

GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE UK

Meeting the challenge of the
Sustainable Development Goals



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FOREWORDS

At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which included 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs aim to end poverty, hunger and inequality, support action on climate change, improve access to health and education, and build strong institutions and partnerships, over the next 15 years. The inclusion of a standalone goal (Goal 5) on women's equality, as well as the mainstreaming of gender and inclusion through the other 16 goals, is a key achievement for the international community.

The hard work, however, has only just begun. Gender inequality is an enduring challenge, with women and girls continuing to lag behind men and boys on key rights, opportunities and well-being worldwide. This hampers global development and means that women and girls, are unable to contribute effectively or realise their full potential. The manifestations of gender inequality may be diverse in different contexts, but it is a common challenge for all countries, regardless of economic development; and the SDGs have been framed as goals to drive progress everywhere, regardless of starting point. This makes them universally relevant and important.

The British Council is committed to playing its part in contributing to the [SDGs](#), including the goals and targets on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Creating opportunity for women and girls is set out as a priority in our corporate plan. Working with partners worldwide to progress gender equality is an important way in which we can meet our core purpose of building knowledge and understanding between the UK and other countries as well as contributing to a safer, more prosperous and inclusive world. We are able to draw on a wealth of experience and resources to promote this agenda of change. Through our work in the arts and sport, for example, we are challenging gender roles as well as building the power and agency of women and girls.

We are working with education systems to support gender equality and inclusion from an early age. Our networks across civil society and government have brought different sections of society together to address gender inequalities and open up spaces for women and girls to participate, exercise leadership and influence decision making. The work we have done with justice systems has strengthened women's access to justice and supported both prevention and responses to violence against women and girls.

While significant progress has been made, there is increasing recognition that if the ambitions of the SDGs are to be met, they must be central to the agendas of governments, civil society and the private sector worldwide, and international organisations. However, achieving change on gender equality is a long-term process that requires purpose and collaboration within our communities and countries as well as internationally. This goes to the very core of the 'global partnership' set out in Goal 17 of the SDGs.

The UK played a leading role in the negotiations of the SDGs and has a lot of expertise and experience to offer to support their delivery. I'm delighted to welcome this report by the British Council assessing achievement of the SDGs in the UK through the lens of women's equality – one of the first reports to be produced anywhere in the world.

Purna Sen
Director of Policy, UN Women

In our work worldwide, we draw on the experience and expertise of the UK in order to share knowledge, approaches and successes, as well as things that have not worked so well, in order to support our partners to meet their own goals. This report lays out the wealth of UK practice that we can offer in a mutually beneficial process of knowledge exchange with other countries. I hope that our partners in the 100 countries that we work in worldwide will find this a useful resource for building understanding of the UK as well as providing inspiration for practices that could be adapted to your diverse contexts.

The UK also has a lot to learn from engaging internationally. This comes through very clearly from stakeholders in the UK consulted in this study, who have expressed great passion about the power of international engagement and its potential for building momentum, motivation, innovation and achievement of shared goals. We want to do more to involve experts and organisations in the UK so that their rich experience is shared and those mutual benefits can be realised. The recommendations of this report set out a clear challenge to the British Council to continue to provide opportunities for mutual learning internationally using the SDG framework to shape our global dialogue, exchange and collaboration.

Sir Ciarán Devane
Chief Executive, British Council

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents evidence about the progress on gender equality in the UK against the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly SDG 5, within five thematic areas: power, participation and leadership; education; economy; justice and violence against women and girls; and culture (including arts, sport and technology). Informed by **Women and Girls: the British Council approach**, the report also looks to the international picture and draws comparisons where this is meaningful.

We hope that this report will provide an essential resource of good practice for the British Council's international partners, as well as a high-level stocktake of progress across the UK that will inform the work of government at all levels, civil society and the private sector. We hope these twin elements will support the achievement of the SDGs globally and domestically.

The research strategy, overseen by an independent advisory group, consisted of a widespread call for evidence, the collation of over 400 pieces of research, 35 interviews with leading UK and international stakeholders in gender equality across government, the private sector and civil society and all the nations of the UK, and a review of findings with expert focus groups. Case studies throughout the report illustrate promising practices and initiatives across policy and direct service provision in the UK alongside international case studies that show where the UK can learn from other countries.

PARTICIPATION, POWER AND LEADERSHIP

Women's equal participation in political life is linked to many other indicators for gender equality and empowerment. The UK Parliament, the national parliaments and assemblies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and local government are a significant distance from achieving parity, although Wales briefly achieved 50 per cent women in its Assembly in 2003 before experiencing a decline. Evidence suggests that efforts need to be strengthened. The UK has academic expertise and would benefit from learning from other countries where legislative and policy change have resulted in significant and sustained progress.

There has been significant progress in the UK, although men remain over-represented in almost all positions of power and decision-making in the UK, and a sexist, sometimes hostile culture in the media impedes women's advancement. Women's organisations in other countries have run successful media campaigns and in the UK there are good examples of using technology platforms to build and amplify the voice of girls and women. Recently, businesses have begun to prioritise the advancement of women in leadership and there is a wealth of research and reports available that document good practice and good results.





EDUCATION

As a developed country, the UK has achieved almost universal primary and secondary education for girls and boys (an important target for the SDGs). Girls enjoy higher educational achievements but there remain some areas where outcomes are not equitable. There is sharp gender segregation in the subjects chosen by girls and boys at secondary and post-secondary level, with little progress on encouraging more girls into better-paid career paths or into the growth area of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) – particularly the mathematical- and technology-related fields. This presents a challenge to meeting the SDG target to eliminate gender disparities in education. Sustained programmes to change cultural expectations and pervasive gender stereotypes, beginning at a young age, will be key to achieving equality in this area.

The opportunity to learn English is critical for the well-being, integration and equality of refugee and migrant women in the UK, but funding and participation are in decline and sufficiently detailed statistics are not available. This is an area where the British Council has a wealth of expertise and [resources](#).

Educational approaches to change gender stereotypes and sexist cultural norms are also important to challenge inequality and to prevent violence against women and girls. While access to education is a right for all, the right of girls and young women to participate in education free from violence or abuse is not yet universal in the UK. The Welsh government's 'whole education' approach leads the way for the UK here.

THE ECONOMY

The nations of the UK have seen a huge shift towards women's more equal participation in the formal economy, which is empowering for women and contributes to economic growth. Equal participation in the workplace is supported by legislation that outlaws discrimination, and powerful voices support women's rights and advancement in the workplace. However, there has been no parallel revolution in care and domestic work. Men do not participate equally in paid or unpaid childcare, elderly care or domestic work in the UK. These crucial social functions in society and the economy remain under-recognised and undervalued, although recent legislation, following the lead of some other countries, is beginning to help shift practices, particularly in childcare and parental leave. With advances in technology, and good data and analysis, UK employers are in a strong position to develop a more 'agile' workforce of women and men who balance their hours of employment with caring and domestic responsibilities.

Research for this report highlighted how the undervaluing of work traditionally done by women combined with austerity policies applied to the UK's social infrastructure have combined to put a brake on women's progress towards economic equality. However, progress is being made in areas such as women's representation on boards, and the UK has a prominent role in the UN's high-level panel on women's economic empowerment, which will be a driver and resource hub for global change.

JUSTICE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The UK is committed to a range of international obligations on justice and violence against women and girls (VAWG) as well as the SDGs. VAWG remains one of the most serious and widespread inequalities in the UK, with some forms increasing, including those facilitated by technology. Rates of reporting remain low, although the recent increase in disclosures of VAWG is a positive cultural shift. Migration, often driven by conflict, is a global issue that has growing importance for women and girls' equality in the UK, and black and minority ethnic (BME) women, migrant women and disabled women in particular can still find it difficult to access justice.

Recent years have seen many positive improvements as policy and law respond to high-profile cases, public debate and feminist activism. The implementation of good policies remains a key challenge, and in some areas policies have unintended consequences, for example economic policies threaten specialist women's support services. The study identifies real opportunities for learning around the UK and internationally.

CULTURAL SECTORS: ARTS, SPORT AND TECHNOLOGY

Culture is recognised as an enabler and driver of sustainable development across the SDGs. The evidence reviewed for the UK includes successes such as the greater prominence of cultural conversations about women's experiences, aligned with social media campaigns and activism, and an increasing body of work and evidence developed between academics and women's organisations. Cultural platforms influence, shape and challenge the world through their stories, and stakeholders draw a clear link between stereotyped and sexist representations in dominant culture and the unfair treatment of women in society. There are few significant levers to shift the prevalent portrayal of women and girls. There remains an entrenched gender gap in the production of UK arts and media, and the representation of women is often stereotyped within traditional gender roles, and can be sexist and heavily centred on appearance and sexualised imagery.

In sport, significant steps have been taken to address the participation gap, funding and coverage of women's and girls' sport in recent years, but women and girls are still less likely to play, watch, volunteer, work in or be represented in decision making within sports governing bodies. As one of the UK's most prominent cultural platforms, women's sport receives only seven per cent of all broadcast sports media coverage.

The importance of technology is highlighted within the SDGs generally and specifically SDG 5 as a means of promoting women's empowerment. There are considered to be three main aspects to ensuring women and girls benefit from technology: access, participation in education and employment, and integrating a gender dimension into research and product design. The UK aims to achieve 95 per cent superfast broadband access by 2017. The UK's digital inclusion strategy focuses on better digital skills, which should benefit women as their skills are likely to be lower. Technology in the workplace has benefited the working lives of some UK women, but better evidence would be helpful, for example in the care sector. Women continue to be significantly underrepresented in the ICT industry and this is reflected in lower levels of women's engagement within the technology design and development processes. However, there is encouraging evidence that digital media and technology have opened up new, effective spaces for women campaigning for change.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The UK has made significant progress in many areas of women's equality, as evidenced by the increase in women's economic activity, and their academic achievements. Law and policy on women's equality in the UK are regarded as a beacon of good practice internationally, and independent bodies are in place to monitor and enforce compliance with the law as well as to offer guidance and support. Measuring and monitoring of progress towards the equality and empowerment of women and girls are done well, by a range of stakeholders from government to academia, business and civil society. The women's sector is vibrant and dedicated in every nation of the UK, from specialist

service providers to expert policy analysts and providers of campaign platforms. Women have entered the formal workforce, and are succeeding in leadership roles, in numbers that might have seemed unattainable for their recent foremothers, denied the right to a vote less than a century ago.

