

Zambia

CHILD PROTECTION 2025 BUDGET BRIEF

This Child Protection Budget Brief examines the national budget's approach to addressing children's protection needs, analysing budget allocations for child protection programmes, and evaluating past spending efficiency, equity, financing, and adequacy.



KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Messages

1 **Funding for Juvenile Welfare and Probationary Services rises sharply from K 2.6 million in 2024 to K 25.1 million in 2025.** The increased budget allocation marks efforts to improve legal representation and support for children in conflict with the law, as well as rehabilitation services.

2 **The core child protection budget for 2025 remains underfunded at less than 1% of the total child protection allocation.** Despite progress in child protection programming in recent years, the core child protection spending is inadequate to address children's justice and other services aimed at protecting vulnerable children.

3 **Birth registration remains underfunded.** There is no dedicated funding for birth registration or integration of the Integrated National Registration Information System (INRIS) with health services. Key spending areas lack financing for equipment, materials, and sensitisation.

Recommendations

1



Sustain gains in child development and justice by ringfencing future child protection budget allocations. This includes strengthening child protection budget reporting through dedicated child protection budget lines, and ensuring timely monitoring of budget execution of core child protection programmes.

2



The government should significantly increase the core child protection budget to reflect the urgent need to address child development and child justice. This funding should prioritise recruiting and training more child protection officers at the district level, scaling up community sensitisation campaigns, and expanding case management services.

INTRODUCTION

Child protection remains a fundamental pillar of Zambia's social welfare agenda, underpinning national efforts to shield children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. With the support of cooperating partners, the Government persistently advances reforms in accordance with the Eighth National Development Plan (8NDP) and the Children's Code Act, No. 12 of 2022, with the objective of enhancing legal, policy, and institutional frameworks for child welfare and justice. These reforms represent a crucial advancement toward establishing a more protective environment for all children.

Nevertheless, ongoing risks persist in jeopardising the wellbeing and safety of children. Numerous children remain vulnerable to exposure to violence, child labour, early marriage, and adolescent pregnancy, issues aggravated by poverty, detrimental social norms, and insufficient access to vital child

welfare services. Furthermore, weak institutional coordination and chronic underfunding significantly limit the capacity of child protection systems to prevent and respond effectively to instances of abuse or neglect.

The 2025 National Budget reaffirms the Government's commitment to child protection, while underscoring persistent financing gaps. Allocations made to the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS) and associated institutions demonstrate an ongoing prioritisation of child welfare. However, the current funding levels continue to be inadequate relative to the scope of the need. It is imperative to strengthen cross-sectoral financing, enhance institutional coordination, and improve resource utilisation efficiency to effectively translate these policy commitments into tangible enhancements in child wellbeing and protection outcomes.

