



House of Commons  
Women and Equalities  
Committee

---

**Implementation of  
Sustainable Development  
Goal 5 in the UK:  
Government and Office  
for National Statistics  
Responses to the  
Committee's Eighth  
Report of Session 2016–17**

---

**Second Special Report of Session 2017–19**

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 18 October 2017*

## Women and Equalities Committee

The Women and Equalities Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office (GEO).

### Current membership

[Mrs Maria Miller MP](#) (*Conservative, Basingstoke*) (Chair)

[Angela Crawley MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Lanark and Hamilton East*)

[Philip Davies MP](#) (*Conservative, Shipley*)

[Rosie Duffield MP](#) (*Labour, Canterbury*)

[Kirstene Hair MP](#) (*Conservative, Angus*)

[Eddie Hughes MP](#) (*Conservative, Walsall North*)

[Jared O'Mara MP](#) (*Labour, Sheffield, Hallam*)

[Jess Phillips MP](#) (*Labour, Birmingham, Yardley*)

[Mr Gavin Shuker MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Luton South*)

[Tulip Siddiq MP](#) (*Labour, Hampstead and Kilburn*)

### Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities](http://www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Judith Boyce (Clerk), Luanne Middleton (Second Clerk), Holly Dustin, Tansy Hutchinson, and Shai Jacobs (Committee Specialists), Alexandra Hunter-Wainwright (Senior Committee Assistant), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Assistant), and Liz Parratt (Media Officer).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Women and Equalities Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6645; the Committee's email address is [womeqcom@parliament.uk](mailto:womeqcom@parliament.uk).

# First Special Report

---

The Women and Equalities Committee published its Eighth Report of Session 2016–17, *Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK*, as HC 885 on 14 March 2017. The Government and Office for National Statistics responses were received on the 29 and 15 September and are appended to this report.

## Appendix 1: Government Response

---

### Introduction

This is the Government response to the Women and Equalities Committee report of the 2016–17 session on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 in the UK, which was published by the Committee on 14 March 2017.

The Committee has made 14 recommendations, all of which were for the Government. The Government is grateful for their work on this important agenda and our response to each of their recommendations is set out below.

The Government played a leading role in developing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As a world leader in international development, we were well placed to work with the global community in developing goals to tackle the challenges that continue to face the world. This included a stand-alone goal on gender equality and targets on female genital mutilation, and—against strong resistance—sexual and reproductive rights.

The Government remains fully committed to the implementation of the goals – both as part of our continuing commitment to being a key player in strategic international development and through our own domestic policy agenda. We believe the most effective way to do this is by integrating each department's SDG responsibilities into their Single Departmental Plans. These inform and direct the priorities of departments throughout the year and we therefore believe this approach is the best way of ensuring implementation of SDG 5 and the other SDGs.

We are still at an early stage of SDG implementation and will continue to monitor this; however, we are confident of our approach and commitment to the SDGs and Agenda 2030. This was emphasised by the Prime Minister's speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2016, where she pledged to 'drive forward the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals'. The Government stands by this pledge at home and overseas, and in relation to SDG 5 and all of the SDGs.

**Recommendation 1: Leadership on the SDGs should come from the top of Government. The Government should domestically publicise its commitment to the achievement of the SDGs in the UK. It should immediately commit to reporting to the UN's High Level Political Forum in 2018. (Paragraph 52)**

The Government has made clear its commitment to the SDGs on a number of occasions and continues to do so. The Prime Minister emphasised this commitment in her speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2016 and in her response on 17 February 2017 to UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development, and over 80 UK businesses.

Every Government Department has a Single Departmental Plan (SDP) that sets out their priorities. The next refresh of these plans will set out what the Government intends to accomplish during this Parliament, as part of our wider programme.

The UK is committed to undertaking a voluntary national review at the UN High Level Political Forum and values the opportunity to learn others' approaches. We are currently considering when to put ourselves forward for a voluntary national review.

**Recommendation 2: We support the International Development Committee's recommendation that responsibility for the SDGs should sit within the Cabinet Office and not the Department for International Development. The Government should take greater leadership by bringing together the elements of Single Departmental Plans that support the SDGs in a co-ordinated National Implementation Plan, to be led by the Cabinet Office. (Paragraph 53)**

DFID retains policy oversight for the SDGs. Departments are responsible for their respective policy areas and the delivery of their commitments related to the Goals. The Cabinet Office continues to have a role in coordinating domestic delivery of the Goals through the SDP process.

As outlined in our response to the International Development Committee, the Government believes that the goals should not require a separate coordinating mechanism. We are keen to avoid the proliferation of government structures and reporting requirements and are using existing mechanisms to embed and track delivery of the Goals. Single Departmental Plans are an established process to focus Government's efforts on important issues and we are confident they will facilitate the delivery of the SDGs.

