

Article

Sustainable Development Goals in the UK: progress on monitoring and reporting data: November 2019

This is the third update on the Office for National Statistics's progress towards measuring the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators in the UK.

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1 . Main points

- We are responsible for reporting UK data for the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); this report outlines our developments and achievements over the past year.
- We are reporting at least headline data for 182 (75%) of the 244 indicators; this has increased beyond our 70% target.
- Additionally, we are reporting all the headline data needed for Goals 5, 7 and 13.
- We have carried out user research, and usability and accessibility testing for the UK SDG data site; the site now has AA accreditation for accessibility.
- We provide international assistance across the world to support other countries to report their SDG data.
- We work with the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) to improve the communication of SDG statistics and data transmission.
- We provided statistical support to the UK government in the preparation and writing of the Voluntary National Review.
- We held a public forum to discuss the social impact of climate change.

2 . Introduction

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for finding and reporting UK data for the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). The SDG team report the data using the methodology agreed by the United Nations (UN). The UK data feed into the UN's picture of global progress towards the SDGs.

This is not an update on UK progress towards meeting the SDGs. The UK government presented this information in the first [UK Voluntary National Review](#) in July 2019.

The review was [presented by the Secretary of State](#) for International Development at the UN High-Level Political Forum in New York in July 2019.

This update will outline our work over the past year and our aims for the coming year.

The SDGs are also known as the [Global Goals](#).

The central aim of the SDGs is to [leave no one behind \(PDF, 681KB\)](#). The UK government has [committed to put the last first](#) in line with this aim. This means that we are committed to finding and reporting the data that will help identify the groups in the UK who are being left behind.

3 . Are we making progress?

In short, yes, we have made progress over the last year in reporting UK data for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In our [last annual update](#), in November 2018, we outlined our nine aims for the 12 months ahead. The table shows the progress we have made against each of these aims.

1 Support the government to prepare the UK Voluntary National Review of progress towards the SDGs	Achieved
2 Strengthen our user research activities by having larger-scale user research, usability testing and accessibility testing of our National Reporting Platform (NRP)	Achieved
3 Introduce mechanisms for data exchange	In progress
4 Report data for 70% of global SDG indicators	Achieved
5 Focus on filling disability disaggregation gaps	Achieved
6 Identify new methods and innovations for data collection	In progress
7 Look at developing the economic case for SDGs in a project designed to engage university students in Agenda 2030	In progress
8 Work on interlinkages between targets based on user research	In progress
9 Work with topic areas across the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to incorporate SDG reporting in their regular outputs	In progress

Aim 1: support the UK government to prepare the UK Voluntary National Review of progress towards the SDGs

The [Voluntary National Review \(VNR\)](#) was published in July 2019 and is available to read. We provided support to the Department for International Development (DfID) who coordinated the VNR. We led the quality assurance of the data throughout the document and contributed to the chapter on the use of data for reporting the SDGs.

The VNR reported the UK progress towards achieving the SDGs using data-led evidence and includes a full statistical annex that we provided, based on data reported on the UK data site.

Aim 2: strengthen our user research activities by having larger-scale user research, and usability testing and accessibility testing of our National Reporting Platform (NRP)

Our aim is to provide a [UK SDG data site](#) that meets the needs of everyone who is using it and that is accessible for everybody.

To achieve this we undertook user research, and usability and accessibility testing.

Understanding our users

During user research we interviewed over 50 people from a variety of organisations across government, private sector and academia.

We identified four main user types of the data site:

- concerned citizen – "Tell me what the goals are and what's being done about them."
- connected influencer – "Give me a tool that will support my ambitions and give me a louder voice."
- fact gatherer – "I just need to quickly see what progress is being made and check the facts."
- involved analyst – "I just want the data so I can do my own thing from it."

Once we had identified these user types we were able to develop user stories to explain their needs. For example, the user story for an involved analyst may be: "I want to know the reasons why ONS has not been able to source data for this indicator so that I can plan my activities accordingly".

We will use user stories and our understanding of the site's users to improve the site. We will continue to explore and validate our findings with ongoing research.

