Donor Finance Data Gaps: Where Does Our Understanding Need To Improve?

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Section 1. Introduction

This paper attempts to provide an overview of the largest gaps in our understanding of development finance. There is a large gap between any estimate of how much is needed to meet the SDGs, and how much is currently provided. But it is hard to understand the extent of this gap without good data on how much finance is currently provided. Furthermore, the greater the extent to which a question requires disaggregated data, the greater the importance of accurate data. Just as an estimate being out by a few miles is insignificant in measuring the distance from here to the moon, but important in finding the nearest shop, missing data can distort our understanding of aid provision in particular circumstances (to individual countries or sectors) even if the aggregate picture is broadly correct.

Accurate data on what resources are available is particularly important in the context of declining aid budgets. The US, UK, Canada, Germany and several other major providers have announced cuts in their Official Development Assistance (ODA) budgets, along with many other smaller donors[1]. Understanding the potential impact of these cuts requires knowing not just how much countries receive from these providers, but the resources received from all sources: large cuts in ODA from Development Assistance Committee (DAC) providers will weigh heavier in countries that do not receive development finance from other sources. And as ODA is 'triaged' , not taking into account these other flows could lead to less-than-optimal cuts: better data can help us ensure that whatever ODA is left is spent as effectively as possible.

Overall, the conclusion of this paper is that our understanding of development finance flows, on aggregate, is sound, but there are dark corners, which undermine our understanding of particular areas (such as how much different countries receive, and how this contributes to debt

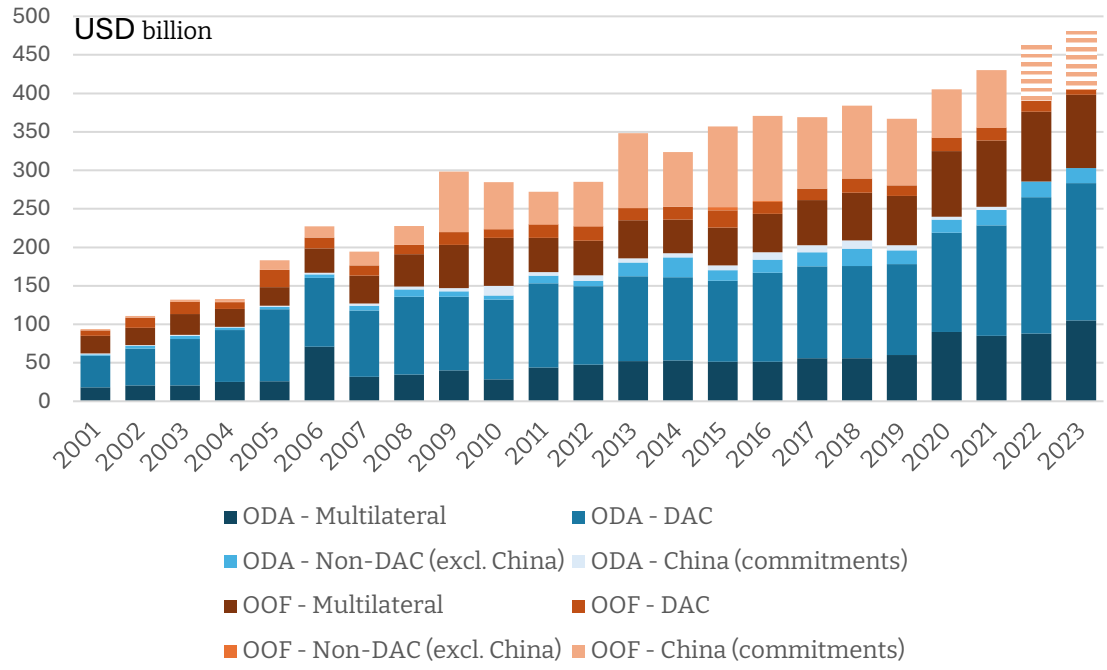
[1] https://donortracker.org/publications/budget-cuts-tracker

distress), or prevent analyses more tailored to specific questions (such as focus on policy beyond those captured by the markers, or even those captured by the markers but including flows beyond just DAC countries). Many of these problems would be inexpensive to solve, but could greatly enhance our understanding of what resources are available to developing countries for particular purposes. In addition, much of the barrier to better analysis is not that data is not in the public domain, but that collating that data is an arduous process, or requires technical skills not always available in government or civil society. Making data more accessible could be an easy way to improve its usefulness and ensure it informs analysis, advocacy and planning.

There are several goals to this paper. The first is to outline why complete, high quality data is important, and how the lack of if can lead to sub-optimal decision making, using examples where we have been misled by incomplete data. The second is to assess the likely scale of a number of key problems in order to identify which are likely to be worth focusing resources on resolving. While this depends on the objectives of data-users to some extent, there are nevertheless some problems that if solved, are likely to have a larger impact on our understanding of donor-provided development finance than others.

This paper is not a complete summary of problems in development finance data, but focuses on statistics and data produced by the OECD DAC. This is by far the most important and widely used development finance dataset, covering hundreds of billions of dollars of flows. The problems discussed were identified following analysis of the data, a range of conversations with experts, and a review of other literature.

Figure 1: Estimate of total official development finance flows, globally



Notes: For China in 2022-2023, data imputed from 2021 as not yet available. ODA data for DAC countries includes some transactions that are spent in-country, the most important of which is in-donor refugee costs, which amounted to around $33 billion in 2023.
Sources: CRS, DAC2b, TOSSD, AidData, India MEA, WB IDS

Section 2 outlines some reasons why better data should be a priority, providing examples of where incomplete or inadequate data has led to misleading analysis or conclusions. Section 3 briefly outlines *types* of data issues, from being entirely missing, to being in the public domain but in a fragmented format that is difficult to learn anything from, again illustrated with development finance examples. Section 4 focuses on ODA, the most prominent form of development finance, with a long history evolving reporting standards. Although sources of information on ODA such as the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) provide a benchmark for good data within development finance, there are nevertheless lingering (and emerging) problems with ODA data, such as inconsistencies between donors and lack of detail in some fields. However, these problems pale into significance in comparison to Other Official Flows provided by the DAC, about which we know very little as section 5 demonstrates. Section 6 discusses development finance from non-DAC countries, examining a range of sources that suggest the likely magnitude of flows that are missing, and focuses on a few important countries. Section 7 concludes and provides a number of recommendations for where small additional attention/investment could yield better development finance data .

Section 2. Why data is important

Key points

- While better data does not directly lead to increased welfare, it is (or should be) both a key component in decision making, and an accountability tool, promoting greater provision of resources by enabling civil society to hold donors to commitments they have made. Small investments in data quality and accessibility could yield dividends by enhancing these uses.
- If data on development finance provision is inadequate, it becomes much more difficult (if not impossible) to assess the impact that development finance has. Studies based on available data that don't take into account known data gaps are likely to be misleading.
- We know that development finance needs are vast, and that current provision is inadequate, even allowing for increases in domestic resource mobilization and private finance. But without good data on development finance – not just from 'traditional' sources – we don't know where the gaps are largest.

There are numerous competing priorities within development, most of which are underfunded. While most people would agree that better data is good in and of itself, investing in data improvements has a cost, which needs to be considered against other uses of funds. Often, this cost is small, as it is possible to do more in harmonizing existing data sources or by making modest changes to existing collection efforts. Nevertheless, the case has to be made for why better development finance data is the right thing to invest in.

This section provides some arguments for why there could be a case for such investments in development finance data, using illustrations of where inadequate data has led to erroneous conclusions[2], where possible. It does not attempt to quantify the benefits from better data, but

[2] This section is not intended to be critical of such analysis, as often there is no alternative to using incomplete data, but rather to highlight areas where lack of development finance data has caused challenges.

highlights how many valued functions performed by advocates and analysts have been undermined by data problems.

Allocating resources effectively

While good data alone is not sufficient to measure effectiveness of either development or climate finance interventions, it is a necessary first step. But where researchers have attempted to estimate relationships between development finance and other variables, they have done so with incomplete data which could undermine the conclusions. For example, some studies[3] have attempted to estimate the impact of climate mitigation finance on GHG emissions trajectories in recipient countries. However, in doing so, researchers have focused on aid that has a mitigation marker applied. This excludes the vast majority of multilateral climate finance, as multilaterals generally do not use the Rio-markers, as well as relevant finance from China. Potentially, the studies are based on not much more than 40% of public mitigation finance[4], which necessarily undermines the conclusions. This is aside from the substantial controversy around the markers' application, which suggest that adding Rio-marked aid across countries may be a poor measure of climate finance. It is possible that if the markers were consistently applied across the full range of donors, different conclusions may have been drawn.

Relatedly, in allocating resources effectively, it is important to consider how scarce resources are in different contexts, and this is impossible to know without considering the full range of resources available. For example, the Center for Global Development have proposed a sensible way of allocating aid[5], where donors prioritize countries that are relatively aid-neglected, relative to various measures of 'optimum' allocation. But as discussed in section 6**,** for multiple countries, development finance received from outside the DAC is substantial and if not taken into account, a country's distance from the optimum allocation could be skewed. By one measure of optimum allocation, Pakistan is severely under-aided, as it only receives around 2% of global aid. However, including Chinese lending[6] and non-concessional flows, Pakistan's share would increase to 4.6% in 2021. These types of flows are not all directly comparable, but nevertheless, all are relevant in considering what resources countries have available.

Of course, even with perfect knowledge, aid would not be allocated solely according to need: politics and national interests of donors have a large bearing on allocations. Ukraine's humanitarian situation following the Russian invasion was significantly better funded than any other, largely because of Ukraine's location. Researchers have found that aid provision correlates with votes at the UN Security Council, and that historical ties to the West increase aid received. Nevertheless, need is still a core concern in allocating (as demonstrated by allocation

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[3] Gavard, Claire and Schoch, Niklas, (2021) "Climate Finance and Emission Reductions: What Do the Last Twenty Years Tell Us?" ZEW - Centre for European Economic Research Discussion Paper http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3799872 for example, or Han S and Jun H (2022) "Growth, emissions, and climate finance nexus for sustainable development: Revisiting the environmental Kuznets curve" Sustainable Development https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/sd.2406

[4] Rough estimate based on the OECD Climate Related Development Finance Dataset and Cichocka B and Mitchell I (2024) "China as a Provider of International Climate Finance" CGD https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/china-provider-international-climate-finance.pdf Estimate based on 2017-2021 figures for which Cichocka and Mitchell report mitigation shares for China's climate finance.

[5] Hughes, S and Mitchell I (2020) "Which Countries Miss Out in Global Aid Allocation?" CGD https://www.cgdev.org/publication/which-countries-miss-out-global-aid-allocation

[6] These are measured on a commitment basis and therefore are not directly comparable, but gives an indication of the magnitude.

models such as that used by the FCDO and World Bank) and therefore measuring what is received matters.

More recently, many analysts have argued that lack of transparency around resources used to mobilise private finance has prevented lessons being learned about what works[7], and meant that we don't have a good understanding of what different instruments have (or can) achieve.

Matching finance to most appropriate uses

To make the best use of official resources, it is important that different forms of finance are matched to the goals to which they are best suited to addressing.[8] For example, the role of private or non-concessional finance in developing health systems is likely to be much smaller than their role in developing renewable energy capacity, given that the latter is more likely to generate financial returns.

But to make this calculation, it is necessary to understand the magnitude of different flows, including those beyond ODA. For example, if it is assumed that OOF flows are close to zero, then it would make sense to allocate a greater amount of ODA to mitigation projects than if it is known that there is a substantial amount of OOF: it is important to address mitigation goals but given that they can often be achieved with market rate transactions, it only makes sense to use ODA for that purpose with no other options available. In practice, neither the magnitude or sectoral allocation of OOF is well understood. Without knowing how much, and how OOF is spent, it can't be known whether finance is being appropriately matched to purposes or whether ODA allocations have responded accordingly.

Holding donors to account

Many countries have made a number of commitments relating to development finance: most DAC countries have in principle committed to spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA, and 'developed countries' have agreed to several climate finance goals, such as mobilising $100 billion by 2020, and the subsequent goal to reach $300 billion by 2035. Each of these have been echoed in subsequent declarations at multiple international for a, such as the Addis Ababa declaration, which reaffirmed the commitment to 0.7%. Such goals will fail to have any incentive effect on finance provision if it is not possible to hold providers to account for these commitments, and that is not possible without robust data on financial provision[9]. If this is not consistent or lacking in detail (or if definitions are malleable) it undermines such targets.

For example, at the Bonn Intersessional in 2024[10], the Chinese negotiators cited research on which countries were providing their fair share of climate finance to congratulate some countries (including France and Japan) and chastise others (UK and US) for not providing adequate finance. However, this comparison was highly misleading for a number of factors: France and Japan are far more generous in how they count climate finance, exaggerating their

[7] ODI Global event 24th April 2025 "Unlocking the potential of blended concessional finance: making aid work harder" https://odi.org/en/events/unlocking-the-potential-of-blended-concessional-finance-making-aid-work-harder/
[8] Gates Foundation (2024) "Principles for Allocating Finance for Development and Climate Goals" https://www.gatesfoundation.org/ideas/articles/development-climate-finance-foreword
[9] Of course, governments may not want to be held to account. But treating governments as monoliths may not make sense in this regard: treasuries and finance departments may wish to minimize spending, but foreign offices and development agencies may value the pressure that can be brought by international commitments and subsequent civil society accountability.
[10] Second NCQG discussion https://unfccc.int/sb60#sessions

figures relative to others, and are much more likely to provide finance as loans, meaning that the relative cost of this provision was lower for these countries. Lack of consistency in reporting, coupled with

Similarly, many advocates across DAC countries focus on ODA provided as a share of GNI by DAC members. But as discussed in section 4.3**,** the headline figures are heavily affected both measurement choices, such as whether to include in-donor refugee costs or private sector instruments, and methodological assumptions that many analysts find controversial. This also affects measurement of progress towards SDG indicator 17.9.1, which measures the dollar value of ODA commitments, which are skewed over time because of measurement changes.

A narrow focus on ODA compounds this. As discussed in section 5, there are a numerous cases where inclusion of OOF dramatically changes the trend in development finance provision for some countries. For example, Korea has been praised for increasing its ODA budget in the last decade, but this increase has been far lower than the decline in OOF disbursements, meaning total development finance provision has declined. But OOF was not mentioned in Korea's recently published Development Cooperation Profile[11], which just mentioned the increase in ODA.

Tracking progress

Tracking progress against commitments is essential for ensuring that those commitments are meaningful, but also in understanding how far away we are from delivering against need. For example, there are several estimates of financing needs for developing countries (see for example Bhattacharya et al (2022)[12]). Many of these estimates divide the figures across commonly referred to sources of finance such as DRM, ODA and MDB finance, in order to see how the gap might be filled. However, this underestimates progress towards financing needs estimates but not including all flows that exist, in particular flows from non-DAC countries such as China.

Monitoring progress, and greater transparency around development finance flows, has also been given emphasis in the Finance For Development Forum outcome document[13]. Paragraph 40c) emphasizes "the importance of the precise measurement of official development assistance to ensure credible and reliable reporting for informed decision-making, resource allocation, progress monitoring and transparency in the reporting of development assistance", and 41b) stresses "the importance of transparency in climate finance reporting". There are also numerous mentions of the importance of better data on impact of development finance; important in and of itself, but as argued earlier also requires good data on what finance is being provided as a first step. In the case of climate finance, there have also been multiple calls for

[11] OECD (2025) "Development Co-operation Profiles: Korea" https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/development-co-operation-profiles_04b376d7-en/korea_d358baed-en.html
[12] Bhattachary A et al (2022) "Financing a big investment push in emerging markets and developing economies for sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery and growth" LSE Grantham Institute Policy Paper https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/publication/financing-a-big-investment-push-in-emerging-markets-and-developing-economies/
[13] UN DESA (2025) "FFD4 Outcome Document: Sevilla Commitment" available here: https://financing.desa.un.org/ffd4/outcome

greater transparency, and greater understanding about overlap with ODA from developing countries especially.[14]

Attracting investment

In the case of transactions such as loans and equity investments, many of which are funded official sources directly or supported by public funds (for example, in the form of blended finance or guarantees), lack of transparency around terms has been cited as a key obstacle to increasing private sector investment.[15]

Unknown unknowns

The above arguments contain examples of where lack of data (or good quality data) may have led to erroneous conclusions. However, the nature of the problem is such that examples are hard to come by precisely *because* data is missing: without other sources to corroborate that data it is difficult to be sure whether it accurately reflects reality. There may be many more examples, which would come to light with better data. For example, analysis after the fact found that China provided 239 million COVID-19 vaccines to developing countries between 2020 and 2022.[16] If this provision was not taken into account in planning by COVAX and others then it is possible vaccinations could have gone further in developing herd immunity, but this is hard to tell. Alternatively, humanitarian emergencies are always underfunded, but the fact that many large countries do not systematically report humanitarian funding means that donors may not be prioritising those emergencies most in need. Again, it is hard to tell without better data.

Section 3. Types of data problem

Key points

- Some data – such as development finance flows from some non-DAC countries – is completely missing. But even where this is not the case, there can be substantial data issues still: missing key variables, not being from reliable sources, or being measured inconsistently.
- Often data is publicly available but difficult to access. This is particularly the case for scores of documentation that could shed light on what projects are aiming to achieve, and whether they are successful. However, even for basic ODA data, some types of analysis are difficult without some coding knowledge, which can be prohibitive for many potential users.

Across the different types of development finance flows, the nature of the data gaps differs widely. For some types of flow, essentially nothing is known, not even an aggregate figure. Other data sources are well developed but miss key elements that would be useful for policy-making, and for some there is transparency on paper, but a lack of understanding around what the data means, or substantial barriers to accessing it. This section briefly reviews common problems.

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[14] Ritchie E and Bekele M. (2024) "Do we need a common definition of climate finance? It depends who you ask" Development Initiatives https://devinit.github.io/blog/do-we-need-common-definition-climate-finance/

[15] Meyer D. et al (2025) "The power of better access to data" Environmental Finance https://www.environmental-finance.com/content/analysis/mobilising-capital-for-emerging-markets-requires-better-data-and-a-collaborative-effort.html

[16] Miao S (2024) "Mapping China's COVID-19 aid footprint" AidData https://www.aiddata.org/blog/mapping-chinas-covid-19-aid-footprint

These types of data problems are not necessarily clearly delineated, but can blur into one another.

Complete lack of data

While increasingly rare, there are still some types of development finance about which it is difficult to know anything. As discussed in the next section there are some Private Sector Instruments that do not show up in any dataset, because they are deemed too politically sensitive to report. There also appear to be some large loans from non-DAC countries that are unrecorded (based on media reports and World Bank International Debt Statistics – see section 6 – and even some repayments to DAC countries not captured anywhere in OECD statistics (see section 5). Arguably the most important is China. While there have been heroic efforts to fill this gap by searching through media reports for details of transactions[17], there remains essentially no official data on the majority of transactions.

Data missing key variables

Far more common is the case where data is available, but missing crucial information. Needs of data users evolve over time and so this problem is not static. Before 2010, there was essentially no data for DAC countries on how to measure adaptation as the adaptation Rio-marker was only introduced that year, as it was only introduced in 2009, when measuring climate finance gained new importance with the Copenhagen commitment to provide $100 billion of it. New OECD policy markers have been introduced over time to reflect evolving priorities, but there is always a lag in their use (section 4.1). Recently, there have been calls for ways of identifying aid to local actors which is difficult with current variables.

However, for many flows, basic information that should be provided as a mater of course is missing. Many DAC countries report data on Other Official Flows (OOF – flows not concessional enough to be ODA or not sufficiently developmental in purpose) but provide little information beyond the aggregate disbursement amounts (section 5.2), nothing on sectors, terms, intentions, or even recipients beyond the regional focus. For a large amount of multilateral climate finance, the opposite is generally true: there is a good dataset on commitments, but no information on what actually gets disbursed (or at times, at least not without substantial effort, see next point).

Data is inaccessible

Commonly, data is in the public domain but spread across a range of sources that are difficult (or even impossible) to assemble. UK climate finance is an example: full information on up-to-date UK climate finance necessitates cobbling together information from four separate sources, and even then some assumptions need to be made to fill gaps from some departments. As mentioned, for some multilaterals, climate finance commitments are available from the OECD Climate -Related Development Finance dataset, and disbursements for development finance generally are available from the OECD Creditor-Reporting System dataset. In principle it should

[17] See for example AidData Chinese Development Finance Programme https://www.aiddata.org/cdfp and Boston University China's Overseas Deveopment Finance Database https://www.bu.edu/gdp/chinas-overseas-development-finance/

be easy to combine these sources using project ID codes, but in practice, these codes are inconsistent or missing, making it a thankless task[18].

