend of ending violence against children is maximised and continues to grow. The world must follow through on its commitments to end child marriage and prevent sexual violence against children in all its forms.

To ensure this:



Donors must increase funding to prevent and respond to sexual violence against children, including child marriage. Children – girls and boys – must not fall through cracks of policies and commitments to address violence against women and girls. Funding to combat problems of this scale should focus more on addressing these issues in childhood where chances of preventing long-term negative consequences are the highest.






Donors must commit to putting children at the heart of initiatives and programmes to tackle conflict-related sexual violence. The Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Conference will bring together 800 global stakeholders in London from 28 to 29 November 2022 to shine a light on progress, challenges, and good practice in preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence. It is a moment to galvanise efforts to ensure children are not left behind by making child-focused political and funding commitments.






Funding must be accompanied by greater transparency and better data regarding ODA to address sexual violence against children. Donors should develop a standardised methodology for tracking ODA to end violence against children, gender-based violence against children, and promote gender equality. Better tracking will enable better measurement of investments in ending child marriage and sexual violence against children. Measuring progress towards ending violence against children requires regular monitoring of the resources allocated to ensure they are used in the most effective way. As current monitoring mechanisms still do not adequately capture and track investments in ending violence against children, we strongly recommend, as noted since the first Counting Pennies report in 2017, the adoption of a new 'ending violence against children' policy marker within the OECD-DAC's database.

ANNEX 1. HOW IS THE MONEY SPENT? COMMITMENTS FOR INVESTING TO END CHILD MARRIAGE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN BY TOP DONOR COUNTRIES SINCE 2020

Here we provide a breakdown of highlighted projects and new funding commitments made since 2020 to end sexual violence against children by the top 10 donors (ODA total and specific funding for ending sexual violence against children).

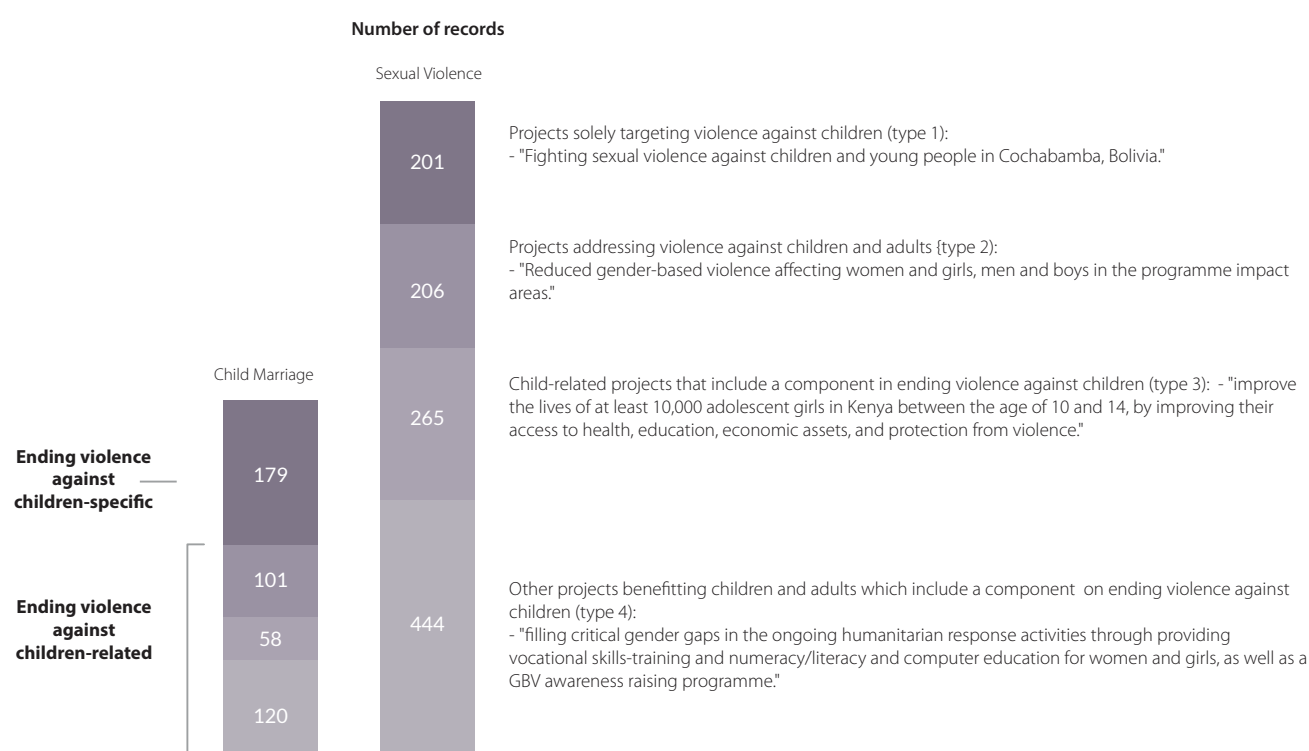
Country	Commitments since 2021
United States of America 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between 2021 and 2022, the Department of State invested approximately US\$ 110 million to advance Women Peace & Security.¹⁸ • USAID/BHA's funding to combat gender-based violence has continued to increase by US\$ 10 million or more each year since 2013, reaching US\$ 103 million in 2021. • In September 2022, the US announced an additional US\$ 400,000 for the U.N. Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Sexual Violence in Conflict, bringing total US funding for the office to more than US\$ 2 million in 2022.¹⁹
Sweden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2021, Sida disbursed SEK 1.6 billion for gender equality projects, making up 6% of disbursed funds. The percentage has remained constant since 2019. 80% of Sida's disbursed funds had gender equality as a main or sub-objective. Regardless of the subject area, they work on gender equality in every project, in line with Sweden's feminist foreign policy.²⁰ • Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is one of Sida's top priorities. Nearly SEK 1.7 billion (3.8%) of Sida's total aid in 2021 was spent on SRHR, including gender-based violence and child marriage. 49% of Sida's health aid focuses on SRHR.²¹
Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In November 2021, Canada announced CAD\$ 325 million in support to improve the health and rights of women and girls – including by preventing sexual violence.²² • In May 2022, the Canadian Government provided CAD\$ 1 million in funding to the International Criminal Court to strengthen accountability for conflict-related sexual violence.²³