Usability testing

As a part of our user research we asked people to give us feedback on their experience of using the site by giving them a set of questions and asking them to use the site to find the answers. By observing their actions and asking them about their thoughts during the exercise we will be able to understand where improvements should be made to the site.

We will continue usability testing to inform developments and changes. If you would like to help with our ongoing testing of the site, please complete our [short online survey](#).

Accessibility testing

We want to make our data site as accessible and usable as possible for everybody. We arranged for the Digital Accessibility Centre to test our site against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). The site was [given "AA" standard accreditation](#) in July 2019. Our [accessibility statement](#) gives more information about the site's compatibility with tools and any known issues.

More information about our [digital accessibility testing](#) for the UK SDG data site can be found in this update on the UK SDG data site.

Aim 3: introduce mechanisms for data exchange (such as, through Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) and application programming interfaces (APIs))

The UN working group on Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX) is leading the development of ways for countries and organisations to share data and metadata using SDMX. We have been working with the UN Statistical Division, to test the developments proposed by the SDMX working group.

We are working with the US Government and the Center for Open Data Enterprise (CODE) on SDMX features for the [Open SDG platform](#). We are also working with other countries who are involved in testing different SDMX options: Cambodia is testing an option that imports data using an SDMX API; and Kyrgyzstan is testing the ability to import data using an SDMX file. We are also starting to develop a feature that will allow data to be exported using SDMX.

We will share information about our experiences using SDMX through our work in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Task Team on Data Transmission.

The [UK SDG data site](#) now uses Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to help automate the updating of data for 15 SDG indicators. We have developed scripts in Python to extract data using the ONS website API and transform it into the format required. This has made the process for updating these indicators much quicker and more efficient. We are exploring which other indicators, from other sources, could be updated using APIs.

More information about [how we are using APIs](#) can be found in this update on the UK SDG data site.

Aim 4: report data for 70% of global SDG indicators

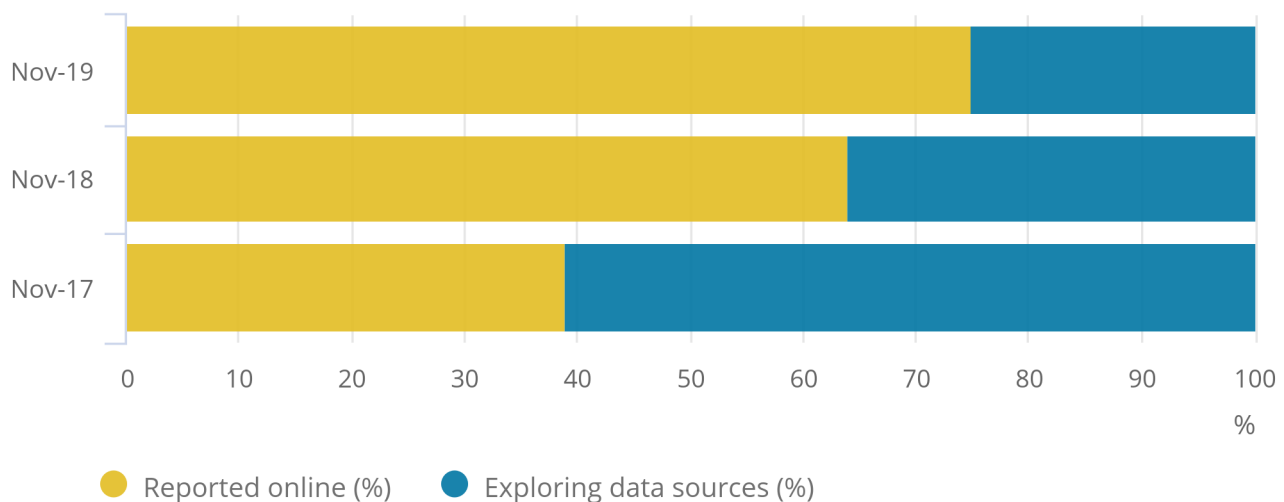
[We are reporting](#) at least headline data for 75% (182) of the SDG indicators.

Figure 1: How many global indicators do we report data online for?

