

Stephen Twigg MP
Chair, International Development Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

31 January 2019

Dear Mr Twigg,

I write in response to the International Development Committee's call for evidence for its inquiry on *UK progress in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*.

As the Committee may be aware, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the UK's National Statistical Institute, and largest producer of official statistics. We aim to provide a firm evidence base for sound decisions and develop the role of official statistics in democratic debate.

ONS previously provided oral evidence to this Committee's first inquiry regarding the SDG's, in November 2015. The following short note provides an update on our work in this area since the publication of the Committee's report in May 2016. In light of the inquiry's terms of reference, it also provides additional information on ONS support for statistical modernisation and capability building internationally.

I hope this evidence is helpful to the Committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Iain Bell

Deputy National Statistician and Director General for Population and Public Policy | Office for National Statistics

Office for National Statistics – Written Evidence to the International Development Committee: UK progress in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Overview

1. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) strategy for sustainable development goal reporting is threefold:
 - a. To source and report data for all the SDG global indicators and develop comprehensive analysis to put the SDGs into context
 - b. Make our data and analysis coverage more comprehensive to ensure no one is left behind in line with our commitments to the Inclusive Data Charter¹
 - c. Make SDGs data available to all using open source products that other countries can reuse for free
2. Alongside this we have launch an ONS International Development Team to plan and lead the provision of high quality technical assistance to build the capacity of the statistical systems in developing countries.

Progress and developments from ONS since the last SDGs inquiry

Reporting and analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals

1. Since the publication of the committee's report on Sustainable Development Goals in the UK in May 2016, ONS has made significant progress towards sourcing the appropriate UK data for the global indicators, putting that data into context and making that data available to everyone.
2. We are currently reporting data for 157 (64%) global SDG indicators. A further 22 (9%) are currently in progress, and for the remaining 65 (28%) we are exploring data sources (only the Netherlands report on more global indicators). Over 40% of the global indicators reported contain at least 1 required disaggregation (a much higher proportion than any other country). All data are published and available to all via our new National Reporting Platform² (NRP) which was launched alongside our first annual report '*Sustainable Development Goals: progress and possibilities*³ in November 2017. Our second annual report '*Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, an update on progress*'⁴ was published in November 2018.
3. We have started to release a series of narrative publications which have included short pieces on child mortality⁵, partner abuse⁶, people on remand in custody⁷, a slide share on renewable

¹ <http://www.data4sdgs.org/news/10-governments-and-organizations-announce-commitments-inclusive-representative-data>

² <https://sustainabledevelopment-uk.github.io/>

³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/sustainabledevelopmentgoalstakingstockprogressandpossibilities/november2017>

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/sustainabledevelopmentgoalstakingstockprogressandpossibilities/november2018>

⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/childhealth/articles/ukdropsineuropeanchildmortalityrankings/2017-10-13>

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/sustainabledevelopmentgoalsandachievingequalitywhichwomenarethemostvulnerableandatriskofexperiencingdomesticabusebyapartner>

⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/reportingonthesustainabledevelopmentgoalspeopleonremandin custodyinenglandandwales/2018-08-03>

energy⁸, and a broader compendium publication looking at economic statistics related to SDGs⁹.

4. During summer 2017 we undertook a consultation to understand how stakeholders want us to report on SDGs and how to prioritise filling data gaps. Our response to this consultation was published on 11 December 2017¹⁰.
5. The consultation responses were supportive of our proposed programme of work and expanded on details that aligned with our development work. Geographic breakdowns to the lowest level possible were highlighted as a priority area for development and respondents suggested further prioritisation should be centred around what is relevant and a priority for the UK.

Inclusive Data Charter and Disaggregation

6. On 19 March 2018 we published the first UK Data Gaps report detailing the global SDG indicators with no known UK data sources and the biggest data disaggregation gaps for the UK¹¹. To coincide with the UK commitment to the Inclusive Data Charter¹², on 13 July 2018 we published our data development plans to fill SDG data gaps at both the headline and disaggregation level¹³.
7. For example, one of the biggest data disaggregation gaps for the UK is migrant status. In September 2017 ONS set out a comprehensive work programme utilising new powers under the Digital Economy Act to improve migration statistics that will deliver by spring 2020. We anticipate the outcome of this work will help fill SDG data disaggregation gaps.