Development finance institution (DFIs) transactions are similar: technically publicly available through annual reports and financial statements, but unnecessarily difficult and time-consuming to assemble, given that these could easily be included in other datasets.[19] Publish What You Fund (PWYF) have written extensively on the lack of transparency around DFI transactions, and publish an annual index ranking different DFIs on their transparency. This has shown improvements in transparency, but the most recent assessment concludes that critical gaps remain.[20]

A variant of this problem is that data requires significant background knowledge or coding skills to access. This is inevitably a problem with complex datasets with lots of options like the CRS (see section 4.5), but often, more could be done to facilitate wider access. As discussed in the next section, this is something that the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) acknowledges, and they have recently produced dashboards to help users gain quick insights. But more could be done to support tailored queries without the need for technical skills (potentially for little cost).

Data exists, but is of poor quality or inconsistent

Often data exists, but is measured inconsistently across providers (or across time). This is most famously the case with climate finance: there has been extensive research demonstrating the fact that the way donors classify projects as climate has both changed over time (with a far less strict interpretation of what counts in recent years, following political pressure to provide more climate finance) and is different across providers, with many similar projects being counted completely differently by different countries (see section 4.1). But it is also true of ODA to some degree: methodological choices and controversial assumptions on how to measure some transactions has led to inconsistent data across providers (section 4.3).

Section 4. ODA gaps and progress

Key points

- Policy markers are a helpful tool for indicating which projects have a focus on areas of interest. Coverage for DAC countries is generally high, especially for high-profile markers such as the Rio (climate) and gender markers, but beyond the DAC there is a significant drop off in coverage. In particular, while multilaterals have their own systems for measuring focus on climate and gender, their limited use of markers in the CRS impedes comparisons with bilateral provision.
- For DAC members, the key issue with Rio and gender markers is not completeness, but consistency. Extensive research has suggested that there is considerable divergence between donors in how projects are marked. This may have improved over time, however, indicating that progress is possible.

[18] Correspondence with authors of ONE Climate Finance Data files https://data.one.org/climate-finance-files
[19] This may change with the new PSI reporting requirements.
[20] Publish What You Fund DFI Transparency Index 2025 https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/dfi-index/

- There are inconsistencies in how ODA is measured across donors that limits full comparability, and controversies around particular measurement decisions such as how loans and PSI instruments
- Controversy over how aspects of ODA are measured have led to inconsistencies in headline figures, as some donors have chosen not to count (or are considering limiting the inclusion of) some expenditure items, notably in-donor refugee costs and private sector instruments.
- ODA data is among the most detailed development finance flows available, but there are still accessibility issues which mean that its full potential is not exploited.

While section 3 discussed some controversies (expanded on below) OECD data on ODA from the DAC is nevertheless the most comprehensive, and vetted dataset on international development. ODA is defined as aid provided from donor governments (official) for the purpose of promoting economic development and welfare in developing countries as its main objective (development) and is concessional in character, i.e. provided in the form of grants or subsidised loans[21] (assistance).

Strictly speaking, the concept only applies to aid from the DAC, who have sole decision-making authority over what ODA includes. However, the term "ODA disbursements" is frequently used to describe the combination of bilateral ODA from DAC countries, concessional finance provided by multilaterals, and concessional aid from countries beyond the DAC.[22]

ODA data goes back to the 1960s, although the completeness of this data declines the further back in time you go. This section focuses on what has led to the high quality of this data source, and some remaining challenges.

The most detailed source of information on ODA flows is the Creditor Reporting System. This is created by data submissions from the donors themselves (the DAC sends out large surveys), prepared in adherence with extensive documentation on ODA reporting requirements and guidelines, and then quality-assured by the DAC secretariat.

This dataset has a total of 5,824,912 observations, across transactions from DAC members, multilaterals, a selection of non-DAC countries and increasingly private philanthropies. Broadly speaking, these observations describe individual projects financed by donors. However, different reporting practices across countries, in particular reporting at different levels of aggregation, makes this more complicated. Some projects have different structures which make it easier to report them across multiple observations, for example, projects with many different components. Others are split across different rows to reflect multiple sectors of focus, with the financial figures pro-rated across these sectors. In addition, loan instruments tend to have many more observations, as each disbursement and repayment is entered separately. This means that the raw number of observations per donor is not necessarily reflective of the total number of projects that each donor enacts.

[21] Although this remains the official definition, new rules on the inclusion of Private Sector Instruments means that this part of the definition needs to be caveated. It is recognised that PSIs are generally not concessional, and the criteria for their inclusion is instead "additionality". This change is controversial, as explored in section 4.3.
[22] The term ODA is often treated as synonymous with "concessional aid ". In DAC terminology, ODA has a "donor-perspective", in that it measures aid directly provided by donors whether they go directly to countries or via multilaterals/other institutions.

Nevertheless, the sheer number of observations each year demonstrates the wealth of information contained within the dataset. For ODA transactions, DAC members are required to provide information on recipients, sectors, whether it focuses on a range of policy areas (via the policy-markers, such as gender or disability), lending terms if a loan, which organisations funds are channeled through (e.g. NGOs private consultants, partner governments) and descriptions of the projects. While not required under the DAC mandate (which applies only to members), in practice all the major multilateral organisations also report this data, along with a growing handful of non-DAC donors and private philanthropies. The result is a large database of flows from various types of donors to recipient countries, along with a selection of other ODA-eligible types of expenditure that get spent domestically in donor countries (most significantly, in-donor refugee costs).

Four factors have supported the development of ODA data and its comprehensiveness.

- **Mandatory reporting:** All DAC members are required to report their ODA flows in accordance with the reporting directives as a condition of their membership, as well as to follow other DAC recommendations and guidelines.[23]
- **Attention given to ODA:** ODA has become synonymous with foreign aid, and is the target of substantial advocacy efforts and political attention. An entire ecosystem of NGOs and thinktanks exists to scrutinize decisions on ODA spending and push for greater volumes, and for it to be spent more effectively (or often, according to the priorities of advocating organisations). This has been fueled by past controversies, in which ODA was perceived to have been wasted or spent according to domestic political priorities. ODA is also unique in having high-level political commitments associated, dating back to the UN Commission in which the 0.7 target was established.
- **Long history:** Finally, in contrast with measures such as TOSSD or SSC, ODA has been measured for decades, and this has allowed for multiple refinements and evolution in reporting. Many of the changes to ODA rules themselves have been controversial (see below), but there is no question that actual data reporting has developed substantially even in the last few decades, let alone in comparison to the first years of ODA measurement in the 1960s.
- **Data comes direct from official sources:** As discussed above, the data is produced and endorsed by the donors to which it pertains. This means there are agencies accountable for its production, according to agreed-upon standards (and subject to various quality assurance procedures). Data points can be queried with those agencies, who can verify their accuracy or otherwise, and explain unexpected phenomena. This is a key point of difference relative to other important aid datasets such as those produced by AidData, which are the product of third-party research.

This combination of a long reporting history, extensive outside scrutiny, and the ability of the DAC to compel members to report makes the DAC datasets on ODA the best official data source on any type of development finance, by some margin.

The capability of the secretariat has also been an enabling factor: they have been active in chasing up members who have not completed their reporting, validating data received, and

[23] OECD DAC (2011) "EXTENDED OUTLINE OF THE DAC GLOBAL RELATIONS STRATEGY" DCD/DAC(2011)22 https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC(2011)22/en/pdf

pursuing options for data improvements. This secretariat has also been responsive to user needs and changes in political focus, for example, carrying out surveys and extensive analysis on in-donor refugee cost reporting following the Syria 'refugee crisis' following 2014/15 (before which such spending had been marginal).

Despite this progress, there remains dissatisfaction with the quality of some elements of ODA reporting, and varying quality of reporting across countries. The DAC secretariat is cognizant of these problems but lacks capacity to pursue each fully, and therefore needs to prioritize the most pressing or politically relevant problems. And while some problems relate in inadequate or inconsistent data, some relate to more fundamental, conceptual disagreements, and therefore are not always solvable by simply having more data available. Such problems require agreement at the political level to solve.

4.1 Inconsistent use of policy markers

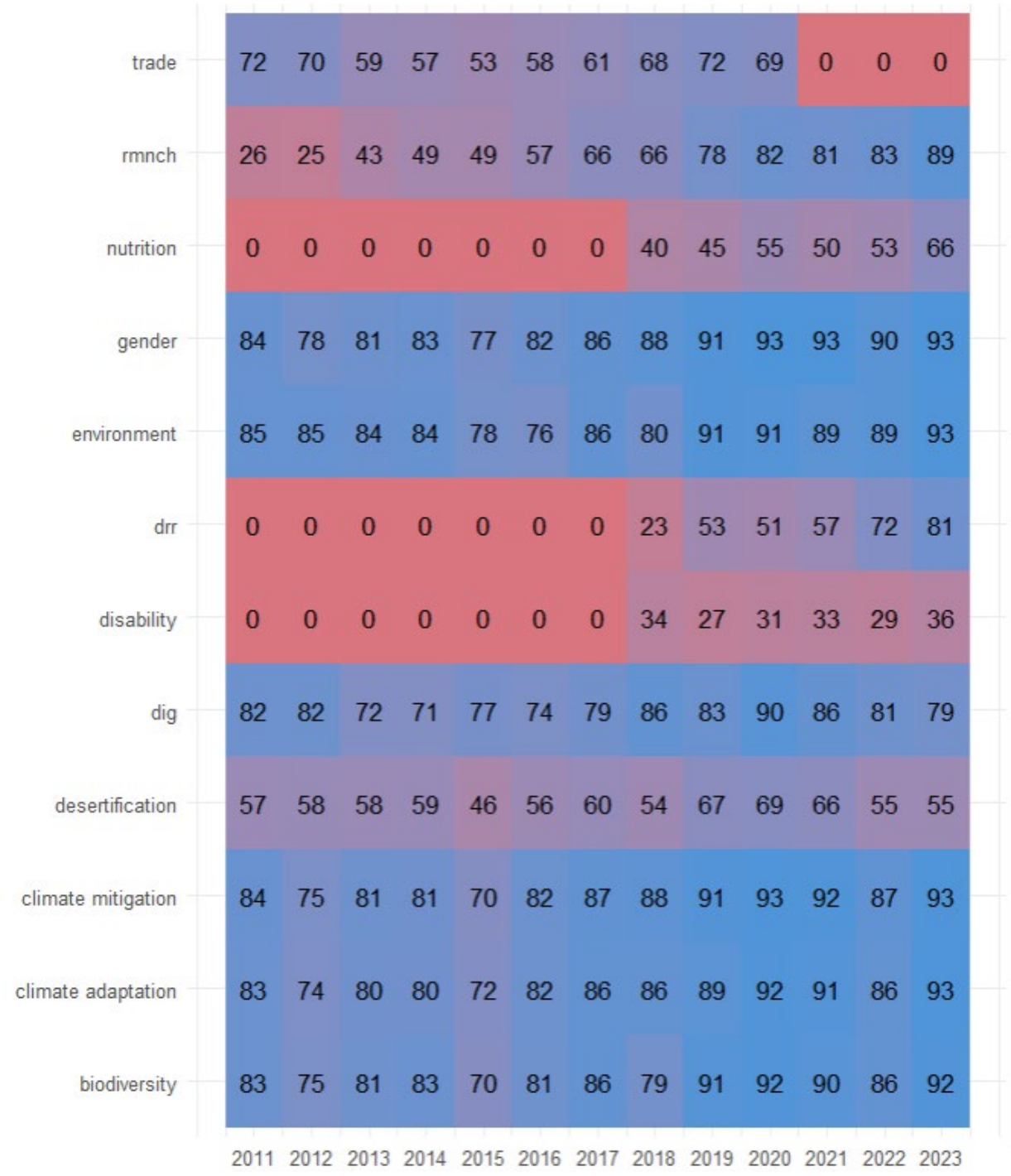
Within the CRS reporting system, there are 12 individual policy markers, allowing donors to denote whether projects focus on a range of issues from desertification to trade. These allow donors to denote whether projects have a "significant" focus (meaning that a project has been adapted to address that goal, but it is not fundamental to the project's design) or "principal" (meaning that the project would not have been approved without that objective). These are generally demand driven: for example, the adaptation marker was introduced in recognition that there was no method at the time to track adaptation expenditures that could count towards the climate finance goal agreed in 2009.

Reporting on some markers is considerably better than others, in particular, as explored below, the gender and Rio-markers for climate have received significantly more attention, and so are more likely to be completed (and, more likely to non-zero, indicating that projects are more likely to have a gender/climate focus). Other markers receive significantly less attention, and many were introduced in response to political debates at particular points in time that are now less relevant.

There is therefore a question about the appropriate response. DAC Statistical Peer Reviews – periodic reviews of the quality of reporting processes by DAC members and what they find challenging – frequently mention the proliferation of markers as a burden on the reporting process, as it takes time both for project sponsors to assess their projects against each of the many conditions (and often expertise that may be hard to source) and for data quality assurers to validate that the markers have been correctly applied (requiring further expertise).[24] As a result, many are simply ignored, and the lack of comprehensive of reporting means that it is impossible to say anything about aggregate trends in aid focusing on those areas.

[24] Another issue, explored more in section 4.5, is that data on which disbursements have markers applied are only available via the full CRS dataset which is unwieldy for users lacking coding knowledge. The online tables only show commitments that have been marked (e.g. the gender marker table: https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?fs[0]=Topic%2C0%7CDevelopment%23DEV%23&pg=0&fc=Topic&bp=true&snb=87&vw=tb&df[ds]=dsDisseminateFinalCloud&df[id]=DSD_GNDR%40DF_GENDER&df[ag]=OECD.DCD.FSD&df[vs]=1.4&dq=DAC_EC..1000..2.0%2B1%2B2%2B10%2B99.C.Q_T..&lom=LASTNPERIODS&lo=2&to[TIME_PERIOD]=false)

Figure 4.1: DAC Completeness of reporting on policy markers, percent of bilateral allocable aid disbursements, 2011-2023



Notes: only bilateral allocable aid is included (i.e. general budget support (A01), imputed student costs (E02) debt relief (F01), administrative costs (G01), promotion of development awareness (H01) and in-donor refugee costs (H02-H06) have been excluded). Zeros indicate years in which the marker was not in use. Averages are weighted by disbursements. This is based on current list of DAC countries and so not countries were DAC members throughout this period, although such countries represent a very small share of total disbursements.
Source: CRS

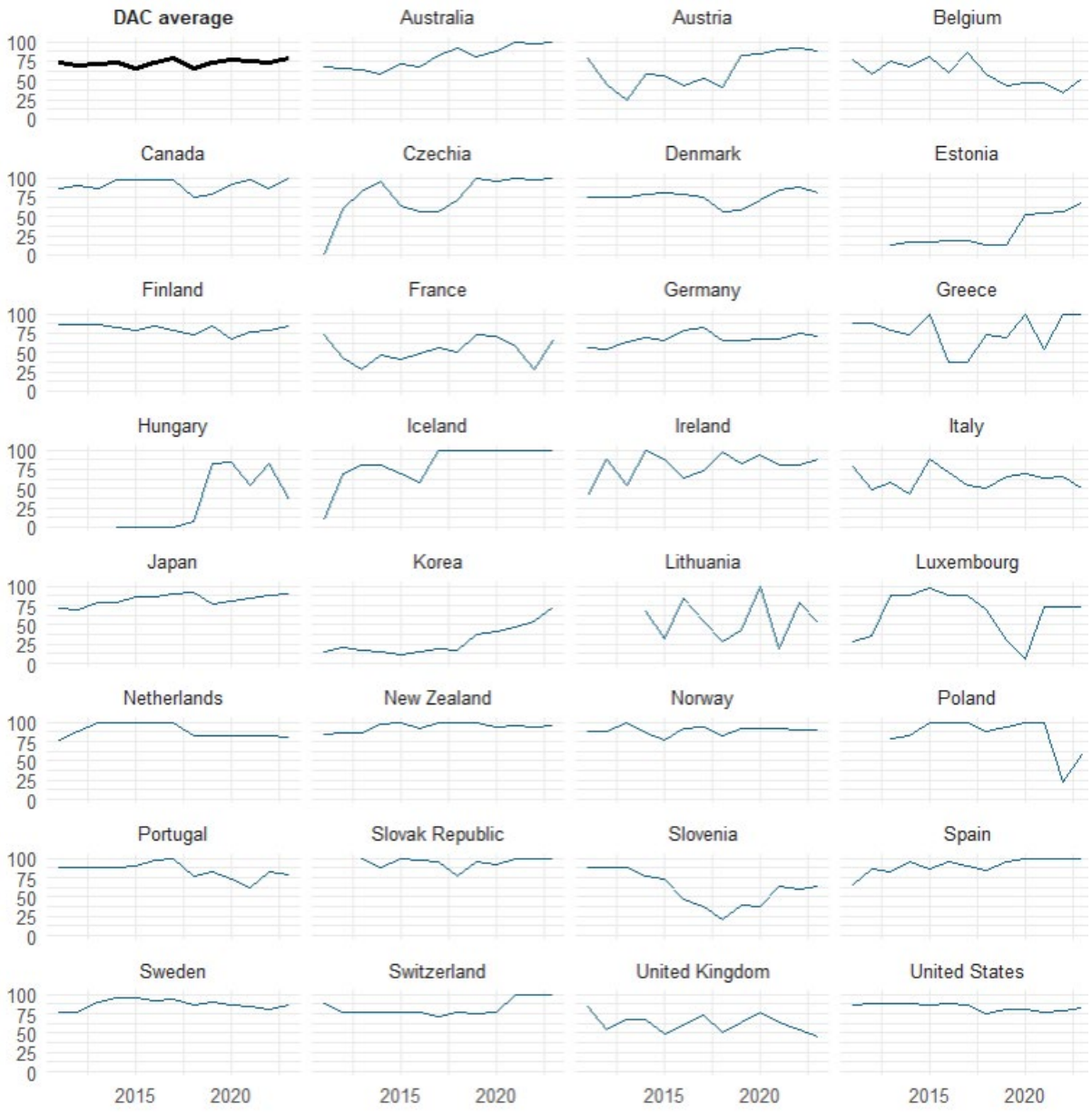
There are substantially differing performances across countries. This is demonstrated in figure 4.1, which shows the average completion rate for all markers over time. We find the percentage

of bilateral allocable[25] aid disbursements for which the marker has been applied (even if the marker is zero) for each marker, and average these percentages across donor. For years in which a marker is not present (for example, the nutrition marker was introduced in 2018) we remove that marker from the average.

Several countries consistently fill out nearly all marker fields, such as the Netherlands, New Zealand and Norway, and several others have improved significant over time (Japan, Czechia, and Australia for example). Other countries are far more varied in their reporting, in particular Italy, France and Ireland. Some countries have seen a substantial decline in completion rates over time, for example Finland, Belgium and Slovenia. This is partly a result of the introduction of new markers in 2018: for most countries, these explain a large part of the gap in marker coverage. It should be noted too that two of these markers (nutrition and disability) are described as optional in the OECD reporting directives.

[25] For some types of aid, it does not make sense to apply the markers. For example, general budget support cannot be linked to any particular activities by definition and therefore cannot be said to have particular policy objectives. All of the analysis in this section refers to "bilateral allocable" aid, which is a subset to which the markers are generally thought to be relevant. This excludes in-donor refugee costs, imputed student costs, administrative costs, general budget support, promotion of development awareness and debt relief.

