Community Grants: Essential Information

Annual Application Round 2, FY 2024/25

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Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature

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1. This document and further resources

1.1. Purpose of this document

This essential information document is intended for organisations interested in applying for a **Community Grant** from the Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature Grants Programme (OCEAN). It outlines the key eligibility criteria and requirements of the application process, as well as the key dates and how to apply. It also details important information for you to effectively manage your grant should your application for funding be successful.

For information on Partnership Grants, refer to the Partnership Grants: Essential Information.

1.2. Guidance notes

We strongly recommend that you read this document in its entirety before you start your application for OCEAN funding. This document summarises all key information but is not exhaustive. For more detail, make sure you also read the latest versions of the following guidance notes, which will be available via the OCEAN website and Flexi-Grant ahead of each new funding round:

- Complete Guide for Applicants
- Finance Guidance
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Guidance
- Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Guidance
- Flexi-Grant Guidance

1.3. Webinars and workshops

To help you develop an application, the OCEAN Grants Administrator invites you to attend the following events:

- Stage 1 Introduction
- How to Develop your Concept Note
- Frequently Asked Questions and Application Support

Applicants who subscribe to the OCEAN mailing list will receive invitations to attend events and all events will be published on our website ahead of each new funding round – https://oceangrants.org.uk/. You will need to register for these events through the website in order to attend. All applicants that successfully pass to Stage 2 will be invited by email to attend additional webinars to help with the development of their Stage 2 applications.

1.4. OCEAN Helpdesk

If you require any assistance with your application, you can contact the OCEAN Helpdesk via helpdesk@oceangrants.org.uk in your preferred language. We will respond to your query within five working days.

Please be aware that the Helpdesk can only provide clarifications on the information included in the published guidance notes. The Helpdesk is not able to comment on your project ideas, pre-assess your eligibility, or confirm if your draft application and supporting documents meet requirements.

2. OCEAN Community Grants

2.1. About OCEAN

The Ocean Community Empowerment and Nature (OCEAN) Grants Programme (hereinafter referred to as 'OCEAN') is a global competitive grants initiative that aims to support the people most impacted by declining ocean health and climate change through funding local solutions to local problems.

OCEAN Impact: Placing the ocean on a path to recovery, enabling local communities and nature to thrive.

OCEAN is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), through the UK's Blue Planet Fund (BPF) – a £500 million portfolio of programmes supporting developing countries to protect the marine environment and reduce poverty. Applications and grants are administered by NIRAS (referred to as the 'OCEAN Grants Administrator').

2.2. OCEAN funding pathways

There are two distinct OCEAN funding pathways available: Community Grants and Partnership Grants. Grants are awarded via these two pathways to **projects that aim to reduce multi-dimensional poverty in ways which contribute to the protection, restoration, and/or benefit of the marine environment and its biodiversity.**

While projects may have a primary focus, they must demonstrate a clear and integrated approach that addresses the critical links between poverty reduction and the marine environment. It is crucial for all projects to recognise and address the interconnected challenges of socio-economic development and poverty reduction in conjunction with the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of marine ecosystems.

2.3. Community Grants

The Community Grants pathway has been designed to meet the needs of **small- to medium-sized, locally-led, in-country organisations legally registered and working in an eligible coastal-country** (further details in Annex A). All Community Grants applications must:

- support a reduction in multi-dimensional poverty;
- lead to improved protection, restoration, conservation or sustainable management of the marine environment;
- address the needs of and barriers for women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, aiming to reduce gender and social inequalities (i.e., a GEDSI Responsive approach), though projects meeting or striving toward a higher GEDSI ambition (GEDSI Empowering) will be prioritised
- demonstrate how they contribute to climate adaption and/or climate mitigation;
- demonstrate a good understanding of the context in which the project will take place;
- increase the capability and capacity of local communities and/or organisations; and
- contribute to developing new ideas, providing local solutions to local problems, and empowering communities.

3. Round 2 Community Grants

3.1. Application process

The OCEAN Community Grants application process consists of two stages (timings in Section 4):

- **Stage 1: concept note:** applicants are required to submit an initial concept note outlining their project idea and its anticipated impact.
- **Stage 2: detailed application:** applicants are required to submit a detailed application form accompanied by supporting materials and demonstrate their response to the OCEAN Expert Committee's feedback from Stage 1.