Open source platform to enable re-use

8. The UK is among the leading countries in its response to SDGs data for global indicators – from reporting data to publishing plans and outputs in an open and transparent way. Supporting the development of statistical capacity to report SDGs data and ensuring the most vulnerable groups are visible in data, both domestically and globally, is central to ONS work on data for SDGs.
9. Our National Reporting Platform¹⁴ has been developed with our Data Science Campus and in collaboration with the United States. We have deliberately developed an open source solution, so others can freely reuse our code. Technical guidance on copying our site is available in our wiki webpage¹⁵. Our approach has also received interest from a number of other countries including Germany, Australia, Poland and Armenia. The National Statistics Institutes in Ghana and Rwanda have formally adopted the platform and are receiving technical support under our formal partnership on statistical modernisation.
10. Through ONS collaboration with the US government and the Center for Open Data Enterprise, we have been combining code and features in the UK and US platforms into one produce a single harmonised open platform. This new version will allow countries to more easily adopt

⁸<https://www.slideshare.net/statisticsONS/renewable-energy-in-the-uk>

⁹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/compendium/economicreview/july2018/measuringinequalitiesintheukforthesustainabledevelopmentgoals>

¹⁰<https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/sustainable-development-goals/ons-approach-to-measuring-reporting-sdgs-in-the-uk/>

¹¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/ukdatagapsinclusivedataactionplantowardstheglobalsustainabledevelopmentgoalindicators/2018-03-19>

¹²<http://www.data4sdgs.org/initiatives/inclusive-data-charter>

¹³<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/methodologies/inclusivedatacharteractionplanfortheglobalsustainabledevelopmentgoals>

¹⁴<https://sustainabledevelopment-uk.github.io/>

¹⁵<https://github.com/ONSdigital/sdg-indicators/wiki>

future developments and share resources such as translations. It will also include improved mapping features, a key requirement for our partner countries.

ONS support for statistical modernisation and capacity building internationally

11. ONS is supporting statistical modernisation in Africa, funded through a DFID grant¹⁶. Partnerships have been developed with national statistical offices in Rwanda, Ghana and Kenya, as well as with the UN Economic Commission for Africa. These partnerships have a strong focus on SDG measurement, including filling data gaps, increasing availability of disaggregated data, user consultation and data dissemination. Early results of these programmes include the launch of the National Reporting Platform of the Ghana Statistical Service¹⁷ on African Statistics Day 2018, at a high-profile event attended by over 300 representatives from Ghanaian ministries, districts and agencies. ONS is continuing to support the National Institute of Statistics Rwanda in transforming and loading data into their reporting platform, which is to be launched soon.
12. The UK is also a member of a United Nations Task Force on Reporting SDG indicators using National Reporting Platforms (NRPs). The Task Force is working on a document that maps the main features across several existing NRPs and includes case studies showing how different countries have approached reporting their data
13. We are a Steering Group member of the Conference of European Statisticians' (CES) Expert Group on Statistics for SDGs and contributed to the development of a roadmap for the development of official statistics for monitoring SDGs¹⁸, which was launched in June 2017. We are also co-chair of the UNECE group on Communicating Statistics on SDGS, as well as members of UN groups, reporting platforms and data development.
14. As a member of the Geospatial Working Group of the United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group (UN IAEG), we have worked on the development of the Global Statistical Geospatial Framework¹⁹ – a set of principles developed by the UN Expert Group on the Integration of Statistics and Geospatial Information (UN EG-ISGI) to support the use of geospatial data within the sustainable development agenda.
15. We have been exploring innovative and globally scalable methods to support SDG reporting, in collaboration with our Data Science Campus and the UN Global Platform for Official Statistics. The first project in this work stream has produced a globally scalable method to monitor SDGs indicator 9.1.1 – the proportion of the rural population living within 2km of an all-weather road. We are currently working with the World Bank, who are the custodians for this indicator, to validate the methods and data sources. We will then be sharing our approach via the UN Global Platform.

Office for National Statistics, January 2019

¹⁶<https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-GOV-1-300443/documents>

¹⁷<https://sustainabledevelopment-ghana.github.io/>

¹⁸<https://www.unece.org/statistics/networks-of-experts/ces-steering-group-on-statistics-for-sustainable-development-goals.html>

¹⁹<https://www.efgs.info/information-base/production-model/global/>