**Recommendation 3: We urge the Government to publish its report examining the domestic implementation of the SDGs, as promised to the International Development Committee in September 2016, without further delay. (Paragraph 54)**

The Government published its report setting out the UK's approach to delivering the SDGs both domestically and internationally on 28 March 2017. A link to the report can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agenda-2030-delivering-the-global-goals>

Regarding SDG 5, the report details Government action to further gender equality at home and around the world. At home, the report focuses on the Government's efforts to increase equality for women in the workplace and to ensure a secure environment for women and girls, by tackling Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the UK. We have recently undertaken a series of measures to strengthen women's economic empowerment, for example new mandatory gender pay gap reporting regulations and doubling the amount of free childcare available.

Amongst other things, the report also highlights the £80 million the Government has committed to spending through its Ending Violence against Women and Girls Strategy, and our teen relationship abuse campaign, 'Disrespect Nobody'.

We want to enable girls and women to live free from violence and exploitation globally. We have continued to prioritise the needs of women and girls in our development spend, focusing on leading internationally on the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and supporting women's land rights.

**Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Government Equalities Office ensure that the key SDG principle of 'leave no-one behind' is fully embedded in its revised Single Departmental Plan. That revision should be carried out in consultation with organisations with expertise in this area. (Paragraph 89)**

The revised Single Departmental Plan for the Department for Education will reflect its responsibilities and obligations stemming from the SDGs. This is the case across Government, where the Single Departmental Plans are an instrument for both domestic and international implementation of policy informed by the SDGs.

**Recommendation 5: The Minister for Women and Equalities should take personal responsibility for ensuring action to achieve SDG 5 across government, with the full support of the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Cabinet Secretary to ensure cross-departmental action. (Paragraph 90)**

The Minister for Women and Equalities is fully committed to achieving gender equality in the UK, as SDG5 calls on all countries to achieve. She will continue to show leadership and take responsibility across the Government to ensure that departments understand their obligations stemming from SDG 5. We will make clear that Government departments will deliver their commitments under SDG 5, working with DFID, which has policy oversight for the SDGs.

**Recommendation 6: The Department for International Development should ensure that the following SDG targets are included within a named department's Single Departmental Plan: valuing of unpaid caring and promotion of shared responsibility for it within the household and the family; and ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of political and public life. The SDG 5 target to ensure "universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in the Beijing Platform for Action" must be included within the Department for Health's plan. (Paragraph 91)**

The Cabinet Office will shortly ask departments to update their Single Departmental Plans. As mentioned above, these will account for the Government's commitment to the Goals, including SDG 5. The Government wants to see an increase in the number of women offered public appointments and supports the Hampton-Alexander Review's work around increasing the number of women in the executive pipeline.

The Department of Health will carefully consider including reference to "universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in the Beijing Platform for Action" within its Single Departmental Plan, subject to the Single Departmental Plan clearance process.

The Government also announced a £5 million fund to mark the upcoming centenary of the legislation that gave women the right to vote. This funding will support projects to celebrate the 100 years that have passed since the Representation of the People Act coming up in 2018, and will educate young people about its significance.

**Recommendation 7: When all the refreshed Single Departmental Plans are published, the Government should make it clear how all the SDG 5 indicators have been incorporated. If choices are made not to incorporate some of the indicators, it must be clear which are not included and what the rationale for their exclusion is. (Paragraph 92)**

The Cabinet Office and HM Treasury are working with the Government Digital Service (GDS) to ensure that the published Single Departmental Plans are accessible and integrated within GOV.UK and provide the public with a sense of departmental performance in key areas. This will include departmental activity that contributes to delivery of the SDGs.

**Recommendation 8: We note concerns that have been expressed to us about compliance of devolved administrations with SDG 5. We would welcome further discussion with the Government Equalities Office and representatives of devolved administrations and assemblies on how harmonisation of women's rights across the UK can be achieved. (Paragraph 93)**

The Government resolves to continue working with the devolved administrations on the implementation of the SDGs in the UK. Although methods to implement the Goals may differ across the administrations of the UK, they all share the visions inherent in the SDGs.

Many areas of gender policy are devolved. However, the Government Equalities Office maintains a good relationship with the relevant departments in the devolved administrations and there are regular meetings at senior civil servant level between gender policy officials from the UK Government and their devolved counterparts. We have further solidified this strong relationship with a series of consultation events dealing with a number of issues around the reporting process around the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which took place in Summer 2017. These took place across all the nations of the UK, with the full support of the devolved administrations.