3.2. Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for a Community Grant, applications need to meet the mandatory eligibility criteria for the funding pathway. Applications will be assessed on their technical merit, **only if** they meet **all** eligibility criteria and application requirements. **Applications that fail to meet the specified eligibility criteria or application requirements (see details below) will be rejected.**

Grant size	• Up to GBP 250,000.00 • The maximum annual budget value in any given year must not exceed 50% of the lead organisation's annual income
Project duration	• Minimum Duration: 12 months; Maximum Duration: 41 months (all projects must conclude by 31 March 2029). • There is a preference for multi-year projects where possible to support greater impact and better value for money, unless distinct objectives can be achieved within one year.
Project start date	• Between November and December 2025.
Project country	• Based in a country listed in Annex A: Eligible countries.
Lead organisation	• Can be a non-profit organisation, academic or research institute, private sector organisation, business, or business association. • Must be legally registered in the same country where the project is implemented. • Must have an annual income of less than £1 million (calculated as an average of the past two years of the organisation's accounts). • Must be formally established for more than two years and must be able to provide two full years of detailed financial accounts. • Funds cannot be used to generate a profit for the lead organisation.
Partner organisations	• Partnerships are encouraged but are not mandatory, and the lead organisation may partner with one or more partner organisations. • Partner organisations can be a non-profit organisation, academic or research institute, private sector organisation, business, or business association. They can be based in the project country or elsewhere and no income requirements apply. • Government agencies and inter-governmental organisations can be a partner organisation but may not receive funding.

3.3. Selection criteria and assessment process

Applications that meet eligibility criteria and application requirements will be reviewed by three members of the OCEAN Expert Committee, an independent panel of marine and sustainable development experts. The Expert Committee will assess applications using the pre-defined selection criteria across the following themes:

- Technical merit
- Marine conservation impact
- Poverty reduction
- Community empowerment

After each application stage, all applicants will be provided with a letter outlining the outcomes of their application and detailing feedback on their application. Feedback does not constitute reasons why an application has been rejected and is provided to support applicants to strengthen their applications for future funding rounds.

3.4. Gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI)

OCEAN is committed to ensuring that all Community Grant projects will do no harm and will not exacerbate inequality. To support this, the Expert Committee will use the below scale to assess how applicants' proposed projects contribute to and promote GEDSI.

Community Grant projects must, at minimum, have a **GEDSI Responsive** approach, though Community Grants projects that are more ambitious in their GEDSI approach - by meeting or demonstrating a clear plan to meet the standard of **GEDSI Empowering** - will be prioritised**.** Please review the Complete Guide for Applicants for further details, as this will be assessed alongside the scoring criteria.

1. GEDSI unaware	2. GEDSI responsive	3. GEDSI empowering	4. GEDSI transformative

3.5. Value for money (VfM)

OCEAN is committed to ensuring that all Community Grant projects must demonstrate, at minimum, medium value for money (VfM), i.e. maximise the expected impact from each Great British Pound (GBP) spent. To ensure this, the Expert Committee will assess applications on their expected VfM using the scale below. Please review the Complete Guide for Applicants for further details, as this will be assessed alongside the scoring criteria.

1. Low value for money	2. Medium value for money	3. High value for money

3.6. Upper middle-income country (UMIC)

As an Official Development Assistance (ODA)-funded programme, OCEAN is primarily focused on Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Low-Income Countries (LICs) and Lower Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), as defined by the OECD DAC eligibility. Consequently, projects based in an Upper Middle-Income Country (UMIC) must provide a compelling and well-justified case for support to be considered for funding.

To do this, projects based in an UMIC must demonstrate how they will directly benefit the poorest and most marginalised groups in the primary country and share learning with projects

based in LDCs or LMICs. Projects based in a UMIC may strengthen their case if operating in areas of high importance for the marine environment and climate adaptation, are working with local government partners, or where there is a clear need to promote GEDSI.

