Gender equality

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Prepared by

[NAWO logo]
The UK has achieved solid gains on the road to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The introduction of mandatory gender pay and bonus reporting for large employers, access to shared parental leave and return to work funding is helping to level the playing field. There is, however, much more to be done.

Progress against targets has been slow and in some areas is at risk of stagnation. Women and girls are diverse and innovative agents of change and SDG5 is central to the achievement of all SDGs. Progress should be monitored in a way that reflects the overlapping or multiple forms of discrimination experienced by women on the grounds of sex, race, religion, age or other characteristic (known as intersectionality), to ensure that the law works for everyone. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains an ongoing issue, with domestic violence hugely underreported, as are hate crimes towards the LGBTQ community. Action is urgently needed to address the gender imbalance in non-paid work, and a renewed commitment to ensure women are afforded fair and equal progression to top positions in boards, business, and government is required.

### Performance rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainable Development Goal Target</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.1</strong> End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.2</strong> Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation</td>
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<td><strong>5.3</strong> Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation</td>
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<td><strong>5.4</strong> Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate</td>
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<td><strong>5.5</strong> Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</td>
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<td><strong>5.6</strong> Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences</td>
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<td><strong>5.a</strong> Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws</td>
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<td><strong>5.b</strong> Access to enabling technology, including smart phones, information and communications technology and training to promote empowerment of women and girls</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>5.c</strong> Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels</td>
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Key findings

1. Slow progress in advancing women’s fair access to the labour market and inequality in controlling economic resources poses a risk to the achievement of SDGs in the UK. Renewed focus and sustained effort is required to meet Targets 5.5 and 5.4 so women’s talent and resources are recognised as an equal contributor to the labour market. Slow progress to close the gender gap in time spent engaged in unpaid work is undermining progress in this area.

2. Research capturing views of young women and girls in the UK reveals that discrimination and sexual harassment is a major concern.

3. Organisations of all kinds should be encouraged to ‘gender mainstream’ – to incorporate a gender perspective in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies, regulatory mechanisms and spending plans. Budgets should also be analysed for their impact on inequality.

4. There is a need to ensure that the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by women and girls is reflected in gender discourse, budgeting, policy and planning, and that the needs of older women are captured to address inequality levels across their lifetimes. This reinforces the need for improved UK-wide disaggregated data-collection to address gaps in the data required for robust monitoring and evaluation.

Performance and progress

In addition to joining key international agreements such as the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, and the Istanbul Convention, the UK has several legislative and policy protections to prevent and eradicate discrimination based on gender (Target 5.1), notably The Equality Act 2010. The inclusion under the Act of mandatory reporting on gender pay and bonus gaps for large employers in England, Scotland and Wales has been welcomed for the signal it has sent to employers at home and the example it sets abroad (Target 5.c). Gender pay gap reporting has, however, confirmed the persistence of discriminatory practices against women and girls in the workplace. According to the ONS the gap between what UK male and female workers earn, based on median hourly earnings for all workers in 2017, stood at 18.4% – up from 18.2% a year earlier.

The introduction of shared parental leave, free childcare allowances for working families with 3 and 4 year olds, and the right for all employees to request flexible working have helped narrow this gap and support women and girls’ participation in the workplace. Yet data from the World Bank, OECD and ONS show that inequality for women and girls in the UK increases throughout their lifetime. Consideration of the needs of older women should be central in policy and legislative design given the value they bring to the UK economy through paid and unpaid work.

Women and girls may face multiple and additional forms of discrimination in relation to their age, disability, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment or other characteristics. To capture the diversity of these experiences and ensure the law works for everyone, where possible measurement of progress of legislative and policy safeguards against discrimination should be viewed through the lens of this intersectionality.
Action is urgently needed to tackle gender stereotypes and prejudice that continue to underpin discrimination. The UK has secured progress against Target 5.2 on elimination of violence against all women and girls (VAWG) with ONS reporting declining levels of physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months in England and Wales. But further progress is needed to support victims and UK-wide data is needed to gain a full picture of the scope of VAWG. Statistics from other sources indicate the prevalence of VAWG in Northern Ireland and Scotland, including rising domestic abuse cases in Northern Ireland – 2017 saw the highest level recorded since 2004/05. Domestic abuse remains underreported and has more repeat victims than any other crime. Women’s Aid estimates it affects 1 in 4 women in their lifetime and on average two women in England and Wales are killed every week by a current or former male partner. In the past five years, police have recorded more than 11,000 cases of ‘honour’-based violence cases across the UK, including abductions, beatings and murders. The Crime Survey for England and Wales based on interviews with a population sample during the year ending March 2015 found that 79% of victims of partner abuse did not report it to the police. It is important that funding schemes, grants, and programmes are well resourced and that legislative and regulatory frameworks at national and local level work to support those at risk or affected by abuse throughout life, to encourage reporting and successful prosecution.

Many young women and girls in the UK continue to face a number of unacceptable pressures and do not feel safe in their everyday lives; 64% aged 13 to 21 reported some form of sexual harassment at school or college in the past year. Changing attitudes of boys and men is central to tackling this issue. Through health services, access to education, safeguarding and sexual and reproductive rights the UK is considered to have a mechanism in place to meet Target 5.6 but further work is needed to achieve this target. Research shows that many young women and girls in the UK believe that education on sex and relationships is out of touch with the realities they face today; further training on healthy relationships needed in schools. Continued progress against harmful practices (Target 5.3) is essential to shifting negative gender stereotypes and empowering women and girls as change agents, although continued reported decreases in the rate of underage marriage are welcome. There has also been an overall decrease in female genital mutilation (FGM) cases between 2015 and 2016. Despite these gains, many women and girls in the UK are at risk of being married whilst underage or against their will and NSPCC estimates that 137,000 women and girls are affected by FGM in England and Wales.13

Slow progress in closing the gender gap in time spent on unpaid work (Target 5.4) and in ensuring women’s participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels in political, economic and public life (Target 5.5) is concerning. It risks undermining achievement of SDG5 in the UK. While there has been a slight reduction in unpaid work for both sexes, the gap between women and men is not narrowing fast enough. The amount of unpaid work undertaken by women fell from 19.8% of their total work in 2000 to 16.7% in 2015; for men it was 11.8% in 2015. This has a wide-reaching impact on women’s access to the labour market and their control over economic resources.

