

Article

Sustainable Development Goals data update, UK: December 2021

Our fifth annual report on progress made towards measuring the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators in the UK.

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1 . Foreword

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework of targets to aim for by 2030. This is more than a set of statistics; it is an agenda, a way to identify people or places that need the most help to make life better.

The framework echoes our UK Statistics Authority core principles: it is radical, ambitious, inclusive and sustainable. The Authority aims to make sure everyone counts, and is counted, and no one is forgotten. In a similar way, the SDGs ethos is to [leave no one behind](#).

The SDG framework has clear links with current priorities for UK policymakers and the public, such as levelling up and achieving net zero. They all have connections and similarities to the SDG targets, which aim to achieve sustainable social and economic improvement and environmental sustainability.

This year, our update outlines the continuing ambitious work we are doing at the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to report SDG data. It also reports how the ONS is supporting the UK to lead global developments in SDG reporting. For example, I can proudly say that we have helped over 30 countries, regions or organisations report their own SDG data using Open SDG.

We have achieved a lot in the first six years of the SDGs and we will focus on maximising the value of the SDG by providing the strong evidence required by policymakers to address our Government's current challenges.

That means working with a wide community of people and organisations. For example, we have engaged at local level and being successful at launching new platforms for Bristol and Liverpool, enabling local monitoring and evaluation. Also, the role of the business community in leading the way in environmental sustainability was recently highlighted at the UN Climate Change Conference.

I am very proud of the work the ONS has done on SDG showcased here in our fifth annual report.

Sam Beckett, Second Permanent Secretary

2 . Overview

This is our fifth annual report on progress made towards measuring the global Sustainable Development Goal indicators (SDGs) in the UK. It sets out what we have achieved since our [our last release in 2020](#) and how you could contribute to our work.

Today, we have also released an analytical article: "[Leaving no one behind: A review of who has been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, December 2021](#)". This collates available evidence and considers how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted our society, economy and the environment, and how this links to SDGs.

We are always open to questions or suggestions about our work. We embrace [Goal 17](#) by encouraging partnerships. If you can help with our SDG data reporting and monitoring, or would like to find out more about SDGs, contact us at sustainabledevelopment@ons.gov.uk.

Sustainable Development Goals

The SDGs are the United Nations' (UN) radical and ambitious Agenda for a more inclusive, sustainable and prosperous world that leaves no one and nowhere behind by 2030.

There are 17 Goals, 169 targets and 247 indicators grouped under five pillars: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships. Together, they give the world a focus. They aim to reduce poverty and hunger. They highlight important topics like health and education, economic growth, equal rights, justice for all and environmental balance. They promote the idea that sustainable development requires partnerships at local, national and global level to make progress.

There are strong links across the SDGs framework and a range of priorities for UK policymakers and the public, including levelling up and achieving net zero.

SDGs and the UK government's latest commitments

In 2015, alongside other UN member states, the UK government committed to delivering SDGs. The Office for National Statistics (ONS), as the National Statistical Institute, is responsible for monitoring and reporting SDG data for the UK.

Lord Ahmad recently reconfirmed the UK's commitment to achieving the goals by 2030 [at the UN High Level Political Forum](#). He stressed that SDGs remain a globally recognised framework for building back better from coronavirus, in line with the Prime Minister's [levelling up](#) priorities. These echo the inclusive idea that lies at the heart of the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

All UK government departments have now embedded SDGs throughout their [outcome delivery planning](#) process. The ONS has a responsibility to ensure that relevant data and statistics are available to monitor progress towards these outcomes.

SDGs, the environment and "net zero"

The environment has been an increasing focus of policymakers and the public, including around the global [UN Climate Conference \(COP26\)](#) held in Glasgow in November 2021. The UK government recently published the [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#). It states, "the main outcomes of the policies and proposals in this Strategy will have a positive impact on the UK's contribution to the global SDGs".

There are dedicated SDGs on [affordable and clean energy](#) and [climate action](#), against which the ONS reports data. The ONS also recently launched a new [UK climate change statistics portal](#), making a wider range of information and insights on climate change more accessible and usable for everyone.