Like all countries, there is still more work to do in the UK: for example, to change sexist cultural norms about gender that demean women, that are supportive of male violence and that act to limit the horizons of women and girls. These norms include the undervaluing of caring and domestic work which together represent 56 per cent of GDP but are still rarely seen as work for which men have equal responsibility. New patterns of transnational migration have important implications for gender equality: attention needs to be focused upon migrant women and girls in the UK, as well as women and girls who are disadvantaged and vulnerable in other ways, including race and disability.

We asked expert stakeholders to identify how the UK can work towards achieving SDG 5, and how UK organisations and bodies can assist international partners to do the same. To meet the goals for sustainable development by 2030, stakeholders recommended action for the UK in five areas:

- planned action on gender equality, linked across nations and sectors, such as gender equality strategies at national and local levels
- the production of world-class statistics through joint working between governments and academia
- a strong and vibrant women's movement working in partnership with governments, funders and business
- levelling-up of rights for all women and girls across the UK
- partnerships between governments, civil society, business and the media to change the culture and social norms that underpin gender inequality.

Stakeholders strongly valued the power of international collaboration and the British Council's role in exchanging knowledge to build understanding of sex equality and the empowerment of women and girls worldwide.



INTRODUCTION

Using the cultural resources of the UK, the British Council creates friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries.

The British Council's work to address gender inequality and empower women and girls is core to its role of building knowledge and understanding between the UK and other countries, and contributing to global prosperity and security. We work collaboratively with local partners so that projects can be responsive to the local context and to multiple stakeholders. We promote gender equality and women's empowerment by supporting collaboration between women and women's organisations, as well as building alliances with other stakeholders including men and boys, civil society organisations, governments and the private sector. In doing this we draw on UK expertise for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, policy and practice, and to take collaborative action.

This report is the first stocktake of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the UK from the perspective of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), looking at the progress that has been made as well as the priorities for further action. It aims to stimulate dialogue and new thinking about how progress can be accelerated both in the UK and internationally.

The report is designed as a resource for our global partners through case studies and links to an extensive database of good practice in the UK in a number of key areas. It includes examples of international practice and case studies where they address UK priorities, so it will also be useful for those working on women's equality in the UK. Potential areas for collaboration between the UK and other countries are identified, which could 'revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development' outlined in the SDGs. In this collaboration, we seek to recognise the mutual learning that is possible, particularly across the global north/south divide.

We are also mindful that, amid a period of possible changes to the UK's constitutional arrangements and relationship with the European Union (EU), this report could provide a useful tool for progressing gender equality in the UK as a whole.

The declaration by leaders signing the SDGs in September 2015 includes the vision of:

'A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed.'



The UK was a leading advocate of the inclusion of gender equality in the SDGs, and is signed up to strong international commitments on gender equality including the [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) and the [Beijing Platform for Action](#). Other relevant conventions include the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), the [Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) and the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). The International Development Select Committee has recommended that the UK government take a co-ordinated and strategic approach to implementing the SDGs domestically, and ensure that they are referenced in every department's plan.

In 1998 the European Convention on Human Rights was incorporated into [domestic law](#). Agencies such as the [Equality and Human Rights Commission for Britain \(EHRC\)](#) and the [Equality Commission for Northern Ireland](#) monitor and enforce equality law. Equality legislation in the UK is seen as a beacon of good practice globally, in particular the positive duty to *promote* equality (including sex equality) in the [Northern Ireland Act 1998](#) and the [Equality Act 2010](#) in Britain, and the [International Development \(Gender Equality\) Act 2014](#). [The Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) provides a set of national indicators against the SDGs in Wales.

Women and girls in the UK have taken huge strides forward over the last century, securing legal rights to vote on the same terms as men and to stand for public office, the right to work and be paid on equal terms, the right to a free primary and secondary education, to participate in sports and culture, and the right to be safe. These rights are reinforced by accountability systems such as parliamentary select committees and processes, public inquiries, and regulatory and monitoring bodies, as well as the engagement of a vibrant and active civil society, social protections including welfare and pension rights, and by access to justice through the legal aid system.

However, it is clear no country in the world has achieved gender equality as framed within the SDGs, and the UK is no exception. Inequalities and barriers to achieving gender equality continue to exist across the nations that make up the UK. Inequality and disadvantage are not experienced uniformly: this

report identifies particular groups of girls and women in the UK for whom their gender links with other experiences or characteristics to produce specific, and sometimes particularly acute, challenges.

The Introduction to the SDGs [states](#): 'As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. *And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first*'. (emphasis ours)

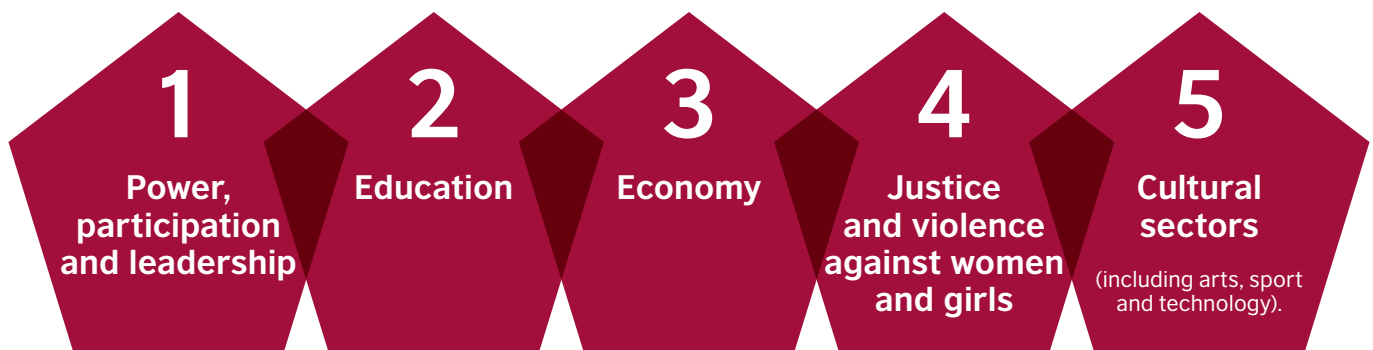
Sex discrimination and disadvantage impact differently upon some groups of women and girls (by way of example, this includes those with insecure immigration status or for whom there are language barriers, or because of race, age, disability or sexual orientation) who experience multiple and cumulative disadvantages.

[UN Women](#) says: 'Women's organizing and the strength of their autonomous movements are the strongest predictors of gender equality laws and policies across a range of areas from family law to violence against women and from non-discrimination in employment to childcare services.' There is a wealth of expertise and knowledge in the women's movement in the UK built up over two centuries, working within and with the political, economic and business domains, and covering diverse communities and diasporas from across the world.

In the UK, the women's movement has been a crucial driver for change in all these areas, working with and mutually supporting female politicians championing gender equality, informed by a formidable expert academic community and strengthened by dialogue with the international community. If there is one theme that united the people who contributed to this study, it was the power of the women's movement, most powerfully when acting in partnership with government and the private sector, to create change. Collaborating internationally, building new partnerships and approaches to address gender inequality will be our best chance of achieving the goals for gender equality and empowerment for women and girls by 2030.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

The research remit for this report was to gather evidence about progress on gender equality and good practice in the UK against the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**, particularly SDG 5, within five thematic areas reflecting the core areas of work of the British Council in ‘promoting a friendly knowledge and understanding’:



Informed by [Women and Girls: the British Council approach](#), the report also looks to the international picture and draws comparisons where this is feasible and meaningful. The report is designed to be an accessible and informative resource, using hyperlinks to signpost readers to further evidence.

Any assessment of progress in the field of gender equality in the UK is potentially vast, and inevitably constrained by both time and the primary evidence available. The scope of this study is secondary: a rapid, non-exhaustive review of existing evidence that represents an overview of the terrain of gender equality within each of the four nations of the UK, and across the UK as a whole, published in the period 2010–16. There are some diversions from this frame of reference – in particular within the cultural section, where lack of current data forced the use of research pre-dating 2010.

This study aims to provide evidence and analysis using the framing provided by the SDGs and other international declarations on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and in relation solely to the core themes of the British Council's work. As a result some areas of inequality, such as women's health, are not covered. It is important to [note](#) that some lawmaking, policy and financial powers are controlled by the UK government and others devolved to the governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. A comprehensive study of the full impact of these differences is out of the scope of the report, but some specific examples are drawn upon and illustrate some of the areas where the freedom to develop different approaches has resulted in faster progress, such as in the first elections to the National Assembly for Wales.





The study was completed between March and July 2016. It was undertaken by an expert research team, informed and reviewed by an independent advisory group, convened by the British Council, that included representatives from government departments,

statutory agencies, business and civil society, and the four nations. The project was overseen by the British Council Head of Gender and Inclusion. Following an initial focus group to inform the research strategy, the study used a three-stage process:

The process

1. A call for evidence using a snowball methodology, via more than 400 stakeholders in government, academia, business and civil society/the women's sector in the UK, and internationally, resulting in more than 400 pieces of research being reviewed by the team.
2. 35 interviews were completed with leading UK and international stakeholders across the five themes to build a deep, rich picture and provide engaging examples of participants' insight from their experiences of working on gender equality in government, the private sector and civil society across all the nations of the UK.
3. A review of the key research findings on progress, gaps and priorities was completed in consultation with expert and informed focus groups.