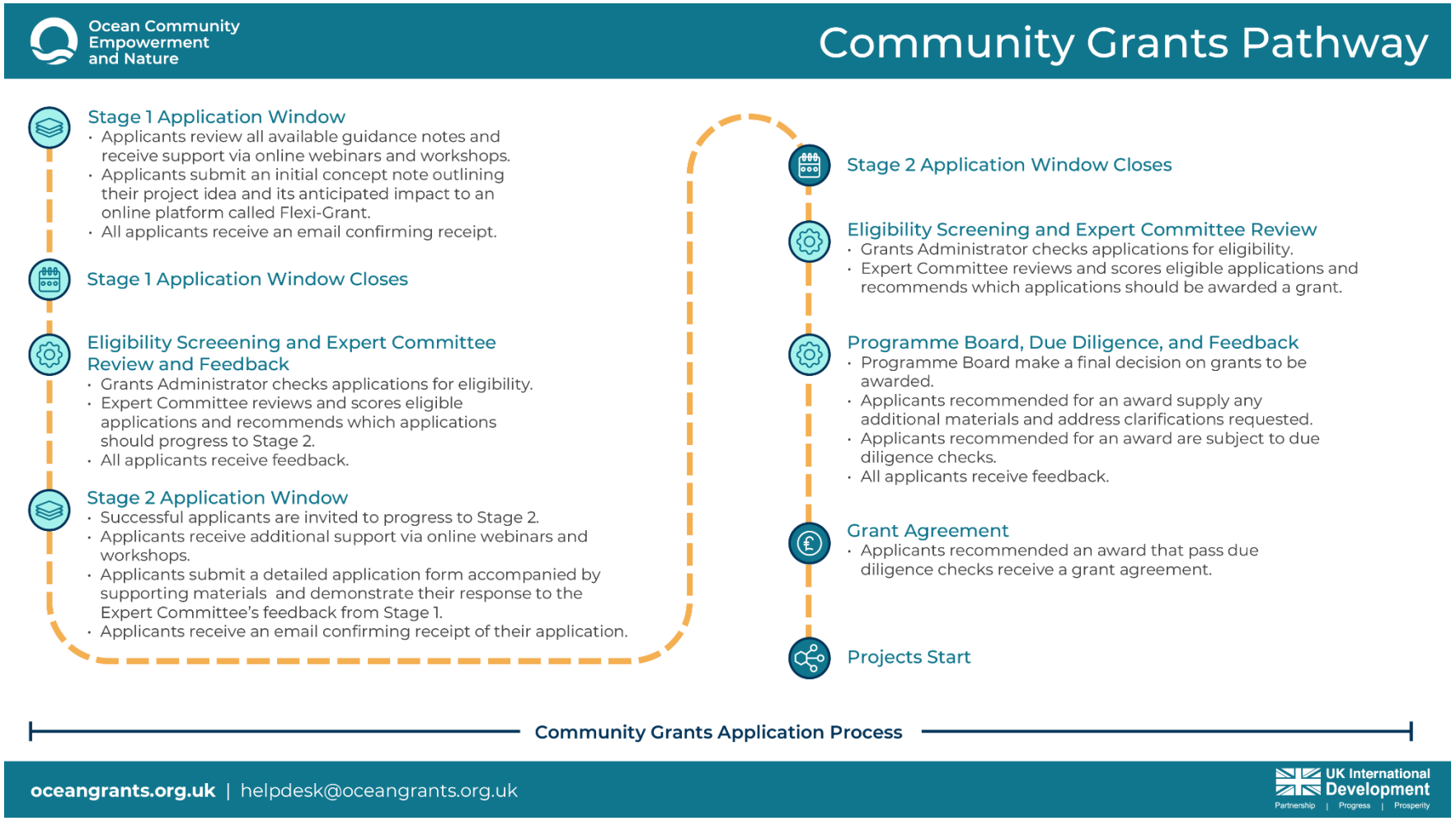
This will be evaluated by the Expert Committee, and applicants must meet it to considered for funding. Please review the Complete Guide for Applicants for further details of the scoring criteria.

3.7. Contribution to climate adaptation and/or mitigation

All applicants should ensure to demonstrate how their proposed projects will contribute to climate adaptation and/or climate mitigation. Projects may contribute to this directly or indirectly and should detail in the application any impact or contribution their projects anticipate having on climate adaptation and/or climate mitigation.