Figure 4.2: Marker completion rates, percent of bilateral allocable aid disbursements, all markers



Notes: Percentages are total disbursements that have a marker applied by each country each year relative to total disbursements (even if the marker is zero). Only bilateral allocable aid is included (i.e. general budget support (A01), imputed student costs (E02) debt relief (F01), administrative costs (G01), promotion of development awareness (H01) and in-donor refugee costs (H02-H06) have been excluded). Markers introduced since 2018 were excluded for prior years. Source: CRS

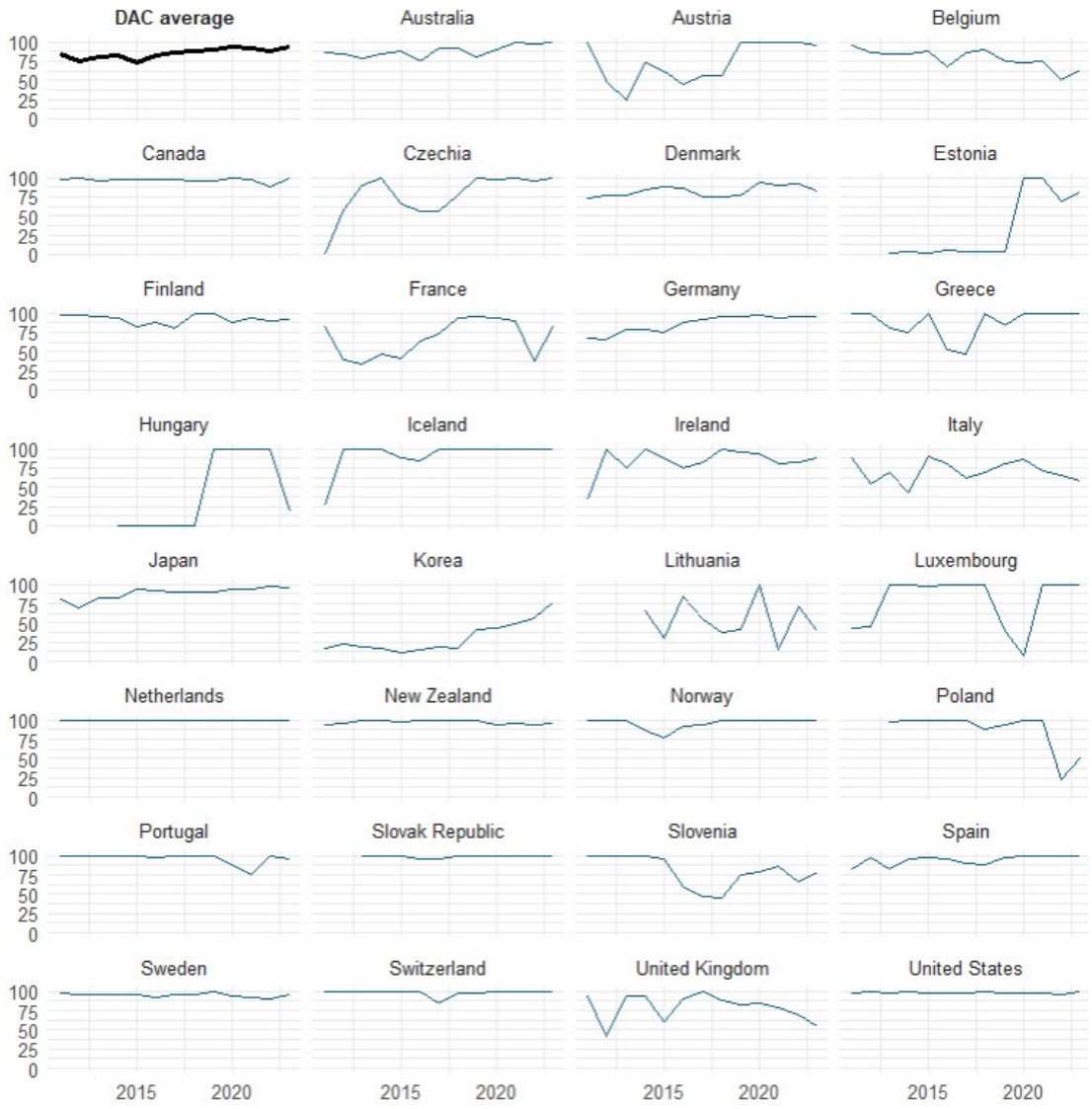
The situation is different for the three markers on which there is the most political attention: gender, and the two Rio-markers for mitigation and adaptation focus.

Gender and climate both have dedicated networks within the OECD that analyse and discuss the use of these markers, and use them to analyse trends in ODA focusing on gender or climate goals. In addition, there is considerable interest from NGOs and outside analysts with many provider regular reports on such trends. Rio-markers have gained further importance as the primary way in which DAC members report on climate finance (funded by ODA) to the UNFCCC,

and therefore how their contribution to climate finance goals (such as the $100 billion goal) get calculated. Consequently, the share of observations within the CRS that are no assessed for these priorities has declined substantially over time, and is generally low (although, there was an increase in the share in 2023 – this might be revised in subsequent data editions).

The problem with these markers is therefore not they are too incomplete to obtain an accurate picture in the aggregate, but that the way they are applied differs substantially across donors, and has not been consistent across time. Although there is substantial guidance on how to apply these markers, exactly how they are applied is still at the discretion of donors. Unlike sectors, which are mutually exclusive in DAC statistics and so cannot be double-counted, markers can overlap substantially and many projects have multiple "principal" objectives.

Figure 4.3: Marker completion rates, % of bilateral allocable aid, just Rio-markers and gender



Notes: Percentages are total disbursements that have a marker applied by each country each year relative to total disbursements (even if the marker is zero). Only bilateral allocable aid is included (i.e. general budget support (A01), imputed student costs (E02) debt relief (F01), administrative costs (G01), promotion of development awareness (H01) and in-donor refugee costs (H02-H06) have been excluded). Markers introduced since 2018 were excluded for prior years. Source: CRS

Rio-markers

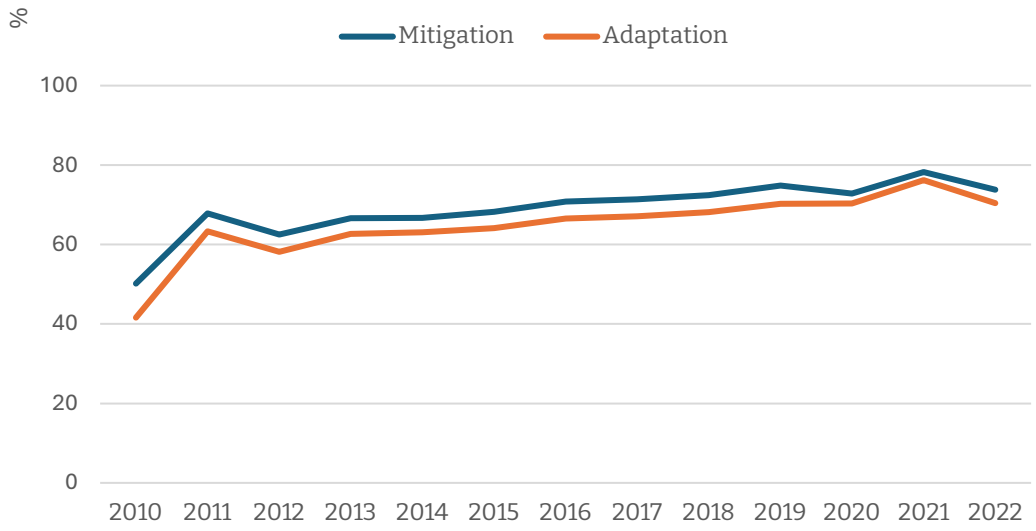
There has been extensive research into inconsistency in the way the Rio-markers are applied, and the questionable projects that have been designated as having a mitigation/adaptation focus, which has produced several specific examples illustrating difference in application. For example, despite the fact that donation of excess COVID vaccinations was an intervention that was essentially the same across countries, some counted this as adaptation finance, whereas most did not. Researchers have found that core contributions to multilateral organisations – which by definition are identical across donors – have received different markers across donors.[26] For example, Japan counted core contributions to the Coalition for Pandemic Preparedness as adaptation, the only country to do so.

There are various reasons for this divergence. There are legitimate differences of opinion in what should count as having "principal" or "significant" climate objectives between countries, which lead to different markings. There are also differing degrees of political pressure to be seen to be spending ODA on climate finance, for example, the UK has made its commitment to spend £11.6 billion of aid on climate finance very high profile, and this has led to the UK relaxing its definition for what can be included. Furthermore, there is often a lack of capacity of programme staff who are responsible for initial markings in aid departments, something which has been address in DAC statistical peer reviews.

The DAC secretariat has conducted extensive work into trying to harmonize the use of Rio-markers, and this has does seem to have yielded results. The Rio-marker Handbook contains an indicative table of the most appropriate markers to apply in each sector. This is not intended to be prescriptive and the DAC acknowledge that there can be reason to deviate from the suggested markings. However, over time, there has been an increase in the correspondence between the suggested markings and those applied by the DAC. This suggests that markings have become more consistent between donors over time, as they adhere closer to the DAC guidelines, increasing comparability.

[26] Ritchie (2024) "Climate finance: earning trust through consistent reporting" Development Initiatives https://devinit.github.io/media/documents/report_Climate_finance-Earning_trust_through_consistent_reporting.pdf

Figure 4.4: Percentage of ODA that matches indicative table markings

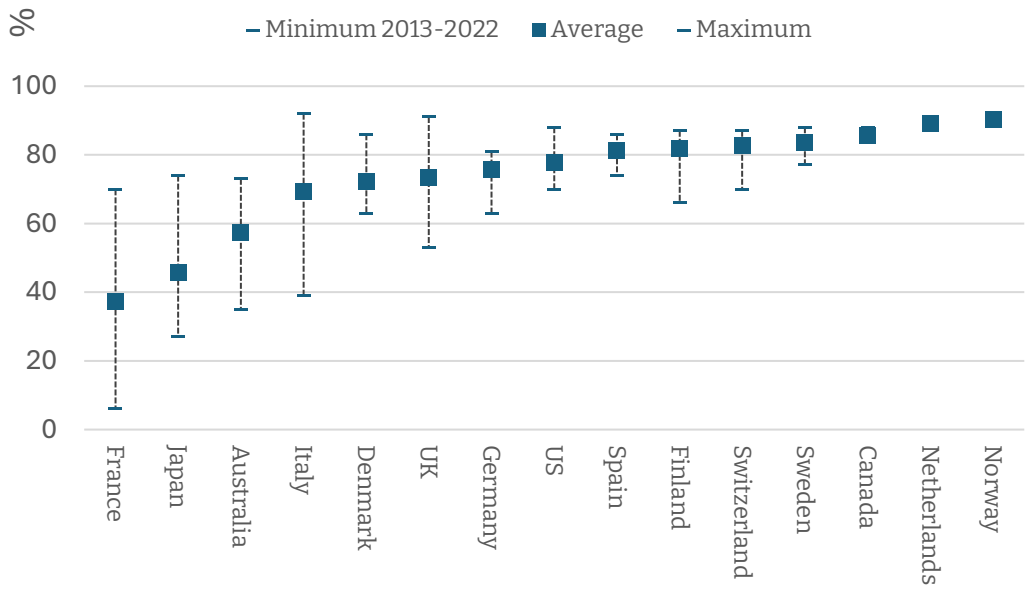


Source: Ritchie E (2024)

While on aggregate, donors are increasingly adhering to the DAC's guidelines on the application of the Rio-markers, there are still significant divergences: some countries are much less likely to follow the suggested markings than others, France and Japan in particular. For each country there is substantial deviation between the suggested markings and those from the indicative table. Figure 4.5 (taken from Ritchie (2024)[27]) shows the percentage of ODA expenditure marked in the way the indicative table suggests by country, on average between 2013-2022, along with the maximum and minimum values over that period. On average, less than 40% of France's bilateral ODA was consistent with the suggested markings in any particular year, and less than 50% of Japan's[28]. It is no coincidence that these are among the countries to have received the most criticism for over-counting climate finance.

[27] Ibid.
[28] This may have changed in subsequent data: Japan significantly changed its marker use in the most recent year.

Figure 4.5: Degree of correspondence between mitigation-marked projects and the OECD's suggested markings, 2013–2022



Notes: The graph shows the percentage of disbursements for each donor for which the mitigation marker matches that suggested by the OECD's indicative handbook.
Source: Ritchie E (2024)

Gender markers

Similar criticism has been levelled at the gender marker. An Oxfam report found that there is a "major gap between self-reported funding and high-quality gender equality projects". Norway has claimed that it's relatively low share of disbursements with a gender equality objective is related in part to its stricter interpretation of what counts as a gender objective.[29] ODI identify a risk of increasing "gender washing", undermining the quality of purported-gender finance[30]. Morgan (2019) expresses the concern that targeting gender equality has been reduced to a tick-box exercise[31].

Comparing mentions of relevant terms (such as "women" or "gender") in project descriptions to the gender marker applied to those projects is indicative (albeit not conclusive) of inconsistent markings over time. Between 2012 and 2023, the share of Switzerland's bilateral aid with a significant or principal gender marker applied increased from 15% to 55%, whereas the percentage of disbursements with project descriptions mentioning key terms increased only from 8% to 9% over the same period. By contrast, the share of Sweden's aid with a significant or principal marker applied fell from 73% to 62% between 2012 and 2023, whereas mentions of key terms increased from 7% to 33%.

As discussed, this problem will not necessarily be solved with more data, but with continuing scrutiny of the way in which markers are being applied, and drawing attention to

[29] Henningsson (2020) "The devil is in the details" Donor Tracker https://donortracker.org/publications/devil-details-challenges-tracking-oda-gender-equality
[30] George R and Gulrajani N (2023) "Trends in development finance for gender" ODI Global https://media.odi.org/documents/ODI-Trends_in_development_finance_for_gender.pdf
[31] https://apolitical.co/solution-articles/en/how-to-take-gender-and-health-beyond-ticking-boxes

inconsistencies across donors and questionable examples. As found in Ritchie (2024), increased support for statisticians in aid agencies may also alleviate the problem, both in terms of better guidance and examples of 'correct'[32] applications for project sponsors, and for quality assurers. This could be support by modern natural language processing tools that could reduce the burden of checking the thousands of projects that get reported. The DAC is already exploring the use of such tools, however, for them to be effective, the projects have to provide adequate detail in the description fields, and as a subsequent section shows, this is not the case for all countries.

Limited scope of policy-markers

The other major limitation of the policy markers is that they are only compulsory for ODA reporting from DAC members. Both countries outside the DAC and (more importantly) multilateral providers only report markers on a voluntary basis. Similarly, as discussed below, Other Official Flows are also exempt. Given that outflows from multilaterals are growing in important relative to bilateral ODA, this is major limitation.

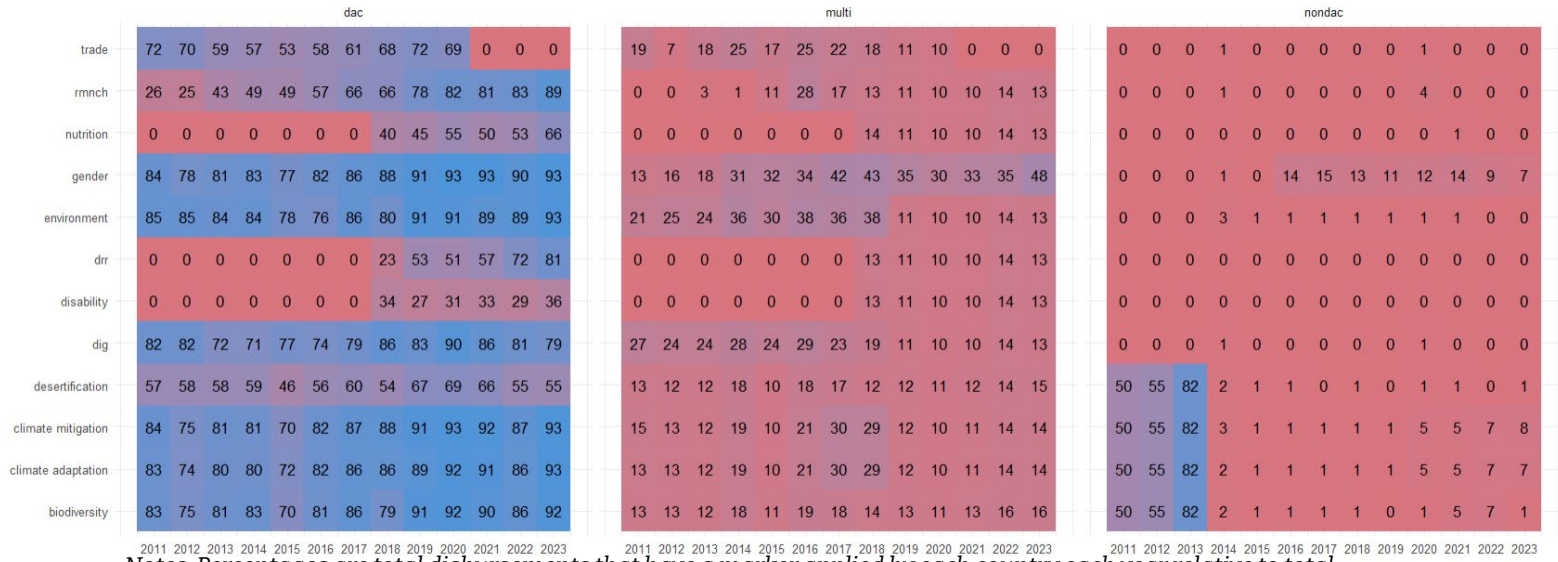
Given that the Rio-markers provide the most accessible way to measure climate finance, this has led to partial analysis that ignores large swathes of climate finance provision. In the first section, two papers were discussed that failed to find any impact of mitigation finance on GHG emissions pathways. This analysis relied on the Rio-marker for mitigation to identify mitigation finance, however, this essentially had the effect of limiting the analysis to bilateral ODA from DAC countries.

The MDBs have their own approach to measuring climate finance, which many regard to be superior[33], and there have been suggestions that the DAC should move to a more similar approach. However, that debate is highly political. In the mean time, it would be relatively simple for the MDBs to agree on an approach to convert their system (which assigns coefficients for climate focus between 0 and 100%) to a Rio-marker, and to report this to the DAC. The result would still suffer from the inconsistencies discussed above, but would nevertheless make the markers useful for a wider range of analyses.

Non-DAC countries reporting to the CRS are even less likely to apply markers, although they are also under no obligation to do so. So far, this is less of a problem given the sectors in which non-DAC countries are likely to spend: non-DAC ODA is highly concentrated in general budget support (to which markers are generally not be applied, given that the support is not linked to particular activities) and emergency response (the majority of which is not Rio-marked), which took up 47% and 25% of non-DAC aid respectively in 2023. However, non-DAC countries reporting to the DAC nevertheless spent over $600 million in 2023 in sectors such as transport and agriculture, that would likely be marked as climate finance if spent by DAC donors.

[32] There is of course subjectivity in the application of markers and so there is not necessarily a correct application per se, but approaches can be more or less consistent with guidance and practice of other countries
[33] See for example Weikmans and Roberts (2017) "The international climate finance accounting muddle: is there hope on the horizon?" Climate and Development https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17565529.2017.1410087

Figure 4.6: Marker completeness by donor type, % of bilateral allocable aid



Notes: Percentages are total disbursements that have a marker applied by each country each year relative to total disbursements (even if the marker is zero). Only bilateral allocable aid is included (i.e. general budget support (A01), imputed student costs (E02) debt relief (F01), administrative costs (G01), promotion of development awareness (H01) and in-donor refugee costs (H02-H06) have been excluded). Markers introduced since 2018 were excluded for prior years.
Source: CRS

4.2 Lack of detail in text descriptions

There is an increasing focus on not just the quantity of aid that countries provide, but what that aid is aiming to achieve. This is essential for assessing the impact that aid could have, and whether it is focusing on the most effective interventions. Greater information in description fields also allows much richer analysis of project focus, by providing more input for natural language processing models that can be used to evaluate the focus of projects in a much more flexible way than other methods allow. For example, large-language-models have been used to assess how much aid is focused on anticipatory action or pre-arranged finance (CDP 2024)[34], or to assess the accuracy (or otherwise) of climate finance measurement[35]. Even simple text searches have allowed data users to check for the extent to which aid focuses on children (UNICEF 2024)[36] or women's economic empowerment[37], analyses that are not possible from sector codes or policy markers alone.