UK, 2017 to 2019

Figure 1: How many global indicators do we report data online for?

UK, 2017 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics

We are reporting at least headline data for 133 (79%) of the 169 targets.

We are reporting 100% of the headline data needed for three of the goals:

- Goal 5: Gender equality
- Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy
- Goal 13: Climate action

We signed up to the [Inclusive Data Charter](#) in 2018. We are committed to breaking down the headline data for SDGs to identify any vulnerable groups who are being left behind.

The latest update on our commitment to the Inclusive Data Charter is in [Section 5](#) of this report.

Aim 5: focus on filling disability disaggregation gaps

We ran a project that focused on increasing the number of indicators for which we are able to report data broken down by disability. We are now able to break down headline datasets by disability for indicators [5.5.2](#), [8.6.1](#), [9.2.2](#) and [9.5.2](#).

We realise that disability is only one of the possible categories we can use to break down the SDG data. We are committed to exploring new data sources to provide a full picture and leave no one behind. This includes the disaggregations explicitly mentioned in the indicators as well as standard categories like age, sex, geography, income, ethnicity and migratory status. We also recognise the need to try and break down data by the [protected characteristics named in the Equality Act \(2010\)](#) and will look to include these where possible in our SDG reporting.

We are working with topic experts across the Office for National Statistics and the rest of government to provide disaggregations for the UK SDG data.

The teams we work with have written about their [SDG-related work](#) in an update on the UK SDG data site.

Aim 6: identify new methods and innovations for data collection

We have worked with the Office for National Statistics [Data Science Campus](#) to help develop new methods and data sources that will help us to identify who might be left behind. They have written about [their work to help source and report more UK SDG data](#) in a blog on their website.

Cash machines (Goal 8) – an example of how we work with the ONS Data Science Campus to develop new data sources

Official statistics are not available about the number and coverage of automated teller machines (ATMs) or cash machines. To provide data for target 8.10 we used the [Digital Economy Act 2017](#) to enable us to work with [LINK](#) to access their detailed data about ATMs. We were able to use this data to analyse where cash machines are located and what functions they have.

Using the LINK data we are now able to [report the number of cash machines per 100,000 people](#) in the UK for indicator 8.10.1. We are working to disaggregate that data to show how many of the ATMs have technology to help partially sighted people or people with hearing needs.

The Data Science Campus is continuing to expand the information that can be reported using the LINK data. They are working on new methodology that will show how many people in the UK live within a 10-minute walking distance of an ATM, for example.

Aim 7: look at developing the economic case for SDGs in a project designed to engage university students in Agenda 2030

We will use the Office for National Statistics Renaissance Prize to ask university students to develop an economic case for SDGs.

The competition is open to all UK undergraduate students. The prize challenges students to use economic statistics in an essay about the measurement of the modern economy.

The winner of the Renaissance Prize will receive £500 and a chance to present their concept to economic experts.

To enter, applicants will need to submit an essay of up to 2,500 words and provide a business case for the SDGs by answering the set question.

Aim 8: work on interlinkages between targets based on user research

The Interlinkages Working Group of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) published its report in March 2019. The [Interlinkages of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development background document \(PDF, 6.17MB\)](#) states:

“By identifying strong and positive interlinkages (correlation) between targets and indicators, countries can leverage efficiency by directing statistical reporting and policy to those with the greatest potential for positive externalities. In turn, this allows countries to prioritize the allocation of scarce resources toward targeted programs and projects whose interlinked nature optimizes the potential for robust, sustainable development outcomes.”

We have started to look at where we can add value to UK SDG statistics by analysing interlinkages. We will continue with this work, which requires planning, discussion and collaboration across government and the third and private sectors.

Aim 9: work with topic areas across ONS to incorporate SDG reporting in their regular outputs

We are continuing this work. The following ONS publications have linked the SDGs to the information in the release:

- [Greenhouse gas intensity, provisional estimates, UK: 2017](#) included a specific section on SDGs and indicator 9.4.1, which is about the intensity of carbon dioxide emissions
- [UK Environmental Accounts: 2019](#) included sections linking their outcomes to SDGs
- [Crime in England and Wales: year ending March 2019](#) stated that statistics in the bulletin are used to help monitor progress towards the SDGs

We are building on these initial successes and are working with more topic areas.

