



# Investing in adolescent girls

Key changes in the bilateral donor  
funding landscape - 2022 update

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## Introduction

As the Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework enters its final five years after a decade of implementation, it is crucial to pause and take stock of the state of funding directed to supporting the well-being and development of adolescent girls (Sachs et al., 2024; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2024).<sup>1</sup> If the international community is to succeed in achieving the SDGs in the remaining five years, funding for adolescent programming must be efficiently and effectively allocated, especially for programmes targeting the most vulnerable groups (Guglielmi et al., 2022).

This report is the latest in a series of reports by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) research programme (Devonald et al., 2023a; 2023b) conducted in partnership with the Adolescent Girls Investment Plan (AGIP). It aims to contextualise the levels of funding dedicated to adolescent girls and to gain insights into how allocation and prioritisation of funding has evolved over the first 10 years of the 15-year SDG framework.

Adolescence is a unique and critical part of a girl's life course, characterised by social, physical and psychological changes (Patton et al., 2018) that are especially responsive to the gender norms that permeate girls' social and economic environments (Marcus & Harper, 2015; Watson, 2015; GAGE consortium, 2019). During adolescence, because young people are particularly susceptible to influence, interventions can have a significant impact on the trajectories of young people's lives, especially when they relate to countering poverty and entrenched gender inequality by developing positive normative trajectories

(UNICEF, 2017). On that basis, investment that targets adolescents can yield exponentially greater results, impacting individuals immediately (during adolescence), but also impacting their adult life and the lives of any children they may have (Sheehan et al., 2017; UNICEF, 2022).

The lack of transparency in the funding landscape for adolescents makes it difficult to track investments, and a lack of disaggregated data by age and other dimensions poses an obstacle to understanding which adolescents are actually reached by funding (Marsh and Blake, 2019; Arutyunova et al., 2022; Devonald et al., 2023a; 2023b). Despite these challenges, and with a view toward diminishing their scale, GAGE has developed a methodology to estimate the scale of funding that targets gender and adolescent programming, as well as mapping the landscape of donors and recipients of that funding. In a report published in 2023 (Devonald et al., 2023a), GAGE debuted this methodology and established an initial baseline understanding of the funding landscape for adolescent girls, finding that funding was (a) distributed unequally across sectors and populations, and (b) disproportionate to the greater needs of adolescent and youth populations in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (Devonald et al., 2023a; 2023b).

This report builds on earlier GAGE reports by analysing funding data from the year 2022 (the most recent data available), two years after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and the beginning of the global post-pandemic recovery. It evidences a critical need to continue and build on commitments as well as follow through with pledges made, and to invest in the progress made so far with and for the world's most disadvantaged adolescent girls.



Girls playing in Afar, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

<sup>1</sup> The latest Sustainable Development Report (Sachs et al., 2024) concludes that even before the Covid-19 pandemic, none of the 17 SDGs were on track to be achieved by 2030, and since 2020 progress has slowed still further, especially SDG 2, Zero Hunger, which not a single UN Member State appears likely to meet. Furthermore, the gap in progress between high-income countries and low-income countries has expanded in recent years.

## Methodology

In our initial reporting on this topic, to map investments focused on adolescent girls, we reviewed data from the largest donor official development assistance (ODA) tracking dataset – the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Creditor Reporting System (OECD-CRS) – at the global and country level during 2021, and compared it to data from previous years (2016–2020). At the global level, we selected the top 10 bilateral donors in terms of support for gender equality – the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, the United States (US), European Union (EU) institutions, Japan, Sweden, Canada, the Netherlands, France and Norway (Donor Tracker, 2019) – and explored data for all LMICs. We also compiled country case studies for Bangladesh and Ethiopia, and explored data from all official donors on the OECD-CRS. We selected ODA that has gender equality as a principal or significant objective of the project or programme, and then used keyword searches of project titles and long descriptions in the OECD-CRS database for age-specific terms to identify funding that goes towards adolescent and youth-specific projects or programmes. For more information on the methodology, see Devonald et al., 2023a.

For this report, our methodology mirrors the baseline by compiling the most recent tranche of data from the OECD-CRS on ODA from 2022. Using a keyword search

approach, we identified and sorted projects or programmes with a clear focus on children, adolescents and youth respectively, as well as programming that focused on all young people, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO). Within these ranges, we used a keyword search to identify programmes that specifically targeted young people with disabilities and young people who have been displaced from their homes (refugees, internally displaced people and asylum-seekers). We also searched within these ranges for aid focusing on gendered vulnerabilities, including female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. Though the searches were thorough, there are certain limitations inherent to this approach. Organisations included in the OECD-CRS database can have differing definitions of ‘youth’, sometimes including only adolescents but other times including people aged between 15 and 30 years. Some disability programmes include ‘women, youth and people with disabilities’ as main target groups, but it is not clear whether girls with disabilities or adult women with disabilities are included in this paradigm, for which reason we removed markers that mention ‘young people “and” people with a disability’, keeping only those entries marked ‘young people with disabilities’. Finally, the inclusion of both significant and principal gender equality markers (i.e. important vs primary objective) is likely to overestimate the amount of specifically gender- and adolescent-targeted programming.