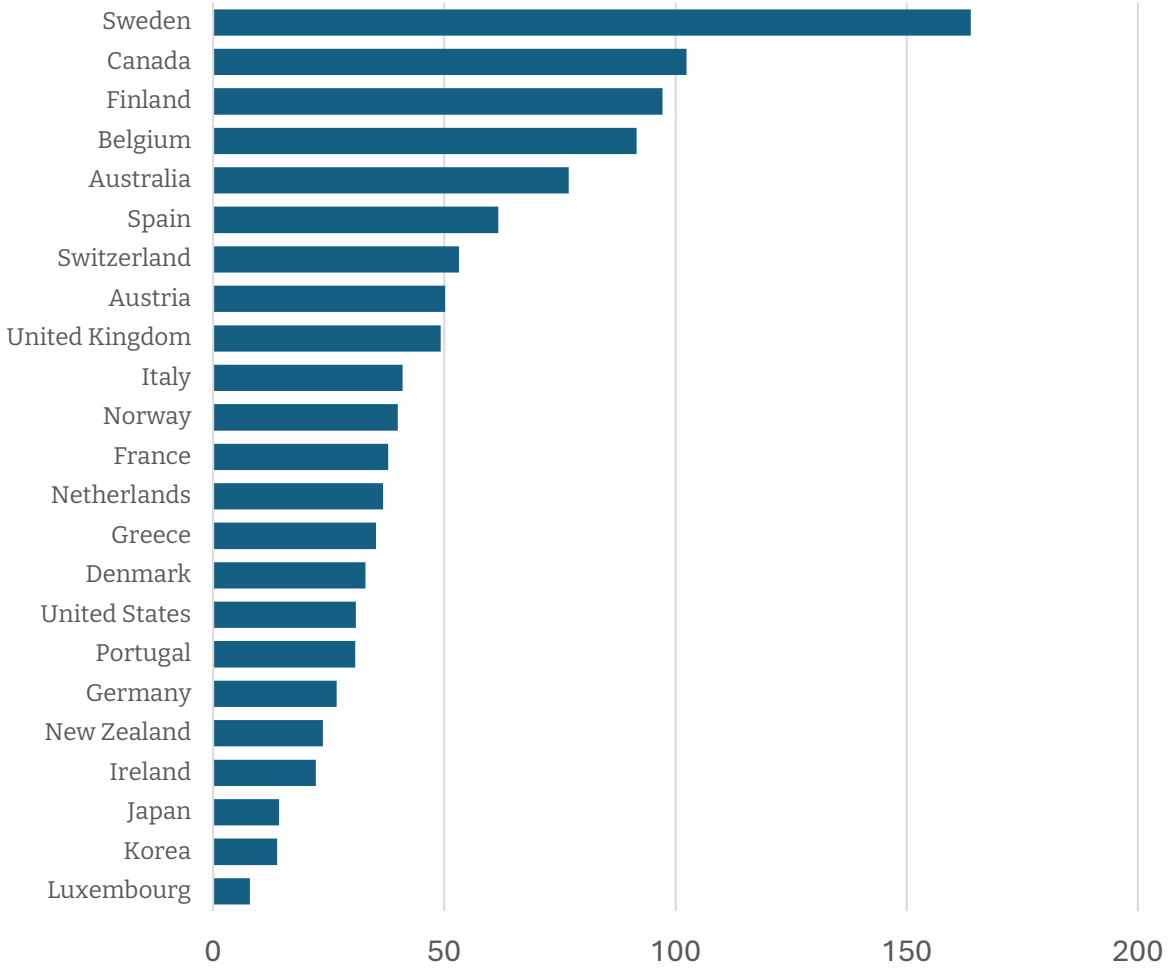
However, the comparability of such analyses across countries is hamstrung by the different level of information that is provided in project descriptions across countries. What may appear as a lower focus on a policy area by a particular country may simply reflect the more limited use of the description fields. Whereas some countries like Canada[38] and Sweden reported hundreds

[34] Plichte and Poole (2024) "The State Of Pre-Arranged Financing For Disasters 2024" Centre for Disaster Protection https://www.disasterprotection.org/publications-centre/the-state-of-pre-arranged-financing-for-disasters-2024
[35] Miller A and Ritchie E (2023) "Is climate finance wrongly reported by over a billion dollars per year?" Development Initiatives https://devinit.org/blog/climate-finance-wrongly-reported-ai-world-bank-fcdo/
[36] Baldoumas and Ritchie (2024) "Leave No Child Behind: Analysing the cuts to UK child-focused aid" UNICEF https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Leave-No-Child-Behind-Analysing-the-Cuts-to-UK-Child-Focused-Aid-Nov-2024.pdf
[37] Development Initiatives and Care UK (2023) "UK leadership on gender equality globally" https://careinternationaluk.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/UK_leadership_on_gender_DI_CARE_final.pdf (accessed June 2025)
[38] Canada's descriptions tend to be provided in both French and English, but this is accounted for in the above analysis.

of words in each project description, others, such as Japan or Luxembourg, report only a handful. There are reasons why some descriptions may be shorter than others. Some projects are genuinely simpler and so take fewer words to describe, and longer descriptions are not necessarily more helpful if they fail to relate the core activities of the project, which is often the case[39].

Nevertheless, generally speaking longer text descriptions are likely to convey more information about the project that can allow for more useful analysis, and so the large spread between countries – from an average of around 14 words per project for Japan, to 164 for Sweden – makes this much easier for some countries than others. Some of this difference may result from different project structures, or use of template language, or verbosity, meaning this analysis is far from perfect. But such considerations are unlikely to explain the twelve-fold difference between the shortest and longest average description lengths among donors.

Figure 4.7: Average words per long description, weighted by disbursements



Notes: this is based on the long description field in the CRS. Missing values are treated as having a length of zero.
Source: CRS

[39] Personal communications with other analysts

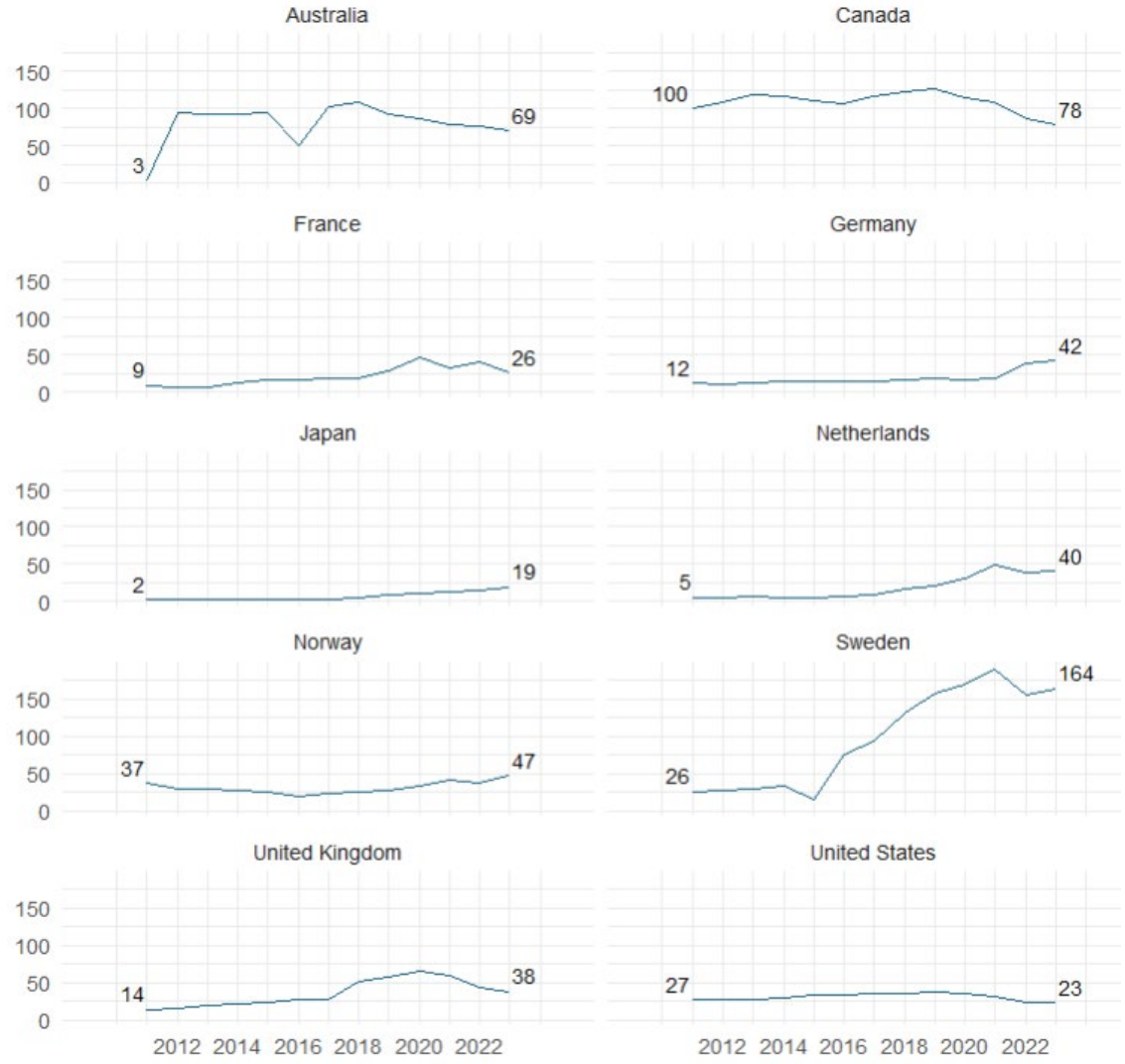
To some extent there may be substitutability between the policy markers and description fields given the tools available to analyse text data. If a project focuses on empowering people with disabilities, then this focus should be obvious from an adequate text description, and this could reduce the importance of having an accurate policy-marker for this priority. Instead of having an infinite array of policy-markers covering all areas that analysts might be interested in, DAC members could ensure that text fields adequately capture project priorities, and allowing data users to search for projects of interest.

However, an issue with this approach is the way that projects are split across different observations in the CRS data. Many projects are split into different components- for example, if the same project targets two sectors simultaneously it will be pro-rated across them both – and in such cases the descriptions are identical across observations, but with different marker values applied in each case. In other cases, the opposite is true: the same project is subdivided to the point where descriptions no longer give a helpful overview of what the project is trying to achieve, but merely describe one task within it. This means that analysis relying on the description fields for individual observations will necessarily be approximate.

There has been some improvement over time. On average, words per description increased from around 10 in 2006 to over 40 in 2023. This is partly because the description fields were blank for a much greater share of observations in 2006, but this still indicates a substantial increase in available text information. Some countries have made greater improvements than others: Sweden has added 11 words to the average description per year since 2006 (although, this may have arisen from change in project structure[40]).

[40] OECD feedback.

Figure 4.8: Average words per description, top 10 DAC donors



Source: CRS

Notes: this is based on the long description field in the CRS. Missing values are treated as having a length of zero.

This should not be solved by mandating greater word counts, which could incentivise greater verboseness without necessarily producing more helpful descriptions. Rather, countries should be encouraged to be clear about the exact activities that will be undertaken. This is especially important for linking projects to the evidence base for what interventions are likely to be more effective. For example, the Global Education Evidence Advisory Panel[41] have produced a document detailing what education interventions are likely to be 'great buys' (such as teaching at the right level or structured pedagogy) or "bad buys" (such as providing textbooks on their own). The impact on education outcomes of such interventions can vary by orders of magnitude. But the CRS purpose codes are insufficient for identifying what type of intervention is being

[41] GEEAP (2023) "Cost-Effective Approaches To Improve Global Learning" https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099420106132331608/pdf/IDU-977f73d7-22b1-4777-980c-c5a14598eef8.pdf

funded, and so it is important to provide descriptions that allow data users to identify what is being funded to understand the likely impact, and whether donors are responding to evidence.

In addition, there should be a field in the CRS in which donors are able (and encouraged) to provide links to project documentation, which would allow greater transparency of project objectives and performance. Some donors already provide such links in the descriptions in some cases, but a dedicated field – such as exists in other standards such as IATI – would make this easier for data users and producers.

4.3 Lack of consistency in measurement

The usefulness of ODA data has been impaired by disagreements about what to include, and how certain transactions should be measured.

The most obvious example is in-donor refugee costs. Initially introduced into ODA in 1988[42], it was not envisioned at the time that this would ever be a major component of ODA flows. However, following Syria 'refugee crisis' in the mid-2010s, IDRC reached a peak of 10% of total gross ODA, which led to a great deal of discussion about whether it should be included in ODA at all. Prior to 2014, less than 2% of ODA was spent on IDRC on average each year; this increased to 7% between 2014 and 2021. At this time, Luxembourg and Australia made the decision not to count IDRC in their ODA figures on principle, laudable, but impairing the comparability of headline ODA figures across countries.

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this discussion intensified as IDRC reached a new peak of 14% of total ODA in both 2022 and 2023 (in the latter year, DAC countries spent more aid on IDRC than the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa). Multiple other countries discussed changing the way that IDRC is included, for example, the Netherlands and Sweden both implemented a cap on the total share that of ODA that IDRC can comprise. These multiple approaches to including IDRC – coupled with the maximalist approach taken by some countries such as the UK[43] – mean that ODA figures do not mean the same thing across countries. This is not an academic concern given the scale of current IDRC: the ranking of countries according to ODA provided as a share of GNI would change if this was measured consistently. For example, Norway has claimed to be the largest donor relative to GNI[44]. But this is largely because Luxembourg does not count IDRC: based on Ukrainian refugees alone, Luxembourg would almost certainly overtake Norway if it counted these costs[45].

A similar problem is emerging with Private Sector Instruments, that have been eligible to be included in ODA since 2017 (initially under provisional reporting standards). These are transactions that are generally made with the private sector on a commercial basis, for example, market rate loans to help businesses expand that create some social value. However, the US has

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[42] Hynes W and Scott S (2013) "The evolution of Official Development Assistance: Achievements, Criticisms and the Way Forward" OECD Development Co-operation Working Papers No. 12 https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2013/12/the-evolution-of-official-development-assistance_g17a242d/5k3v1dv3f024-en.pdf

[43] Ritchie E (2023) "Spiralling emergency accommodation costs from the UK's Home Office are diverting aid from the world's poorest" Development Initiatives https://devinit.org/blog/emergency-accommodation-costs-uk-home-office-diverting-aid/

[44] https://www.norad.no/en/news/news/2025/historic-decline-in-international-aid/

[45] Given the number of Ukrainian refugees in Luxembourg in 2023, they would need to have incurred a per capita cost of only $15,000 to overtake Norway, well below reported costs for similar countries. https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine

continually objected to their inclusion[46], partly on the grounds that such transactions are not concessional, and has since confirmed that it will not report eligible transactions as ODA. If it did, the US would likely be the largest provider of PSI ODA by a considerable margin. The European Investment Bank is also choosing not to report eligible transactions, because it considers that there is a political risk to reporting the details of such transactions, without which they cannot be counted[47].

As well as debates around what to include in ODA, there are controversies around how loans[48] and debt relief[49] are measured. Many analysts believe that the way that the grant equivalent of ODA loans is estimate dramatically overstates the fiscal cost of those loans (ostensibly what ODA should measure), because the discount rates overstate the risk of lending. Alternative estimates of the value of ODA loans put the figure anywhere between around 50%[50] and 90%[51] lower than the official figures, depending on the country and the alternative assumptions used in measurement. For countries such as Japan and France that give a sizable share of their total ODA as loans, these alternative methods would substantially reduce their total ODA. Choosing the most appropriate method requires some judgement, and the OECD do not accept the criticisms levelled at the official method[52], but nevertheless, it highlights that ODA figures are highly dependent on individual measurement assumptions.

4.4 Lack of timeliness

A common criticism of ODA – especially the detailed, project level data provided in the CRS – is that it is only produced at a considerable lag. Generally, this data is only available around a year after the relevant calendar year[53]. In situations such as 2025, when there have been announcements of large cuts, but we still do not have full data on 2024, this can make the data feel less relevant when it arrives.

There is an inevitable trade-off between timeliness and accuracy, common to all statistics, as it takes time to gather and verify data. As discussed above, the DAC secretariat put considerable effort into establishing the accuracy of the data provided to them by donors. Each year since 2020, the CRS alone has contained over 300,000 rows, and this does not include the data on multilateral contributions, or mobilized private finance. It is therefore unsurprising that the complete CRS dataset is published at a lag.

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[46] Amland B. (2024) "Moment of truth for new OECD rules on aid reporting of private sector investments" Development Today https://www.development-today.com/archive/2024/dt-2--2024/moment-of-truth-for-new-oecd-rules-on-reporting-private-sector-investments-as-aid

[47] Personal correspondence with OECD

[48] Cutts S (2022) "Giving Credit Where it's Due: The need to address the flaws in the calculation of ODA loans" published on Publish What You Fund https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/app/uploads/dlm_uploads/2022/03/Giving-Credit-Where-credits-Due-Paper-March-2022.pdf

[49] Ritchie E (2020) "New DAC Rules on Debt Relief – A Poor Measure of Donor Effort" CGD https://www.cgdev.org/publication/new-dac-rules-debt-relief-poor-measure-donor-effort

[50] Ritchie E (2020) "Mismeasuring ODA – how risky actually are aid loans?" CGD https://www.cgdev.org/publication/mismeasuring-oda-how-risky-actually-are-aid-loans-0

[51] ODA Reform (n.d.) "Overcounting the ODA in loans" https://www.odareform.org/oda-loans

[52] OECD (2025) "Modernising official development assistance (ODA): Frequently asked questions" https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2025/03/modernising-official-development-assistance-oda-frequently-asked-questions.html

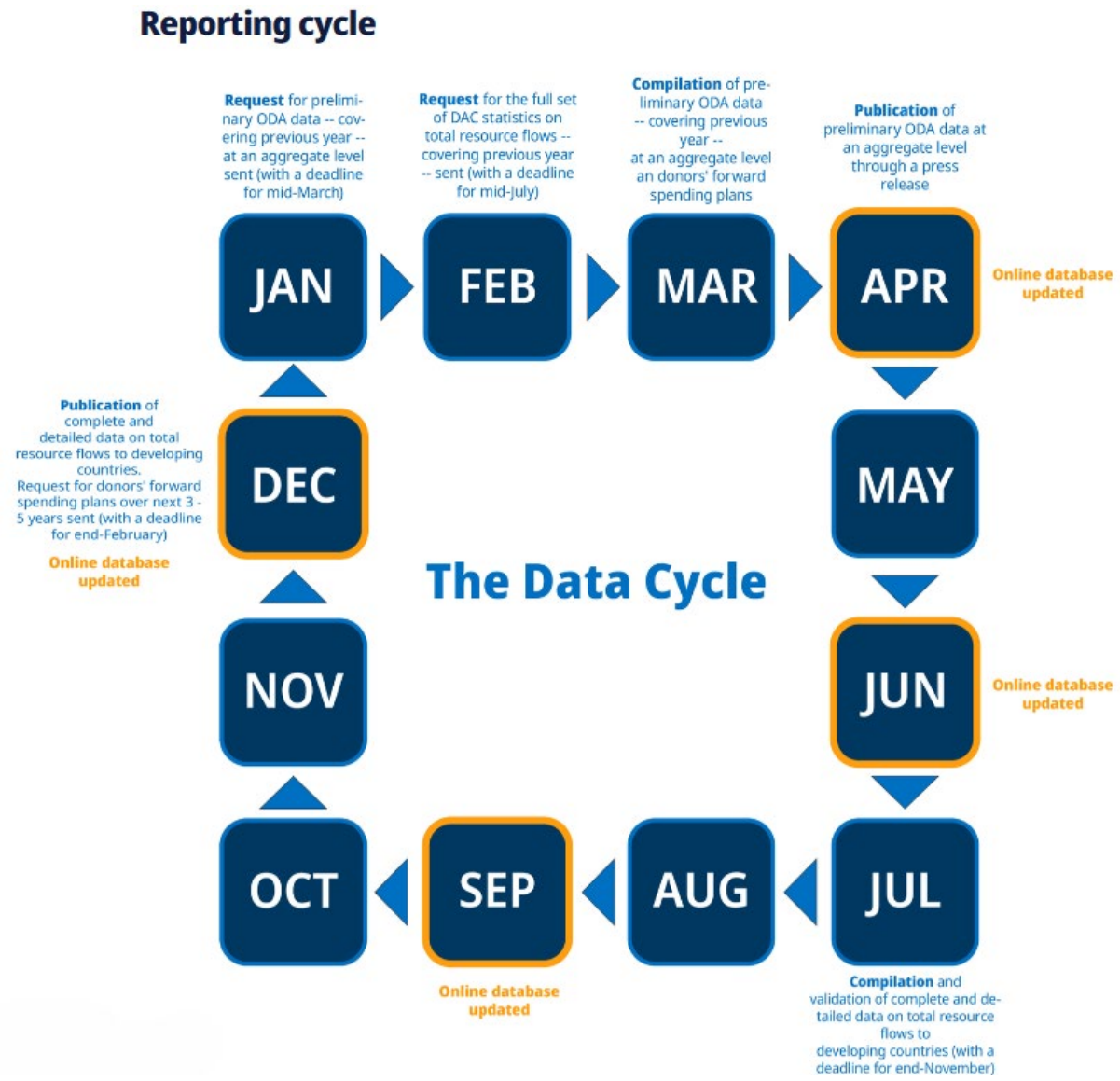
[53] https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2024/10/resources-for-reporting-development-finance-statistics.html

However, for many purposes, quicker data that is largely correct can be more useful than near-perfectly-accurate data produced years after an event.[54] This has been especially true in recent years, where there have been dramatic changes to ODA volumes and composition. Following the Russian invasion in Ukraine, there was considerable interest in the extent to which the additional support for Ukraine would displace ODA provided to other regions, and whether the large anticipated increase in IDRC would have a further impact. There were several attempts to answer this question using other datasets. But the final official data with which these questions could be answered was only available at the end of 2024. The DAC recognize this, and produce a helpful set of provisional data based on an advanced survey considerably sooner (usually mid-April of the following year), and include supplementary tables on topics of interest (for example, aid to Ukraine in recent years). But this data is necessarily limited.

In some areas, the working party on statistics at the DAC has already experimented with using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in order to speed up the data verification process. As well as helping to ensure consistency in variable use such as the markers, it may also afford potential to speed up quality assurance of published data.

[54] In the UK, the first published GDP figures tend to be based on around 40% of the data that will ultimately go into the statistic: some subsequent revisions are inevitable but this has been judged to be the most useful trade-off between accuracy and speed of publication.

Figure 4.9: DAC data reporting cycle



Source: *https://www.oecd.org/en/data/insights/data-explainers/2024/10/resources-for-reporting-development-finance-statistics.html*

A solution to this problem does exist: donors have the option of reporting to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), a platform that aims to improve transparency of aid data by allowing near-real-time reporting[55], and providing more flexibility to reporters in terms of what variables can be reported (such as forwards looking budgets), and how data can be structured. The Financial Tracking Service hosted by UNOCHA performs a similar function for humanitarian data, with additional fields reflecting the special cases of humanitarian interventions (such as the humanitarian 'clusters' that a project is funding). But currently, multiple important donors do not report adequate data to assess ODA trends[56].