**Recommendation 9: Our main recommendation is that the Government Equalities Office should immediately launch a consultation on developing the most effective mechanism to facilitate ongoing partnership between government and civil society to implement SDG 5. A plan, outlining how this mechanism will work and how it will be funded, should be published by September 2017. Alongside this, a timetable should be published setting out when this partnership mechanism will be established and demonstrating that it will have met regularly prior to the 2018 High Level Political Forum. (Paragraph 132)**

We engage regularly with civil society and will continue to do so. The implementation of the SDGs is one of the issues that are raised in our conversations since the adoption of the 2030 Development Agenda. GEO and other departments have therefore sought to incorporate it in stakeholder engagement opportunities, such as our preparations for the Commission on the Status of Women and our CEDAW reporting civil society engagement.

As mentioned in our response to Recommendation 2, the Government intends to use existing mechanisms to track delivery of the Goals. We will therefore continue engaging

with civil society, directly from GEO or through other Government departments where necessary to ensure an effective monitoring of the state of gender equality in the UK without putting in place additional mechanism.

**Recommendation 10: We also recommend that the Department for International Development, or the Cabinet Office, should ensure that the relevant government departments investigate the possibility of incentives to increase business engagement with SDG 5 goals. This should specifically examine the possibility of embedding SDG 5 targets within public procurement criteria, as already undertaken by DFID. (Paragraph 133)**

The Government believes that the SDGs will create stronger trading partners and better opportunities for business. Achieving the SDGs will require action by many organisations, including partner governments, the private sector, civil society and multilateral institutions.

DFID sees business as an essential partner in advancing economic development internationally, by creating jobs and better incomes for the poor, providing goods and services in the communities where they operate, and by investing, paying taxes and finding innovative solutions to development challenges. During the 2017 Family Planning Summit in London, DFID engaged the business community to directly contribute to SDG 5, specifically the target to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in the Beijing Platform for Action. Ten pioneering companies announced new commitments at the Summit, including British companies Vodafone, Reckitt Benckiser (Durex) and Twinings.

Private sector engagement in sexual and reproductive health has markedly increased, including from Indian, Nepalese and Filipino firms. This private sector expertise and these networks will reach millions of girls and women. The private sector also has an important role to play in pushing for better governance, policy reform, transparency and anti-corruption.

GEO and DFID consulted a wide number of private sector stakeholders (including those from retail, finance and services) as part of the Government's engagement in the UN Secretary General's High Level Panel (HLP) for Women's Economic Empowerment.

The views and feedback of business were incorporated into the development of the HLP's two reports, in particular in developing recommendations for changing business culture and practice to deliver for women. As part of the discussions, the Government explored ideas for how to incentivise businesses to deliver women's equality and is currently looking at the most effective way of taking this forward. At the international level, DFID's new £12.8m Work and Opportunities for Women programme will work with businesses to help 300,000 women in their supply chains in developing countries to get better jobs, with higher incomes, and better working conditions.

In terms of public procurement, the Government agrees that organisations should consider diversity and inclusion in all parts of their business, including the supply chain. Public organisations must comply with applicable procurement law when conducting their procurement activities and award contracts on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender, which in the case of central government involves assessing value for money (or best value for local authorities). The public procurement rules allow for

social considerations to be incorporated into the procurement process subject to certain requirements. In doing this we need to avoid disproportionate compliance burdens which would hinder small firms from bidding for public sector contracts.

In addition, the Public Sector Equality Duty sets out certain legal obligations in relation to equality which public organisations must have due regard to when conducting their procurement activities. The requirement to comply with the PSED applies to all public procurement regardless of the value and therefore public bodies are legally responsible for complying with the PSED when undertaking public procurement. This must be done in a way that is proportionate and consistent with existing procurement law, which means that the value and subject matter of the contract will impact upon the relevance and extent to which equality considerations are incorporated into individual procurements. Further information about how the PSED applies in a procurement context can be found in [Procurement Policy Note 11/13 - Public Procurement and the Public Sector Equality Duty](#).

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 also places a requirement on public sector procurers to consider the economic, environmental and social benefits of their approaches to certain types of procurements, before they start the procurement process. These obligations must be met in a way that is consistent with applicable public procurement law. This means ensuring that where equality-related matters are incorporated into public procurement, they are relevant to the subject matter, or relate to the performance, of the contract.

The Government has recently published the Standard Selection Questionnaire, which allows for organisations to be excluded from the bidding process where any finding of unlawful discrimination has been made against it.