3 . Current state of data reporting

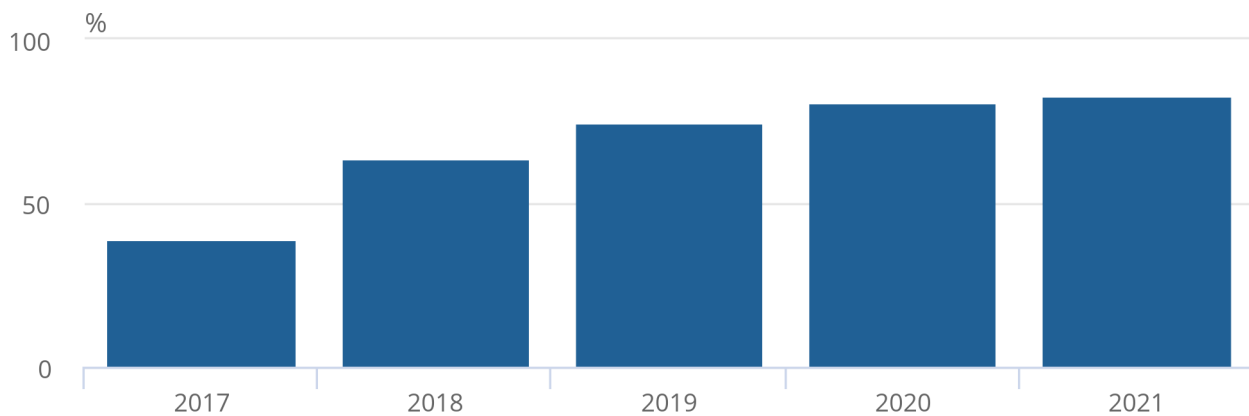
We continue to make good progress in reporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators, filling increasingly challenging data gaps. To date, we have acquired headline data for 83% of the global SDG indicators (204 out of 247), up from 39% in the first report in 2017 (Figure 1). We have recently been successful in filling gaps across various targets. Some of these include [indicator 1.a.1](#) on official development assistance grants, [indicator 4.1.2](#) on education completion rate, [indicator 13.2.2](#) on greenhouse gas emissions, and using geospatial data to fill the gap for [indicator 15.1.2](#) on biodiversity.

Figure 1: The percentage of reported Sustainable Development Goal indicators at headline level reached 83% in 2021, an increase of over 40 percentage points since 2017

Percentage of reported indicators at headline level, 2017 to 2021

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Percentage of reported indicators at headline level, 2017 to 2021



Notes:

1. We first populated our [website](#) with data in 2017.
2. This year, the [UN's 2020 Comprehensive Review Process](#) recommended 36 indicator changes. There are now 247 indicators to report data for, compared with the 244 we covered in previous releases.

We also continue to find the best ways to disaggregate data. This follows our mission to leave no one and nowhere behind and ensure everyone counts.

There are eight main disaggregations to be measured for all indicators (where applicable) covering income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts. There are also additional disaggregations where needed. Over the last year, we have been successful in disaggregating a few additional indicators, such as [indicator 4.b.1](#) on official development assistance by sector and type of study for scholarships, [indicator 5.4.1](#) on unpaid domestic and care work by sex, and [indicator 8.3.1](#) on informal employment by sector of employment.

We have developed the website [reporting page](#) to show how many indicators have achieved the disaggregations specified in their title. It is important to provide these disaggregations, as they are specifically relevant to the indicator's context.

4 . Improving Sustainable Development Goals reporting

We are always looking for ways to improve the data we report for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the past year, we focused on a few important areas. We released a way of identifying alternative sources to help us increase the granularity of SDG indicators. We continued to improve the website where we report data to make it easier to use. We continued to promote sub-national reporting, so more local-level data are available.

Inclusive data

In 2020, the National Statistician commissioned an [Inclusive Data Taskforce](#). It produced a [set of recommendations](#) on how best to make a step-change in the inclusivity of UK data and evidence. Some crucial initial activities were laid out in the [National Statistician's response](#) in September 2021. These include actions with clear links to SDGs, such as updating the [Inclusive data charter action plan](#) and developing new tools that allow users to search for disaggregated data. We will continue to make progress by building collaborative relationships with data suppliers. It will improve the inclusiveness of UK data and evidence, and ensure it is equally accessible to all.

Non-official sources assessment

In July 2021, we published our approach for assessing the quality and suitability of statistics from [non-official sources for SDG reporting](#). It allows us to expand our breadth of sources beyond official statistics, without compromising on quality. Using this to fill data gaps will help us highlight vulnerable populations and environments. [The protocol](#) is transparent and has a simple scoring system based on the pillars of the UK Statistics Authority [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) and critical SDG characteristics. Our work on this is collaborative, building on feedback from across the Government Statistical Service (GSS). We have international interest and are sharing resources and lessons learnt with other National Statistical Institutes and across various United Nations (UN) forums.