A 15-year-old girl in Oromia, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

# Findings

## Overall findings

Our review found a relatively substantial increase in the overall amount of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA in 2022: \$8.57 billion, compared to \$7.72 billion in 2021. This increase was much more pronounced than from 2020 to 2021, when gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA was \$7.62 billion (see Figure 1). Though the increase itself is positive, the upward trend is belied by a more concerning one – 2022 marked the third consecutive year in which ODA that was gender- and adolescent-targeted declined as a percentage of overall ODA (from 5.50% to 4.76%, down from its highest point of 6.18% in 2019). This reflects a troubling indication that ODA targeting gender and adolescents is being deprioritised in relation to other target populations.

Our investigation also focused on the age ranges prioritised by gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA using keyword searches. Unfortunately, as noted in our two previous reports, the data available in the OECD-CRS is often not clearly disaggregated, and uses terminology so vague that specific age ranges are difficult to identify. For example, in 2021, 17.7% of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA used terms such as ‘young people’ or ‘girls’, which are insufficiently specific to be situated within ranges that reflect contemporary understandings of key development stages (Ross et al., 2020). In 2022, this proportion rose to 19% (\$1.74 billion), indicating that whatever underlying causes are responsible for this lack of precision appear to be continuing without being addressed.

The amount of ODA programming that identifies ‘adolescents’ as a target group has increased from \$1.3 billion to \$1.4 billion, as has the funding allocated

Figure 1: Amount of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA, 2016-2022