Good analysis of the impact of gender inequality, and effective interventions, must consider women and girls in the round; we sought research and interventions that take an [intersectional](#) approach to gender inequality.

A selection of case studies throughout the report illustrates promising practice and represents a cross-section of initiatives, policy and direct service provision led by business, civil society, and local and national governments in the UK, which can stimulate ideas and potential areas for collaboration both within the UK and internationally. International practice and case studies are included to provide examples of where the UK could learn from work elsewhere.

We did not undertake any independent evaluation of the impact of these initiatives. Over 160 potential case studies were submitted within the call for evidence, highlighted by interviewees, and discussed at the focus groups. Examples of good practice and innovative approaches can also be found throughout the reports listed in the [full bibliography](#) for the study, which is available as a separate document to download.

PARTICIPATION, POWER AND LEADERSHIP

The Sustainable Development Goals require of every state that they *'Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life'*. Nations are required to *'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'*.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

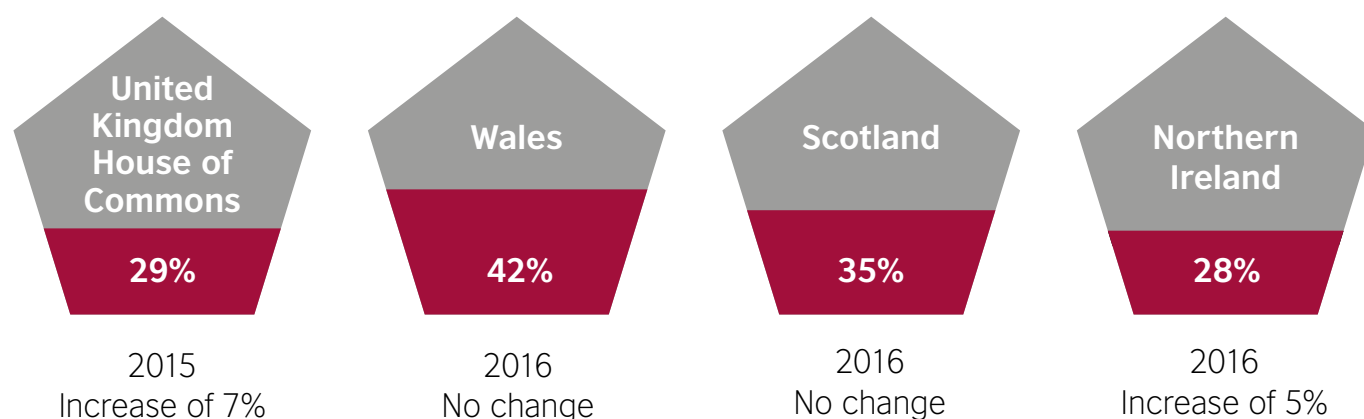
The most straightforward global measure of women's leadership is [participation in national parliaments](#). The story for the UK is one of overall slow progress, with some clear successes in the four nations and in some political parties.

In 1999, the UK Parliament ranked 25th in the world for women's representation; at the time of writing it is [ranked 48th](#). Women MPs are less diverse than the general population: 13 per cent of the UK population is from an ethnic minority background, but only ten per cent of the 191 female MPs ([20 women](#) – up from 11 in 2010) are from an ethnic minority background, none of whom has a declared disability. [26 per cent](#) were educated at fee-paying schools compared with seven per cent of the population. Monitoring information concerning sexual orientation is not published, although a number, including a Cabinet minister, have publicly stated they are lesbians. There is a sizeable '[motherhood gap](#)' in the UK Parliament, with fewer female MPs having children relative both to male MPs, to women in comparable professions, and to women more widely in society. In 2013 some 45 per cent of female MPs did not have children compared to only 28 per cent of male MPs. The number of women in local government has increased in recent years, alongside [increasing devolution of political powers](#), but does not [exceed 32 per cent in any nation](#).

Both the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament achieved their highest representation of women in the elections of 2003. Wales became the first nation in the world to achieve 50:50 representation. This was achieved through a combination of factors including the introduction of positive-action measures to ensure women's (s)election by the leading political parties.



Women's representation in UK and national parliaments: change since previous election



Sources: UK – *Sex and Power* report, 2015; Wales – *In Brief, Assembly Election 2016: Women's Political Representation*, 2016; Scotland – *Holyrood, Analysis: the representation of women in the Scottish Parliament*, 2016 and <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/scotland-blog/2016/may/12/holyrood-2016-scottish-parliament-gender-gap>; Northern Ireland – *NI Assembly Research paper NIAR 141–16: www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2016-2021/2016/general/14616.pdf*

The new governments for Scotland and Wales were also a relatively '[blank canvas](#)' with no incumbents in pre-existing seats, although as cross-cultural [research](#) has shown, masculinist cultures permeate parliaments, and women had to campaign hard. In Northern Ireland, efforts to advance women's equality in public life include a [gender equality strategy](#). Concerns were raised by a number of our stakeholders that there is a risk of complacency developing particularly in Westminster (the London home of the UK Parliament), which mitigates the sustained effort required to maintain progress. This may be a reflection of underestimating how hard-won the gains for equality, made by political parties, civil society organisations and others, have been to date. The *Sex and Power* report on the 2015 elections to Westminster set out key recommendations to government, political parties, civil society and the media.

SUCCESSES

In relation to politics, [enabling legislation](#) was introduced and extended by the UK government in the form of the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, amended by the Equality Act 2010. This permits political parties (whose [role is key](#)) to use quotas or other positive-action measures such as all-women shortlists in the selection (not election) of parliamentary

candidates, until 2030. Such measures have achieved significant gains. The highest-performing countries tend to be those that [use quotas](#). Positive-action measures address the implicit bias in recruitment and selection – the 'demand' – reflected in the recent findings of the Fawcett Society's *Sex Equality: State of the Nation* survey, where six in ten respondents agreed that men in top jobs won't make way for women unless they have to. There are 'softer' but less expeditious methods which can be used by political parties to increase women's representation, mostly addressing the 'supply' of candidates. The House of Commons [Speaker's Conference](#) on Parliamentary Representation in 2010, the Women in Parliament report *Improving Parliament* in 2014, and an independent report *The Good Parliament* in 2016 all made proposals for change. Innovations to note include the newly formed Women and Equalities Select Committee in Westminster, a promising mechanism to mainstream women's equality into legislation, and the [Women's Equality \(WE\) Party](#), the first party in the UK to make women's equality its purpose, founded in 2015. In the London Mayoral election 2016 the Women's Equality candidate attracted one in 20 of all votes cast. Candidates also ran in Wales and in Scotland, where one candidate commented: 'We may not have won a seat but we have certainly won influence'.

GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE UK:

Meeting the challenge of the Sustainable Development Goals

Women's participation in political life is important in itself but also for the diversity of perspective it brings to decision making. Internationally, the impact of women's equal participation in decision making has been [reported](#) to be important in: developing gender equality policy and machineries; socio-economic development (a theme picked up later in this report); and peace building as reflected in the UK [National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security](#), through which the UK government co-ordinates its overseas

work, and recognises, in practical ways, that gender equality is [necessary](#) to build lasting peace. In terms of the equally important commitment to meet the principles of [United Nations Security Resolution \(UNSCR\) 1325](#) domestically, it is essential to address the ongoing challenge of ensuring the participation of women in the post-conflict process in Northern Ireland. UK stakeholders also told us of the important contributions made through the individual efforts of a number of female politicians, or 'critical actors'.

Case study – Gender-inclusive peace building in Northern Ireland

UN Women's authoritative [global study](#) on preventing conflict, transforming justice and securing peace summarises the international evidence, including from Northern Ireland, that the influence of women's groups in peace processes produces significantly better outcomes. In Northern Ireland in the late 1990s, a coalition of women drawn from academia, trade unions and community activism succeeded in using electoral mechanisms to gain involvement in the peace negotiations and ensure the inclusion of issues of concern to women, including measures to prevent violence. Women's civil society organisations remain strong and well connected to seats of institutional power, including local government and academia. Good partnerships, and funding for agencies such as the Women's Resource and Development Agency, have enabled continued learning and refinement of good

practice as well as consolidation of that learning in strategic guides such as the 2014 [Women, Peace and Security toolkit](#) that built on the experiences of over 800 women from Northern Ireland and Ireland. Representatives from government, academia and civil society have shared learning with other nations (such as in a [project](#) led by Ireland, with Timor-Leste and Liberia) exploring similarities, differences and innovations for gender equality in peace building and security. Factors such as the leadership and gender awareness of some critical political actors have helped organisations working on post-conflict peace building to recognise their obligations, under [domestic and international](#) standards, to contribute to the movement to recruit and elect more women into decision making through initiatives such as [Women In Local Councils](#) and the [Women in Politics Review](#). Challenges remain, both in hearing women's voices within communities and increasing women's representation in public life.



While women in the UK remain under-represented in other fields of public life, and in the workplace, there is a strong commitment – evident from the business, public and civil sectors, supported by academics – to analysing both qualitative and quantitative data on the challenges of enhancing the voice, participation, power and leadership of women and girls. The absence of women from platforms is often highlighted (e.g. by using social media or [apps](#) or in direct addresses as in an [example](#) from Australia) to ‘call out’ event organisers who have convened ‘[manels](#)’ (men-only panels). To address the norm of men’s over-representation, organisations – such as the [UK Government Digital Service](#) – have formally committed to gender diversity at events. Concerted efforts in business and in academia have produced a wealth of knowledge for the advancement of women in leadership. There is an impressive body of relevant, up-to-date knowledge and evidence for ‘what works’, using the expertise of the girls’ and women’s sector, academia and business. For example in business, [Lloyds Banking Group](#) (a supporter of the government’s [Think Act Report](#) programme) has a range of evidence-based policy and practice for developing women’s participation and leadership, including its Breakthrough network for women and mentoring partnership with Manchester Enterprise Academy. Internationally, technological advancements are enabling international collaboration such as the [Mentoring Women in Business](#) programme connecting experienced and aspiring women in business around the globe.