Country	Commitments since 2021
<p data-bbox="165 331 400 360">United Kingdom</p> 	<ul data-bbox="544 331 1420 674" style="list-style-type: none"> • In November 2021, the UK announced £18 million of new funding to end child marriage through UNICEF and UNFPA. This funding will benefit women and girls in 12 countries, including Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Yemen.²⁴ • In November 2021, the UK announced a £3 million boost to organisations tackling violence against women and girls, administered via the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women.²⁵ • In November 2021, the UK announced £1.4 million of new funding for the Global Survivors Fund, which helps support survivors of sexual violence, including through financial support and education.²⁶
<p data-bbox="165 712 376 741">EU Institutions</p> 	<ul data-bbox="544 712 1430 1234" style="list-style-type: none"> • The EU provides €12 million in support for the UNFPA/UNICEF joint programme on ending female genital mutilation in 16 Sub-Saharan countries. The programme aims to engage civil society organisations, men and boys and traditional leaders to change the social norms that make FGM so largely practiced. • In Zambia, the EU funds a €25 million programme to strengthen the capacity of national authorities to: fight against sexual and gender-based violence, to prevent it, to change the social norms and mind sets that lead to discrimination and violence, and to improve access to comprehensive services for victims. • The EU has recently announced €5 million in financial support to the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureates, Nadia Murad and Dr Denis Mukwege, for projects that will assist women who are victims of sexual violence. • In the Pacific, the EU funds a €13 million regional programme to combat domestic violence
<p data-bbox="165 1272 344 1301">Netherlands</p> 	<ul data-bbox="544 1272 1425 1794" style="list-style-type: none"> • The Netherlands' SDG 5 fund (with a budget of over €500 million) is part of the Strengthening Civil Society policy framework launched in 2021. It focuses on reinforcing women's rights organisations. It also encourages social, economic, and political change for equal rights, opportunities and security. • In 2021, the Dutch government spent €52,076,156 on women's rights and gender equality • In 2021, a new €75 million, five-year collaboration was started with the Women Gaining Ground project. The project aims to equip women and girls with the necessary knowledge and skills to build a society without sexual violence.²⁷ • The Netherlands has one of the world's biggest funds for the promotion of equal rights for all women and girls, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health and rights: the SDG5 Fund, worth a total of €500 million over the period 2021-2025.²⁸

ANNEX 2. METHODOLOGY FOR EVAC ANALYSIS

The methodology used for this report largely emulates the methodological framework used in the 2017 *Counting Pennies* report, which analysed the OECD-DAC CRS 2015 database. It relies on a combination of codes and keyword analysis of the long description, short description and the project title in the OECD-DAC CRS database. Because there are no codes or markers in OECD DAC database, any attempt to measure aid spending towards ending sexual violence against children and child marriage can only be an estimate.