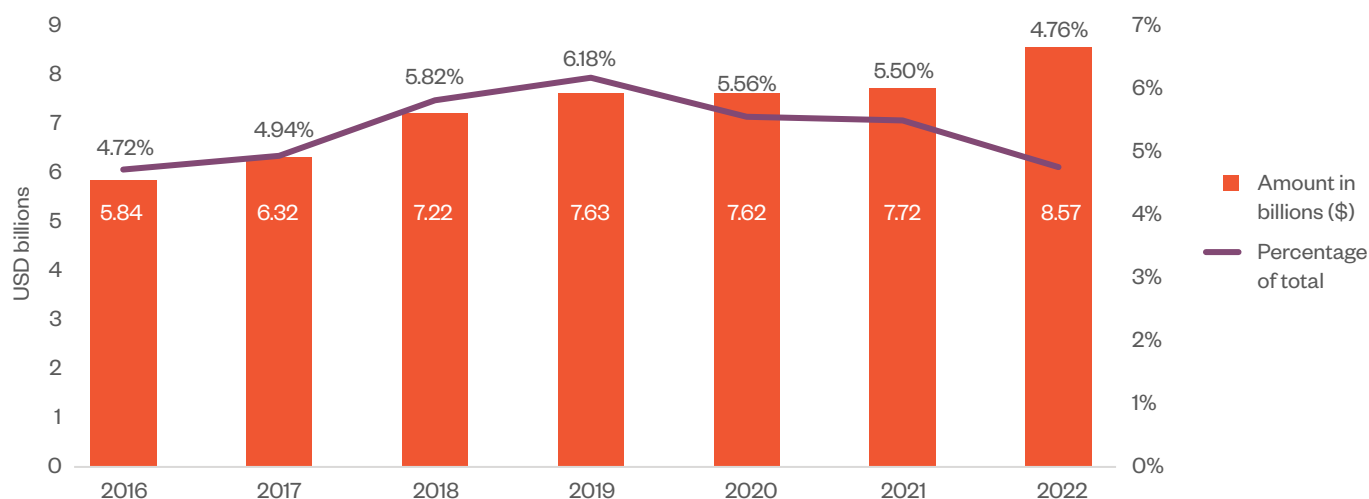
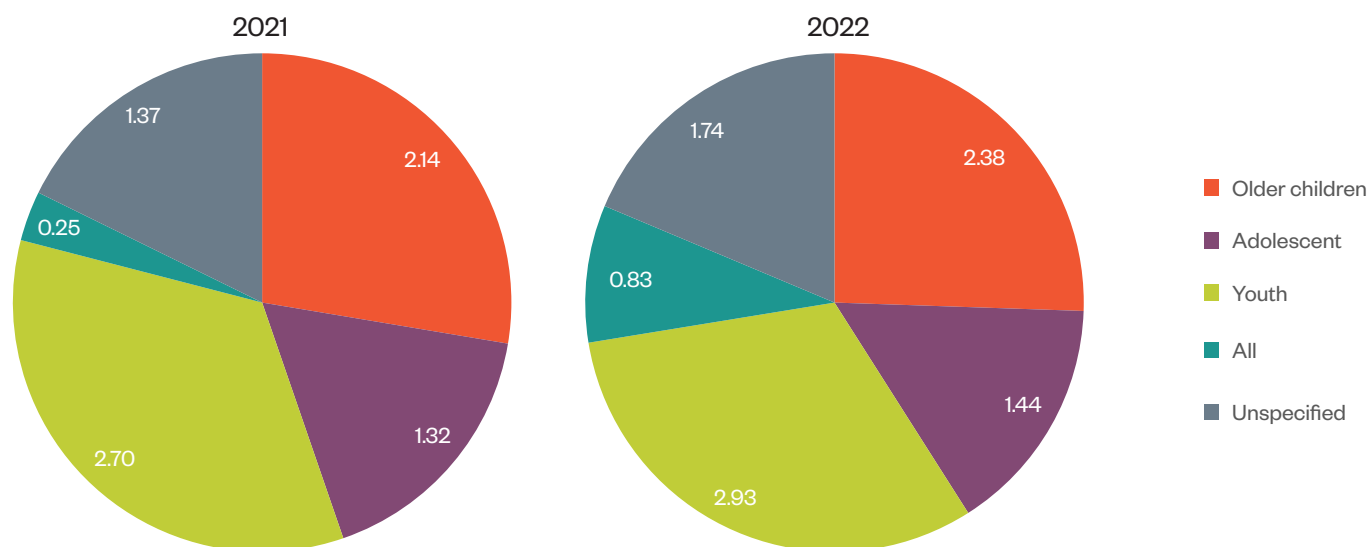
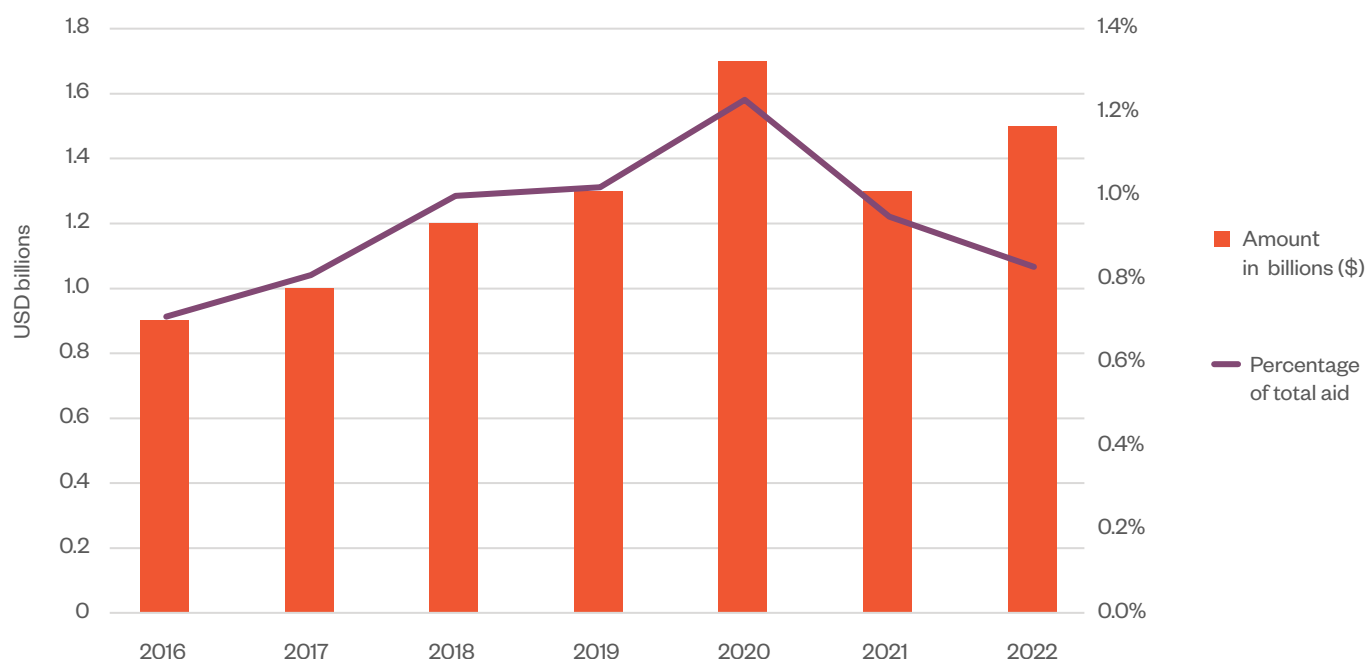