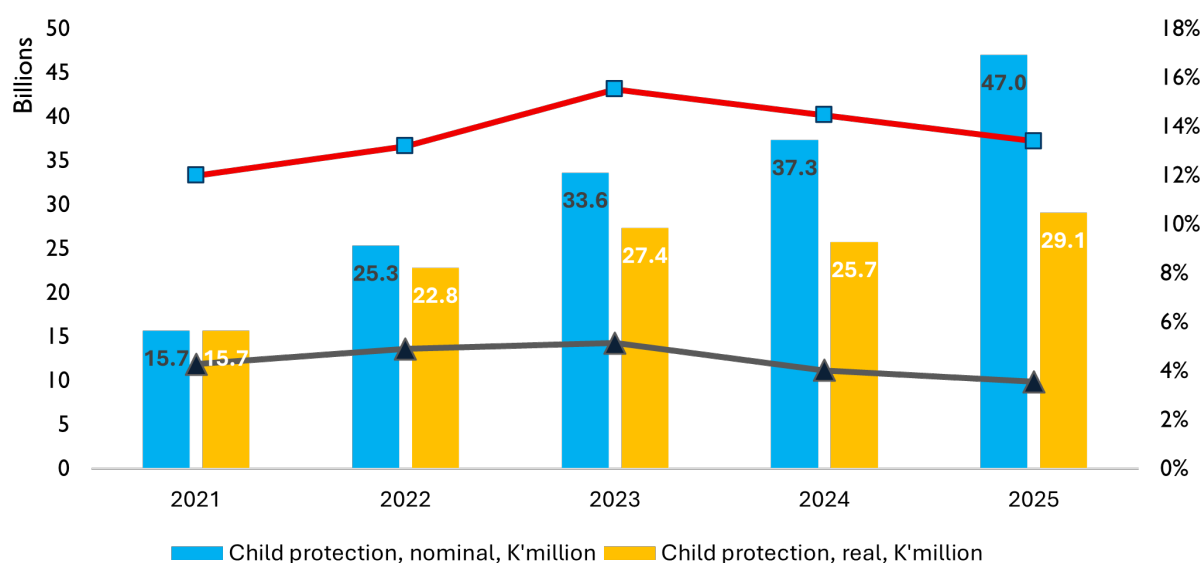
SIZE AND TRENDS OF CHILD PROTECTION SPENDING IN 2025

In 2025, the child protection sector received K47.0 billion, accounting for 13% of the national budget and 4% of GDP.

The allocation supports a wide range of services aimed at safeguarding children's rights and wellbeing, including social welfare programmes, child justice services, and family support initiatives. However, child protection lacks clearly identifiable activities in the output-based budgeting, making it necessary to include broader programmes that safeguard children's rights and wellbeing. These include interventions in sectors such as early childhood education, primary and secondary education, and primary health services.

Child protection expenditure in Zambia has experienced a significant increase in recent years. From 2021 to 2025, the child protection budget rose nominally from K15.7 billion to K47.0 billion. Nevertheless, its proportion of the national budget marginally grew from 12% in 2021 to 13% in 2025, reaching a peak of 16% in 2023. Conversely, the budget's proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has fluctuated between 4% and 5%, indicating that investment in child protection has not kept pace with the overall growth of the economy and fiscal capacity. This indicates that, although absolute funding has increased, child protection has not been accorded proportionally greater priority within the government's expenditure strategies (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 : Size and trends of child protection budget, 2021-2025.



Source: Compiled from Ministry of Finance Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, 2022–2025.

CORE CHILD PROTECTION

Core child protection focuses on addressing specific protection needs related to violence, abuse, exploitation, harmful practices, and neglect. This includes programmes such as child development, child welfare, adoption services, keeping girls in school (KGS) and juvenile welfare and probation services. These initiatives are crucial for providing direct support and intervention to children in vulnerable situations, ensuring their safety and well-being.

The core child protection budget in 2025 accounts for less than 1 percent of the total child protection allocation.

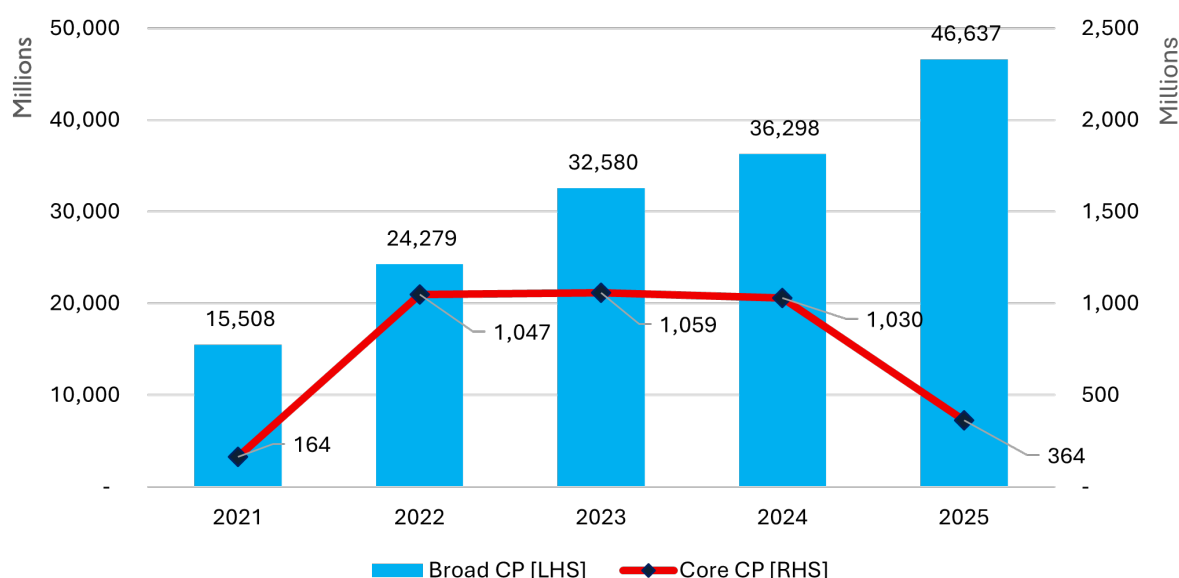
Between 2024 and 2025, core allocations have decreased from K1.1 billion to K356.5 million, reflecting a significant decline of about 65.3%. The decline is mainly attributed to the discontinued reporting of the secondary school bursary budget line of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF).