PRIORITIES AND GAPS

In most areas of senior political life, leadership in business, public life and civil society, women hold less than 30 per cent of positions of power and influence.

The UK Parliament does not yet meet many of the standards for the IPU’s [evidence-based](#) framework for gender-sensitive parliaments. The UK did not meet the baseline target of 30 per cent of women in decision making (set in 1996) in the Commonwealth Plan of Action 2005–15.

In Europe, [EIGE data](#) ranks the UK 14th of 28 countries in the domain of ‘power’ and lowest in Europe for supreme court judges. Areas of recent rapid improvement include women on FTSE 100 boards since the Davies Review of 2011 – a rise from 12.5 per cent in 2011 to [26.1 per cent in 2015](#), although women’s appointment to executive roles remains low at 9.6 per cent. Increasing the number of women on boards is actively investigated and monitored by a number of organisations and partnerships including the [EHRC](#), and government departments including the [Government Equalities Office](#) with Cranfield School of Management, and most recently the [Hampton–Alexander review](#).

A selection of civil society, academic, business and government reports and reviews on women’s and girls’ participation, power and leadership published in the UK since January 2015 alone: [The Fawcett Society](#) | [Centre for Women and Democracy](#) and the [Counting Women In coalition](#) | [London School of Economics Commission on Gender, Inequality and Power](#) | [Girlguiding](#) | [The Young Foundation](#) | [Women’s Equality Network Wales](#) | [Northumbria University](#) | [Lancaster, Roehampton and Bradford](#)

[universities](#) | [University of Bristol](#) | [University of Cambridge](#) | [Ulster University](#) | [YWCA Scotland](#) | [Scottish Women’s Convention](#) | [EHRC](#) | [House of Commons](#) | [Northern Ireland Assembly](#) | [Women’s Policy Group Northern Ireland](#) | [Equality Commission for Northern Ireland](#) | [Welsh Assembly](#) | [ERS Cymru](#) | [Engender](#) | [Women’s Business Council](#) | [The 30% Club](#) | [Virgin Money with HM Treasury](#) | [PWC](#) | [Ernst & Young](#) | [CIPD](#) | [Telefónica](#) | [Deloitte with Government Equalities Office](#)

The effectiveness of mechanisms to increase women's political representation can vary for example by geography and level of economic development. However, there are some common factors that influence representation worldwide, including gender ideology, party ideology, electoral rules, democratisation, and pressure from international and domestic women's movements. Strong women's movements have been instrumental in achieving legislative change in Nepal and Tunisia; both Nepal and the self-governing Kurdish region of Syria have introduced special measures for quotas that reflect intersectional under-representation. Rwanda has a long-established cross-party women's caucus. In the Czech Republic and Turkey, women's organisations have challenged social norms. Stakeholders told us that party regulation mechanisms are under-used in the UK – in Timor-Leste extra state broadcasts were given to parties who selected women for winnable seats; in Ireland, party funding is reduced by 50 per cent if parties do not nominate at least 30 per cent women; and in France, state subsidy levels are tied to women's nominations.

Across our research the gap that was most consistently highlighted in the UK and particularly Westminster was voice: the extent to which the voices of women and girls are being conveyed to, and acted upon by, government domestically. Women's organisations are particularly effective where they work in partnership with government. There are examples of good practice, including the Women's Business Council, supported by the Government Equalities Office; the latter itself acts as a focal point for gender equality initiatives across the UK government, alongside similar units in the other nations. Reports and recommendations are being produced by women's and girls' organisations, experts and specialists, but the channels of communication and influence are broadly perceived to be limited. The CEDAW observations in 2013 echoed the concerns of stakeholders following the closure in 2010 of the UK Women's National Commission, and the lack of a cross-departmental culture at UK level of regular engagement with women's organisations. By contrast in Wales and Scotland, while there are challenges (particularly around funding), women's civil society organisations are better connected and have been directly supported by funding from government, with whom they regularly engage across a range of policy areas.

Case study – Girls matter

In 2014, led by its young members, the charity Girlguiding asked more than 2,400 of its members aged seven to 25 how they wanted the next UK government to improve the lives of girls and young women. The robustly designed consultation and survey resulted in eight priorities for change to eliminate the barriers that hold girls and young women back and limit their aspirations. Materials were used to campaign prior to the General Election of 2015 in the media as well as by lobbying politicians, including face-to-face meetings that built girls' confidence and skills. Multiple digital platforms were used. Educational materials about democracy and voice were created and shared. The materials form the basis of ongoing campaign work.

Outputs and outcomes included:

- 5,319 pledges of support.
- 500 girls interacted with a politician face-to-face.
- 104 MPs supported the campaign across the political parties.
- #GirlsMatter mentioned 24,000 times on Twitter.
- 75 pieces of coverage across national, regional and local media.
- Over 1,000 Hear Our Voice resources – supporting young members to learn about democracy, parliament and using their voices – had been distributed by the close of the campaign.

<http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/girls-matter>

Finally the impact of a gendered, sexist and often hostile culture in the media remains a significant barrier. Nobody is immune, as studies of [Hillary Clinton's](#) US presidential campaigns and commentary on [Theresa May's](#) leadership have shown. Women with power are often caricatured by journalists using sexist '[cultural shorthand](#)'. Women in the public eye are subjected to higher rates of [online abuse](#) than men and have judged statutory responses to be [inadequate](#), leading to the founding in 2016 of cross-party initiative [Reclaim the Internet](#). Initiatives focusing on the media, in the UK and internationally, are discussed elsewhere in this report.



EDUCATION

The UN's commitment to education is sustained in the SDGs, in particular [SDG 4](#): to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. Targets under SDG 4 include 'eliminate gender disparities in education' and equitable outcomes for girls and boys, men and women, in school and in technical, vocational and tertiary education. They include education for gender equality and the provision of safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

ATTAINMENT AND OUTCOMES

Girls in education tend to [perform](#) better than boys at all ages, to the extent that concerns have been raised by some commentators, e.g. recently by the [Higher Education Policy Institute](#). Yet as the [EHRC](#) says, the comparatively higher academic achievement of girls and women is not resulting in fuller employment or more highly paid work. Women and girls are still limited by gender stereotyping and inequality. The large-scale [EPPSE 3–16](#) study of 2,600 young people in England found that at age 14 and 16 boys felt more confident and more positive about themselves than girls, and boys' academic self-concept was as high as that of girls, despite their lower actual test performance. In the [Think Future](#) study of over 20,000 undergraduate students in the UK and Ireland, most male and female students felt that they were treated equally at university, but only around 42 per cent of women were confident that their gender would have no bearing on their career progression after graduation, or on their future pay, versus around 72 per cent of men. There continues to be a gender [pay gap](#) among graduates.

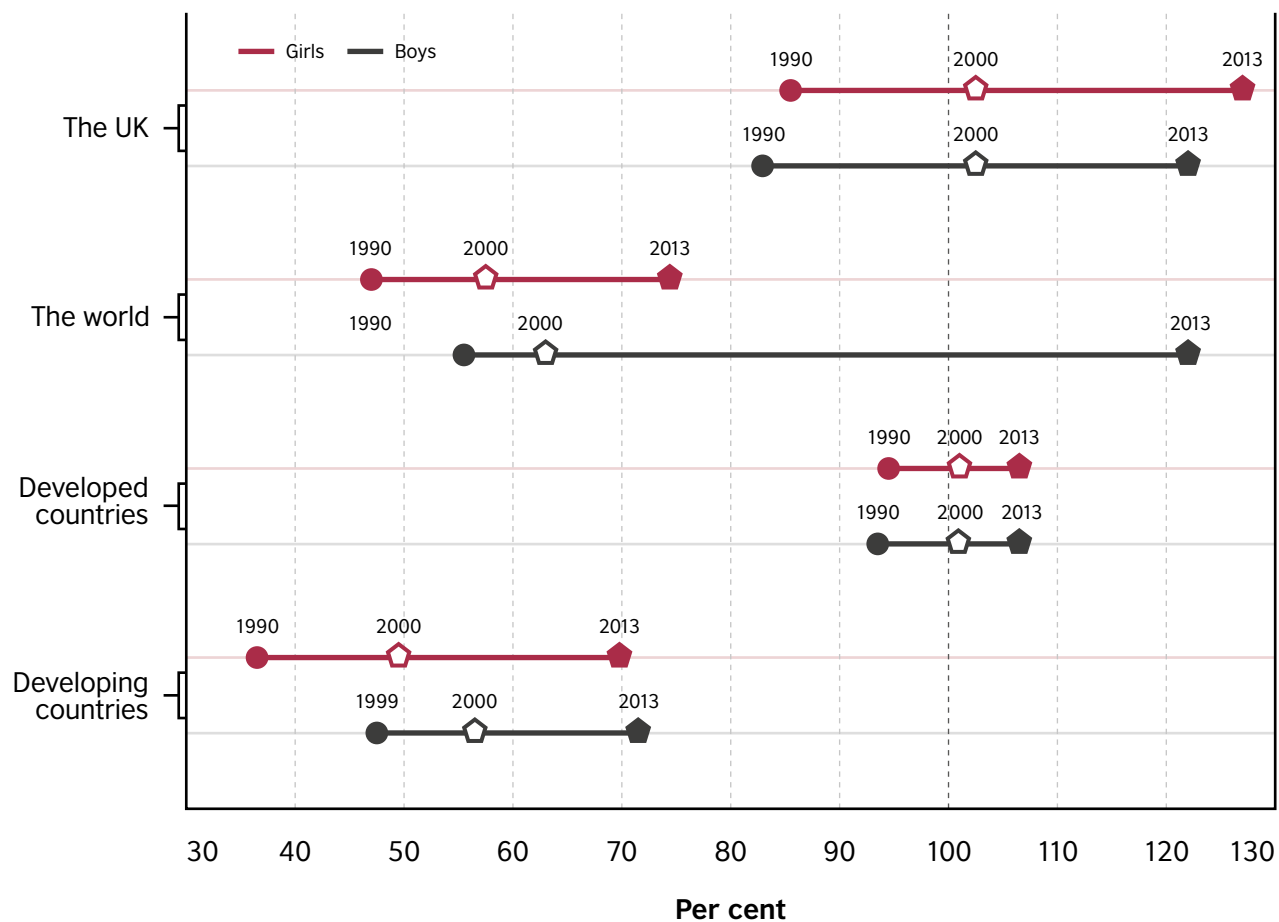
In the UK, almost all girls and boys have participated in education to age 14 for [more than a century](#). This has been a right, and an obligation, in law since 1944. At tertiary level in the UK there are now more female undergraduates (56 per cent) than male undergraduates (44 per cent) ([2014–15 figures](#)), which may reflect knowledge of the added benefits of a university degree to women – a UK government [report](#) estimated the positive impact of a degree on lifetime net earnings to be 28 per cent for men but 53 per cent for women.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The [global picture](#) is one of a narrowing gender gap in primary, secondary and tertiary education, with enrolments tending to increase faster for girls and women than men and boys.