Figure 2: Gender- and adolescent targeted ODA in \$ billions , by age category, 2021 and 2022



**Figure 3: Amount and percentage of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA with gender principal tagging, 2021-2022**



to ‘youth’ (up from \$2.7 billion in 2021 to \$2.93 billion in 2022). Similarly, the budget targeting ‘older children’ has increased, from \$2.1 billion to \$2.38 billion, in line with the generally consistent minor increase in funding for adolescent- and gender-targeted ODA more broadly (see Figure 2).

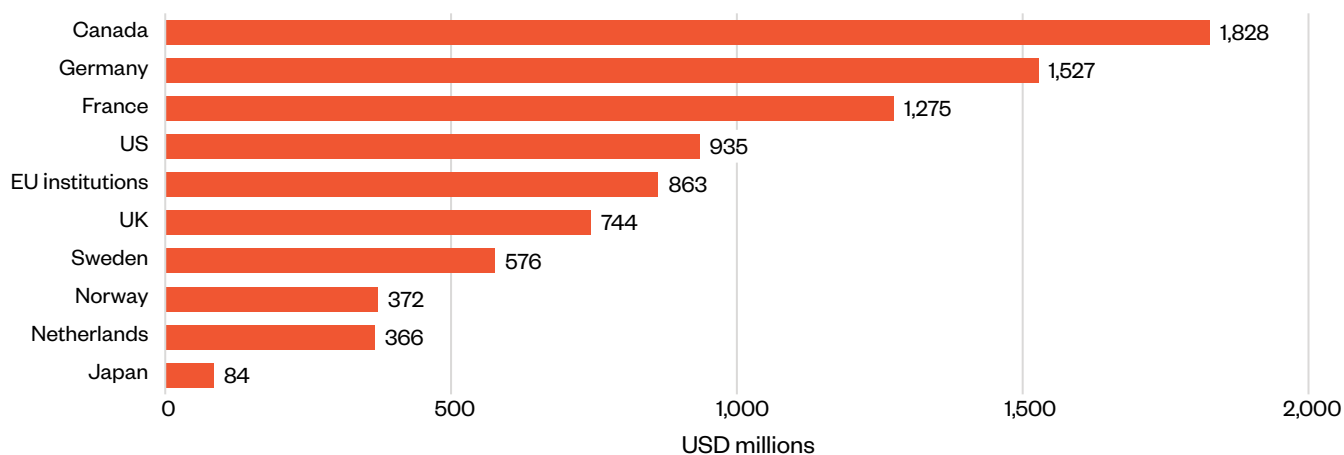
Though the increase in funding allocated to adolescent and youth is a generally a positive trend, optimism may be cautioned by the decrease in the percentage of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA with gender principal tagging as a segment of overall budgets – down from 1% in 2021 to 0.82% in 2022, suggesting a deprioritisation of gender equality as a focal point of adolescent-targeted aid (see Figure 3).

### Breakdown by donor, sector, channel of delivery and recipients

The donor landscape has remained broadly consistent from 2021 to 2022; the top three donor countries being Canada, Germany and France (in that order). These three countries have all increased their level of spending too: Canada from \$1.22 billion to \$1.8 billion, Germany from 1.15 billion to \$1.5 billion, and France from \$1.1 billion to \$1.3 billion. In 2022, the US eclipsed EU institutions as the fourth highest contributor, jumping from \$0.74 billion to \$0.94 billion, while EU institutions’ contributions shrank from \$0.95 billion to \$0.86 billion (see Figure 4).

The UK continued its precipitous drop (having gone from \$1.32 billion in 2020 to \$0.99 billion in 2021), down