**Recommendation 11: We recommend that the Government publish its plans for a robust framework for the independent verification and monitoring of the UK's progress on the targets within SDG 5. This should be made public by September 2017. Given that national indicators will be included within Single Departmental Plans, the Government should also demonstrate how it ensured that the process for selecting national indicators was transparent and involved the participation of civil society when it publishes the revised SDPs. (Paragraph 174)**

The UN Statistical Commission is responsible for developing a global indicator framework which acts as a means of independently verifying progress towards the Goals. Single Departmental Plans lay out how each UK Government department intends to deliver on government commitments across the full range of their policies and activities. Single Departmental Plans provide an effective framework where departments can be held to account with regard to the progress they are making towards the Government's commitments on Agenda 2030. This approach also avoids creating a multiplicity of separate reporting frameworks.

As part of the refresh of Single Departmental Plans, departments will select a range of indicators that best reflect activities they are undertaking across all areas, including those contained within the SDGs.

The Government has engaged regularly with civil society on SDG 5 and gender equality more widely and will continue to do so. As mentioned elsewhere in this document, we plan to make SDG 5 a central strand of this year's CSW civil society engagement programme, in addition to our engagement with civil society around the CEDAW reporting process.

**Recommendation 12: We also recommend that the ONS immediately convene a working group to explore what role organisations working with women and girls can play in developing national indicators and contributing data to them. This could be modelled along the lines of the Gender Statistics Users Group. (Paragraph 175)**

The Office of National Statistics (ONS) will be responding directly to the Committee on this recommendation.

**Recommendation 13: The Government should make a clear commitment to collecting data against the SDG targets in a manner that allows for comprehensive disaggregation. (Paragraph 176)**

The Committee's report acknowledges that the UK is in an enviable position relative to many other countries in terms of data collection and disaggregation.

As part of their responsibilities for collecting and reporting UK data to the UN for all global sustainable development indicators, the ONS are committed to addressing the requirements set out in paragraph 74 of UN Resolution 70/1. This called for all data to be disaggregated by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

In late June, ONS launched a consultation on the sustainable development goals. The purpose of the consultation is to seek feedback on their approach to the measurement and reporting of UK progress against the global indicators. This will ensure a robust approach to tracking progress in key areas.

**Recommendation 14: The Government should ensure that funding is provided to expert organisations to enable them to participate fully in the data collection and monitoring functions necessary for the achievement of SDG 5. This must be additional to any Government funding for their day-to-day activities. (Paragraph 177)**

As part of their commitment to collecting and reporting on UK data for all global sustainable development goals, the ONS has recognised the need to identify or develop new data sources as being central to being able to monitor progress. The ONS is keen to work with potential suppliers to ensure data is relevant and fit for purpose. As mentioned in the answer to Recommendation 13, the ONS launched a consultation on the SDGs in late June 2017, which offers a chance to shape reporting on the SDGs, priorities for data development and criteria for data selection.

## Appendix 2: Office for National Statistics

---

Dear Mrs Miller,

Firstly, I would like to offer my congratulations on your re-election as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee.

Prior to the dissolution of the 2015 Parliament, the Women and Equalities Committee published a report on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK.<sup>1</sup> One of report's recommendations was directed towards the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and now—following the reappointment of the Committee—I wish to offer ONS's response.

Recommendation 12:

*“We also recommend that the ONS immediately convene a working group to explore what role organisations working with women and girls can play in developing national indicators and contributing data to them. This could be modelled along the lines of the Gender Statistics Users Group. (Paragraph 175).”*

ONS is keen to work with all groups, including women's networks and organisations, as we begin to collect and report UK data towards the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 244 indicators.

The Committee's report specifically recommended that ONS convene a working group to explore what role organisations working with women and girls can play in developing indicators and contributing data, along the lines of the former Gender Statistics Users Group.

ONS and the Royal Statistical Society will host an event in early 2018, “What can be done about the gender data gap?”. The event will bring together stakeholders from across civil society, academia and government to discuss issues around the evidence available to decision-makers on gender. This will also be the platform for finding an ongoing way for organisations working with women and girls to engage with the development of statistics and evidence needed.

I am also pleased to say that our consultation<sup>2</sup>, seeking views on ONS' approach to measuring and reporting UK progress against the global indicators, opened on 29 June 2017. ONS has encouraged interested users to take part in this consultation, through our stakeholder networks (which include women's groups and organisations) and via ONS' Twitter platform. The consultation will run for 12 weeks, closing on 21 September 2017.

ONS will be reflecting on what users tell us about official data on gender in the course of this consultation and at our event with the Royal Statistical Society, as we shape our plans for developing official data in this space. If you would find it helpful, I will write to the Committee again early next year, with an update on these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Iain Bell

Deputy National Statistician, Population and Public Policy | Office for National Statistics

---

1 [Report on the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK](#)

2 [ONS approach to measuring and reporting SDGs in the UK](#)