[55] This was very useful for analysts in the UK context when cuts to the ODA budget were announced: IATI gave clarity on where the cuts would fall ahead of time (although, the UK is unusually good at reporting to IATI among bilateral donors).
[56] See for example Publish What You Fund analysis, such as in the Aid Transparency Index https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/the-index/2024/

4.5 Difficulty in accessing data

Given the size and complexity of datasets on ODA transactions, there is a significant barrier to entry in using the data. While a selection of variables are available on an online portal, the full CRS dataset is only available in a parquet format that needs statistical software (such as R or Python) to access. Whole organisations have existed that are dedicated to help less tech-savvy users access the data, as well as those that facilitate integration with other datasets such as World Development Indicators, or the World Economic Outlook from the IMF. Organisations frequently have to spend resources hiring consultants to carry out the exact analysis they want, even when in principle this could be obtainable from the online data[57].

With a dataset the size of the CRS this is always likely to be a concern. The DAC secretariat have acknowledged this, and in the past, there was an online query system that greatly facilitated user access, but this was ended along with the switch to the new OECD websites. The secretariat has also produced a number of dashboards that give a quick overview of some important summary statistics[58]. But these do not allow for a great deal of tailoring to specific needs. For example, a common request from civil society is to see ODA by country *without* in-donor refugee costs included but this is not currently viewable in the dashboards.

Another frequent request of civil society is to better understand how donor's multilateral contributions support different objectives. For example, it is well understood that a large amount of health ODA is channelled through institutions such as the Global Fund or Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisations (GAVI). While there is an established methodology for calculating these 'imputed multilateral shares', it is nevertheless cumbersome to assemble, and this is a barrier for many data users.[59] In fact, even seeing the relative importance of each multilateral institution to donor's ODA budgets is not straightforward: apart from the EU institutions and World Bank arms, there is no table that combines multilateral contributions by institution with bilateral aid (this needs assembling from DAC1/DAC2a and Providers' Use of Multilateral System tables).

There is a balance to be struck between full flexibility (allowing users to analyse the full range of CRS variables) and legibility (allowing non-expert users to access what they need without being overwhelmed with parameter choices). Addressing this balance would require input from a range of stakeholders, including those without data analysis backgrounds but who nevertheless need access to the data to inform their work. However, with the understanding gained from such inputs the investment needed to create such tools may not be significant. The DAC could even use large-language model tool to allow users to create their own more complex queries. In the UK, FCDO staff are experimenting with developing a tool that allows users to interrogate full project documentation, although this is still experimental. A similar tool could be provided for different users to extract analysis on topics of interest.

4.6 DAC ODA Data summary

Overall, the quality of DAC ODA data is high, with most countries providing near-complete data across a wide range of variables. However, there are nevertheless some countries that are

[57] Personal communications
[58] See for example https://www.oecd.org/en/data/dashboards/official-development-assistance-at-a-glance.html
[59] Personal communications – this author has frequently been contracted to produce such numbers.

further behind than others in some areas, as the above analysis has shown, especially some larger countries such as France and Japan. This section briefly summarizes these gaps in 2023.

The performance of different countries depends on what variables are included in the analysis. For example, most countries fill in the expected start and completion dates for all disbursements, but France and Japan rarely use these fields (about 10% in each case in 2023), and so including these variables will have a large impact on their scores. Conversely, these two countries complete the SDG focus variable for nearly all disbursements, whereas the Netherlands and New Zealand do not use it at all.

We focus on the following nine variables: sector, project title, project description, commitment date, the climate adaptation and mitigation markers, the gender marker, SDG focus and channel name. The first four relate to basic project information that should be available for all projects (and generally are). The markers and SDG focus variable are of especial interest given relevance for SDGs and other targets. The channel name variable provides important information on the first receiver of aid, and the extent to which aid reaches developing country organisations (whether government or NGOs). For observation with a non-zero (and non-missing) disbursement value, we create an index from zero to nine that captures the number of non-missing variables. For example, if a disbursement has reported each of the above variables other than the SDG focus field, the score would be 8. We then calculate the average score (weighted by disbursements) for each country.

Figure 4.10 plots this score for DAC countries in 2023, against total bilateral ODA for that country to capture the importance of that missing data (for example, Ireland has a low completion score but its bilateral ODA was less than 4% that of the US). The country to stand out the most is the UK. It is one of the largest bilateral donors, but has a data completion score in 2023 of around 7, indicating that on average, disbursements are missing two of the above variables. In 2023, this is partly because the UK recorded a large decline in the use of the Rio-markers.

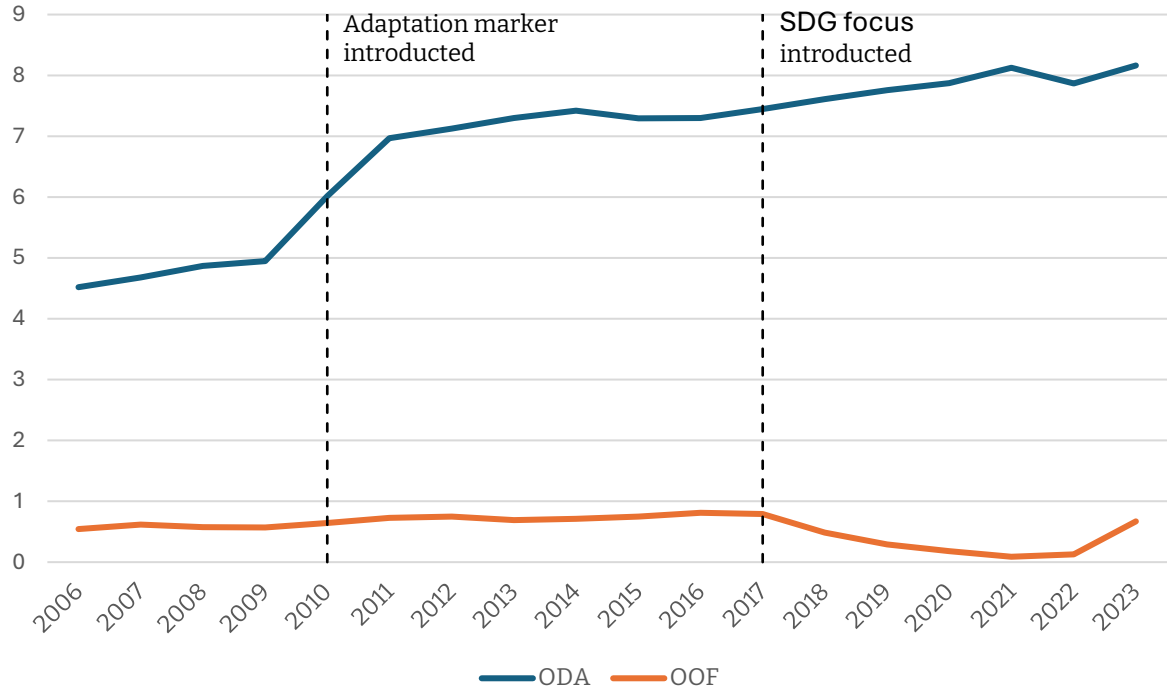
Figure 4.10: Data completeness score against total bilateral ODA, 2023

Notes: Data completeness score is first created by calculated for each disbursement, with a score of one for each of the following variables that are not missing: : sector, project title, project description, commitment date, the climate adaptation and mitigation markers, the gender marker, SDG focus and channel name. The overall score is the average weighted by disbursement value.
Source: CRS

Care should be taken in interpreting this figure. While Japan has a high completeness score, as noted above, the descriptions provided are generally less informative, and its use of the Rio-markers has courted controversy (as has France's). In addition, whereas the UK performed poorly in part because of the Rio-markers, it has its own separate way of tracking climate finance, for which data is (largely) available elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is notable that Czechia, Slovakia, Iceland and Switzerland each have average scores of 8.9 or above, indicating near complete data. Ireland has the lowest score of 5.8, indicating more than three variables missing on average.

Figure 4.11 demonstrates that this completion score has improved over time. Part of the improvement relates to the introduction of new variables: vertical lines mark the introduction of the Rio-adaptation marker in 2010, and the SDG focus variable in 2017. But even aside from these introductions, there has been a clear improvement over time. But figure 4.11 also shows how little information is provided for Other Official Flows (OOF), the subject of the next section.

Figure 4.11: Data completeness scores over time for bilateral ODA and OOF



Notes: Data completeness score is first created by calculated for each disbursement, with a score of one for each of the following variables that are not missing: : sector, project title, project description, commitment date, the climate adaptation and mitigation markers, the gender marker, SDG focus and channel name. The overall score is the average weighted by disbursement value.
Source: CRS

5. Other Official Flows

Key points:

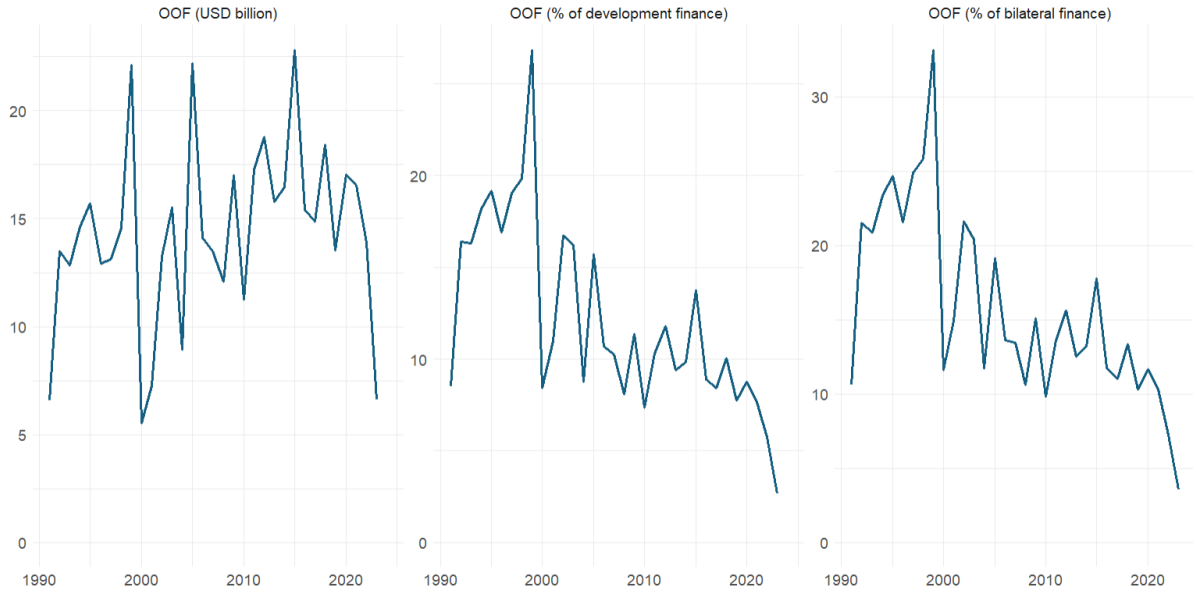
- OOF is in the order of tens of billions, but almost nothing is known about these flows. This is particularly true for Japan, for which only aggregate annual figures are available (which is significant given that Japan is the largest provider of OOF).
- Ignoring these flows mischaracterises trends from individual donors. For example, ODA lending by EU institutions appeared to jump considerably in the 2010s, but in reality this was merely a change in how the same loans were reported: movements in market rates meant these crossed the boundary from OOF to ODA but lending didn't actually increase.
- Even these flows may not be the full picture: data from the World Bank International Debt Statistics for some DAC countries suggests that some official debt flows (and reflows) are not captured by DAC statistics.

For DAC countries, the vast majority of political attention is focused on ODA. However, several countries provide a substantial amount of development finance that is not concessional enough to be counted as ODA. Termed Other Official Flows (OOF), there is very little focus on such flows, and very little information on the nature of them or what they aim to achieve. The definition of OOF in the reporting directives is vague, mainly defining it in opposition to ODA: flows that are

either no concessional enough to be ODA, or not primarily aimed at development. But the directives offer some examples of the types of transactions that it may cover: grants for representational purposes (likely to be small), loans intended to promote development but no concessional, or loans to private exporters in donor countries, for example.

In the past, OOF has been a substantial part of official development finance (ODF, or OOF and ODA combined) from DAC countries. Over the past three decades, OOF disbursements from DAC countries averaged $14.4 billion per year, reaching a peak of $22.8 billion in 2015. It has declined substantially in recent years, falling to $13.9 billion in 2022. In 2023, it fell to $6.6 billion, but this is partly a result of OOF associated with private sector instrument (PSI) transactions which became ODA in that year.[60] One of the current difficulties with this data is understanding how much OOF is Nevertheless, as a percent of official development finance (ODA and OOF provision) from DAC countries, it has declined each decade, from 18% in the 1990s, to 12% in the 2000s, 10% in the 2010s, and 5% in the 2020s so far.

Figure 5.1: Other Official Flows from DAC countries (USD, and as % of ODF and bilateral ODF)



Note: In 2023, the figure is affected by a recategorization of some PSI transactions from OOF to ODA.
Source: CRS, DAC2b and DAC1

While one implication of this decline in OOF relative to ODA is that the size of this data gap is shrinking, it also highlights the fact that analysing ODA is incomplete: the recent increase in ODA needs to be set against the decline in OOF. This is particularly important at the country level, for example, while Korea has increased its ODA by $1.1 billion between 2015 and 2023 (an increase of over 70%) OOF declined by $12.0 billion over the same period. While Korea has been congratulated for its increase in ODA over this period, its total development finance provision has fallen by 77% (see also the box on the EU institutions). While Korea may therefore have substituted less concessional finance for more concessional finance to some extent, which is

[60] This type of reclassification is a key reason why it often makes sense to consider OOF and ODA together, as often the boundary between them can shift. In principle, this may be positive with respect to transparency, as there are more stringent reporting requirements for ODA, but it is too early to judge whether these are being met.

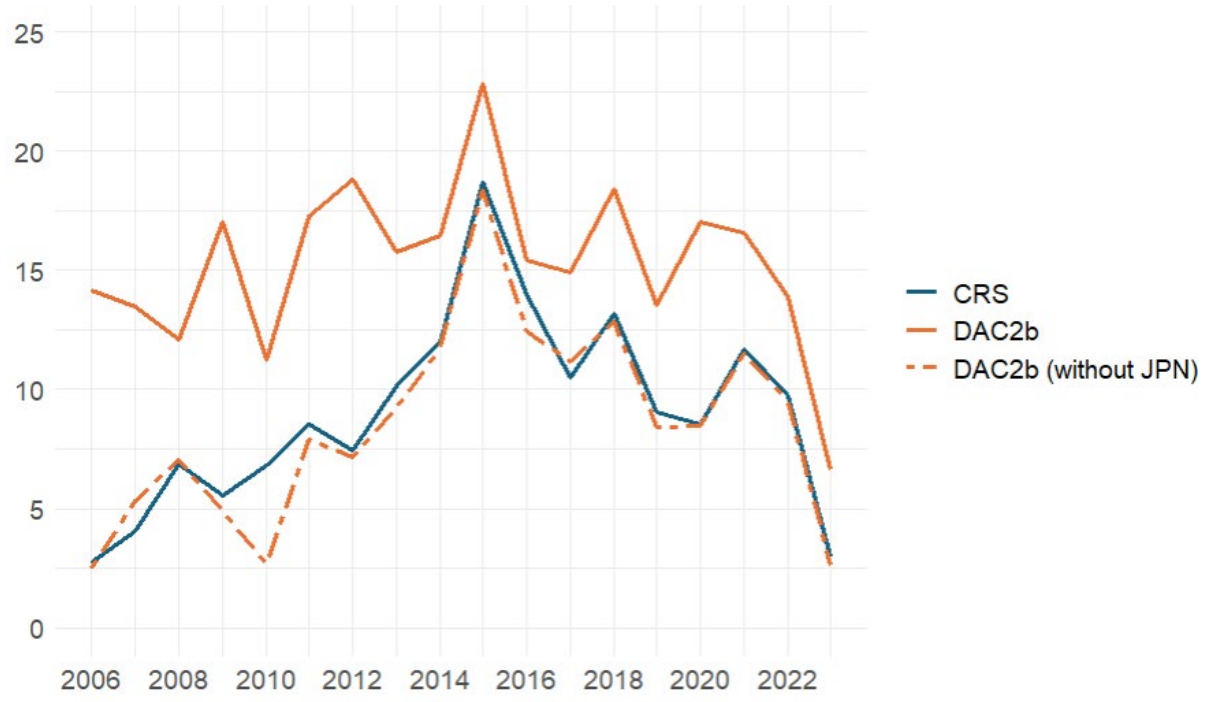
positive[61], it nevertheless completely changes the overall picture in Korea's development finance provision.

This section explores the state of OECD data on OOF, and finds that the quality of this data is generally poor. There is very little information on the nature of the flows or what they are trying to achieve, and other sources suggest reasons to believe that the data is incomplete.

5.1 Inconsistent between datasets

The first problem with OOF data is that it is inconsistent between the different datasets provided by the OECD. The above figures pertain OOF according to the online OECD table "DAC2b", which provides information on OOF and export credit flows. However, as with other online tables, this merely provides aggregate data, rather than the project level data provided in the CRS. But the reporting of OOF in the CRS is highly incomplete. Between 2006 and 2023, OOF disbursements from DAC countries were $275 billion according to DAC2b but only $162 billion according to the CRS.

Figure 5.2: OOF disbursements according to DAC2b and CRS



Source: DAC2b and CRS

As figure 5.2 shows, this difference is mainly because of Japan: despite being by far the largest provider of OOF, it reports essentially no OOF to the CRS (between 2006 and 2008 it reported a total of around $1 billion, but over this period Japan's total OOF disbursements were $24.8 billion according to DAC2b). When Japan is removed from the DAC2b data, the correspondence between DAC2b and the CRS is closer. However, for countries that have provided OOF in the form of equity according to DAC2b, this does not appear to be included in the CRS dataset. There

[61] Although as discussed below, there is a question mark about how much this merely reflects the change in the ODA boundary.

also appear to be inconsistencies in how some transactions are recorded (for example, transactions described as loans in DAC2b but with equity 'finance types'[62] according to the CRS.

Some of this discrepancy is related to the transition from Private Sector Instrument (PSIs) transactions being recorded as OOF, to being included within ODA.

5.2 Very little detail reported

Even for the data that is reported to the CRS, in principle allowing project level analysis, very little information is provided. No policy markers are applied to any OOF, there is no sector information (all transactions list the sector as "sectors not specified", and the majority of OOF transactions report the recipient as being either regional, or bilateral unspecified. Nor do we know the terms of OOF transactions, other than that they are not concessional enough to be counted as ODA.

To our knowledge, there is essentially no information available on these transactions, despite the fact that over the past decade (between 2013 and 2023), total OOF disbursements were $171 billion.

Table 5.1: Marker usage for non-PSI OOF transactions, 2023.

		% of disbursements to which markers have been applied			
	OOF disbursements, CRS (USD million)	Gender	Mitigation	Adaptation	SDG focus
Australia	29	0	0	0	0
Austria	28	0	0	0	0
Belgium	6	0	0	0	0
Canada	15	0	0	0	0
France	710	0	0	0	0
Germany	605	0	0	0	0
Italy	162	0	0	0	0
Korea	680	0	0	0	0
New Zealand	18	0	0	0	0
Poland	1	0	0	0	0
Portugal	5	0	0	0	0
Türkiye	108	0	0	0	0
UAE	6	0	0	0	0
Japan	*No transactions reported*				

[62] A CRS variable that denotes the nature of the financial transaction.

Box: EU Institutions OOF raise questions over relationship between OOF and ODA

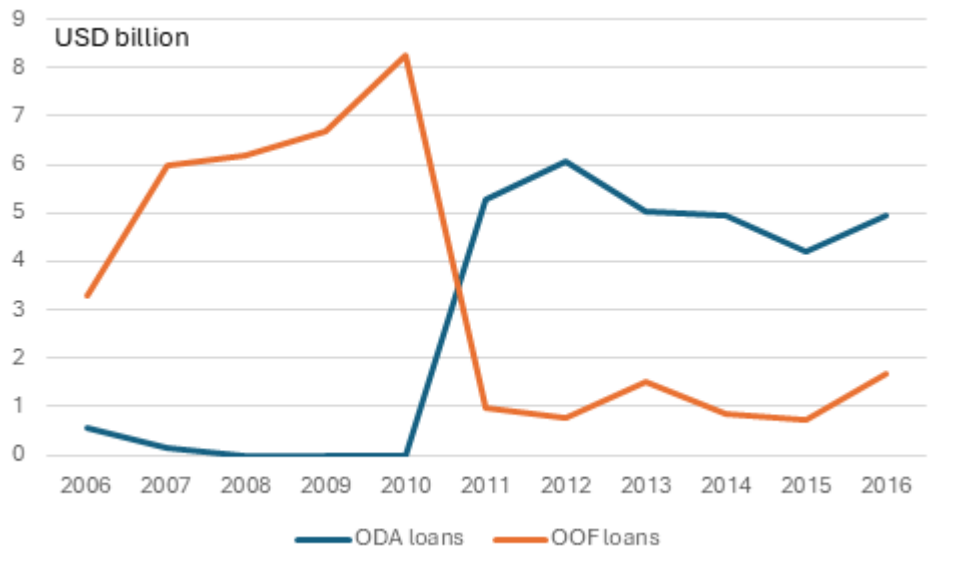
The EU Institutions is the second largest bilateral provider of OOF, behind only Japan, and has provided $2.5 billion per year on average over the last twenty years. However, current levels are small compared to previous decades: in the 2010s, average annual disbursements were $3.9 billion, compared to $1.2 billion since. The decline in OOF disbursements was sudden in 2011, when it fell from $8.3 billion to $1.0 billion (decline of around $7.3 billion, or 88%).