**Figure 4: Donors’ gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA, 2021-2022, by amount (\$ millions)**

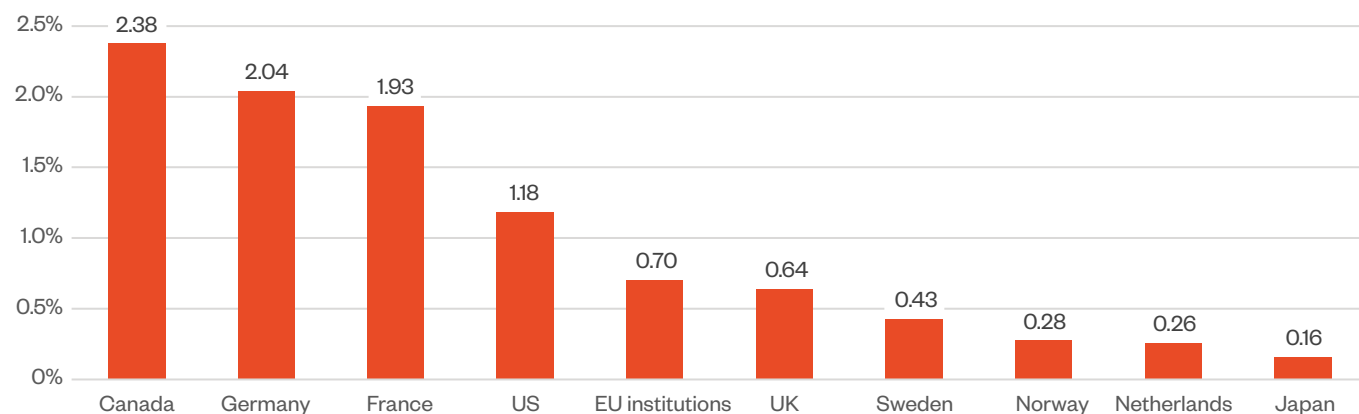




to \$0.75 billion in 2022 – evidence of a longer-scale trend in the UK’s budgetary allocation. Norway and the Netherlands held steady from 2021 to 2022 at \$0.37 billion, while Japan remained 10th in the list of donors, reducing its contribution from \$0.17 billion to \$0.08 billion. Compared to 2021, 2022 appears to demarcate a significant shift in prioritisation, both regionally and globally: although the four biggest donors in 2022 increased their allocations to gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA, the remaining six in the top 10 all either contributed less or at least failed to increase their spending in this area – five of these being European countries, in addition to Japan (see Figure 5). This difference could well signal the beginning of a broader-scale transition of European priorities as political climates in Europe undergo a well-publicised lean to the political right.

The data available from 2022 also provides key insights into the sectors targeted by donor funding. Broken down by SDG (arranges from highest to lowest), the issues prioritised by donor funding are rendered more visible (see Table 1). The greatest increase in funding by far was in areas related to SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), which increased from \$147 million to \$256 million – a 74% increase. Though this goal saw the greatest relative increase in prioritisation, in real terms the shift brought it only up to the last tier on the list, eking out a position above Zero Hunger, which received \$182 million in targeted funding. By contrast, while SDG 4 (Quality Education) remained the sector receiving the most of targeted funding, education-focused donations decreased by 5% on the previous year – the only SDG area that suffered a drop in funding.

**Figure 5: Donors’ gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA, 2021-2022, by percentage of donor’s total ODA**



A 20-year-old Jordanian woman pursuing her diploma © Marcel Saleh/GAGE 2024

**Table 1: Overview of the amount and change of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA by sector and SDG from 2021 to 2022**

Sustainable Development Goal (by level of ODA, from highest to lowest)	Sector	Total in millions (\$ 2021)	Total in millions (\$ 2022)	Percentage change (%)
SDG 4 Quality Education	Basic education	3460	3275	-5.35%
	Post-secondary education			
	Secondary education			
	Education, level unspecified			
SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being	Population policies/programmes and reproductive health	1309	1487	13.60%
	Basic health			
	Health, general			
	Non-communicable diseases (NCDs)			
SDG 1 No Poverty	Emergency response	924	969	0.11%
	Other social infrastructure and services			
SDG 5 Gender Equality	Government and civil society, including violence against women and girls	821	1031	0.15%
SDG 15 Life on Land	Agriculture	234	244	4.27%
	Forestry			
SDG 2 Zero Hunger	Development food assistance	157	182	15.92%
SDG 16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	Conflict, peace and security and refugees in donor countries	147	256	74.15%



Students, 15 and 16, in school, Wavel camp, Lebanon © Elie Matar/GAGE 2024

Every other SDG area (including Health and Well-being, No Poverty, Gender Equality, Life on Land, and Zero Hunger) saw more modest increases, in line with the expectations associated with the broader trend of incrementally increased overall funding.

Overall, while the top four recipient SDGs for gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA remained the same throughout our analysis, there have been shifts between 2020 and 2022 in the percentages of ODA that are thematically earmarked (see Figure 6a-6c). Of note, SDG 4 (Quality Education) shifted from receiving 51% of gender- and adolescent-targeted funding in 2020, down to 45% in 2021 and 38% in 2022.