BROAD CHILD PROTECTION

Broad child protection encompasses general activities aimed at fulfilling broader social welfare needs of vulnerable children. This includes access to child development, health, and education related subprogrammes like early childhood education, primary and secondary education. Broad child protection programmes are essential for creating a supportive environment that promotes the overall development and welfare of children.

The broad child protection allocation has risen significantly, from K15.5 billion in 2021 to K46.6 billion in 2025. As shown in Figure 2 below, the broad child protection budget primarily increased due to major transfers to education to support the free education policy and increased Social Cash Transfer (SCT) to support vulnerable families affected by the 2023/2024 drought under the Emergency Cash Transfer (ECT) programme.

Figure 2 : Budget allocation to Broad and Core Child Protection in Zambia, 2021–2025.



Source: Compiled from Ministry of Finance Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, 2022–2025.

CORE CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAMMES BY THEMES

The 2025 budget highlights five core child protection programmes. These include Juvenile Welfare and Probational Services, Public Welfare Assistance Scheme (PWAS), Keeping

Girls in School (KGS), Child Development, Child Welfare and Adoption Services, and Civil Registration. Figure 3 below provides a breakdown of core child protection spending.

JUVENILE WELFARE AND PROBATIONAL SERVICES

Juvenile welfare and probational services take up a significant chunk of the core child protection allocation with K25.1 million in 2025, an 858% increase from 2024. This is the most significant budget growth that has been seen in juvenile welfare and probation services. The allocation increased from K2.6 million in 2024 to K25.1 million in 2025. Despite a sharp increase in the number of juveniles in conflict with the

law, targets for legal representation and support remained unchanged at 2,000 for both 2024 and 2025. Notably, this target was already exceeded in 2024, with 3,025 juveniles reached. Furthermore, targets for court representation and diversion services remained stagnant at 700 juveniles for both years, despite a significant shortfall in 2024 as only 265 juveniles received such support.

PUBLIC WELFARE ASSISTANCE SCHEME (PWAS)

Public welfare assistance scheme funding has experienced approximately 106% growth from K3.5 million in 2022 to K7.2 million in 2025. In the core child protection share, the public welfare assistance scheme aims at supporting vulnerable

children and their families, ensuring access to necessities, in-kind support, and emergency repatriation for stranded individuals.

CHILD WELFARE AND ADOPTION SERVICES

Funding for child welfare and adoption services has increased by 172% from K1.3 million in 2024 to K3.4 million in 2025. Despite an increasing number of children being reintegrated into families from 2022 to 2024 and an increased target in 2025, funding for child welfare and adoption services saw a

decline from 2022 to 2024 before bouncing back in 2025. The increase in 2025 is due to the increase in efforts to reintegrate children into family-based care, with 400 children being targeted, from 210 children in 2024.

CIVIL REGISTRATION

The budget for civil registration rose from K3 million in 2022 to K5.6 million in 2025, reflecting an 86% increase. It is anticipated that approximately 120,000 vital events will be recorded, including child births. However, birth registration is