Participation rates in secondary education, world/UK



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014

Note: Participation rates exceed 100 per cent due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged students because of early or late entrants, or grade repetition.



SUCCESSSES

[All nations of the UK](#) provide access for all young people to state-funded primary and secondary education as a universal service, and every nation of the UK has some provision for free early-years (preschool) education. Primary and secondary education are compulsory between the ages of five and 16, and [participation rates](#) are equal for girls and boys at, effectively, 100 per cent. However, access and outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils are [very low](#) and exacerbated by inadequate/inconsistent data monitoring arrangements as well as recent changes to [planning policy](#) and [other policies](#) affecting housing.

UK participation rates in tertiary education are [high](#) – 35 per cent of women and 33 per cent of men are graduates of tertiary education.

The UK continues to rank highly, though it has dropped from first to third among EU countries on the [EIGE](#) indicator for gender equality in the knowledge domain between 2005 and 2012 (largely as a result of a decrease in lifelong learning and an increase in subject segregation).

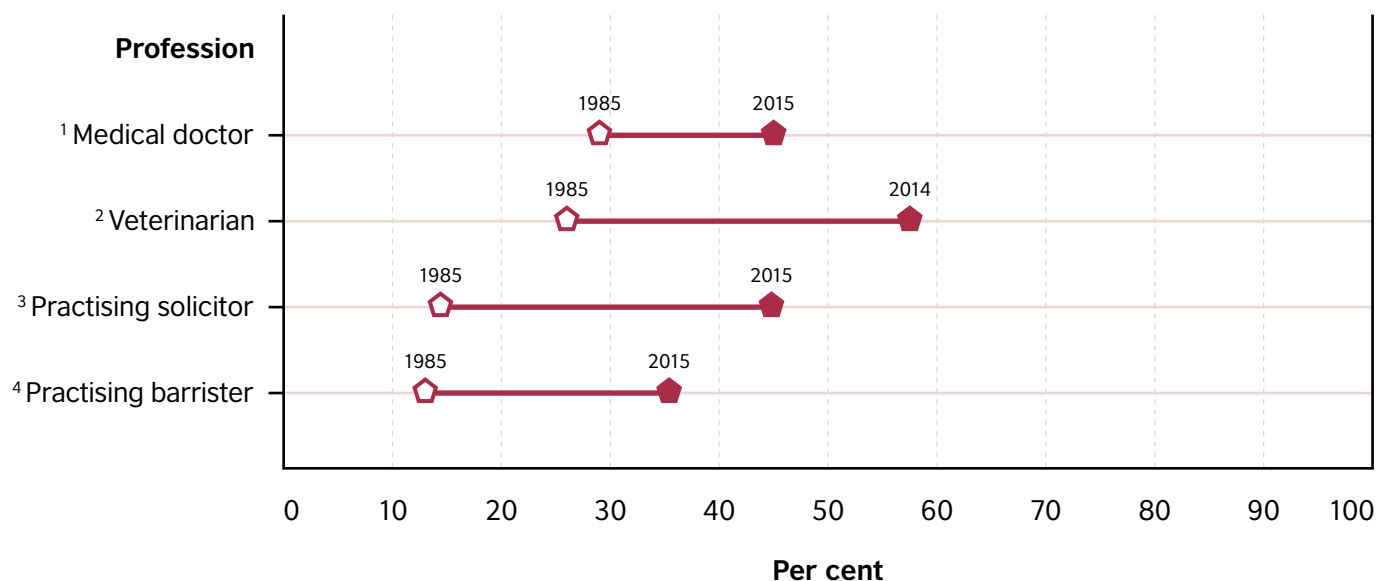
In the course of a generation (1985–2015), the traditionally male-dominated and high-status professions of medicine, law and veterinary science have been transformed through the entry of women, who graduated in these subjects in equal or above-equal numbers to men. Participation rates of higher education (HE) students in the UK, however, vary markedly by gender according to subject choice, which directly affects the pipeline into careers.

In the UK, legislation prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. This means that neither girls nor boys can be denied the right to study a subject based on their sex. Curriculum breadth and balance varies across the nations but ensures girls and boys are taught a range of subjects that might be thought of as ‘traditionally’ masculine or feminine to at least age 14 (at which point they often make gendered subject choices). Legislation also imposes a positive duty to prevent discrimination. It is widely recognised that the education sector is a key site for challenging and changing the discriminatory gender norms that are embedded in the media, homes and workplaces. There is no centralised database of relevant programmes but there are some excellent local, national and UK-wide initiatives, some of which are listed by the new Gender Equalities Leadership in Schools [Network](#) for England and Wales.

Case study – ABCD de l'égalité

Meeting the target to **educate for gender equality** by 2030 (SDG 4.7) is likely to require a co-ordinated national approach. An example of a whole-nation approach can be found in the French government's [ABCD de l'égalité](#) programme, rolled out nationally after a pilot evaluation. This programme provides for training of new and existing teachers and of school inspectors and managers. It includes online resources and a suite of teaching and learning resources across the curriculum. Education for gender equality is formally specified in Article L121-1 of the Education Code, 2013.

Percentage of women in traditionally male-dominated professions, UK



Source: 1. Health and Social Care Information Centre, 2. Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, 3. Law Society, 4. Bar Standards Board

Case study – Inspiring Women

‘Inspiring Women’ is part of the Inspiring the Future campaign run by the charity Education and Employers, which connects state schools and colleges with people from the world of work. This initiative is cross-sectoral – it has successfully integrated ideas and ongoing contributions from stakeholders across government, the private sector, the educational sector and the third sector. Launched in 2012, it began small and is scalable. It started in secondary schools and colleges in England and is now expanding to include primary schools and extending across the four nations of the UK. Inspiring Women addresses the significant occupational gender segregation in the UK workforce that limits the horizons of girls and women, contributes to the gender pay gap and

deprives UK sectors, such as STEM and sport, of access to the full talent pool. Some 20,000 women from a wide range of occupations have signed up to pledge an hour of their time once a year to talk face-to-face with girls in school about the job they do and the route they took through education and training.

Inspiring Women and Inspiring the Future operate through a secure online ‘matching’ platform that is free and user-friendly, developed pro bono in the private sector. The British Council in China is currently working to develop the concept for girls and young women in [China](#).

www.inspiringthefuture.org/inspiring-women

PRIORITIES AND GAPS

The key challenges for the UK have been identified as subject and opportunity segregation by gender, English for women who speak other languages, and safety. Universities, colleges and schools in the UK enjoy a much-valued level of independence as individual institutions, which militates against a co-ordinated strategy at the scale required to achieve cultural change.

Girls perform as well as boys in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) subjects at GCSE level, (the main qualification taken at 16 years) and more girls than boys rate science as [a favourite subject](#). However, far fewer girls and women study STEM at further education (FE) and HE level, with no sign of rapid improvement. Between 2010 and 2012 applications to HE computer science courses made by women and girls declined from 16 per cent to [14 per cent](#), while acceptances fell from 15 per cent to 12 per cent. In 2015 the proportion of young women in [Scottish Modern Apprenticeships](#) for civil engineering was 0.8 per cent compared with 97 per cent in hairdressing.

Research confirms the importance of cultural expectations and pervasive gender stereotypes, beginning at a young age, in setting gendered paths to further study and thence occupational segregation. Consistent messages are required to overcome these barriers, beginning with early years. Resources such as Zero Tolerance's [early years guide](#) for gender equality are excellent although not universally taken up. Effective projects (e.g. [‘Get On with Science’](#) in Wales) sometimes cease when short-term funding ends. Increasingly, universities (e.g. the [University of Birmingham](#)) are helping to give continuity by running ongoing programmes for girls. Funded action plans like those from [Skills Development Scotland](#) are required to meet the target of eliminating gender disparities in education by 2030.