Total number of records containing a component of sexual violence or child marriage by type of EVAC



Sources: Author's analysis of CECD CRS ODA 2020 database

ENDNOTES

- ¹ World Vision International et al. (2021) *Counting pennies III: An analysis of official development assistance to end violence against children, It Takes A World* | World Vision International. Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/policy-report/it-takes-world/counting-pennies-iii-analysis-official-development>.
- ² UNIFEM (part of UN Women) (2010) *Get the facts - violence against women*. Available at: https://www.endvawnow.org/uploads/browser/files/FactsheetAdolescent_Aug2010_en.pdf.pdf.
- ³ ChildFund Alliance (2014) *The costs and economic impact of Violence Against Children*. Available at: <https://childfundalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ODI-Policy-Brief-The-cost-and-economic-impact-of-violence-against-children.pdf>.
- ⁴ Save the Children (2021) *Weapon of War: Sexual Violence against Children in Conflict*. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.org/content/dam/usa/reports/ed-cp/weapons-of-war/weapon-of-war-report-2021.pdf>.
- ⁵ ChildFund Alliance (2014) *The costs and economic impact of Violence Against Children*. Available at: <https://childfundalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/ODI-Policy-Brief-The-cost-and-economic-impact-of-violence-against-children.pdf>.
- ⁶ UNICEF (2021) *10 million additional girls at risk of child marriage due to COVID-19*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/10-million-additional-girls-risk-child-marriage-due-covid-19>.
- ⁷ World Vision International (2021) *COVID-19 and child marriage*. Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/hunger-crisis/covid-19-and-child-marriage>.
- ⁸ World Bank (2021) *COVID-19 leaves a legacy of rising poverty and widening inequality*. Available at: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/covid-19-leaves-legacy-rising-poverty-and-widening-inequality>.
- ⁹ Based on comparative analysis of all cases of early marriage and sexual violence (rape, attempted rape, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, inappropriate sexual relationship, sexual harassment, and sexual assault) reported by our field offices between September 2018 and February 2020, and March 2020 and August 2021. This data does not represent all the cases occurring in the community, but does provide a sense of relative increases or decreases over time. Especially given the limited mobility in the first few months of the pandemic, we can also assume that the numbers from March 2020 are still yet an undercount.
- ¹⁰ World Vision International et al. (2021) *Counting pennies III: An analysis of official development assistance to end violence against children, It Takes A World* | World Vision International. Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/policy-report/it-takes-world/counting-pennies-iii-analysis-official-development>.
- ¹¹ World Vision International (2020) *COVID-19 Aftershocks: A Perfect Storm*. Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/report/coronavirus-health-crisis/covid-19-aftershocks-perfect-storm>.
- ¹² The data in the table is corrected for 2020 prices to allow more accurate comparison.
- ¹³ OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (Gendernet) (2020), *Aid Focused on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A snapshot of current funding and trends over time in support of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. Available www.oecd.org/development/gender-development/Aid-Focussed-on-Gender-Equality-and-Women-s-Empowerment-2020.pdf; OECD (2022), *Development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment: A snapshot*. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/dac/Gender_ODA_2022.pdf.
- ¹⁴ Development Initiatives (2022) *ODA 2020–2021: Key trends before and during emerging crises*. Available at: <https://devinit.org/resources/oda-2020-2021-key-trends-before-during-emerging-crises/?nav=more-about>
- ¹⁵ World Vision International et al. (2021) *Counting pennies III: An analysis of official development assistance to end violence against children, It Takes A World* | World Vision International. Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/policy-report/it-takes-world/counting-pennies-iii-analysis-official-development>.
- ¹⁶ World Vision International (2022) *The Violence-Prevention Dividend*. Available at: <https://www.wvi.org/publications/child-protection/violence-prevention-dividend>
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ United States Government (2022) *Women, Peace, and Security Congressional Report*. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/US-Women-Peace-Security-Report-2022.pdf>.
- ¹⁹ Italy, U.S.M. (2022) *How the U.S. promotes gender equality around the world*. Available at: <https://it.usembassy.gov/how-the-u-s-promotes-gender-equality-around-the-world/>.
- ²⁰ Sida (2022) *Gender Equality*. Available at: <https://www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work/thematic-areas/gender-equality>.
- ²¹ Sida (2022) *Sexual and reproductive health and rights*. Available at: <https://www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work/thematic-areas/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights>.
- ²² Government of Canada (2021) *Canada announces support aimed at improving the health and rights of women and girls*. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2021/11/canada-announces-support-aimed-at-improving-the-health-and-rights-of-women-and-girls.html>

²³ Government of Canada (2022) *Canada provides funding to International Criminal Court to strengthen accountability for conflict-related sexual violence*. Available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2022/05/canada-provides-funding-to-international-criminal-court-to-strengthen-accountability-for-conflict-related-sexual-violence.html>

²⁴ UK Government (2021) *Foreign Secretary launches campaign to tackle sexual violence in conflict around the world*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-secretary-launches-campaign-to-tackle-sexual-violence-in-conflict-around-the-world>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Netherlands, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021) *'The fight against sexual violence is won by strong and independent women and girls'*. Available at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ministeries/ministerie-van-buitenlandse-zaken/het-werk-van-bz-in-de-praktijk/weblogs/2021/women-gaining-ground-crea-geetanjali-misra>.

²⁸ Government of the Netherlands (2022) *Equal rights and opportunities for women and girls*. Available at: <https://www.government.nl/topics/development-cooperation/the-development-policy-of-the-netherlands/equal-rights-for-women-and-girls>.