Recipient countries saw changes in prioritisation largely commensurate with the top-down directed change from donor countries, and in many cases these shifts were extreme (see Table 2). For example, in 2021, Jordan received the most gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA funding (\$304 million), while in 2022 that funding was more than halved to \$144 million. Türkiye, Bangladesh and Ethiopia, which had received the 2nd, 3rd and 4th largest portions of funding respectively in 2021, dropped off the list of biggest recipients entirely, replaced by Indonesia, Tanzania and Lebanon; the latter two each received more than \$190 million, while Indonesia was the beneficiary of a staggering \$441 million – more than double the amount

Figure 6: Rates of % change of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA from 2020 to 2022

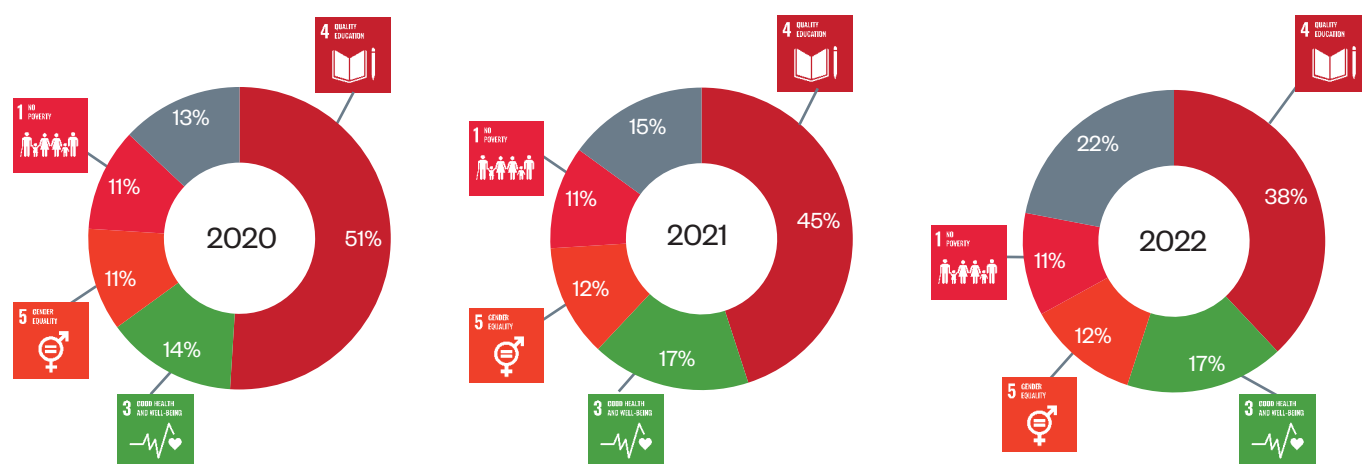


Table 2: Top 10 recipient countries of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA by amount (\$ millions), 2022

Country (excluding groupings)	Amount received (in \$ millions)
Indonesia	441.480014
Tanzania	197.986264
Lebanon	193.145795
Mozambique	188.739813
Ethiopia	181.176172
Türkiye	177.961322
Nigeria	167.781821
Morocco	167.560388
Democratic Republic of the Congo	167.061764
Yemen	166.507072

going to Tanzania, the 2nd highest on the list. Though the data available does not indicate the underlying reasons for these shifts in donor funding and recipient targeting, it does open several questions to the field of researchers and humanitarian practitioners regarding shifts in both thematic and geographic priorities.

The GAGE report on gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA in 2021 (Devonald et al., 2023b) did not include recipient channels within its scope, but this iteration does present the opportunity to outline the types of institutions that benefited most from donor funding. By a wide margin, multilateral organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs), and public sector institutions were the primary recipients of funding, with just a fraction of the resourcing being allocated to private sector institutions, public-private partnerships (PPPs) and teaching/research institutions (see Table 3).

### Gender and intersectionality

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’s call to ‘leave no one behind’ requires an intersectional approach to understanding vulnerability among young adolescents with disabilities face even more challenges than other groups of vulnerable. The WHO estimates that 1 in 6 people globally have a significant physical or developmental disability (WHO, 2023) (approximately 16% of the world’s population). Although our analysis of the 2022 data found that ODA funding is often intended to target people with disabilities, the amount of gender- and adolescent-