An example of how this could be achieved is by enhancing climate adaptation through the restoration of coastal habitats like mangroves and seagrasses, which serve as natural buffers against storms and rising sea levels. These restored habitats additionally contribute to climate mitigation by increasing carbon sequestration within marine ecosystems, helping to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere

3.8. Overview of Community Grants pathway process



4. How to apply

4.1. Timetable for Annual Application Round 2

The call for **Stage 1 applications** will open on 06 January 2025 and close on 17 February 2025. Results are expected to be circulated to all applicants in May 2025.

The call for **Stage 2 applications** is by invitation of successful Stage 1 applications only and will open on 19 May 2025 and close on 30 June 2025. Results are expected to be circulated to all applicants in October 2025.

4.2. Flexi-Grant

All applications must be submitted through Flexi-Grant, using the provided templates where indicated. All mandatory questions in the application form must be answered, and all required attachments must be uploaded to meet application requirements.

Templates and guidance materials are available for download from Flexi-Grant. **We recommend that you review the Flexi-Grant Guidance to learn how to use and navigate the platform, before you start your application.**

4.3. Language

Application forms and supporting documents are accepted in the following languages, with different forms available on Flexi-Grant for each language:

- Bahasa Indonesian
- English
- French
- Portuguese
- Spanish

4.4. Application requirements and supporting materials

Applications will be assessed on their technical merit, **only if** they meet eligibility criteria and application requirements. Application requirements and requested supporting materials to be submitted with an application on Flexi-Grant are detailed in the table on the following page. Please note the distinctions made between Stage 1 and Stage 2.

If your application is recommended for funding, you will be asked to provide additional documentation (listed in Section 5.2) that will be subject to due diligence checks to ensure they are satisfactory prior to award of the grant agreement.

Requirements	Stage 1	Stage 2
Completed application form	All mandatory questions answered on Flexi-Grant Stage 1 Application Form.	All mandatory questions answered on Flexi-Grant Stage 2 Application Form.
Project workplan	Not required.	Required on workplan template.
Project budget	Not required.	Required on budget template.
Project logframe	Not required.	Required on logframe template.
Project Theory of Change (ToC)	Required on ToC template.	Required on ToC template.
Project risk framework	Not required.	Required in application form (table to be filled in).
E-signature of lead applicant	Required scan of a real (not typed) signature. Do not upload a QR code.	Required scan of a real (not typed) signature. Do not upload a QR code.
Evidence of legal status of lead organisation	Required upload of registration certificate. For applications under below £100,000, this can be replaced by a letter of support from Host Governments/ British Embassy or High Commission.	Required upload of registration certificate.
Lead organisation's financial annual report and accounts	Required upload of financial accounts covering the last two financial years. For projects over £100,000 these must be either audited or independently examined accounts.	Required upload of financial accounts covering the last two financial years. For applications over £100,000 these must be either audited or independently examined accounts.
Lead organisation's project references	Not required.	Required upload of one reference letter for a project / grant / partnership held in the last five years by the lead organisation. If you do not have this, use a reference for the project leader and/or a letter of support from the Host Government (no template, must be on the letterhead of the funder/partner. Do not upload a copy of the contract).
Letter of support from partner organisation	Not required.	Required upload of a letter from each partner organisation (no template, letter to be on partner organisation letterheaded paper).
Lead organisation's safeguarding policy	Not required.	Required upload of relevant policy.

Requirements	Stage 1	Stage 2
Lead organisation's whistleblowing policy	Not required.	Required upload of relevant policy.
Lead organisation's GEDSI policy	Not required.	Required upload of relevant policy.
Evidence of engagement with British embassy / high commission	Not required.	Required upload of relevant evidence.

5. Grant award and management

5.1. OCEAN Programme Board

After applications are recommended by the Expert Committee, the OCEAN Programme Board, comprising Defra and other representatives from His Majesties Government (HMG) who are responsible for the strategy of OCEAN, will make a final decision on which grants will be awarded. **Any grants awarded will be conditional upon applicants meeting pre-award requirements, passing due diligence checks (further details below), and may include additional caveats to funding if issues are identified during this process**.

