

DFID Results Estimates: Technical Notes



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Introduction

DFID collects data across its programmes to monitor its performance and to ensure that it is having a positive impact for the world's poorest. Results estimates are figures which have been aggregated from across our programme results, using data collected from a wide variety of sources. In 2015, DFID began using its [Single Departmental Plan \(SDP\)](#) as its main results framework, which consists of indicators covering a number of priority areas. The SDP covers a five year period from April 2015 to December 2020. Results estimates cover the whole of the reporting period thus far.

1 Reporting

1.1 Voluntary Compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

As of 2020, DFID's results estimates are reported separately to its [Annual Report and Accounts \(ARA\)](#) in a stand-alone publication. This reflects our commitment to voluntarily comply with the UK Statistics Authority's [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Other measures we have taken to comply with the Code include the transfer of governance of results estimates to DFID's Chief Statistician. Our [statement of voluntary compliance](#) explains how the Code's pillars of trustworthiness, quality, and value have been applied to DFID's results estimates.

1.2 Minimum Reach

Most results indicators, other than spend indicators, report counts of programme beneficiaries. It is important to ensure that each beneficiary is only counted once toward the headline result. For some indicators, this might mean ensuring beneficiaries are counted once across the lifetime of the project, and for other indicators it might mean ensuring beneficiaries are counted once in any given year — see [Section 3.4](#). Standard, published methodologies set out the rules under which project results should be included or discounted. For example, a sanitation programme and a water programme might both be operating across the same geographic region. According to our Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) methodology, we only report the beneficiaries of one or other programme (water *or* sanitation), not both. In this example we cannot guarantee the same household does not benefit from both programmes, we would only include the total beneficiaries of one of these programmes. Therefore, this conservative approach ensures that, as far as possible, our results estimates represent reliable information on the **minimum** reach of DFID's interventions.

1.3 Results Types

We use the OECD definition of [results](#). Results are defined as the **outputs, outcomes or impacts** of development interventions, with each element contributing to the next, forming a results 'chain':

Outputs: The products, capital goods and services which result from development interventions.

Outcomes: The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term change and effects of intervention outputs.

Impact: Positive and negative, primary and secondary, long-term effects produced by development interventions.

Of course we cannot achieve outputs or make an impact without allocating resources to programmes. Therefore, we also report the financial and operational investments we put toward our interventions: these are our **inputs**. Results are what we can evidence we have achieved using those inputs.

1.4 Indicator Types

There are three types of results estimates: *cumulative* indicators, *peak year* indicators, and *average* (mean) indicators.

Cumulative indicators: Sum of results achieved across all years in the reporting period. Cumulative indicators are used when there is no overlap of results across different years.

Peak year indicators: Report the value for the single year in the reporting period with the largest number of individuals receiving DFID assistance. Peak year measures are generally used where individuals might benefit from an intervention in multiple years. This method reduces the likelihood of double counting, ensuring we measure the minimum number of unique individuals reached.

Average (mean) indicators: Report the average (mean) number of individuals receiving DFID assistance across all years in the reporting period. 'Number of total women and girls using modern methods of family planning' is the only indicator for which we report the average across years.

It is possible that aggregated figures for an indicator may be comprised of peak year figures for some DFID departments contributing results, and cumulative figures for others, depending on the quality of data available. Aggregation is the summation of reported figures provided by departments, while applying a coherent set of rules. For DFID, these rules are primarily in place to avoid overestimation. For example, it might be possible to count individual beneficiaries of humanitarian aid in countries with established refugee settlements, but this may not be possible in countries where populations are still largely transitory, perhaps escaping from conflict or famine. The former countries may be able to avoid double counting during data collection and, therefore, report cumulative figures, while the latter might conservatively estimate humanitarian beneficiaries using the peak year method.

1.5 Timeliness

Each results release is based on the latest available data and represents results as of the end of March each year. For many countries, and programmes, there are time lags associated with data reporting, especially where programmes are delivered in remote regions or challenging political environments, or where our delivery partners' reporting schedules are not synchronised with our own. All reporting departments and partner organisations are made aware of deadlines as early as possible and we build in time to quality assure returned data. However, at the end of March, some figures may not yet be confirmed and/or fully available, meaning that those reported for the latest year may not represent all results actually achieved in that period. When the results estimates for the current year are published, previous years' figures are updated simultaneously, accounting for information that has become available since the last publication - see Section 2 on Revisions Policy.