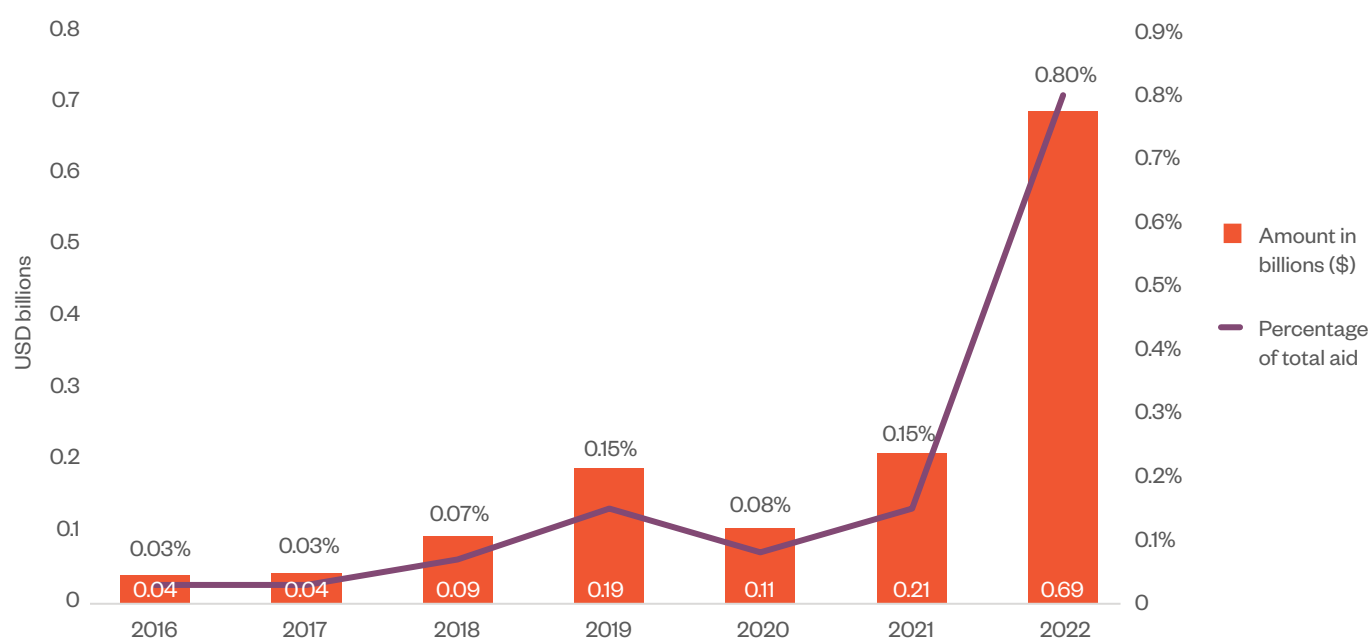
**Table 3: Channel through which donor funding is received\***

Recipient channel	Amount received (in \$ millions)
Multilateral organisations	2627.528841
NGOs and CSOs	1952.451368
Other	106.979902
Private sector institutions	422.098881
Public sector	2777.600099
PPPs	20.616789
Teaching institutions, research institutes or think tanks	291.925242
(Unspecified)	371.676387
<b>Total</b>	<b>8570.877509</b>

*\*NB: this was not included in the 2021 review so it will only contain 2022 data*

targeted ODA is vanishingly small compared with the proportion of young people with disabilities (see Figure 7). In 2020, \$110 million was allocated to young people with disabilities – only 0.08% of overall ODA funding, and a sharp decline from the pre-pandemic total. Though data for 2022 is limited, we found that in 2021, funding for young people with disabilities rebounded to \$210 million – 0.15% of that year’s total ODA, but only 1.5% of all gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA. In 2022 that amount increased more than threefold to \$689 million – 8% of gender and adolescent-targeted ODA.

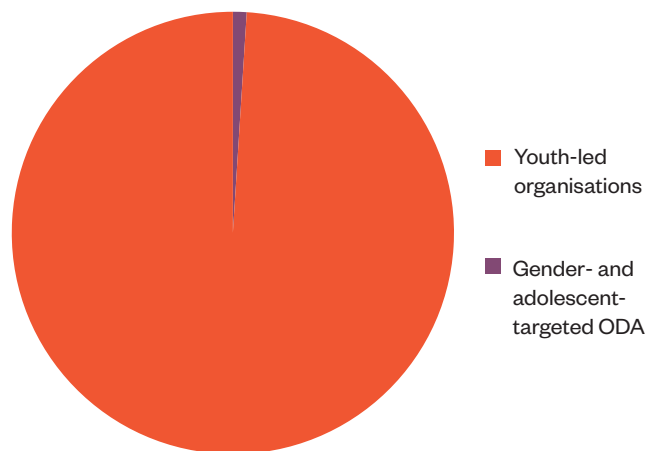
**Figure 7: Gender- age- and disability-related ODA, 2016–2022**