5.2. Pre-award requirements

If you are successfully recommended for funding, you will be requested to provide the following documentation to meet necessary due diligence requirements:

Requirements	Project budget Under £100,000	Project budget between £100,000 - £250,000
Lead organisation's counter fraud, bribery and corruption policy	Relevant policy document(s) required.	Relevant policy document(s) required.
Lead organisation's equal opportunities / diversity policy	Relevant policy document(s) required.	Relevant policy document(s) required.
Lead organisation's code of conduct	Relevant policy document(s) required.	Relevant policy document(s) required.
Lead organisation's ethics policy	Not required.	Relevant policy document(s) required.
Lead organisation's financial processes (including foreign exchange policy, investment policy and reserves policy)	Not required.	Required upload of relevant document(s).

5.3. Due diligence

The Grants Administrator will carry out due diligence checks on all applications recommended for funding. These checks might relate to the legal, financial, and operating status of the lead organisation and will include a review of pre-award requirements as well. Successful applicants will be issued with a grant award letter and accompanying terms and conditions only if all checks are passed. **Applications that do not pass due diligence checks will be rejected.**

5.4. Terms and conditions for grant award

The terms and conditions (T&Cs) detail, among others, the grant purpose, value, period, and reporting and financial arrangements. **Grantees must always adhere to these T&Cs, while Defra retains the right to amend these at any time.** The T&Cs include key guidelines grantees must adhere to throughout project implementation such as, but not limited to, visibility statement, inventory requirements, requirements around the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and data protection provisions. **Failure to comply with the T&Cs may result in Defra immediately suspending the grant funding, terminating the grant funding agreement and taking action to recover some or all the funds paid to the grantee.**

5.5. Project start

Projects are expected to start between November and December 2025. The encouraged start month is November 2025. Upon project start, the Grants Administrator will organise a series of **mandatory onboarding sessions** with grantees to cover reporting requirements, the processing of financial claims, management of project risk registers, monitoring, evaluation and learning plans, and GEDSI action plans.

5.6. OCEAN Grantee Community

Once your project has begun, you will be invited to join the OCEAN Grantee Community – our online learning and networking site dedicated to supporting grantees to connect, share learning, request peer support and exchange resources and ideas. As part of the OCEAN Grantee Community, you will be invited to attend regular learning events with the Grants Administrator to support peer-to-peer learning and implementation of your grants.

5.7. Reporting requirements

Grantees must provide robust reporting against intended project objectives. **To continue receiving funding from OCEAN, reports must be in the required template, completed and submitted within the deadlines. Funding can be stopped if these requirements are not met.** The reporting schedule is as follows:

- **Half year report**: must be submitted by 31 October of each year in the funding period.
- **End of year report**: must be submitted by 30 April in each year of the funding period.
- **Final report**: must be submitted within three months from project end date for multi-year grants or one month from project end date for single year grants.

5.8. Learning events

To help ensure that grantees meet all mandatory requirements as part of their Grant Agreement and to help support the successful implementation of your OCEAN Grant, all grantees will be invited to attend a series of learning events. These events will be run by the Grants Administrator, with an aim of developing capacity and facilitating peer-to-peer learning and networking.

5.9. Disbursements and claims

Awards are payable **in quarterly instalments and can be claimed via the claims process.** Grantees must forecast their quarterly instalments for the upcoming financial year (FY) (from 01 April to 31 March) upon grant award and at the start of each FY. On a quarterly basis, grantees must also confirm whether their forecast remains accurate, and, if not, provide an updated forecast for the remainder of the FY.

The first three quarters will be paid in advance in line with forecasted amounts. The fourth quarter will be paid in arrears and be based on the total actual expenditure for the year less the advance claims paid. Review the Finance Guidance for detailed and further information.

5.10. Change requests

Grantees can accommodate emerging significant technical (e.g. change in key personnel, changes to logframe) and/or financial (>10% change to any budget line) project needs by submitting a change request form on the provided template. Grantees must discuss this with the

Grants Administrator before submitting any request to ensure that proposed changes are acceptable. Changes can only be made to current and future years; unless the case is exceptional and clearly justified. Please review the Finance Guidance for detailed and further information.