The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report (2017) indicates lagging UK progress on SDG5 for women’s economic empowerment. The proportion of elected women in parliament was at 31.9% in 2017 and the proportion of females on boards of publicly traded companies was only 27%. While the number of women on boards of FTSE 100 and 250 companies has doubled since 2011, too few have been appointed to senior board roles. ONS data shows that the percentage of women in managerial positions stagnated between 2011 and 2015 at around 30% followed by a small increase.
to 33% in 2017. But progress has been uneven and concerted, sustained efforts are needed to prevent further stagnation.

**Synergies and coherence**

The empowerment of women and girls is fundamental to achievement of all SDGs and can act as a catalyst in driving forward progress. As such, SGD5 is closely interlinked with, and dependent on, almost all the other SDGs. SDG5 can assist realisation of SDG3 for healthy lives and wellbeing and access to sexual and reproductive health-care services. In closing the gap on inequality and unequal access to education and employment it can also support SDGs 4, 8, 10 and 16.

**Local to international dimension**

Upholding established regional and international norms and agreements in gender equality are crucial to SDG5 delivery. Brexit could undermine SDG5 if aspects of the Equality Act which are derived from EU agreements and directives including those on working time, parental leave and pregnant workers are undone. This includes protections against discrimination on the grounds of gender reassignment; protection against discrimination in employment on grounds of sexual orientation (and extended provisions against discrimination on grounds of race, disability and age under Further Employment Equality Directives); and legislation providing equal pay for work of equal value. VAWG research and services benefiting from EU membership and funds under the Lisbon Treaty may be impacted along with victims’ rights if police cooperation on trafficking, VAGW and child maintenance is reduced.
**Recommended actions**

1. A comprehensive UK strategy to support achievement of SDG5 including improved UK-wide data collection across all target areas; data should be disaggregated to take into account multiple discriminations and accuracy of data collection on domestic abuse must be improved.

2. Gender mainstreaming should be built into policy, legislation, programme design and spending and analysis of the impact of spending on gender inequality conducted. This should also take into account intersectionality and trends in inequality across lifetimes.

3. The Istanbul Convention should be ratified and implemented.

4. Measures to empower women to be part of decision-making processes, including mandatory reporting on women in business and politics with targets and action plans where necessary.

5. Shared responsibility for care and unpaid work, supported by affordable childcare, flexible working arrangements and job design.

6. Sustained and adequate resourcing and an improved legislative framework to ensure services and organisation safeguard and treat women and girls at risk of VAWG or harmful practices.

7. Provision of fit-for-purpose, high quality sexual and relationship education in schools with procedures to safeguard against and address sexual harassment and hate crimes.

8. Concerted focus in curriculums to remedy gender imbalances and stereotyping, encouragement of women and girls into underrepresented areas such as STEM.
Case Study

The #freeperiods campaign

SDG TARGETS: 5.1, 4.1

In 2017 the Pink Protest and teenager Amika George joined forces to launch the #freeperiods campaign, which asked the Government to end period poverty in the UK. Amika initiated the campaign after she saw on a BBC news report that 1 in 10 girls in the UK struggle to afford menstrual products. The BBC’s coverage included interviews with girls that were regularly missing school or using alternatives such as tissue or, in one case, socks.

The #freeperiods campaign organised a protest outside 10 Downing Street to raise awareness of the issue and ask the Government to end period poverty. In March 2018 the Government committed £1.5 million of the Tampon Tax Fund to address the issue. As well as girls, women on low incomes are also struggling to pay for sanitary items. The Scottish Government has been piloting a trial in Aberdeen providing free sanitary items to women from low income households, and in May 2018 they announced their intention to roll out the programme across the nation.

www.pinkprotest.org/freeperiods
Case Study

Gender Pay Gap Reporting

**SDG TARGETS: 5.1, 5.5, 5.A, 8.2, 10.2, 10.4**

As part of The Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017, mandatory Gender Pay Gap Reporting for organisations with 250 or more employees was introduced. This requires these employers to report publicly on the difference between the hourly rates women and men are paid within their organisation, and several other factors such as differences between bonus payments.

Gender Pay Gap reporting does not identify the differences between what men and women are paid for the same roles, or equal pay. It is the gap in average earnings across the whole workforce. This means if the majority of women are employed in lower grades within the organisation the Gender Pay Gap will be greater.

The first set of published results in April 2018 showed that men were paid approximately 65% more per hour than women. Although this is not a perfect way of monitoring gender equality within an organisation, the publication of the results and wide media coverage has raised awareness of the inequalities that still exist between men and women in the workforce. In particular, reasons behind certain sectors, industries or professions having such substantial pay gaps has been questioned, and actions being taken to remedy this are being requested.

Endnotes


9. IKWRO. (2015). In only five years, police record more than 11,000 ‘honour’ based violence cases. ikwro.org.uk/2015/07/research-reveals-violence/


12. Ibid.


18. Ibid.