4 . What else have we been doing?

ONS forum “SDGs: the social impact of climate change”

In October 2019, we hosted a public forum in London looking at how the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can provide a structure to understanding the impact of climate change in the social context.

The forum started several conversations that we are continuing with stakeholders. Fiona Dawe wrote about the event in a [National Statistical Blog](#).

Sex and gender article

In February 2019, we released an explainer article: [What is the difference between sex and gender?](#) to explain why the differences between sex and gender are important in SDGs and data collection.

Events

We are active within the international SDG community and in the past year we have participated in numerous events, including the following.

United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), July 2019

We attended sessions and side events at the HLPF to provide greater understanding and wider context to the SDG reporting. We were invited to take part on discussion panels in two side events about Voluntary National Reviews. Attendance at the HLPF proved a successful engagement opportunity for our team leading to new contacts with other national statistics institutes, academia, global agencies and the third sector.

Commonwealth Heads of Statistics conference

We hosted the [2018 Commonwealth Heads of Statistics Conference](#) in November, in London. We were invited to speak about our work on SDG reporting to statistical delegates from across the Commonwealth and demonstrated the UK SDG data site, promoting its use of free and open source software. This encouraged collaboration and cloning of the site for other countries to report their own SDG data.

UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

We take a leading role in SDG-focused UNECE Conference of European Statisticians (CES) task teams. Members of our team represent the UK as co-chairs of two different task teams: the task team on data transmission and the team on communicating statistics.

UNECE Steering Group meeting

The UK hosted the annual meeting of the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) Steering Group for SDGs in Cardiff, in September 2019.

The meeting focused on the development of the second edition of the [Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals](#). During the meeting, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Interim National Statistician addressed the group and spoke about the strength of the SDG framework.

UNECE Expert Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development

We are members of the UNECE Expert Group on Statistics for Sustainable Development and attended the annual meeting in April 2019.

We presented updates of the task teams that we are co-chairs of during the [meeting](#): the [task team's work on SDMX and APIs \(PDF, 363KB\)](#); and the [task team's work on how different member countries communicate statistics \(PDF, 404KB\)](#).

We attended various other events throughout the year to engage with stakeholders, often providing a presentation about our work and always inviting involvement and collaboration. Among others, we attended:

- Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region, March 2019
- Statistics User Forum, June 2019
- 24th Government Statistics Service (GSS) Methodology Symposium, July 2019
- ONS Population and Public Policy Conference: Transformation, Analysis and Insights, July 2019
- UK Health Camp 2019, September 2019
- Task Force on the value of official statistics meeting, September 2019
- European Forum for Geography and Statistics (EFGS), October 2019
- ONS Economic Forum, October 2019
- United Nations Inter-Agency Expert Group (IAEG) 10th meeting, October 2019

Webinars

The UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) have a regular webinar series and we were invited to participate, alongside the Department for International Development, in a [webinar about the UK Voluntary National Review](#), in December 2018. We provided updates on our work and discussed the potential of using and sourcing non-official data with the attendees of the webinar.

The Centre for Open Data Enterprise (CODE) organised a webinar entitled: [What's Next for SDG Reporting?](#). We were invited to participate to share insights into our work with CODE on the development of the UK SDG data site and the Open SDG project.

5 . Inclusive Data Charter

This year we reinforced our commitment to leave no one behind through our [Inclusive Data Charter](#) Action Plan (IDCAP). Our IDCAP [sets out the ways in which we can deliver the promise to improve and strengthen data breakdowns across the SDGs](#). It highlights our current data development projects and collaborations and the teams who are supporting our efforts. We have continued to work towards improving the quality, quantity and availability of inclusive data.

Because of the successes of the ongoing work within our IDCAP, we will soon be in a position to review the action plan. This will allow us to reflect on work that has already been completed and add new points for action ensuring that we continue to move forward by disaggregating our data further to ensure no one is left behind.