Not including this drop gives a substantially different picture for EU development finance. But (to our knowledge) there was no discussion of this large drop. OOF is barely mentioned in the EU DAC Peer Review of 2013, despite sections on "aid and beyond" and "a broad approach to development finance".

In the same year as OOF plummeted, ODA disbursements increased by 42%, or by $5.4 billion (a similar volume to the decrease in OOF), most of which came from a sudden increase in ODA loans (from zero to $5.3 billion).

This increase in ODA loans – lauded at the time – did not come from a genuine increase in development finance disbursements, but from an existing loan portfolio being reclassified. The interest rate charged on most EU loans depends on prevailing market rates, and during the early 2010s, the decline in global interest rates meant that lots of loans that had started as OOF became concessional enough to count as ODA.

Figure 5.3: EU Institutions, OOF and ODA loan disbursements, USD current prices

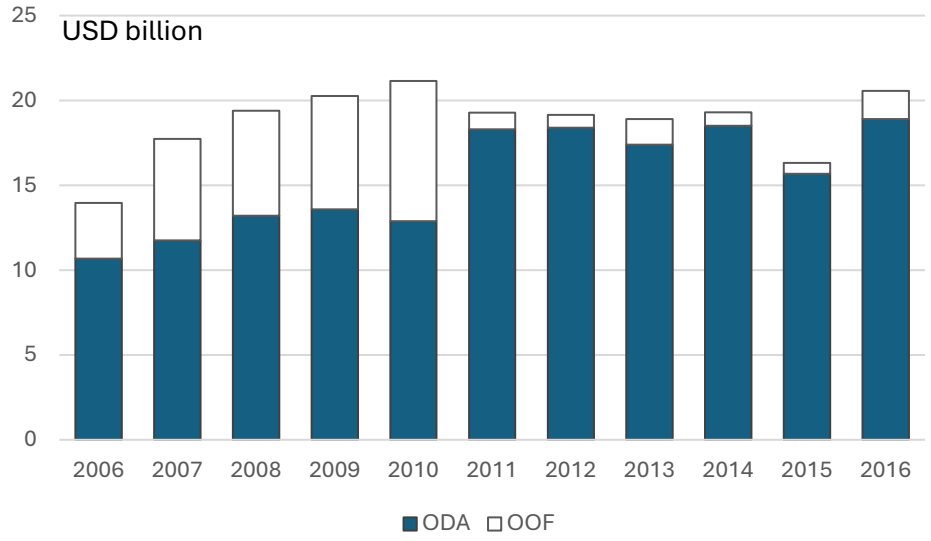


Source: CRS

The increase in ODA was therefore matched by a limited increasing in donor effort (given that the decline in the EU's borrowing costs was passed onto countries to which it lent) but actual lending did not increase: EU loans just crossed the concessionality threshold as a result of wider market conditions. This threshold is arbitrary – there is little difference between a 25% and 24% grant element of a loan – but the end result is the appearance of a big increase in development finance provision if OOF is not taken

into account. Commentary at the time focused on the dark blue bars in **figure 5.4,** whereas both together give a more accurate (and less encouraging) picture.

Fig 5.4: EU Institutions ODA and OOF



Source: CRS

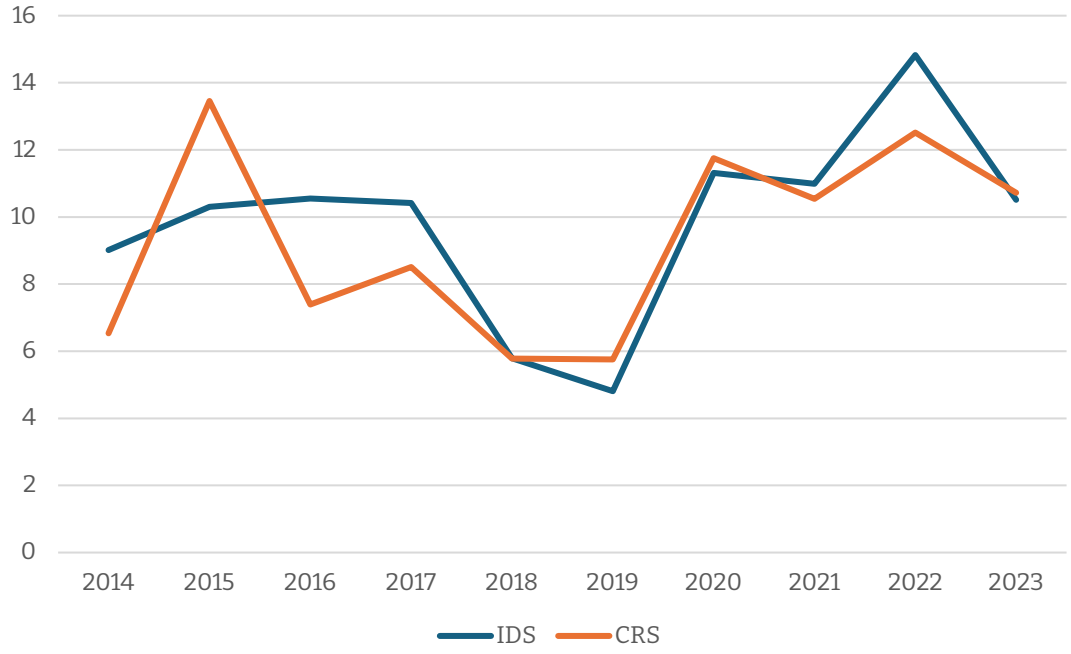
5.3 Reported flows may not be full picture

Comparison with other data sources suggest reasons to doubt whether even the aggregate information provided is complete. Below, we examine data from the World Bank International Debt Statistics, which contain series on net official flows between countries. Unfortunately, for official bilateral creditors, only net flows are available, rather than disbursements and repayments separately. Nevertheless, we compare this data to net flows contained within the CRS/DAC2b to ascertain where there might be gaps in OOF data.

Overall, the correspondence between IDS and CRS data is close. There are differences in some years, but overall, the picture of aggregate net flows between DAC members and L&MICs is similar from both sources. Both suggest that in 2023, net loans to developing country governments equalled around $10.5 billion[63], and that this figure has roughly doubled since 2019. Possibly consistent with improving DAC data over time (or a decline in OOF volumes for which data is less complete), the divergence between the series has narrowed over time.

[63] $10.7 billion according to CRS and $10.5 billion according to IDS.

Figure 5.5: Net debt flows to L&MICs from DAC (USD billion)



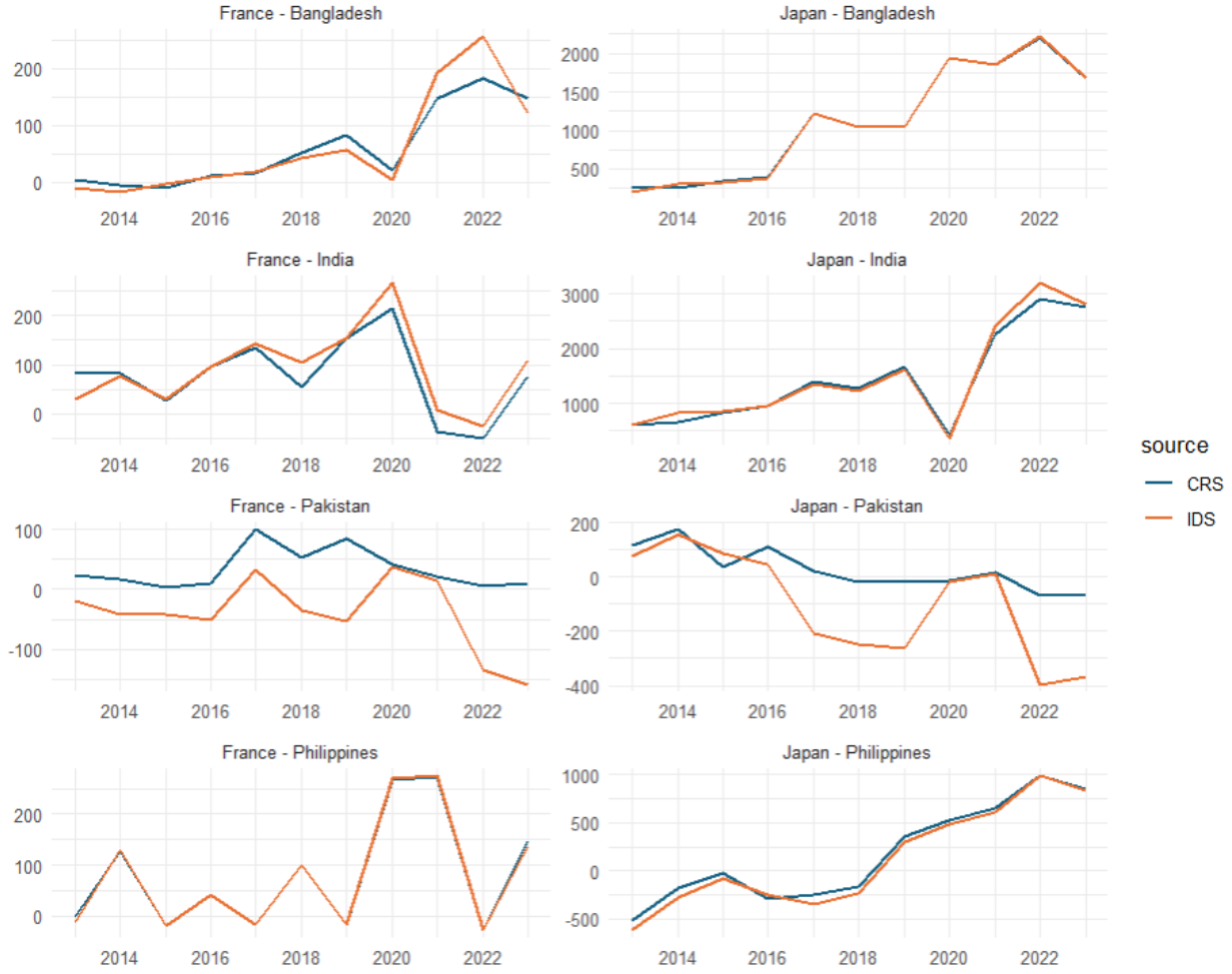
Notes: CRS data includes loans (finance_t from 420 to 431) with a recipient government channel code, excluding PSI and debt relief. IDS data is series code DT.NFL.BLAT.CD
Source: CRS, DAC2b and World Bank IDS

This hides substantial divergence among particular countries. Figure 5.6 demonstrates this by examining loans from France and Japan – the two largest lenders within the DAC – to a selection of the largest recipients of OOF/ODA loans, and comparing DAC statistics on OOF/ODA lending[64] to debt flows recorded by IDS. For some countries, the data sources match closely: for Bangladesh and the Philippines there is little difference between the sources (although IDS suggests slightly higher lending from France to Bangladesh in recent years).

However, for other countries, DAC statistics are clearly missing important debt flows. In particular, net debt flows from both Japan and France to Pakistan are considerably lower according to IDS relative to what is reported in DAC statistics. Whereas France has consistently been providing net financial support (examining debt flows) to Pakistan between 2014 and 2023 (in each year, net flows of ODA and OOF loans were positive), the picture is reversed according to IDS. In particular, there was a large decline in net flows to Pakistan in 2022 and 2023: flows to France and Japan *from* Pakistan were $158 million and $369 million respectively. Whereas the CRS suggests that loan repayments from Pakistan to these two lenders were $53 million in 2023, the IDS suggests reflows were nearly half a billion higher.

[64] Only non-PSI loans for which the recipient government is listed as the channel are included, because IDS measures only official debt/lending.

Figure 5.6: Dyadic debt flows, CRS and IDS



Notes: CRS data includes loans (finance_t from 420 to 431) with a recipient government channel code, excluding PSI and debt relief. IDS data is series code DT.NFL.BLAT.CD
Source: CRS and World Bank IDS

There are multiple possible reasons for the difference between sources. ODA loans tend to have a long duration and there are possibly reflows recorded in balance of payments statistics on loans that originated before the CRS was as well developed, and there almost certainly definitional or methodological differences that affect the numbers. However, the DAC have acknowledged in the past that OOF transactions are underreported[65], and therefore this could also reflect gaps in the DAC data system. In fact, we know this could be the case for Japan who have not reported any OOF at the country level: OOF is only available aggregated by region. In either case, it suggests that DAC statistics do not give the full picture in terms of official flows to developing countries. While the similarity at the aggregate level suggests that this problem may not be large, this is misleading, as both disbursements and repayments could be underreported, and these effects will differ across individual countries, as shown above.

[65] Personal conversations with DAC secretariat

6. Development finance beyond the DAC

Key points:

- There have been several attempts to create datasets on development finance flows (mainly, but not always concessional) that include countries beyond the DAC. One of the most significant is Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) which includes …
- Broadly speaking, these efforts suggest that expanding our knowledge of development finance to include countries beyond the DAC will not greatly change the aggregate picture.
- The main exception is China, which is clearly a hugely important player in development finance even if lending is below its mid-2010s peak. While official figures on Chinese lending are not available, and this is unlikely to change, but there already substantial efforts to fill this knowledge gap using third party sources.
- Another smaller exception is India. Finance provided by its EXIM bank and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is likely in the billions of dollars, on par with some of the smaller DAC members. Both agencies provide some data on these flows, but this could be substantially improved at little cost, for example, by allowing for spreadsheet downloads and providing information on disbursements against line of credit commitments.
- Various non-DAC countries report to the DAC. This is welcome, as are the DAC's efforts to expand this group, but the completeness of data on ODA-like flows from this group is far behind that of the DAC (owing to the voluntary nature of the reporting). Encouraging greater completion of marker information and more detailed descriptions would be a simple way to improve the usefulness of this data, especially for the larger donors such as Saudi Arabia and UAE.

The world has changed since the DAC formed in the 1960s and agreed to gather and provide data on ODA flows from its members. The share of DAC members in global GDP has fallen from a peak of 82% in 1992 to 57% in 2023. Furthermore, as Kenny (2020)[66] notes there are now nearly 100 countries that are richer than the median DAC member was in 1960 when the organization was first formed. Consequently, attention is increasingly turning towards the development cooperation that is provided by countries outside the DAC.

This is not a new concern. At least as far back as 2011 there were concerns raised about the lack of data on flows from non-DAC countries given the rise in Chinese lending[67]. Development cooperation from Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and UAE has a long history, and in the 1970s in particular (during the oil price boom), OPEC countries provided a large share of total development cooperation. South-South Cooperation (SSC) as a concept is nearly as old as ODA,

[66] Kenny C (2020) "Why is the World So Stingy?" CGD https://www.cgdev.org/blog/why-world-so-stingy
[67] See for example Hubbard M and Sinha P (2011) "The case for including other public flows for development" The Brooker Online https://www.thebrokeronline.eu/article/the-case-for-including-other-public-flows-for-development-d90/

but has been increasingly recognised in recent years, not least as part of SDG 17 indicators, and in discussions at Finance For Development forums[68].

Unfortunately, there is so far no official database that attempts to measure development cooperation from such providers in a consistent way, such as there is for ODA (notwithstanding the complications mentioned above), at least not one that includes the most important providers. This may change: there have been numerous efforts in recent years to harmonize measurement of SSC. In 2025, UNCTAD produced a measurement framework for SSC intended to support piloting of data collection for official development and humanitarian flows[69], and this is part of a broader project to quantify SSC,[70] although this effort is still at the pilot stage. There has also been resistance to making comparisons between ODA and SSC, given the different natures of the two sources[71]

To date, while there have been a number of attempts to measure ODA-like flows from a wider group of countries than the DAC, they are either very approximate, or incomplete. Our picture of development finance flows beyond the DAC is therefore limited, and comes from piecing together flows reported by various sources, both official and non-official.

This section discusses some of these efforts, with a particular focus on three cases: non-DAC countries that report to the DAC, for which there is reasonable officially reported data but with more limited information that for DAC countries, China, for which there have been substantial academic attempts to estimate flows but little official data, and India, which is more willing to make data public, but whose data lacks important variables.

6.1 CGD's Finance or International Development

One of the most comprehensive attempts to measure development finance provided by DAC and non-DAC donors in a comparable way (to our knowledge) is the Center for Global Development's "Finance for International Development" (FID)[72]. This attempts to measure finance provided by countries that are members of either the G20, or have a GNI of over $70 billion. It aimed to measure the grant equivalent of cross-border flows (including contributions to multilaterals), i.e. it does not include several components of ODA such as in-donor refugee costs, scholarships or imputed student costs.

The authors found that for the selected countries, FID from non-DAC countries accounted for 10% of the total in 2024[73], and that this was heavily concentrated in China and gulf states. The figure for China was $5.3 billion in 2024. This might seem low given the alternative estimates of Chinese lending, but this was largely a result of methodological choices, most notably

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[68] See Calleja R et al (2023) "How Do Non-DAC Actors Cooperate on Development?" CGD Policy paper 294 https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/how-do-non-dac-actors-cooperate-development.pdf for a comprehensive overview

[69] UNCTAD (2025) "Manual for the framework to measure South–South cooperation" UNCTAD/TCS/STAT/INF/2025/1 https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tcsstatinf2025d1_en.pdf

[70] UNCTAD (n.d.) "Quantifying South-South cooperation for the Sustainable Development Goals" UNCTAD Project code 2326D https://unctad.org/project/quantifying-south-south-cooperation-sustainable-development-goals

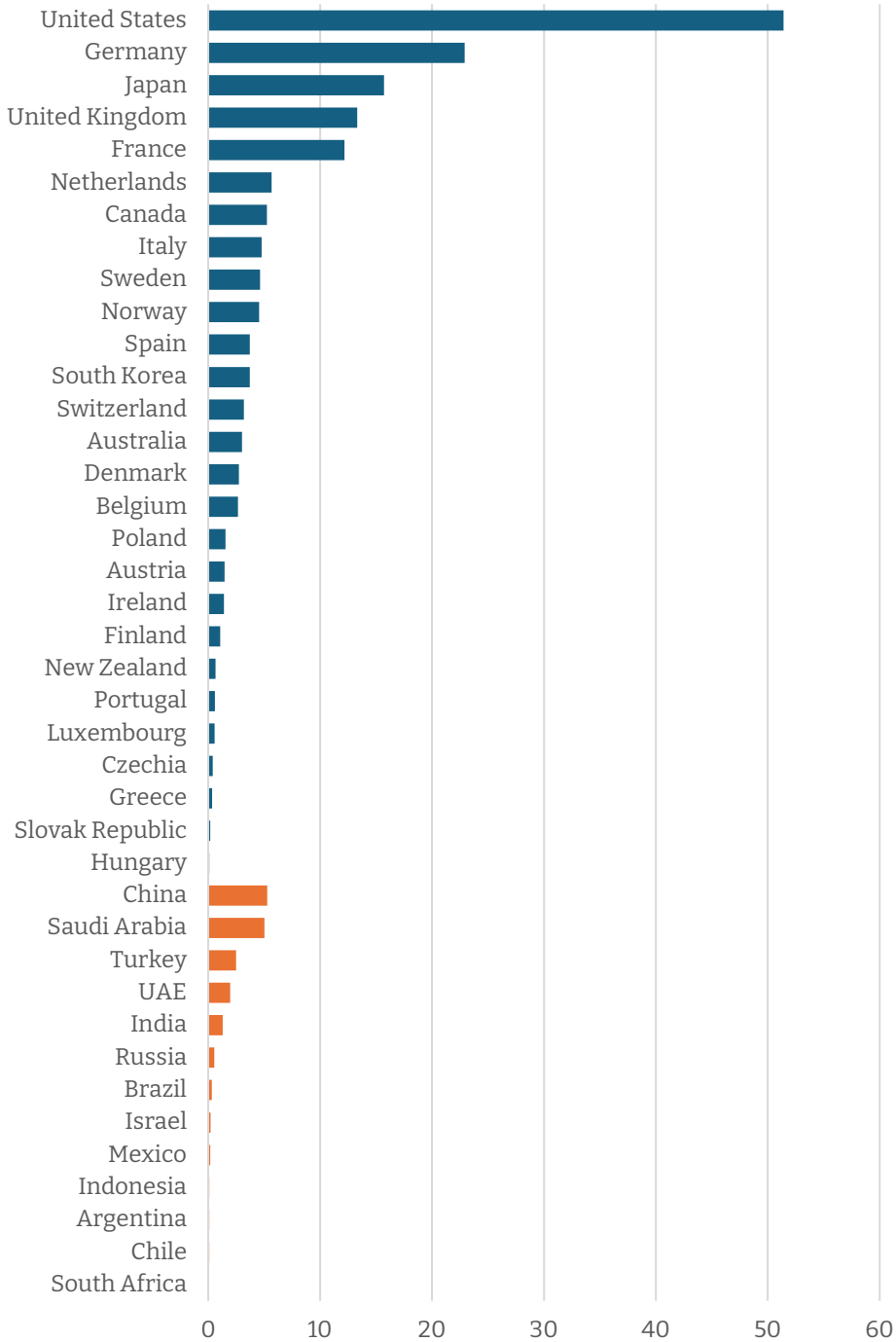
[71] [71] Besharati N and MacFeely S (2019) "Defining and Quantifying South-South Cooperation" UNCTAD Research Paper No. 30 (UNCTAD/SER.RP/2019/2) https://unctad.org/publication/defining-and-quantifying-south-south-cooperation

[72] Mitchell I et al, (2020) "Finance for International Development (FID): A New Measure to Compare Traditional and Emerging Provider Countries' Official Development Finance Efforts, and Some Provisional Results" CGD working paper https://www.cgdev.org/publication/finance-international-development-fid

[73] This data is not currently available, but was shared by the authors of a forthcoming CGD update.

attempting to measure the grant equivalent of loans, rather than the face value of disbursements, and only measuring loans from "official" Chinese sources, China's data is examined specifically in Box 5 in the original FID report.[74] Aside from China, the largest providers of development finance outside the DAC were Saudi Arabia ($5.0 billion), Turkey ($2.4 billion), UAE ($32.0 billion) and India ($1.3 billion). These numbers are all lower than the equivalent values given in the initial report for 2017.