5.11. Spot audits

Every year, a proportion of projects will be identified for a spot audit to ensure the grant has been spent in accordance with the agreement with Defra. Grantees must be able to provide electronic information about all the transactions accounted for, and to produce copies of original receipts and invoices backing up claims if requested. The spot audits may include a review of internal financial controls and procedures, a record of which should be kept to support this.

5.12. Project visits

Every year, selected projects will undergo an in-person monitoring visit (up to five days) to facilitate feedback and support. The details and scope of any visits will be agreed beforehand between the grantee and Grants Administrator to ensure there is minimal impact on the project team's ability to carry out its planned activities.

5.13. OCEAN visibility and communications

Successful grantees will be supported by the Grant Administrator to share news about their projects as widely as possible. Grantees are required to sign a visibility statement and acknowledge funding from the UK Government in written materials and verbal statements and through use of the UK International Development (UK Dev) logo on project assets as part of their Grant Agreement. You will be provided with a copy of the UK Dev branding guidance[1] for further information on how to acknowledge ODA funding from the UK government when your project starts.

5.14. Project close

All grantees will need to submit their final report within three months of their project's end date or one month from project end date for single year grants. A final actual claim should be prepared detailing the actual expenditure in the final year and submitted with the final report.

Where applicable, grantees will need to submit a project end statement (audit, independent examiner and self-declaration) at the end of their project. For all projects over £100,000, a copy of the annual audited accounts for the project organisation covering the funding period also needs to be submitted with audit of the grant at the end of the project. Further details can be found in the Finance Guidance.

The final actual claim will only be paid once your final report has been received and is dependent on the final review and audit being acceptable. It usually takes three months for the final payment to be made. Late or sub-standard reporting may result in any outstanding claims not being paid.

[1] Branding guidance for ODA-funded programmes can be found at the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/official-development-assistance-oda-funded-programmes-branding-guidance/branding-guidance-for-oda-funded-programmes--2

6. Annex A: Eligible countries

Below is the list of countries eligible for an OCEAN grant. Please ensure your country is on the list below before submitting an application for funding. This table is adapted from the OECD-DAC list[2], with modifications to focus on eligible coastal countries only.

For countries marked with *: any funding allocated to these countries is likely to be limited, as these countries are expected to graduate from the OECD DAC list on 01 January 2026, after which they will no longer be eligible for ODA funding.

Least developed countries	Lower middle-income countries	Upper middle-income countries
Angola	Algeria	Albania
Bangladesh	Cabo Verde	Argentina
Benin	Cameroon	Azerbaijan
Cambodia	Congo	Belize
Comoros	Côte d'Ivoire	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	Egypt	Brazil
	Ghana	China (People's Republic of)
Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)	Honduras	Colombia
	India	Costa Rica
Djibouti	Iran	Cuba
Eritrea	Jordan	Dominica
Gambia	Kenya	Dominican Republic
Guinea	Lebanon	Ecuador
Guinea-Bissau	Micronesia	El Salvador
Haiti	Morocco	Equatorial Guinea
Kiribati	Nicaragua	Fiji
Liberia	Nigeria	Gabon
Madagascar	Pakistan	Georgia
Mauritania	Papua New Guinea	Grenada
Mozambique	Philippines	Guatemala
Myanmar	Samoa	Guyana*
São Tomé and Príncipe	Sri Lanka	Indonesia
Senegal	Tokelau	Iraq
Sierra Leone	Tunisia	Jamaica
Solomon Islands	Ukraine	Kazakhstan
Somalia	Vanuatu	Libya
Sudan	Viet Nam	Malaysia
Syrian Arab Republic		Maldives
Tanzania		Marshall Islands
Timor-Leste		Mauritius
Togo		Mexico

[2] https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/oda-eligibility-and-conditions/dac-list-of-oda-recipients.html#asterisk

Least developed countries	Lower middle-income countries	Upper middle-income countries
Tuvalu Yemen		Moldova Montenegro Montserrat* Namibia Niue Palau Panama* Peru Pitcairn Islands Saint Helena Saint Lucia Saint Vincent and the Grenadines South Africa Suriname Thailand Tonga Tristan da Cunha Türkiye Turkmenistan Venezuela Wallis and Futuna West Bank and Gaza Strip