Two statisticians within the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) team now work directly with the Inclusive Data Charter (IDC) secretariat. They will provide technical advice for new and existing IDC champions. This advisory role will include how to develop and carry out champions' action plans. The IDC functions to help create working relationships between champions with similar priorities. The secretariat will play an important role in brokering and facilitating these relationships.

6 . International capacity building

We receive funding from the Department for International Development (DfID) to enable us to provide assistance to build statistical capability in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) community.

Partner countries

DfID has partnered with a group of countries and agreed to provide formal assistance with statistical capacity building. We are working with DfID to help these countries improve the quality and availability of their SDG data.

In the past year, we have worked with colleagues in Ghana, Rwanda and Kyrgyzstan to help them clone the UK SDG data site. We supported the running of workshops to convert their existing data into SDG-specific statistics.

Open SDG

We have been working with the United States government and the [Center for Open Data Enterprise](#) (CODE) to develop [Open SDG](#).

Open SDG is a reporting platform for managing and publishing data and statistics on SDGs. Open SDG is open-source and is freely available for any country or organisation to reuse.

More than 10 countries are now reporting their SDG data using Open SDG or previous versions of the US or UK data sites. Many countries have used the guidance on the site to create their own version. Open SDG can be customised and some countries have amended their site to fit their own purposes.

We have worked with CODE and the United Nations Statistics Division to develop the ability to use data in the [Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange](#) (SDMX) format. The project also provides a growing number of translations from English into other languages.

More information about [our work with international capacity building](#) can be found in this update on the UK SDG data site.

7 . Next steps

To build on the progress over the last year we have ambitious aims for the next 12 months.

Continue to increase our reporting of UK data for the SDGs by:

- sourcing data for those statistical indicators that we are not currently reporting against – with the aim to reach 80% coverage of all indicators, at least at the UK headline-level
- increasing the disaggregations available on the UK Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) data site
- exploring how we can use the potential of research that is being carried out by academia, the third sector and other organisations, that can further the understanding of who is being left behind in the UK
- developing and exploring innovative data solutions for those indicators where official statistics are not available

Provide analysis of the UK's progress towards the SDGs by:

- working in partnership with Office for National Statistics (ONS) topic leads to identify links with SDGs in statistical publications
- releasing ad hoc analysis exploring the inter-relationships between the SDGs and highlighting the groups who are being left behind

Continue to build our presence across the world by:

- maintaining our proactive presence, and championing the UK statistical response to the SDGs, at UN and other international meetings and conferences
- developing the role of Inclusive Data Charter (IDC) Champion within the team, in collaboration with [Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data](#) (GSPDD), Department for International Development (DfID) and the other IDC partners
- providing proactive and reactive statistical and technical support internationally to help countries in the development of their SDG reporting

Build collaborative partnerships with academia, the third sector, local and central government and other organisations that are able to help us to:

- source new data sources to understand the interlinkages between the SDGs
- identify the groups in UK society who are being left behind
- develop regional reporting of SDG data

Continue to improve the UK SDG data site, by:

- further user research activities so that user needs and feedback drive further development of the UK SDG data site
- continuing implementation of data exchange mechanisms, such as Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange (SDMX)
- assurance of our UK SDG data site against Government Digital Service (GDS) standards with the aim of moving from the current Alpha version to a Beta version
- continuing to work collaboratively with the US Government and the non-profit Center for Open Data Enterprise (CODE); we will develop the Open SDG source code to ensure that it remains relevant, open source and free to use; we will also provide technical assistance to countries looking to adopt it for their own SDG reporting

8 . Where can I find out more?

We publish all our outputs on the [UK Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\) data site](#). This includes the data for SDG indicators and any written [articles we have published](#). We also publish written [SDG-related updates](#) about our work on the site.

You can contact us at the Office for National Statistics with questions or feedback on our email address sustainabledevelopment@ons.gov.uk.

More information about the SDGs can be found online. Some of the websites include:

- [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- [United Nations 2019 SDG Progress Report](#)
- [Global Goals](#)
- [UK Government SDGs](#)
- [UK Voluntary National Review](#)