UK SDG data site and Open SDG

We report SDG data for the UK on our [SDG website](#), which uses the free [Open SDG](#) tool. We are making our data available in more formats, like [Statistical Data and Metadata eXchange \(SDMX\)](#). This makes it easier to share data across systems used by the UN and UK government.

We continued to focus on our user research programme to understand and meet [user needs](#). These activities have informed developments to both the UK website and Open SDG. We added important new features such as progress measure reporting. We improved other features to make our users' experience better. For example, it is now easier to filter data on charts and tables.

We always welcome feedback on how we can make our website easier to access and better to use. If you would like to help, please [sign up to take part in our ongoing user research](#).

Sub-national SDG reporting

The UN agreed the SDGs at a global level. Countries use them to report data at a national level and, increasingly, they are being used and adapted to report at a local level. We have worked with the [Local Government Association](#) and [UN Global Compact Network UK](#) and explored how we can continue to add value to more SDG reporting at a sub-national level. We helped the city of [Bristol launch their SDG data site](#) using Open SDG. This was the first of its type in the UK and we have since helped the [Liverpool 2030 Hub](#) launch another site, this time for the [city of Liverpool](#). These sites, and others that will follow, make it possible for organisations to track and check local progress towards the Goals.

5 . Collaboration and engagement

At the Office for National Statistics (ONS), collaboration and engagement are central to our work on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We work closely with partners across the UK SDG community and across the world, providing world-leading statistical help and advice to increase the impact of SDGs data.

In the UK

We continue to work with policy leads in the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) and Cabinet Office. We helped them to develop guidelines for [Priority Outcome Delivery Plans](#), which departments have used to align their work plans to relevant SDG targets and indicators.

As the lead on data and statistics for the SDGs within the UK, we continue to work with experts and topic leads across the Government Statistical Service (GSS). This included setting up a cross-government group focused on the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). It has provided a forum for discussing issues associated with sourcing, reporting and monitoring UK data for SDGs and the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#).

The United Nations Economic and Social Council recently published their [2021 SDG progress report](#). They acknowledged the vital role of the business community in achieving global SDG targets as we emerge from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We are exploring how our expertise in SDG reporting can support the business community. We are working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to test an approach for engaging businesses. If you are interested in this work, contact us at sustainabledevelopment@ons.gov.uk

Beyond the UK

Open SDG

[Open SDG](#) is a free, customisable online software tool for managing and publishing SDGs data. We lead the growing global community of Open SDG users and provide support in any way we can. So far, there are over [30 users](#) worldwide. It makes it easy for users to publish their data at little cost or with little technical knowledge, meaning that more SDG data are made available to inform decision making across the world. Open SDG is used for reporting SDGs at country level and increasingly at sub-national levels, for example, [Cantabria](#) and the [Canary Islands](#). There are also websites using Open SDG to publish other statistics. We supported the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) when they set up their site using Open SDG for their [25 Year Environment Plan Outcome Indicator Framework](#).

It is quick and easy to set up your own Open SDG website using the [video tutorials on YouTube](#) and [written guidance](#). You can follow the latest developments on our new [Open SDG Twitter profile](#).

Technical support to the Inclusive Data Charter

We have continued to provide technical support to Inclusive Data Charter (IDC) champions in helping them with their ambition to leave no one behind. For example, over the past year, we worked with other IDC champions and helped to develop [an inclusive data action plan for the Government of Kenya's State Department for Social Protection](#). Similar action plan development processes have begun in Paraguay, Nigeria, Senegal and Cameroon.

International conferences and workshops

We continued supporting other countries in reporting SDGs data by delivering sessions at various international conferences and workshops. This includes, but is not limited to, the [Inter-agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators](#), the [High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development](#), the [UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development](#) and the [UN World Data Forum](#).

6 . Future developments

Building on the strong progress made over the last year, we plan to focus on continuing our work to make SDGs data even more inclusive and leave no one behind. We also plan to continue engaging regularly with our users and the wider SDGs community.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed so far. The 2030 Agenda is global and collaborative, and we will continue to rely on many of you to achieve our ambition. If you can help us or would like to provide feedback, contact us at sustainabledevelopment@ons.gov.uk.

7 . Related links

[UK Sustainable Development Goals](#)

Website | Regularly updated

Website publishing outputs including data for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators, articles and SDG-related updates. Also includes archived indicators and the data we collected from them, along with a reporting status page to show how many indicators report data for disaggregations specified in their title.

[Leaving no one behind: A review of who has been most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, December 2021](#)

Article | Released 3 December 2021

This article takes available evidence on the impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19) on society, economy and the environment in the UK, and how this links to the global Sustainable Development Goals.