Despite more women than men completing tertiary education, the education sector itself remains both horizontally and vertically segregated by gender. Only [15 per cent](#) of primary school teachers in England are male but this rises to 38 per cent at secondary level. Scotland has even fewer male primary teachers, at [nine per cent](#), although 13 per cent of primary heads are male. In UK universities, a recent [report](#) highlighted disparities between the number of female staff employed (63 per cent) and the number employed as academics (45 per cent). Of the female academics,

fewer were on a permanent contract, fewer were on a senior contract and of professors only 22 per cent were women. The intersection of ethnicity with gender produced a particularly notable deficit: of all UK professors in 2013–14, only 1.8 per cent were BME women despite 8.3 per cent of the academic staff population being BME. A number of reports have been written across the UK nations addressing the gender gap in HE, and a number of initiatives exist to tackle the disparities, such as the [Aurora](#) leadership programme for women in HE across the UK and Ireland. However, the effect of ‘unconscious bias’ is demonstrated by [studies](#) that show lecturers will be rated significantly less favourably if students believe they are female. Bias is also evidenced against students based on their perceived [gender](#) and [ethnicity](#). The [Chair of the Equality Challenge Unit](#) has [called](#) for university research funding to depend on attaining an [Athena SWAN](#) charter mark, which recognises commitment to advancing women in HE. This is already required of UK medical schools.

ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

Inclusive life-long learning opportunities, and especially the opportunity to learn English, are critical for the well-being of refugee and migrant women in the UK. Being unable to speak English is a barrier to well-being, to family access to healthcare and to the exercise of rights as well as to successful [integration](#) into wider communities and to career progression. Mothers who are unable to speak or understand English are more likely to die. [Five per cent](#) of all maternal mortality cases in the UK in 2011–13 were women who were unable to speak or understand English, rising to [nine per cent](#) of cases of maternal murder in 2009–13. For comparison, one quarter of one per cent of the UK population could not speak English at all, according to [Census](#) data. Government funding for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) has [reduced by over 40 per cent](#) since 2008, and participation is in [decline](#). Eligibility for funded classes is extremely [complex](#) and tends to disadvantage women who do not directly claim benefits, are in low-paid work or who have childcare responsibilities. Of the UK nations, only the [Scottish](#) and [Welsh](#) administrations have an ESOL strategy or policy. The most recent [equality impact assessment](#) from the UK government cites the unavailability of data as the reason that an accurate assessment of gender equality issues in ESOL provision cannot be made.

SAFETY

The SDG 4 target of safe access to education for girls and women has come to the fore in the UK as an issue, particularly at secondary and tertiary level, while sexism and gendered abuse are experienced and observed from a [young age](#). Some comprehensive and evidence-based initiatives have been developed, including the whole-school approach of the [Bristol Ideal](#) – established and supported by the local authority's public health team in partnership with local women's organisations – and [Fearless Futures](#), which promotes empowerment and the disruption of gender stereotypes. The Welsh government has published a [good practice guide](#) for a whole-education approach to violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, developed with Welsh Women's Aid. But the right of girls and young women to participate in education free from violence or abuse is not universal. Over a three-year period, 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in UK schools, including [600 rapes at school](#). The unreported figure will be higher. In 2016 the UK government's Women and Equalities Committee launched an [inquiry](#) into sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools and has recently published its [report](#). *Education for gender equality* (SDG 4.7) and

against gender-based violence in what was described by one of our stakeholders as a 'gender-inclusive environment' is not a statutory part of any UK curriculum, despite [consensus among experts](#) that a whole-institution approach, including clear statutory educational requirements, is necessary. Good-quality education for gender equality and against gender-based violence can be patchy, relying upon the commitment of staff or managers at school or college level.

A universities [taskforce](#) is developing recommendations to challenge the unacceptably high rates of sexism, sexual harassment, assault, rape and other forms of violence against women experienced by students in UK universities. A free educational [programme](#) for English universities, using the evidence-based bystander intervention model, was commissioned by Public Health England and launched in 2014. The Scottish government has commissioned a [toolkit and educational programme](#) to assist implementation of [Equally Safe](#), the Scottish government's strategy for prevention of violence against women, in universities and colleges across Scotland.



THE ECONOMY

Economic targets under the SDGs for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls include: *Recognise 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; and 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.*

Legislation for economic equality is ongoing in the UK. Milestones include the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, the Equal Pay Act of 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, the Pensions Act of 1995 and the Employment Equality (Sex Discrimination) Regulations 2005. The law was changed in 2015 to allow future monarchs' daughters equal rights to inherit the throne.

In the space of a generation, there has been a huge cultural shift in some areas towards UK women's equal economic participation. In particular, while women have always done paid work, cultural norms have shifted from a 'male breadwinner' model to an expectation that women will have a nominally equal participation in the paid workforce. However, the following figures show that the UK labour market remains segregated vertically and horizontally by gender.

- In April 2016 79 per cent of men and 69 per cent of women of working age were in paid work.
- However, women remain considerably more likely than men to work part-time hours (41 per cent versus 11 per cent) [2015 data used throughout], in relatively low-paid jobs, and to be paid less than men for equivalent work, even in the face of longstanding equal-pay legislation.
- Hourly rates for women working part-time are £11.17; for men working full-time they are £16.79.
- Top-earning men earn 55 per cent more than top-earning women.
- The full-time pay gap between women and men was decreasing but has now stalled, and the Fawcett Society estimates it will take over 50 years to close. It currently stands at 13.9 per cent (mean average) but is highest for older women (19.7 per cent for women 50 and over).
- The mean hourly pay gap for full-time and part-time workers combined is 17.5 per cent, which is a 0.2 per cent change from the year before.



- The mean hourly pay gap for full-time work is lower in Scotland (10.6 per cent), Wales (7.5 per cent) and Northern Ireland (3.0 per cent) than it is in England (14.8 per cent).
- Official employment and pay statistics disaggregated by gender combined with ethnicity or disability are not routinely published.
- A '[motherhood penalty](#)' and 'fatherhood bonus' which reward traditional gender roles have been identified in UK pay data. [Fawcett research](#) shows that old stereotypes about working parents persist, with 29 per cent of people thinking that men are *more* committed to their job after having a baby while 46 per cent saw women as *less* committed to their job after having a baby.

[Internationally](#) as in the UK, women work longer hours than men, spend more time on unpaid domestic and caring work, and are less likely to participate in the paid labour force (the global figure is 50 per cent women and 77 per cent men). All over the world men are over-represented in decision-making positions and under-represented in domestic and caring work, which is low-paid and low-status. There has been no substantial decrease in occupational segregation by gender, worldwide, in recent years. Women are more likely than men to be working [shorter hours](#) than they would choose in paid work.

MACROECONOMICS

A recent [LSE report](#) called for analysis of the economy to be broadened to include the reproductive sector and unpaid care work. As one of our stakeholders put it, the default person or 'centre of gravity' in our society is not viewed as a woman with children and caring responsibilities, but a man with a paid job and money in his pocket who is supported by the invisible work of others (mainly women). This view is reflected in Fawcett's recent '[State of the Nation](#)' finding that only seven in ten UK men believe a more equal society between women and men would be better for 'the economy'.

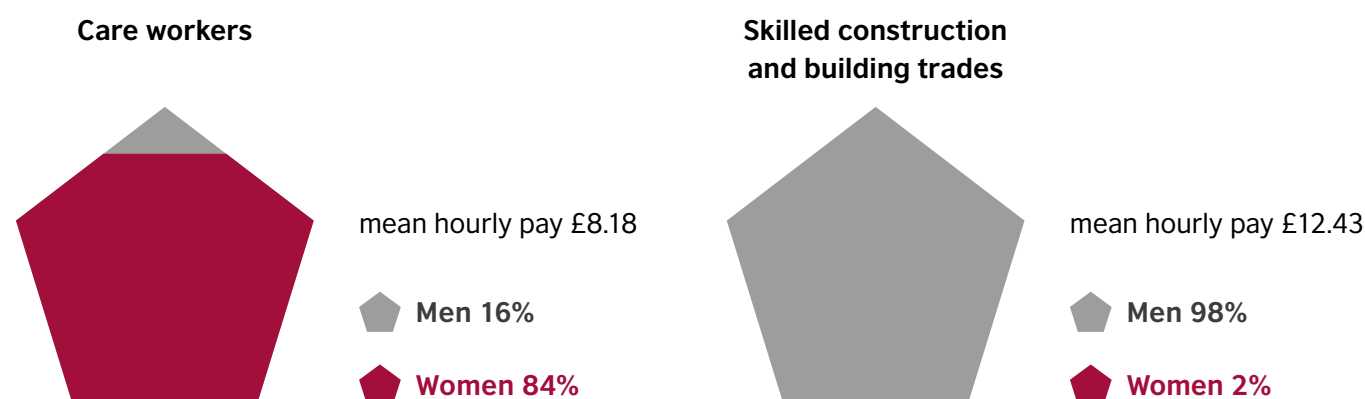
Women are being increasingly encouraged to enter the labour market through legislative and policy initiatives, including the right to have requests for flexible working considered and increased childcare provision (although stakeholders agreed that childcare provision is still far from universal and remains very high-cost). Our research confirms that reproductive, caring and domestic labour remain not only highly feminised but inadequately conceptualised or accounted for in state economic policy. Unpaid care work is largely unrecognised, rather than seen as one of the integral lynchpins of the economy. The important SDG targets of '*recognising and valuing unpaid care and domestic work*' and '*promoting shared responsibility within the household and family*' are less developed, hampering progress towards economic equality. This is felt most acutely by women outside of, or on the margins of, the paid workforce or employed in the low-paid and often insecure feminised domestic and care sectors.

Social protection policies are needed more by women because of their reproductive labour (women need maternity protection rights and maternal healthcare) and inequalities in the care economy (women take more responsibility for caring for families, who need education and healthcare). In the UK many of these protections are funded through deductions from salaries, which disadvantages those in lower-paid or part-time work. Women in informal, insecure work or without full citizenship rights (migrant women) have less access than those in secure employment to social protection such as pensions, unemployment benefits and maternity protection.