## Youth-led organisations

It will be crucial to amplify adolescents' voices and make them more visible to ensure that programming meets adolescents' and young people's needs, and to support them to participate in decisions affecting their lives (Arutyunova et al., 2022; Guglielmi et al., 2024). A key instrument in this approach is the funding of adolescent- and youth-led organisations, in which young people have greater agency in determining the pathways to improving their lives. Though it is difficult to quantify donors' willingness to target funding to such organisations, we know that there are administrative barriers that make it difficult to obtain approval for funding smaller organisations (Guglielmi et al., 2024). As a result, funding for smaller CSOs and indirect support for youth-led organisations through larger agencies is quite low – in 2021, it accounted for just \$87 million, or 1.1% of all gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Amount of ODA going to adolescent- and youth-led organisations



CODEC Shikhon learning centre for girls, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

## Conclusion and recommendations

As aforementioned in the introduction of this report, the 2022 ODA analysis presented here is the third GAGE-AGIP exploration of bilateral funding trends flowing to adolescent girls' needs and priority areas. Stemming from the longitudinal methodology adopted, findings from 2016 to 2022 demonstrate an ongoing disconnect between the percentage of bilateral ODA invested in supporting adolescent girls (4.7% in 2022 down from 5.5% in 2021) and the growing adolescent population across many low- and middle-income country contexts, averaging 20-30% of total country population sizes. Not only do the findings reported here showcase a critical need to increase targeted advocacy efforts and research on the importance of funding adolescent girls at scale, but it also proposes an important lens through which to view the remaining years of the Agenda 2030 and the successor of the SDG framework. In particular, the decrease in funding allocated to gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA with gender principle tagging (down from 1% in 2021 to 0.8% in 2022 – a decline more precipitous than in previous years) will require a diverse set of stakeholders to interrogate and prioritise these issues as the global development agenda evolves.

In addition, the changes in specific SDG investments over time offers key insights into how priorities are shifting for girls. In 2022, SDG 4 (Quality Education) remained the most highly prioritised funding goal for adolescent girls, although the net amount of ODA flowing to Education has been steadily decreasing since 2016. SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) received increased funding streams in 2022, while SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 3 (Health and Wellbeing), SDG 1 (Poverty Reduction) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) remained the primary sectoral domains for adolescent girl-targeted ODA. Our findings also underscore that most funds are channelled through multilateral organisations, NGOs and civil society groups. Of note, we highlight that ODA targeting young people with disabilities remained a very small share (less than 0.2%) of overall budgeting over time, as did funding for youth-led organisations (approximately 1% of gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA).

This notwithstanding, there are some positive trends to celebrate. In real terms, gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA has increased from 2021 to 2022, likely due in large part to the stabilising effect following the global emergence

from the Covid-19 pandemic. With regards to changes in the bilateral donor countries, we note that, as in 2021, Canada, Germany and France remained the three largest donors to gender- and adolescent-targeted programming in 2022, each increasing their respective volume of funding, in contrast to the EU, which reduced its funding total by just under 10%, and the UK, whose targeted funding dropped by 25%. The drastic fall in the UK's development investment priorities vis-à-vis adolescent girls is a trend which must continued to be monitored, understood and ideally reversed, as the UK's recent International Women and Girls Strategy (2023–2030) aims to target investments towards the key life stages for women and girls, including adolescence (FCDO, 2023).

Based on the 2022 ODA findings summarised in this review, we propose the following recommendations for policymakers and advocates:

- Garner support and advocacy around the development of an adolescent-specific marker (age group defined as 10–19 years) in the OECD-CRS database in order to increase funding accountability and accuracy of reporting, and to eliminate ambiguity in investment target age ranges (e.g. to distinguish from 'youth', which can include people up to 30 years of age).
- Work with donors to increase funding that targets adolescents with disabilities, whose intersectional vulnerabilities create a greater need for budgetary attention.
- Earmark gender- and adolescent-targeted ODA for youth-led organisations to amplify young people's agency in determining pathways for change.
- Prioritise public sector channels and public-private partnerships for a more comprehensive and grassroots approach to assisting young people, in all their diversity.
- Continue to invest in research to monitor gender- and adolescent-specific commitments and investments and to increase donor accountability to the adolescent demographic. Future research iterations of investment trends may consider embedding new donors to the existing methodology proposed here, including philanthropic entities, intermediary and feminist funds, and multilateral donors, to more holistically represent resourcing available for and with adolescent girls.

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## About GAGE

Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) is a decade-long (2016-2026) longitudinal research programme generating evidence on what works to transform the lives of adolescent girls in the Global South. Visit [www.gage.odi.org](http://www.gage.odi.org) for more information.

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