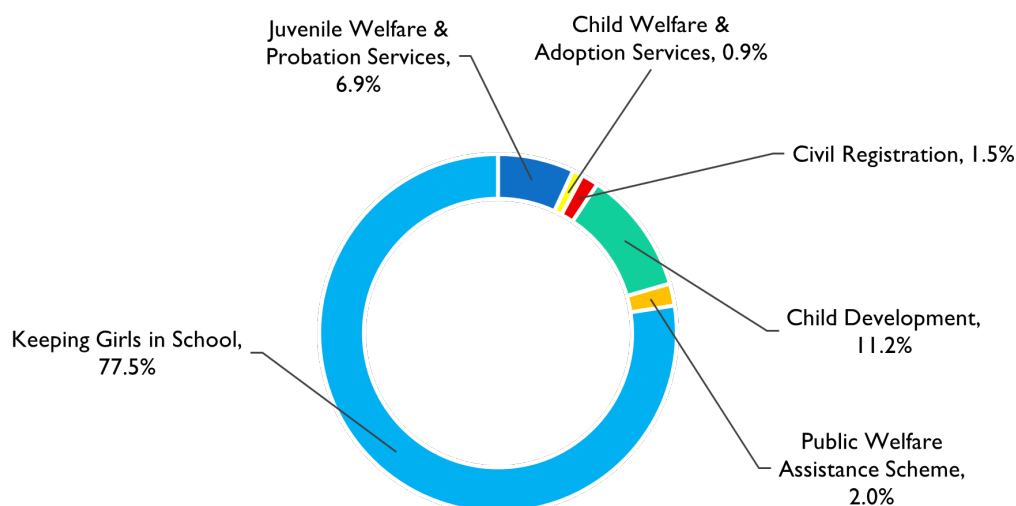
not clearly outlined in the output-based budget. This lack of explicit reference limits transparency and makes it challenging to determine whether the increased funding is effectively supporting the expansion of birth registration services

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Funding for child development programmes peaked at K44.2 million in 2023 but has declined to K40.6 million in 2025. The budget for child development aims to enhance the coordination of activities related to child survival, development, and participation, as well as manage transfers to various children's

homes. The recent reductions in allocations are attributed to tightening of spending on general operations like the use of goods and services. Despite this decrease, efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate street children and vulnerable youth continue.

Figure 3 : The size of core child protection interventions, 2025.



Source: Compiled from Ministry of Finance Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, 2025.

KEY TAKEAWAY



The core child protection budget for 2025 is less than 1% of the total child protection allocation, which is inadequate given the high rates of child marriage, violence, and low birth registration. The Government must increase the number of core child protection allocations in the national budget to safeguard spending for children going forward.

BROAD CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAMMES BY THEMES

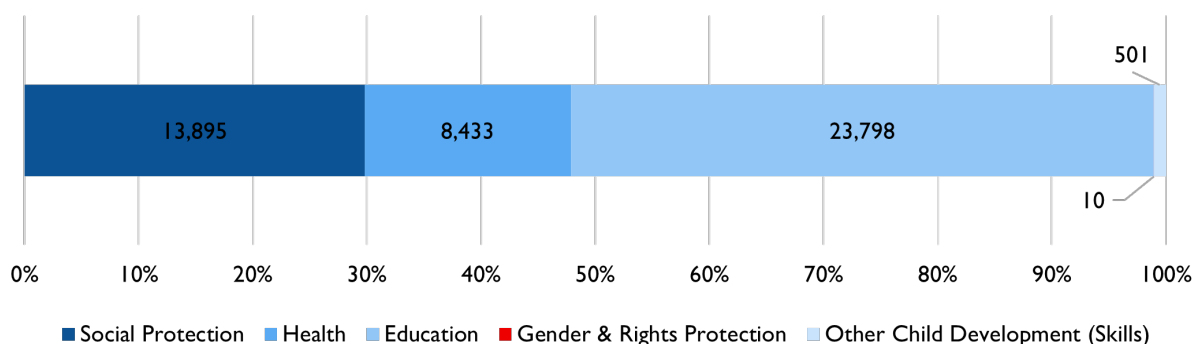
Broad child protection spending in Zambia has risen by roughly 86 percent in real terms between 2021 (K15.5 billion) and 2025 (K46.6 billion). This has mainly been driven by expansions in broad social spending in sectors such as health, education, and social protection; representing, 99% of the broad child protection allocation. The remaining programmes constitute 1% of the broad child protection budget. Figure 4 gives a breakdown of broad child protection spending by sector.