*'The right to equality is not subject to progressive realization, it is an **immediate obligation** of States to ensure that women are able to enjoy their right to equality within economic and social spheres'* (emphasis in the original)

[Mayra Gómez](#), Co-Executive Director of the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Mean hourly pay for workers in care and construction work by occupational segregation



Source: Table 26.6a Mean hourly pay excluding overtime for all care workers www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/careworkerssocashetable26 – www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/datasets/industry2digitsicashetable4

The global economic crisis has opened up [opportunities](#) in the global policy community for critical reappraisal of some dominant ‘gender-blind’ economic approaches, and there is an [emerging consensus](#) on the importance of care. During her time as the UK’s International Development Secretary, Justine Greening made the economic empowerment of women and girls a priority, and was at the forefront of work in the UN to establish a [high-level panel](#) on women’s economic empowerment to support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The increase in paid work for women increases the demand for domestic workers. [Kalayaan](#) has highlighted the high levels of physical, sexual, mental and financial abuse suffered by migrant domestic workers, many of whom have been trafficked. There is also a reported increase in men’s demand for buying sex. These and other ‘pull’ factors combine with a host of ‘push’ factors, leading to growing numbers of economically and socially vulnerable women being trafficked into the UK. This requires urgent action, some of which falls under the government’s [Modern Slavery Strategy](#).

SUCCESSES

The UK has a well-developed infrastructure giving widespread access to water, electricity, food and childcare provision, which reduces the time needed for domestic labour. Women benefit from social protection policies including free healthcare, some free social care and labour rights including maternity leave, and protection against discrimination. There is a minimum wage, which benefits women because they are disproportionately among the lower paid.

Recent years have seen a boom in policy and practice for women’s equality and empowerment in the workplace, supported by some innovative work in the business and private enterprise sector. The policy and legislative environment is supportive of women’s [entrepreneurship](#), which, if the UK were to catch up with China’s rates of new female entrepreneurs, could add an extra 1.3 million new businesses to the economy. Stakeholders told us that the case for diversity and equality being better for business has been successfully made. More needs to be done by small businesses, but senior leaders in large corporations who are champions for gender equality have allocated resources to develop good practice within their organisations and to successful partnerships with government and sometimes civil society. In particular, the [Women’s Business Council](#), chaired by Ruby McGregor-Smith CBE and supported by

Case study – Agile Nation

The Agile Nation project, run by the Chwarae Teg women's organisation with support from the Welsh government and others, helps individual women but on a large scale. It is a holistic and long-term sustainable programme focusing on women in the workplace, including development programmes for women (such as leadership training) and for employers (such as developing modern working practices for 'agile working' including flexible hours, and harnessing technology to enable remote

working). Helping businesses to see the benefits of adapting to an 'agile working' philosophy for all employees (women and men) is crucial, as is applying insights gained through projects such as [WAVE](#) to challenge the vertical (status-related) and horizontal (stereotyped) segregation of men's and women's work.

www.agilenation2.org.uk

the government Equalities Office, has probed the national and international evidence base to produce recommendations for: [starting out, getting on, staying on](#) and [enterprise](#). Practical case studies from all areas of business and enterprise are readily available for implementation.

Ministers and government officials have listened to the voices of women in business and expert women's organisations such as the [Fawcett Society](#). Policy, guidance and legislation is in place, including:

- rights to additional paternity leave and [shared parental leave](#) for fathers
- extended rights to free childcare and tax-free childcare
- rights for all parents to request flexible working
- a duty on businesses employing over 250 staff to report on gender and pay, which complements the UK government's [Think Act Report](#) initiative and [Trailblazing Transparency](#) report. In Scotland public authorities also have equal pay and board composition publishing duties.

The duty to report on gender and pay will build on existing reporting and monitoring requirements to produce more quantitative and qualitative data to address inequalities, and inform work by the EHRC, Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and others on [pregnancy and maternity discrimination](#). Businesses such as [Gapsquare](#) offer technical platforms to help employers to analyse their workforce data.

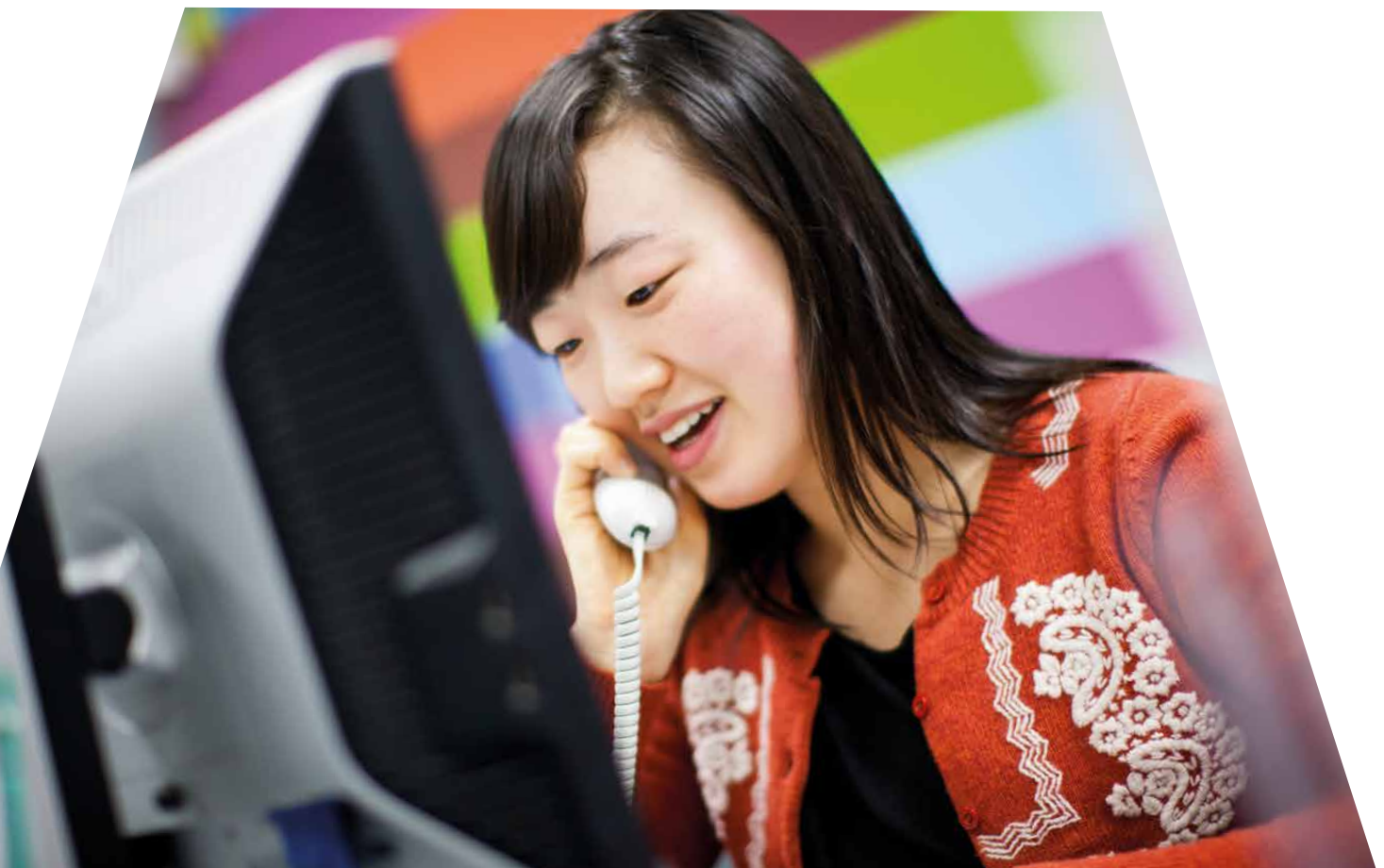
The Office for National Statistics in the UK recently produced a [compendium](#) of statistics on valuing unpaid care and domestic work using what was described by one of our stakeholders as a 'world-leading methodology', assisted in this by consultation with experts in the field. Total 'home production' in 2014 grew to 56 per cent of GDP, valued at £1,018.9 billion. The UK has skilled specialist academic economists working in universities across the UK and a number of academic experts work with women's organisations (such as the women's budget groups for the [UK](#), [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#)) on the production of reports, tools and models that illuminate the value of women's work as well as the causes and the potential solutions for women's and girls' economic inequality. In Scotland, both [Engender](#) (information, research, networking) and the [Scottish Women's Convention](#) (bringing women's voices to government) receive vital funding from the Scottish government and are able to comment on the annual Equality Budget Statement, facilitating gender-responsive budgeting as called for by the Beijing Platform for Action. Gender-responsive budgeting is on the agenda for the [Wales Assembly](#) and for women's organisations in [Wales](#) and in [Northern Ireland](#).



PRIORITIES AND GAPS

The pipeline to non-stereotyped work for men and women, and the pipeline to leadership for women at work, have been identified as priority areas for the nations of the UK. Women still do more unpaid care and domestic work than men. Gender stereotypes about capabilities and responsibilities are stubborn. The inequalities they create need to be addressed by positive-action measures, but the cultural sexism and sexist social norms around women, men and work also need to be addressed, for example by unconscious-bias training, which is beginning to be implemented in some workplaces. Our research did not identify any examples of unconscious-bias training being given to those tasked with guiding young people into career paths.

The increasing demographic challenge of elderly care in the context of decreased public spending was identified as a critical area (or as ‘a disaster’) by many of our stakeholders. This has a disproportionate impact on women both as carers, and because women make up a higher percentage of older people. At the same time, because women’s representation and leadership in decision-making forums is inadequate, local economic strategic plans may be drawn up without input from the care sector, or the women’s sector, and therefore the care economy can be omitted. We were told that care businesses are dropping out of the market because they cannot achieve profitability. A recent briefing for UN Women describes how the introduction of a long-term care insurance policy for older age in the Republic of Korea has reduced the (regressive) ‘out of pocket’ payments made to paid carers while also cutting – by 15 per cent in two years – the unpaid care provided by family carers, who are predominantly women, thereby boosting their labour market availability.