1.6 Rounding

DFID total results are rounded *down* to the nearest 100,000 and all other results are rounded to the nearest 1,000. Multilateral results are rounded in the same way except in cases where a multilateral institution uses a different rounding practice. Disaggregated results estimates may not exactly sum to the total due to rounding.

2 Revisions Policy

In line with the Code of Practice for Statistics, the following sets out DFID's approach to updating or revising results estimates. Revisions are an important and proper part of statistics production and having a policy to guide the revisions process is crucial to ensuring revisions are handled efficiently and transparently. There are three circumstances in which we revise our figures:

1. Updated Data
2. Methodological Improvement
3. Errors

Changes are usually incorporated at the next scheduled publication of results estimates, but there may be circumstances where the figures are revised and republished immediately. This may be where the magnitude of the change is large, it is most helpful to provide the latest data to users on important, topical issues, or to provide clarity where two both current and updated figures might be in public circulation. Where a decision is made to republish the figures immediately, we will alert users through [DFID's Results Estimates](#) web page, and explain the nature, extent and effect of the change.

2.1 Updated Data

DFID publishes results estimates in the summer each year and these reflect the latest available data from the beginning of the reporting period to the current year (see Section 1.5). Data for previous years may be updated at the same time as we collect the latest year's data. Updates to data are common and expected for a number of reasons, such as data lags between programmes starting and actually delivering outputs or obtaining confirmation of results data from partners whose reporting calendar might not be synchronised with DFID's. For example, a country office is informed by a partner that an audit in the autumn found their programme actually reached an additional ten thousand beneficiaries from a region not previously counted. These ten thousand beneficiaries were not, therefore, reported by the country office in the previous results release, but will be added to the total in the next scheduled release. This is one of the reasons we report data cumulatively over the reporting period, and one reason why results are estimates.

2.2 Methodological Improvements

Where there are planned changes in statistical methods or source administrative systems, we will inform users in advance and may consult users depending on the extent of the methodological change being proposed. Usually, these changes will be incorporated into the next scheduled publication of results estimates. However, as in Section 2.1, it may be better to revise and republish the figures immediately rather than wait for the next scheduled publication, depending on the impact of methodological changes.

2.3 Errors

Occasionally, errors will occur in our statistical processes. We do everything we can to minimise the occurrence of these errors and continually review our processes and procedures to minimise this risk (see Section 3). If an error does occur, an unscheduled revision may be issued. As above, the Chief Statistician will decide whether to correct and republish the figures immediately or wait for the next scheduled publication, depending on the impact of the error. For unscheduled revisions, we will alert users immediately and explain the nature, extent and effect of the revision.

3 Data Quality and Assurance

This section describes operational context, data attributes, and assurance measures used for enhancing data quality.

3.1 Operational Context

DFID collates and publishes results once per year, in late spring/early summer. The Finance and Performance Department's (FPD) Results Team manage results commissions and coordinate between policy teams, who have ownership of the indicators, and the departments providing the data necessary to produce the results estimates.

3.2 Data Sources

DFID works with a multitude of organisations, such as partner country governments and multilateral organisations, to deliver development projects, and relies on these organisations to report on results. Each organisation collects data from a wide range of sources, including, but not limited to: surveys; partner country governments' management information systems; data generated from project monitoring by our delivery partners. Project managers conduct a variety of partner monitoring activities throughout the project life-cycle to verify project delivery and ensure the results data we receive are as reliable as possible. Project and partner monitoring activities, include, but are not limited to: site visits; periodic reviews; and third party monitoring.

3.3 Data Limitations

Given the complex nature of development, data collection can be unreliable and uneven in coverage. For example, programme data may be difficult to collect where programmes are delivered in countries with less robust government statistical systems, or where poor infrastructure limits access to certain communities, or because of security risks in conflict affected areas. DFID's reliance on partners and the challenging environments in which we work limits our control over underlying data quality. Therefore, guaranteeing the accuracy and completeness of results estimates is extremely difficult.

3.4 Error Types

In addition to the challenges described in Section 3.3, data collated from individual programmes must be meaningfully and accurately aggregated to produce departmental results estimates. We control this process and DFID Statisticians follow several procedures and rules to guide aggregation (see Section 3.5), which are designed to limit errors in results estimates. The types of errors which DFID attempts to minimise include:

Double counting: Counting the same beneficiary more than once in a programme across different years, or more than once across multiple programmes against a single indicator.