Primary and secondary education allocations make up 49.5% (K23.1 billion) of the broad child protection budget and 96.9% of the education budget, respectively. Education plays a key role in child protection by addressing vulnerabilities like poverty and exclusion. Initiatives such as the School Feeding Programme and Special Education funding not only support learning but also protect children by reducing child labour, improving attendance, and fostering inclusivity for children with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Primary health care services amount to K8.4 billion, representing 18% of the broad child protection budget. This is a 12% increase from K7.5 billion allocated to the programme in 2024. The allocation is expected to enhance access to essential health services for children and mothers through expanded preventive, promotive, and curative care. Funding for drugs, emergency services, and new health infrastructure such as mini-hospitals and maternity annexes will improve maternal and child health outcomes; supporting the Government's goal of maintaining 82% of deliveries by skilled personnel, and will also reduce preventable child deaths and advancing progress toward Universal Health Coverage.

Furthermore, social protection had the second largest allocation of broad child protection spending, amounting to K13.9 billion. Of this amount, the Social Cash Transfer (SCT) programme spending doubled from K4.1 billion in 2024 to K8.3 billion in 2025. As alluded to earlier, this follows the expansion of the programme to capture additional vulnerable households affected by the drought.

Figure 4 : Shares of Broad Child Protection Programmes by Sector in the 2025 Budget.



Source: Compiled from Ministry of Finance Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, 2025.

KEY TAKEAWAY



Zambia has scaled up its commitment to children by doubling real-term child protection spending since 2021. This has expanded child safety, increased learning opportunities, and improved health access for every child.

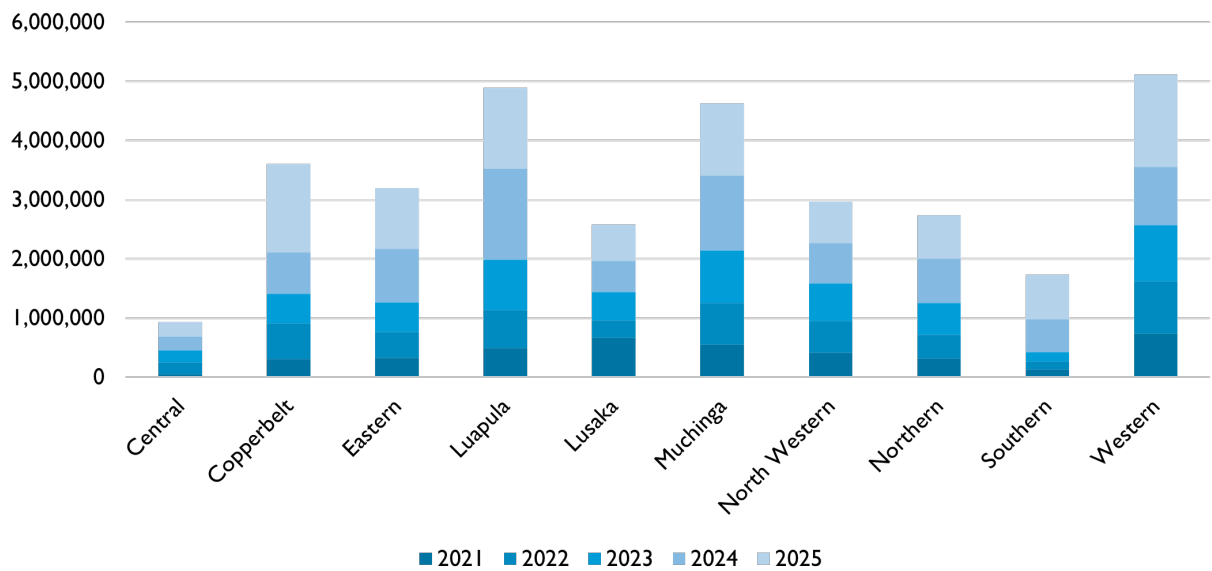
CHILD PROTECTION BUDGET BY PROVINCES

The child development budget has expanded in 2025, strengthening Zambia’s commitment to child protection and welfare across provinces. Total allocations rose by 19%, from K8.1 million in 2024 to K9.7 million in 2025, to scale up advocacy, sensitisation, and support programmes for vulnerable children, particularly street children. The funding will facilitate parental and caregiver training, reintegration of children into society through childcare inspections, strengthening of child protection committees, skills development for orphans, and enhanced child rights advocacy.

