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

21 September 2018

Dear Ms Creagh,

I write in response to the Environmental Audit Committee's call for evidence to its follow-up inquiry on the Sustainable Development Goals in the UK.

As the Committee are 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 provided written evidence to the Committee's previous inquiry on the Sustainable Development Goals in late 2016, and my colleague Abigail Self also appeared in front of the Committee to give oral evidence.

In response to the Committee's new inquiry on this topic, the following short note provides an update on our work in this area since the publication of the Committee's report in April 2017. In light of the inquiry's terms of reference, it also provides additional information on UK reporting on food insecurity and other indicators under Goal 2.

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 Environmental Audit Committee: Sustainable Development Goals in the UK follow up

Progress and developments from ONS since last SDGs inquiry

1. Since the publication of the committee's report on Sustainable Development Goals in the UK in April 2017 the Office for National Statistics (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 154 (63%) global SDG indicators, a further 22 (9%) are currently in progress and for the remaining 68 (28%) we are exploring data sources (only 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 Platform](#) (NRP) which was launched alongside our [first annual report](#) in November 2017, our second annual report will be published in November 2018.
3. We have started to release a series of narrative publications which have included short pieces on [child mortality](#), [partner abuse](#), [people on remand in custody](#), a slide share on [renewable energy](#), and a broader compendium publication looking at [economic statistics related to SDGs](#).
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 2017.
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.
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 UK. To coincide with the UK commitment to the [Inclusive Data Charter](#), on the 13 July 2018 we published our [data development plans](#) to fill SDG data gaps at both the headline and disaggregation level.
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.

Goal 2 – Zero Hunger, food insecurity reporting

8. Measuring food insecurity is a key priority and a requirement for indicator 2.1.2 (prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population, based on the UN Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)). Given that few countries to date have collected FIES data in national surveys, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the UN (FAO) has produced provisional baseline country estimates for more than 140 countries. Whilst we are currently reporting these estimates for the UK there are several shortcomings. For example, the UK sample size is small so limits data disaggregation and the data are not timely.

9. We have already begun work to improve statistics on food insecurity. We have researched all relevant existing data from both official and non-official sources and are looking at options to fill any data gaps. We have assessed the feasibility of including additional questions to existing household surveys and will be discussing this ongoing work with Emma Lewell-Buck MP, relevant government departments and a range of external stakeholders in October to understand any additional requirements.
10. We are currently reporting data for 9 of the 13 global SDG indicators related to Goal 2 – Zero Hunger, a further 2 are currently in progress and for the remaining 2 we are exploring data sources.

Detailed summary of Goal 2 indicators with current sources:

Indicator	Description	Source	Reporting status	Latest Data
2.1.1	Undernourishment	Data sourced from National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS). Median total energy intake for 2.5 th percentile, 2015	Available online	668
2.1.2	Food insecurity	Estimated prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity UK, 2015 on survey from FAO	Available online	9.7%
2.2.1	Stunting	Currently acquiring data on heights of children aged 4-5 from NHS Digital and the National Childhood Measurement Programme (NCMP).	In progress	
2.2.2	Malnutrition	BMI data sourced from National Childhood Measurement Programme (NCMP).	Available online	Data on obese, overweight and underweight BMI categories
2.3.1	Farming production	Only land use for crops currently on tool, but we have worked to source additional data on crop production and are considering how best to incorporate this onto our NRP.	Available online	18,400,000 hectares of UK land used for agriculture and forestry
2.3.2	Income of small-scale producers	Reported on NRP as gross weekly earnings of food producers by sex.	Available online	£392 per week average gross earnings
2.4.1	Productive and sustainable agriculture	No data currently sourced. No agreed international methods.	Exploring sources	

2.5.1	Genetic resources	Cumulative enrichment index reported online up to 2017.	Available online	151000 CEI
2.5.2	Local breed extinction risk	Data sourced from DEFRA.	Available online	5.75%
2.a.1	Agriculture orientation index	Reported on NRP until 2015. More recent data available, update to be completed.	Available online	0.436 AOI
2.a.2	ODA agriculture	Reported on NRP until 2015, but with 2016 update on staging site, ready to be pushed to live.	Available online	£589,000,000
2.b.1	Agriculture export subsidies	No data currently sourced.	Exploring sources	
2.c.1	Food price anomalies	At the early stages of promising discussions with Prices experts.	In progress	

International comparisons and work

11. 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. A quick look at other countries shows that there is a long way to go for many countries on both producing in line with UN meta-data standards and the levels of disaggregation. As noted above only the Netherlands report on more global indicators than UK and no country currently has a greater proportion of indicators for which at least one disaggregation is provided. This does not make us complacent and our published material sets out our plans for filling more gaps and increasing the levels of disaggregation.
12. Our [National Reporting Platform](#) 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](#). Both Ghana and Rwanda are adopting and benefiting from our approach while we have also received interest from other countries including Germany and Australia.
13. 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
14. We have completed a global project to evaluate the feasibility of using the ESRI geospatial platform as a reporting mechanism for SDGs, which would allow the UN to pull data directly from member states and plan to report on this with an update on the availability of geographic breakdowns for UK data in the Autumn.
15. 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 SDGs](#), which was launched in June 2017. We are also co-chair of the UNECE group on Communicating Statistics on SDGs, as well as member on 2 other UN groups (Reporting platforms & Data development).

16. 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 Framework](#) – 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.

Background/ONS role

17. As the UK's national statistics institute, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for reporting of data for regular monitoring of UK progress towards the 244 global Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators. The comprehensive framework for SDGs fits with our [Better Statistics, Better Decisions strategy](#). Sourcing and analysing data covering the economy, environment and society, which is then disaggregated to show the full picture, will enable better-evidenced policy decisions.
18. We have committed to:
 - source the appropriate UK data for the global indicators
 - provide data to the international organisations responsible for each indicator, known as Custodian Agencies, who will report them to the United Nations
 - analyse the data so that we can put it into context
 - make the data available to everybody using an online tool and supporting reports
19. In addition, ONS and the wider Government Statistical Service (GSS), provides a wide range of data and analysis to government departments which supports Single Departmental Plans