Figure 6.1: CGD 'Finance for International Development' Estimates,2024



[74] Ibid. (p.47)

Source: Data shared by authors of forthcoming CGD report

While the authors made every attempt to make the data comparable between countries, they acknowledge that the quality of the data sources made this challenging. Notwithstanding the quality of the above data, it does suggest that the scale of development finance from non-DAC countries that we are missing is small. Turkey, Saudi Arabia and UAE each provided substantial volumes, but all currently report their data to the CRS (although as discussed below, the quality of this data provision lags behind DAC members in some regards, who are obliged to report on more variables). When excluding countries that report to the DAC, the remaining countries provided $7.4 billion collectively. Around 70% of this came from China, for which there are multiple estimates of development finance provided. While official data would be preferable, there is nevertheless a great deal of information about China's development finance publicly available.

That leaves $2.1 billion from countries on which there is no information collected in a systematic way. However, of this, $0.8 billion is from core contributions to multilateral organisations whose outflows are already included in CRS data (mainly UN and the MDBs). Therefore, there is roughly $1.3 billion[75] in development finance flows captured by FID that is not included elsewhere. Most of this (around $1 billion)comes from India's EXIM bank, explored in more detail below. In short, FID data suggests that in terms of the aggregate picture, there is not a great volume of development finance being provided beyond the DAC which is not already captured by existing official or academic sources. However, this may be different at the country level.

6.2 Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD)

The most important attempt to capture official development finance flows beyond DAC members and multilaterals is the Total Official Sustainable Support for Development (TOSSD) dataset[76]. TOSSD was initially born out of the recognition by the DAC that "the development agenda is becoming broader", and that "it is therefore important to recognise and further incentivise the efforts that are being made above and beyond ODA"[77], and in the 2014 High Level Meeting the DAC agreed to develop a measure that would include flows beyond ODA[78]. While originating out of the DAC, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA)[79] in 2015 then committed to hold discussions on the measure, as part of a section on international development stressing the importance of flows beyond ODA, and the value of South-South Cooperation (SSC). Since then, it has been developed by a taskforce outside the UN System, with the OECD acting as secretariat (although the website stresses independence from the OECD). Currently, TOSSD data is available for years 2019 to 2023[80].

The component of TOSSD that aims to capture non-ODA flows from DAC countries has proved the most controversial. There are concerns about the coherence of the basket of activities

[75] Difference due to rounding
[76] https://tossd.online/about
[77] DAC HLM 2014 Final Communique https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC(2014)69/FINAL/en/pdf
[78] For a comprehensive overview see Tomlinson B. (2021) "Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD): Game changer or mirage?" ActionAid, AidWatch Canada and Oxfam International https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/total-official-support-for-sustainable-development-tossd-game-changer-or-mirage-621164/
[79] Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, UN https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2051AAAA_Outcome.pdf
[80] https://tossd.online/

included, and the fact that the data is highly incomplete data. Many large countries do not report any flows beyond those included in the CRS (such as Germany), and for the remainder there is wide divergence in the scope of activities included. For example, France includes a range of domestic subsidies for renewable energy and electric cars. This is reasonable in principle: mitigation is a global public good and it does not matter where emissions arise, and so there is no reason to distinguish between costs incurred domestically or abroad.[81] However, if the US took a similar approach, TOSSD should in principle include expenditures as part of the Inflation Reduction Act, and along with similar interventions from other countries TOSSD should run into trillions of dollars[82].

Of the new data for DAC countries, 62% is accounted for by France ($74.5 billion between 2019 and 2023) and 18% accounted for by the US ($21.2 billion). Czechia accounts for more newly-reported TOSSD than Japan and the UK combined. It is hard to believe that this reflects anything other than different choices about what to report. As noted in Scott and Reigler (n.d.)[83], there is no requirement for providers to report totals for any particular categories, and therefore it is hard to make sense of the list of activities included.

Nevertheless, TOSSD is seen as having potential as a vehicle for reporting on flows beyond DAC countries. Non-DAC countries were initially sceptical (see for example Besharati (2017)[84] or Chatuverdi (2016)[85]), and many remain so, but there are nevertheless a number of new providers that report data, and therefore TOSSD can potentially help to fill the gap in non-DAC reporting. Unfortunately, China and India are not among the new reporters, and are unlikely to ever choose to report, as they see the measure as being 'too close' to the DAC.[86]

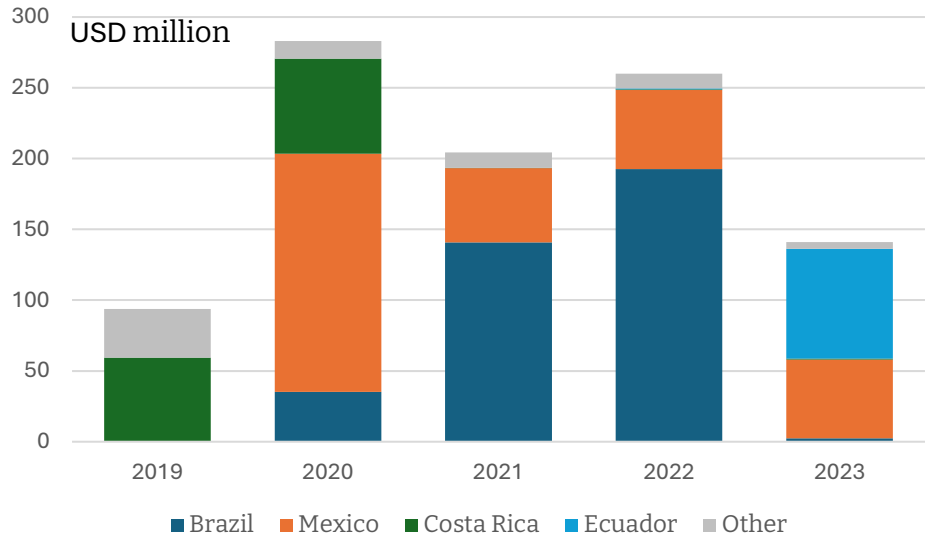
TOSSD reports data on 25 donors that are not included in the CRS dataset, including eleven multilateral organisations (such as the UN Secretariat and the New Development Bank) and 14 bilateral providers (such as Peru, Tunisia and Chile). The inclusion of the additional multilateral outflows is a useful addition to development finance data. This adds $38.2 billion to finance outflows between 2019 and 2023. This information is generally accessible through individual webpages and annual reports of the organisations in questions (for example, the New Development Bank is an important addition, and lists individual projects on its own webpage[87]), but it is nevertheless useful having it collated. Below, we focus on the bilateral additions.

Examining the new countries to report to TOSSD suggests that the additional flows captured is in the order of hundreds of millions, rather than billions of dollars . In total, between 2019 and 2023, such countries contributed finance worth $0.98 billion according to TOSSD. This is

[81] Although, one of the conditions for pillar 2 expenditure (the aspect which focuses on global public goods) in the TOSSD reporting instructions is that "Be implemented in direct co-operation with TOSSD recipients, or private or public institutions from these countries, as a means of ensuring the benefit to TOSSD recipients or their populations". It is not clear how France's expenditure meets this requirement. (p.17 https://www.tossd.org/content/dam/tossd/en/methodology-pdfs/reporting_instructions.pdf)
[82] Scott S. (2024) "The TOSSD Mirage" ODA Reform https://www.odareform.org/post/the-tossd-mirage
[83] Scott S, Riegler H, (n.d.) "TOSSD: A statistical assessment" ODA Reform https://www.odareform.org/post/tossd-a-statistical-assessment
[84] Besharati, N. (2017). 'New Development Finance Measure Should Be TOSSD out the Window!' Policy Insights 45. South African Institute of International Affairs https://saiia.org.za/research/new-development-finance-measure-should-be-tossd-outthe-window/
[85] Chaturvedi, S. (2016). TOSSD: Southernization of ODA. Policy Brief #9. Forum for Indian Development Cooperation. https://fidc.ris.org.in/sites/default/files/9.pdf
[86] Multiple personal conversations
[87] Accessible here: https://www.ndb.int/projects/all-projects/

about 0.06% of outflows from DAC and multilaterals over the same period, and smaller than many individual projects from such providers. The vast majority of this finance comes from Latin American countries, notably Brazil and Mexico, which account for 38% and 34% of TOSSD finance from new bilateral donors respectively over this period.

Figure 6.2: TOSSD from bilateral donors reporting to TOSSD but not CRS



Source: TOSSD

Correspondingly, the majority of TOSSD finance from donors not recorded in DAC statistics is for countries in the LAC region: excluding aid for which the recipient is listed as "developing countries, unspecified", 82% went to LAC countries (Argentina, Venezuela and Colombia were the three largest). This is notable as such economies tend to be relatively developed, and so the marginal impact of development finance is lower. However, most of this cooperation is in the form of mutual knowledge sharing: south-south-cooperation tends to be in the form of scholarships and other forms of in-kind technical cooperation. Overall, these figures corroborate the findings from FID, that flows from non-DAC countries not already captured are likely to be small, other than for China and India.

6.3 Non-DAC reporters to the CRS

For a number of years, several non-DAC countries have reported development finance data to the DAC system, in a broadly comparable way to DAC countries. Currently, there are 20 non-DAC countries with data available in the CRS[88], although many of these are recent editions (such as Monaco) and some no longer report (Russia has not reported since 2020 and Timor-Leste only had a handful of transactions in 2015). In DAC1 data – the online summary table of headline ODA – there are 17 non-DAC countries currently reporting.

By far the most important (in terms of size of disbursements) are countries in the Gulf region. Collectively, they accounted for 51% of bilateral disbursements since 2015 (when there was a jump in the number of non-DAC countries reporting). Saudi Arabia is currently the largest of

[88] In the DAC-CRS-Codebook, there are 24 non-DAC donor codes listed, but four of these – Algeria, Libya, Mexico and Iraq – have no data in the CRS.

these, disbursing $5.3 billion in bilateral aid in 2023, or 32% of the total. The other country of note is Turkey, which has been the largest non-DAC bilateral donor since 2016. However, as discussed above, the majority of this aid goes to supporting refugees within Turkey's borders.

Figure 6.3: Bilateral ODA disbursements from non-DAC, CRS

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Azerbaijan	0	10	7	4	5	5	6	33	0	35	90
Bulgaria	0	0	1	12	10	10	9	9	14	139	27
Croatia	0	30	16	4	14	17	20	19	24	74	98
Cyprus	0	0	1	0	0	3	6	3	6	5	4
Israel	0	0	213	256	388	315	239	242	319	447	422
Kazakhstan	5	27	34	20	24	33	27	30	37	33	0
Kuwait	496	550	632	1,354	849	2,031	730	757	775	523	68
Latvia	0	0	2	3	5	5	5	5	7	90	75
Liechtenstein	0	0	19	19	17	19	19	19	25	30	36
Malta	0	0	8	11	15	21	32	47	49	41	47
Monaco	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	21	23
Qatar	0	0	0	0	0	0	526	542	612	736	667
Romania	0	70	33	110	39	59	65	75	86	103	210
Russia	0	0	902	767	734	628	693	697	0	0	0
Saudi Arabia	0	0	894	1,379	1,795	5,032	2,247	1,899	7,330	6,483	5,332
Taiwan	0	0	225	306	301	265	258	214	193	0	480
Thailand	0	0	71	70	60	62	73	55	72	64	0
Timor-Leste	0	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Türkiye	0	0	4,096	6,688	8,400	8,733	8,469	8,033	7,628	7,110	6,915
UAE	5,486	5,565	8,298	5,255	4,303	5,526	6,210	1,895	1,454	2,845	2,204
Gulf total	5,981	6,115	9,824	7,988	6,947	12,589	9,713	5,092	10,171	10,587	8,271
Total	5,987	6,256	15,457	16,256	16,958	22,764	19,635	14,573	18,653	18,778	16,699

Source: CRS

The reporting of non-DAC flows to the CRS and DAC tables is a welcome source of additional information on development finance flows. The amount that this data is used is limited, however. This is partly because whereas ODA data is essentially complete for DAC countries, meaning that aggregates have an interpretable meaning (it is possible to say "DAC countries provided $223 billion in 2023), this is not the case for non-DAC countries which are clearly a subset that changes over time (it is not possible to say "non-DAC countries provided $X billion in 2023", only that the subset of non-DAC countries reporting to the DAC in that year provided that amount). There is also less focus on holding non-DAC countries to account, because they have not endorsed DAC targets and guidelines in the same way.

In addition, the quality of that data is lower than for DAC data: given that it receives relatively less attention, the DAC secretariat expend less of their limited resources validating the data than for DAC countries.[89] This was demonstrated in figure 4.6 that discussed the scope of the policy-markers, which are widely ignored by non-DAC providers. However, the problem goes deeper, with some known gaps in total provision, and inconsistencies in reporting.

One issue is in how certain transactions are reported. For example, the majority of Turkey's aid is known to be for In-donor refugee costs, directed to the large refugee camps within Turkey's borders, but is not listed as such for political reasons[90]. Allegedly, Turkey has argued that as an ODA-eligible country itself, it is legitimate to class this aid as being for developing countries

[89] Personal communications
[90] Personal communications

(rather than in-donor), and this expenditure on refugees within Turkey is clearly important. But including this figure in total finance flows overstates resources available for other countries. Another example is a $5 billion transaction between Saudi Arabia and Egypt in 2021. This was previously listed as a loan in the CRS, which is consistent with media reports, but in subsequent CRS versions it is described as a grant.

Finally, in recent years there have been substantial changes in the quality of reporting. While this is positive, it means that it is difficult to interpret trends: it is not clear whether increases in reported aid from non-DAC countries come from actual increases in provision, or improved data. Changes can also go in the other direction, further obscuring trends: Russia has previously been a major provider among non-DAC countries (with ODA provision averaging $737 million between 2015 and 2020), but has stopped providing data, and been removed from the online DAC tables. This significant as World Bank International Debt Statistics suggest that Russia has recently provided substantial flows to some countries.

Table X shows the 10 largest net financial flows to developing countries (from bilateral providers) in 2023. These ten lender-borrower combinations highlight the importance of non-DAC lending at least at the individual country level: all but one were from non-DAC countries[91]. China and India are explored more below but Russia has clearly made significant loans to multiple countries that are no longer captured in the DAC statistics. Media reports suggest that these are linked to investments in nuclear energy capability[92].

Table 6.1: Top 10 net lender-borrower pairs in IDS, 2023

Lender	Borrower	Net financial flows (USD million)	
Saudi Arabia	**Pakistan**	**1913**	**Reports to CRS, but listed as grant, not loan**
India	**Sri Lanka**	**1831**	**Doesn't report to CRS**
Russia	**Egypt**	**1448**	**Doesn't report to CRS**
China	**Nigeria**	**879**	**Doesn't report to CRS**
Russia	**Bangladesh**	**745**	**Doesn't report to CRS**
China	**Bangladesh**	**721**	**Doesn't report to CRS**
Russia	**India**	**568**	**Doesn't report to CRS**
China	**Serbia**	**529**	**Doesn't report to CRS**
China	**Egypt**	**486**	**Doesn't report to CRS**
Portugal	**Mozambique**	**383**	**Much higher than reported to CRS**

Source: World Bank IDS

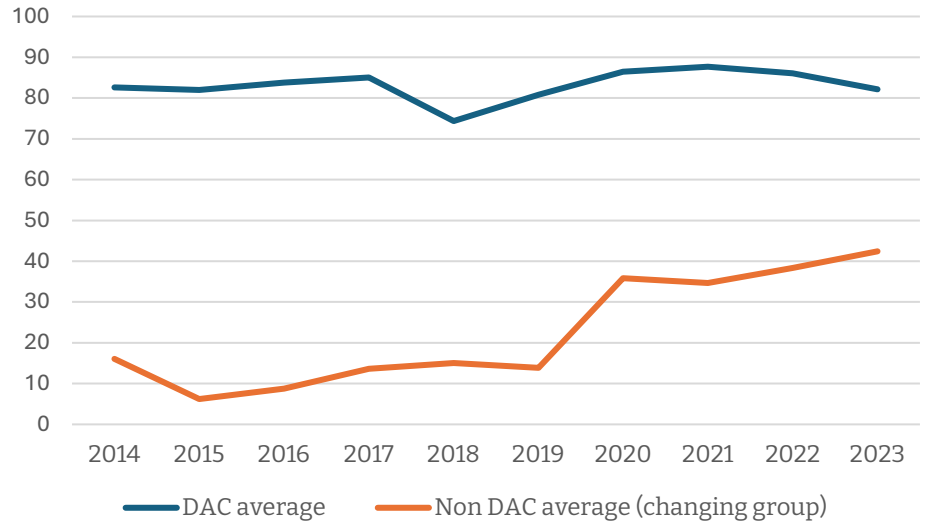
[91] Furthermore, even the one combination that may in principle be present in DAC statistics (Portuguese lending to Mozambique), the figures suggest substantial divergence from what is reported to that dataset. World Bank data suggests that there were net debt flows of $383 million from Portugal to Mozambique in 2023. However, neither the CRS nor DAC2b record any lending between these countries in 2023.

[92] See for example https://thebulletin.org/2023/12/why-egypts-new-nuclear-plant-is-a-long-term-win-for-russia/

Data completeness

Generally, aside from the issues highlighted above, the data reported to the DAC by these countries is usually of a comparable standard to DAC countries, with basic information such as sector, recipient, commitment dates and description fields all well-reported. For non-DAC countries that lend, nearly 100% of disbursements have information on the interest rate charged, and the 'first' and 'second' repayments dates (which in DAC statistics denote the end of the grace period and the completion of payback respectively). The exception is for the markers, which DAC countries are mandated to complete, unlike non-DAC countries. As discussed in section 4.1, this is less of a problem for non-DAC countries given the nature of support provided, which is largely either budget support or humanitarian. In addition, non-DAC countries are substantially better than DAC countries at completing the SDG focus field. The majority of non-DAC countries had filled out this field completely in 2023: 96% of total non-DAC disbursements had SDG information available, compared to 81% for DAC countries.

Figure 6.4: Average completion rate across gender, Rio-markers and SDG focus fields



Notes: Percent of disbursements that are screened for each marker/SDG focus, averaged across donors (weighted by disbursements).
Source: CRS

In other words, it appears as if DAC efforts to maintain standards among non-DAC participants of the DAC have been reasonably successful, even if there remains an interpretability challenge examining data over time given the changing composition of this group. The DAC are currently engaged in further efforts to reach out and expand this group of non-DAC reporting countries which is welcome[93].

6.4 China

By far the most important of these China. While China does not provide an official dataset on its development finance transactions, there have been numerous academic attempts to fill this gap, such as AidData's "Global Chinese Development Finance" database, Boston University's

[93] Personal communication, but see also OECD DAC (2024) "DAC Enlargement and Accession" DCD/DAC(2023)24/FINAL https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC(2023)24/FINAL/en/pdf

"China's Overseas Development Finance" database, and in the case of finance for Africa, the Chinese Africa Research Initiative's Chinese Loans to Africa database. These data sources all agree that China has been the largest bilateral provider of development finance in some years, with total volumes provided coming close to that provided by the entire DAC[94]. The broad trends are also consistent across datasets: a sharp increase through the 2000s and 2010s, followed by a steep decline to the end of the latter decade. The exact figures differ substantially between datasets, and although much of difference disappears when methodological differences are controlled for,[95] there is considerable debate about the exact numbers.