Attribution Errors: Claiming more results than can be directly associated with DFID-funded interventions.

Data Processing Errors: Analytical and computational errors in collation of figures for each indicator.

3.5 Quality Assurance and Documentation

Once received, DFID manages the aggregation of data to produce results estimates for each SDP indicator. This is a complex process and one which differs between departments because of the individual assumptions, contexts, data quality, and project delivery mechanisms they use. Our aim in the aggregation process is to take a conservative approach; to represent reliable information on the **minimum** reach of UK Aid — see Section 1.2. We use several measures, outlined in the following sections, to maximise the consistency and quality of data the aggregation process. In addition, we constantly review and seek to improve processes and systems between commissions.

3.5.1 Standardised Methodologies

To ensure consistency of measurement across countries and to permit meaningful aggregation of results we have developed methodological guidance for each SDP indicator. The Methodology Notes detail the relationship between programme specific results (which are published through [DevTracker](#)) and the published headline results. We also publish our methodology notes on the results estimates web pages to support openness and transparency.

3.5.2 Quality Assurance Logs

The process for the collection, and aggregation, of results estimates includes the maintenance of a quality assurance log, completed by departments providing data, and central teams conducting quality assurance checks. These logs help inform central teams, who might not have detailed country or sector specific knowledge, to understand how figures have been produced. Likewise, they provide country offices and departments with additional guidance about the aggregation and calculations required by central teams. Maintaining a quality assurance log ensures complex aggregation processes are well annotated, and are transparent and reproducible.

3.5.3 Quality Assurance Checks

DFID Statisticians and policy/sector teams quality assure each departmental return, to ensure that methodologies have been correctly and consistently applied, that data processing errors are identified and corrected, and that calculations are reproducible. Findings from quality assurance checks are recorded on the quality assurance log and issues raised with Departments for clarification or correction. DFID Statisticians also conduct reviews of our data throughout the year. Quality assurance checks, include:

Procedural Review: Detailed examination of the methodologies and procedures used by a particular sector to ensure they are clear and effective.

Data Deep-dive: Detailed investigation of figures provided in past years to ensure their accuracy. These are conducted by policy teams investigating a whole portfolio or a particular indicator, perhaps as a benchmarking or progress reporting exercise. Country offices also conduct these reviews, usually where they seek to understand the effect of a methodology change, in response to better data becoming available, upon initiation of a new project, or the end of a project.

Data Impact Assessments: Conducted in response to changes in management information or secondary data sources. For example, DFID previously used its own country Fragility Index to calculate spend in Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS). Following a review of the benefits of producing and maintaining our own list, as of 2020 DFID adopted a more standardised international definition of FCAS using the OECD DAC [States of Fragility](#). Several SDP indicators report the proportion of results estimates achieved across fragility levels, therefore, any change in definition may also impact these results estimates, which a Data Impact Assessment helps to quantify.

Analytical Checks: Results figures returned from country offices and DFID departments during the annual results commission are validated by FPD and policy teams. These checks examine the internal consistency of the data based on the input information, and include checks to ensure figures are summed correctly, appropriate discounts are applied to country level, and respective methodologies are consistent. We also include trend analysis to check whether results are increasing or decreasing in-line with expectations: for example, if new programmes have started in a country we would expect results to increase for the indicators they address. We also check results achieved against the results forecast in the previous years.

3.6 Independent Validation

DFID's Internal Audit Department (IAD) conducts periodic reviews of results estimates. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) provide independent scrutiny and assurance to Parliament of DFID's work, including assessments of the data underpinning results estimates. The Office for Statistics Regulation provide impartial advice on our voluntary application of the Code of Practice for Statistics.

3.7 Production and Availability of Statistical Outputs

Once data is cleaned and quality assured, finalised tables and reports are produced summarising the results estimates for each indicator. Both the datasets and reports are produced using a Reproducible Analytical Pipeline (RAP). Data processing using programming code ensures reproducibility of our outputs and minimises the risk of processing errors. Tables are hosted on the DFID results estimates web pages, and are made available in .xlsx, .odf, and .csv formats, following the Government Statistical Service's [guidance for releasing statistics](#). Indicator reports are provided in downloadable .pdf format.