Provincial allocations reveal varying trends and priorities across regions. Western Province continues to receive the highest share, reaching K1.5 million in 2025 and supporting over 100 children annually with skills training. Central Province,

despite receiving the lowest funding over the period, with allocations rarely exceeding K240,000, has maintained relatively strong intervention coverage compared to Copperbelt. Copperbelt, however, shows notable progress, with allocations more than doubling from about K700,000 in 2024 to K1.4 million in 2025, accompanied by expanded family tracing and support initiatives. Southern Province recorded the most substantial growth, with allocations increasing by approximately 467.6% between 2021 and 2025, enabling the number of children removed from the streets to double between 2023 and 2024. These variations reflect differentiated provincial needs and capacities, underscoring the importance of equitable, needs-based resource distribution. Figure 5 illustrates the provincial allocations for child development from 2021 to 2025.

Figure 5: Child Development budget by province, 2021–2025, (Kwacha, millions).



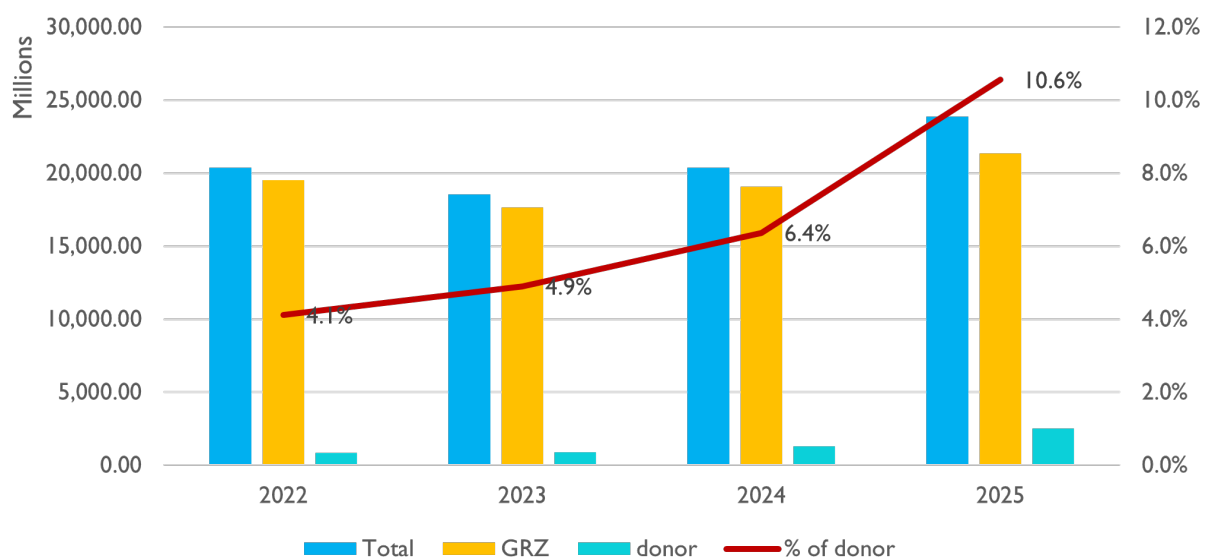
Source: Compiled from Ministry of Finance Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, 2022–2025.

FINANCING CHILD PROTECTION IN 2025

External funding for child protection services is limited to the broad child protection budget. External funding for child protection, consisting of grants and loans, has consistently increased year-on-year, more than tripling from 2022 to 2025 (from K837 million to K2.5 billion). See Figure 6. All donor funding is directed to health and education, particularly primary health services and early childhood education.

Meanwhile, core child protection spending is wholly financed through domestic funding. Despite the financial burden for core child protection entirely being placed on the government, it provides sustainability through predictable funding. Unlike donor funds, which are unpredictable in nature as they rely on cooperating partners’ honouring of pledges. Thus, to avoid limiting the scale and sustainability of child protection services, it is important to ringfence child protection allocations

Figure 5: CChild Protection Funding by Financing Sources from 2021- 2025.



Source: Compiled from Ministry of Finance Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, 2022–2025.



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