The dataset on Chinese development finance that provides the most information – roughly equivalent in detail to the CRS, albeit not from official sources – is AidData, which is currently provides data up to 2021. This data is gathered through AidData's TUFF (Tracking Underreported Financial Flows) methodology. This uses open-source information such as media reports, government statements, and academic studies to compile a project-level dataset of official financing activities by Chinese state institutions. The process involves several steps of triangulation and data-quality assessment, but AidData acknowledge the uncertainty inherent in the process, and provide guidance on which observations are recommended to be used in analysis (based on their assessment of the reliability of those data points).

The biggest problem with all of these datasets – apart from not being from official sources – is that they only provide data on commitments, not what actually gets disbursed. Generally these quantities differ: for multilaterals, commitments have been anywhere between 1.1 and 2 times higher than disbursements in the same year, and the difference is wider for non-concessional loans (more similar to those provided by China). For DAC official flows, the ratio between commitments and disbursements has ranged from 0.9 to 2.6 between 2006 and 2023. It is also likely to be a bigger problem in the case of China, given that a substantial share of such commitments come from Lines of Credit, which are inherently less likely to be fully drawn upon than conventional loans (this is also true of India, and more generally, often the case for South-South Cooperation[96]).

In addition, data is still only available up until 2021, and is not produced regularly like DAC data. This is understandable given the monumental task of assembling the dataset from the diverse array of sources used in AidData's construction, but it does mean that it is difficult to use the dataset for analysing recent trends. This is particularly problematic for rapid onset humanitarian events, where knowing total flows from all providers is important for understanding how far we are from meeting needs. This is illustrated by the recent earthquake in Myanmar: the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) estimates that humanitarian response plan for the earthquake requires $275 million, of which only $96 million (35%) is met[97]. But responders on the ground[98] are aware that China's contribution has

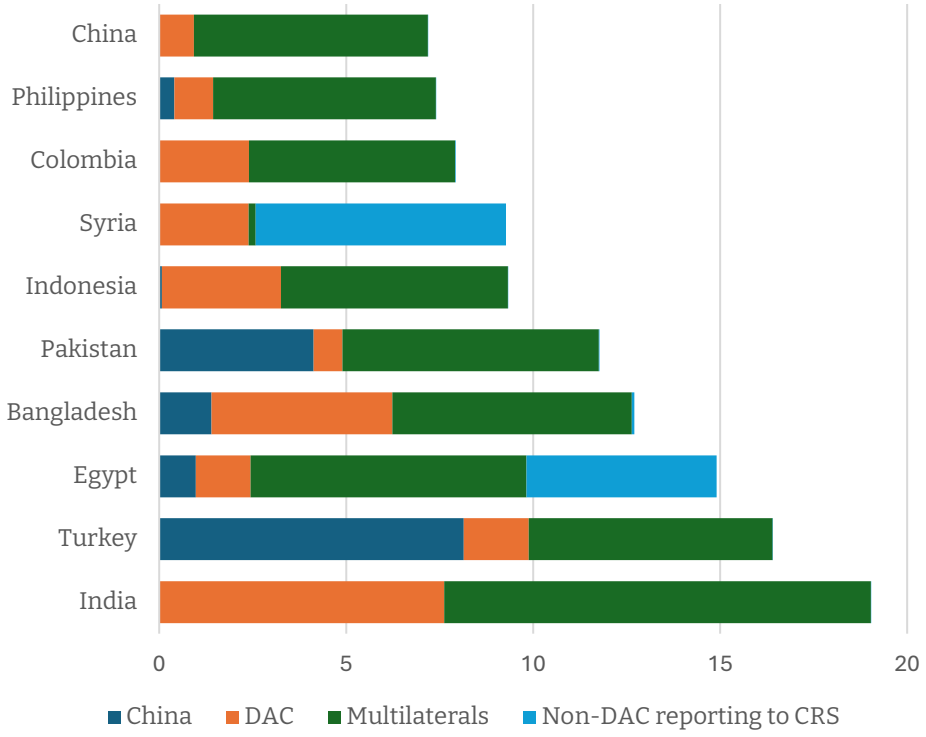
[94] In 2016, AidData reports commitments from China worth $111 billion. Bilateral ODA and OOF disbursements from the DAC (excluding IDRC) where $131 billion in the same year. The numbers are not quite comparable given that AidData report commitment figures, rather than disbursements.
[95] Brautigam D (2024) "Chinese Loans to Africa: The Economist Gets it Wrong" China Africa Research Initiative Blog
[96] Besharati N and MacFeely S (2019) "Defining and Quantifying South-South Cooperation" UNCTAD Research Paper No. 30 (UNCTAD/SER.RP/2019/2) https://unctad.org/publication/defining-and-quantifying-south-south-cooperation
[97] Myanmar Earthquake HNRP Flash Addendum 2025 https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1399/summary
[98] Personal communication

been huge, and China has reportedly committed $137 million to the earthquake[99]. If counted against needs estimates, the requirements would be 85% met. While not quite as simple – the coordinated appeal requirements refer to specific activities, and China may be funding different things – it nevertheless indicates that not including China substantially distorts the overall picture of humanitarian flows.

Care also needs to be taken in comparing AidData's Chinese development finance data with DAC development finance, because it seems to be more inclusive than DAC data in terms of transactions it includes. For example, AidData includes a number of transactions that involve the government lending to Chinese firms, who then invest in other countries. These transactions would not be included in DAC statistics (and have been excluded from figures quoted in this report).

Nevertheless, China is clearly the largest provider of development finance outside of the DAC and in evaluating the resources available for developing countries, attempting to incorporate China's flows should be standard practice, even if challenging. This is particularly true at the country level: there are nine countries for which China committed more finance than the entire DAC in 2021, and even three for which it committed more than the DAC, multilaterals and non-DAC countries reporting to the CRS combined[100] (Sri Lanka, Iraq and Equatorial Guinea).

Figure 6.5: Top 10 countries for largest commitments, 2021, USD billion



Source: AidData

[99] Reuters (2025) "China pledges $137 million for Myanmar earthquake relief" https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/china-pledges-137-million-myanmar-earthquake-relief-2025-04-11/

[100] This excludes countries that are not on the list of ODA-eligible countries such as Chile. However, OOF Commitments have been included in these figures.

6.5 India

India is one of the largest providers of development finance outside the DAC, but receives far less attention that China, whose flows are considerably larger. Nevertheless, available data suggests that India's flows are at least of regional importance, with several large loans and grants made to countries such as Bhutan and Sri Lanka.

Aside from multilateral contributions – obtainable from the MDBs themselves – India's development cooperation largely comes from the Ministry of External Affairs, which mainly provides grants and technical assistance, and its EXIM bank, which provides lines of credit that are tied to Indian firms. Data for each is provided through an online data-portal hosted by MEA. This website does allow users to see breakdowns of aid delivered by country, but not at the granular, project level allowed by CRS data.

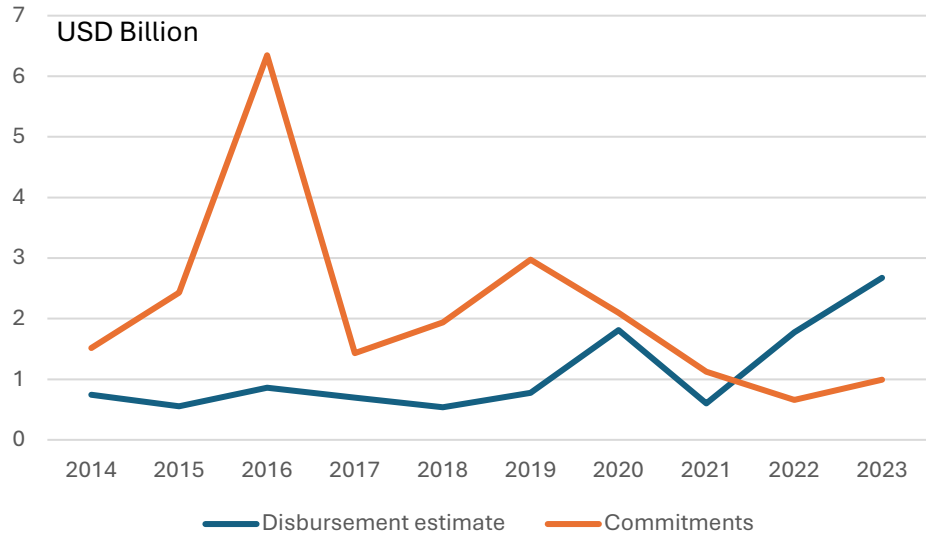
The EXIM bank provides further data on lines of credit that have been committed to each country, as well as the purpose of that transaction. Terms on these transactions are standardised (available from the "GOI Guidelines on LOC" document[101]) and demonstrate that all such loans are comfortably concessional enough to qualify as ODA using the DAC thresholds. However, it does not provide any information on when disbursements. This is particularly important given the nature of line of credit transactions, for which it cannot be expected that the full amount will eventually be utilised. While the commitments are important in showing India's willingness to provide financial support, they do not reveal the extent to which other countries have actually benefited.[102] Past editions of this data *did* provide data on cumulative disbursements for each line of credit, but this is no longer available.

Data is also not consistent between the MEA dashboard, and the data on the EXIM bank website. For example, the dashboard states that a line of credit of $100 million was extended to Madagascar in 2021-22, but according to EXIM, the only line of credit extended to Madagascar was in 2008-09, for $25 million

One way of estimating disbursements against these lines of credit is by using the World Bank International Debt Statistics. India's transactions with individual countries are relatively sparse, and therefore in any particular year there are not a great deal of repayments, meaning that selecting just the years with positive flows between India and partner countries can roughly approximate disbursements. Clearly, this is an underestimate, because even in years where net flows are positive there may be repayments against past transactions reducing the magnitude in some cases. Nevertheless, it provides an indication of likely magnitudes of disbursements.

[101] GOI Guidelines on LOCs - March 31, 2022, https://www.eximbankindia.in/lines-of-credit
[102] Such transactions may also be regarded to be export credits by DAC statistics but in practice, there is no clear boundary between tied aid and export credits in practical terms.

Figure 6.6: India EXIM bank line of credit commitments, and disbursement estimate

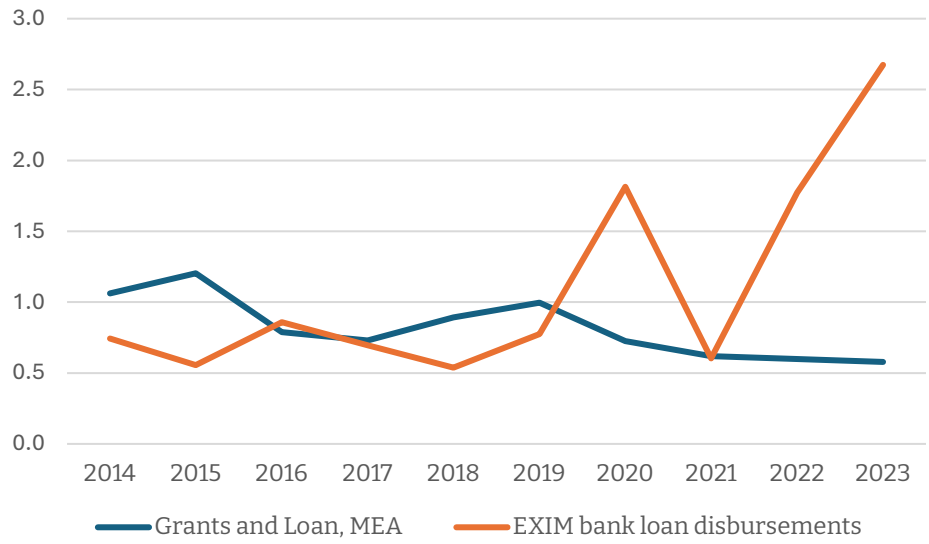


Notes: Disbursements are estimates based on World Bank IDS statistics, and focusing only on country-year combinations with positive net flows. This is necessarily an underestimate in some years, given that these are net flows and so will include some (negative) repayments. Disbursements are infrequent and so this may have less impact than it might otherwise.
Sources: India EXIM bank, and World Bank IDS

The recent increase in disbursements largely comes from lending to Sri Lanka according to the World Bank IDS statistics, and this is corroborated by media reports[103]. It is also likely that the development finance provided by the EXIM bank is the main source of India's finance in most cases: in 2023, grants and loans were reported to be $578 million according to the MEA dashboard[104], compared to potential disbursements of debt flows of around $2.7 billion. Bhutan is by far the largest recipient of grants from India, accounting for 42% of the total in 2023[105].

[103] See for example https://indianexpress.com/article/india/sri-lanka-survived-two-tough-years-of-economic-crisis-possibly-because-of-indias-support-president-wickremesinghe-9408631/
[104] Average INR/USD exchange rate of 0.0121 for 2023 was used for conversion
[105] MEA Annual Report (2024), Government of India https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/CPV/38005_Final-MEA-AR-2023-English.pdf

Figure 6.7: Comparison of sources of India's dev finance provision*



Notes: While described as grants and loans, data from MEA annual reports suggests that the vast majority is in grants (Bhutan is the only country to receive loans, disbursements of $93 million in 2023. Bhutan has been removed from the IDS data to account for this.
Sources: India EXIM bank, and World Bank IDS

India has made significant advances in making its development finance data more accessible, which is to be welcomed. While small compared to total flows, and in particular compared to its neighbour China, flows from India are nevertheless important in certain cases, notably Sri Lanka and Bhutan. India's willingness to create a dashboard for its development cooperation, and the fact that in the past it has published disbursement figures, suggests willingness to be transparent about its figures, even if it is unlikely to ever report through systems associated with the DAC. In publishing the terms that apply to its EXIM bank lines of credit, it is far ahead of DAC donors, who keep this information confidential. There may therefore be value in advocating for some data improvements, such as publication of disbursement figures associated with lines of credit.

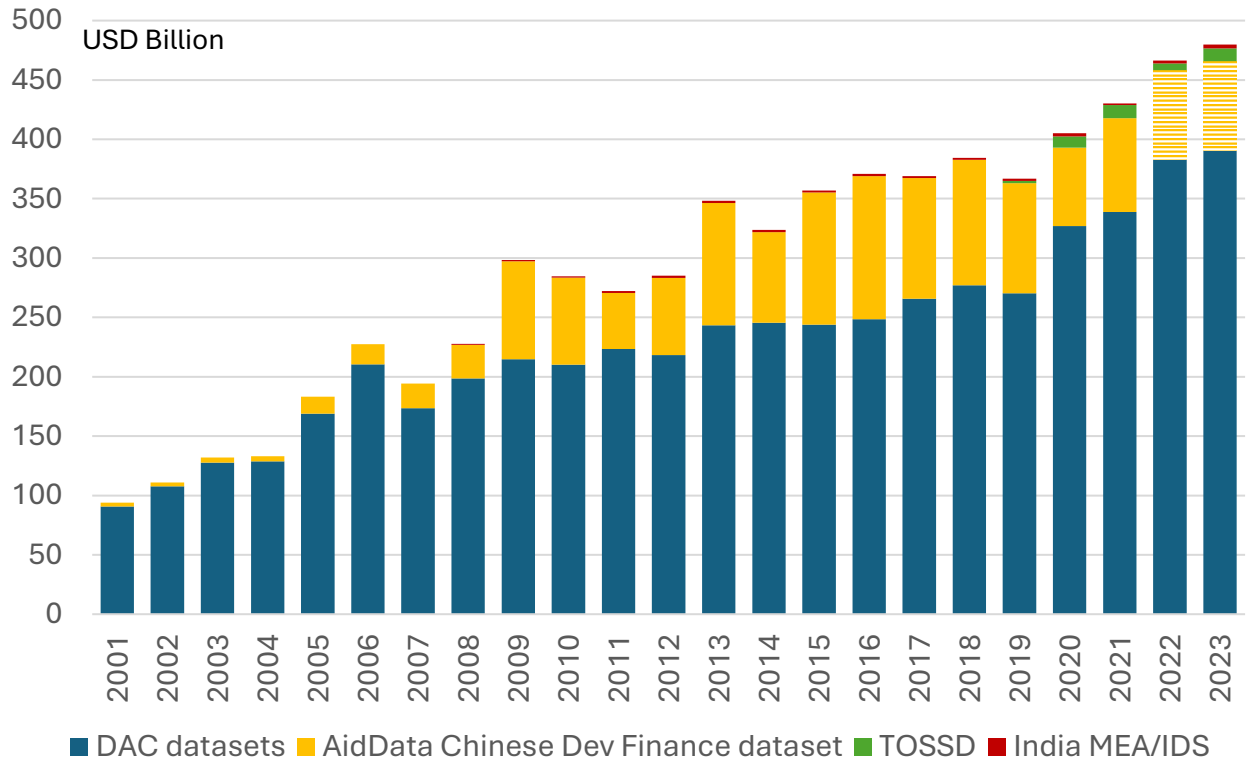
7. Summary and conclusions

This paper has explored the state of data on publicly provided development finance flows, by examining data gaps and quality across both non-DAC and DAC countries, concessional and non-concessional finance. It is not an attempt to provide a complete summary, but highlights potential areas of improvement in data that is commonly used in analysis of development finance flows.

Overall, the main conclusion is that the aggregate picture is unlikely to change much with additional sources of data on non-concessional flows and flows from beyond the DAC, given the magnitudes of DAC and multilateral flows, and estimates of what might be missing. Figure 7.1 demonstrates this point but plotting total development finance from all sources considered

within this report. In the latest year, we estimate that total official development finance was around $480 billion. Of this, 81% was covered by DAC datasets, and a further 16% is an estimate for 2023 based on the most recent data for China from AidData. New development finance reported by TOSSD and sources for India account for only 2.3% and 0.7% respectively.

Figure 7.1 Rough estimate of total public development finance flows, current USD billion



Notes: 2022-2023 data from AidData is not available. We have imputed the latest value (2021) for these years.
Sources: OECD DAC2a, OECD DAC2b, TOSSD, WB IDS, India's Ministry of Economic Affairs, AidData

However, the 'total amount of finance provided globally' is rarely the policy question of interest, rather, it is common to focus on more specific questions such as changes in donor provision over time, the amount that specific countries receive and the extent to which this could add to debt distress, how expenditure with certain purposes has changed such as with climate or gender goals, and other types of bespoke analysis. At this level, there are a number of gaps in our understanding that could lead to erroneous conclusions.

- **Greater attention for OOF, from DAC and advocates:** The biggest gap in our understanding for development finance from DAC countries is other official flows. The nature of these flows is murky, and in certain cases, inclusion of such flows could change the narrative considerably. The DAC is currently working to better understand these flows by surveying members. These efforts should be supported, and advocates and analysts should not limit their focus to ODA, but consider the interaction between these sources. In addition, while reporting on policy markers for OOF is currently voluntary, this should change.

- **Include multilateral donors from TOSSD in the CRS:** There are a number of multilaterals that report to TOSSD but not CRS. While this would not hugely change aggregate flows, it would be useful having these countries included in the CRS.
- **More pressure to report to IATI:** While analysing certain donors up to near-real-time is possible with IATI, it is currently inadequate for assessing the aggregate picture because of gaps from major donors. While this situation has improved in recent years, there should nevertheless be continued pressure for countries to report nearer time.
- **More flexible online query tools for DAC data:** One of the key problems have in accessing detailed ODA data is the technical ability to analyse it in formats currently published, and the difficulty in combining data from the many online tables. Sometimes these concerns are very practical, for example, the effort needed to match 'channel codes' to 'donor codes' to calculate imputed multilateral ODA for different purposes. Furthermore, given that the data-explorer is the go-to for most people accessing data on development finance, it would be useful for these tables to draw on data from other sources as memorandum items (for example, data on China flows, or from World Development Indicators). This may not always be politically straightforward but could be explored.
- **Allow for measurement controversies:** What gets included in official ODA figures is a political decision as much as a technical one. While this author would love to see reversals in recent decisions on PSIs and debt relief, and for different assumptions to be made in the measurement of ODA loans, this is unlikely in the near future. However, in building online query tools, the DAC could do more to allow for presentation of data in different ways, for example, including/not-including certain items, or allowing for different measurement assumptions, Advanced users can do this already, but organisations frequently procure consultants for such analysis. In addition, countries that have opted not to report certain costs (such as Luxembourg and IDRC) should be encouraged to report them to the DAC system even if not included in official figures, to facilitate comparability.
- **Find opportunities to support individual countries in data provision (in particular India):** Apart from China, India is probably (data is murky and so it is not certain) the most important provider of development finance that doesn't report to the DAC. It already produces useful data, but this could usefully be expanded to provide more detail, specifically on actual disbursements.

Finally, analysts and data-users need to be more cognisant of these data concerns when conducting analyses. Most of these problems are well-known, but because of controversies around numbers, or difficulty in using alternatives, they are often ignored. At the aggregate level this may be justifiable, but it is less so for more specific questions.

Improving the quality of development finance data is one of many competing priorities, all of which are underfunded. However, at the margin, some improvements in data quality along the lines outlined above could produce more robust analysis at limited additional cost, so there is a case to be made for making such investments. Given the dramatic recent shifts away from DAC provision of ODA, the importance of focusing on other sources becomes all the more important.