

Iain Bell | Deputy National Statistician and Director
General for Population & Public Policy

Mary Creagh MP
Chair, Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

08 March 2019

Dear Ms Creagh,

I am writing to offer the Office for National Statistics (ONS) response to the Environmental Audit Committee report on the ‘Sustainable Development Goals in the UK follow up: Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the UK’¹.

The Committee made two recommendations to ONS. Firstly:

“ONS should continue to develop its metrics to cover all SDG indicators. Government and civil society must work with ONS to ensure that Government is able to work from timely, UK-wide metrics to measure its performance, with sufficient disaggregation to identify areas of need. It should consider the existing data to determine whether it is fit for current purpose, and to ensure that it covers the outcomes of actions, rather than just outputs. Government should also ensure that it establishes specific mechanisms for action if performance is poor. The Government should show leadership by introducing an SDG impact assessment as part of the cost-benefit analysis undertaken by Government, or for politically strategic events such as the Queen’s Speech and Budget.” (Paragraph 138)

ONS welcomes this report and its recommendations. Sourcing and reporting data for all the SDG global indicators and making our data coverage more comprehensive to ensure no one is left behind is at the core of the ONS strategy for SDG reporting and in line with our wider statistical transformation plans.

Since I gave evidence to the Committee on 23 October 2018, we have continued our efforts to source the appropriate UK data for the global indicators, putting that data into context and making that data available to everyone. We are currently reporting data for 170 (70%) of the global SDG indicators, an additional 16 indicators compared with our position in September 2018. Over 40% of the global indicators reported contain at least 1 required disaggregation. All data are published and available to all via our National Reporting Platform (NRP)².

We continue to work closely with stakeholders across government and civil society to ensure the best possible data are used to report progress towards the SDGs. This includes meeting on a weekly basis with SDG goal champions from across government to review data quality.

To reinforce the principle of “leave no one behind”, ONS has also partnered with the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD) and its global network. This reiterates our commitment for

¹ [January 2018, SDGs in the UK follow-up: Hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in the UK report](#)

² [National Reporting Platform](#)

improved and strengthened data breakdowns through the Inclusive Data Charter. We will work together to improve the quality, quantity and availability of inclusive data. 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.

Our second annual progress report for measuring the SDGs which outlines our developments and sets out next steps was published in November 2018³. It provided an important update on: our assessment of data gaps at global indicator and disaggregation level, our progress towards the inclusive data action plan for developing new data sources and methods to increase data coverage, and plans for prioritising the work to fill data gaps.

“We recommend that the Government work with the Office for National Statistics to measure the potential impact that Universal Credit may have on rates of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms in pilot Universal Credit areas. To be effective this measure should account for the rates of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition before and after the implementation of Universal Credit and compare these rates with areas where Universal Credit has not been applied.” (Paragraph 59)

ONS are committed to supporting the evidence needs of the UK government. We will continue to meet with government departments on a regular basis to determine their requirements for statistical support.

Goal 2 of the SDGs (Zero Hunger) requires the measurement of undernourishment, food insecurity and malnutrition. In respect of indicator 2.1.2 (prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the UN Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES), we have conducted a comprehensive review of relevant existing data from both official and non-official sources and are looking at options to fill any data gaps. Alongside this, we convened a roundtable on 25 February 2019 centred around the strong and growing user need for better statistics on food insecurity. The event brought together representatives from across government alongside civil society organisations which included the Independent Food Aid Network, Food Foundation and Feeding Britain.

At the event it was confirmed that the Department for Work and Pensions will be including food insecurity questions on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) – a development which was strongly welcomed by all stakeholders. Data will be collected throughout the year from April 2019 to March 2020 and we would expect the first set of results by end March 2021.

Participants welcomed ONS leading and convening the roundtable, finding it extremely valuable. I agreed we would look to host a follow-up event in September. I will of course keep the Committee updated on this work.

Yours sincerely,



Iain Bell

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

³ [ONS November 2018, SDGs in the UK, an update on progress](#)