The global economic crisis has resulted in a number of states, including the UK, adopting 'austerity measures' – reduced public spending on social security and services. The case has been comprehensively made that these policies in the UK have been detrimental to women's rights because of women's lower earnings, greater employment in the public sector, greater reliance on social security as a result of caring responsibilities, and greater exposure to 'picking up the pieces' (working even longer unpaid hours) when state-funded care for family members is insufficient. Women who cannot access independent benefits may remain in abusive relationships. Some recent specific measures which have been identified as having a net negative impact on women include child benefit and tax credit changes; housing benefit caps having an impact on access to refuges; and the loss of lifetime social housing licences. The reduction in rates of some selected taxes, again benefiting men more than women, has compounded the unequal impact.

Civil society and women's organisations (e.g. [WBG](#) and the [TUC](#)) including local organisations (e.g. in [Coventry](#) and [Bristol](#)) have conducted extensive research demonstrating the cumulative unequal impact of austerity measures on women, and most acutely on older/BME/single-parent/disabled/low-income women. Shadow CEDAW reports from the [UK](#), [Northern Ireland](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#) as well as shadow reports to the UN's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) have documented these issues, and in its [concluding observations](#) in June 2016 the CESCR raised the unequal impact of austerity policies on disadvantaged groups, particularly women, as a principal concern. The UK government has been asked to impact-assess and review its austerity measures.

Case study – Economic Modelling

The UK Women's Budget Group undertook a comparative analysis of the simulated economic effects of state investment in the construction industry versus the care industry for the International Trade Union Confederation. In all seven high-income countries investigated, investment in the care sector created more jobs overall, with a higher proportion going to women, and for the UK the total positive effects for GDP were higher.

http://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/De_Henau_Perrons_WBG_CareEconomy_ITUC_briefing_final.pdf

Women's equal participation in economic life is protected by legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 and there is an expectation across the public and private sectors in the UK that policies for the equal treatment of women will be in place. However, the existence of legislation and policies is not sufficient by itself to drive systemic change, and formal 'equality impact' assessments have not prevented measures with negative impact from being introduced. The UK has monitored how far its legislation is enforced, for example, in the recent [government and EHRC report](#) into pregnancy discrimination, which estimated that 54,000 women a year in the UK lose their jobs as a result of pregnancy or maternity discrimination. Since the introduction of tribunal fees in Great Britain in 2014, the ability of women to challenge discrimination has been reduced. [Research](#) by the TUC showed that sex discrimination claims fell by 80 per cent in one quarter of 2014 after the introduction of fees of £1,200. The UK government has recognised the widespread practice of coercive control (which often includes financial abuse) in domestic relationships, introducing legislation in 2015 that makes it punishable by law. However, the government is also introducing [Universal Credit](#), a benefit paid presumptively (unless a special request is made) to one person in a couple. This may expose more women who are already at risk to financial abuse, as they will be unlikely to dare to ask for payments to be split.

JUSTICE AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The UK, along with other nations, now has specific targets to meet by 2030 in the Sustainable Development Goals; target 5.2 *requires the elimination of all violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation*, and 5.3 *requires the elimination of all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation*. The theme of justice and VAWG is also woven throughout the goals including Global Goal 1: *End poverty in all its forms everywhere*, Global Goal 10: *Reduce inequality within and among countries* and Global Goal 16: *Peace, justice and strong institutions*.

The UK is also signed up to a range of other international commitments to action, including the 1993 [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#), [General Recommendation 19](#) of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), [the Beijing Platform for Action](#) and the [Bangkok Rules](#).

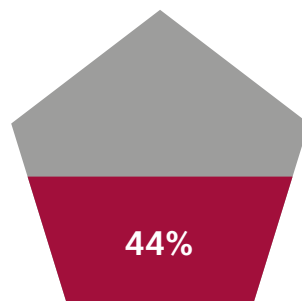
In its 2015 Progress Report, UN Women says that '[Men's use of violence against women is widespread across all countries and socio-economic groups](#)' and surveys consistently show that widely held and deep-rooted [prejudicial attitudes](#) to women and girls underpin VAWG.

According to the [World Health Organization](#): '... acts of violence against women are not isolated events but rather form a pattern of behaviour that violates the rights of women and girls, limits their participation in society, and damages their health and well-being.' [Femicide](#) is a pattern of behaviour in the UK as elsewhere.

Women's experiences in the justice system and of gender-based violence remain some of the most serious and widespread inequalities in the UK. There is [evidence](#) that some forms of VAWG are increasing.

Prevalence of violence against women and girls in the UK

Percentage of women in the UK that have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since 15



Source: Violence Against Women: An EU-Wide Survey http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf

During the period covered by this study, the spotlight has fallen on these issues as a result of a series of cases, including some against famous perpetrators. These include the long-suppressed revelations about Jimmy Savile's prolific sexual offending, and criminal trials of high-profile men such as Rolf Harris and Max Clifford, as well as of groups of men for the sexual exploitation of girls and young women in towns and cities, and ongoing revelations about sexual abuse in institutions around the UK. These cases have taken place against a backdrop of feminist activism and campaigning for women's and girls' rights to live free from violence, harassment and abuse, both online and off, in the UK as well as globally.

As a result of this increased focus, there have been numerous [reviews](#), [inspections](#) and [inquiries](#) in different parts of the UK into institutional failings in [domestic violence](#) cases and so-called [honour-based violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation \(FGM\)](#), rape, [child sexual abuse](#) and [child sexual exploitation](#). They are working with [experts](#) in the VAWG sector and enabling survivors to have their voices heard. This contributes to a positive cultural shift which means that disclosures are likely to increase. In addition to this positive change, however, the [police](#) have indicated that sexual offences, facilitated by technology, may be increasing too. This has serious implications for public services and, as most survivors of violence do not report to the authorities, for specialist support services in the community.

SUCCESSSES

There are now good frameworks in place to deliver change and work towards the total eradication of all forms of VAWG. Strategies have been developed by each of the four national governments around the UK as well as in some regional and local areas. Many of these are rooted in the principles of equality and human rights and have usually been driven by [coalitions](#) of women's organisations working with public officials and politicians across all main parties.



Case study – State-led VAWG strategies around the UK and internationally

The [Beijing Platform for Action](#) requires states to ‘Take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women’ and ‘Formulate and implement, at all appropriate levels, plans of action to eliminate violence against women’.

[Scotland](#) was the first UK nation to take a strategic approach to VAWG, and the [Crown Prosecution Service](#) (CPS) was the first UK government department. The CPS is a locus of gender expertise, working closely with experts to monitor outcomes and develop policy. The UK government in Westminster, with reserved powers over key policy areas, has had [strategies](#) in place since 2009. The UK strategy is led by the Home Office and brings together all the key players across government, ensuring co-ordination, funding and monitoring of an annual action plan. It also encompasses the long-running [This Is Abuse/Disrespect Nobody](#) campaigns to prevent teen abuse, which have linked into multiple media platforms but not as yet integrated into schools. While the UK government strategy is not fully comprehensive, government collaboration with experts in the BME women’s sector has ensured that it includes [global action](#)

on FGM and forced marriage, thus locating these as women’s rights, rather than ‘cultural’ issues, and [funders](#) have supported this work.

[Welsh legislation, the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act 2015](#), creates a legal obligation to create national and local strategies, provides a duty on local bodies to prevent violence, protect and support survivors, and provides for a new National Adviser role. Regional and [local governments](#) across the UK have developed their own strategies too.

The strength of a strategic approach is that it provides a joined-up framework to bring together all forms of VAWG so that connections can be made, there is accountable working across departments and agencies, and there is systematic engagement with stakeholders and experts. It also provides a co-ordinated plan to prevent VAWG, respond to VAWG when it happens and monitor progress. The VAWG strategies, which have often been championed by female parliamentarians, enjoy a high degree of cross-party support.

As with other equality areas, the UK has progressive and comparatively comprehensive laws covering different forms of VAWG, both criminal and civil, which have developed over the last four decades. These include rape within marriage and more recently coercive and controlling behaviour, stalking and so-called revenge porn.

Stakeholders who work both in the UK and overseas singled out legal aid as a global best-practice tool for women to secure protection from violent men (including domestic violence, forced marriage and ‘honour’-based violence) and redress in relation to financial matters. One stakeholder told us: ‘Legal remedies have to be underpinned by a proper legal aid system. Beyond legal redress, it’s about state accountability and good governance.’

[The Human Rights Act](#), incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights, provides rights and protections on VAWG. In addition, victim/survivors in the UK and across the EU are protected by the minimum standards set out in the [EU Victims Directive](#). Stakeholders stressed the importance of the UK ratifying the [Istanbul Convention](#) (signed by the UK in 2012) to guarantee survivors the right to detailed levels of protection and provision. These are rights that would need to be woven into any new agreements following the EU referendum vote.

There is growing focus on the social and cultural context in which VAWG occurs. Issues of discrimination against women in the media were reported by [Lord Leveson](#) in 2012 following evidence given by women's groups as part of the inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the press. The UK government in Westminster has taken a series of actions on [sexualisation](#) and pornography, both of which have been explicitly linked to the discriminatory attitudes to women that underpin and excuse VAWG. Media regulators are increasingly focusing on the harms of sexist and sexualised media content. The [BBFC's criteria](#), which aim to take into account potential for harm, provide a consistent approach to regulation and age restriction across a range of media platforms.

There has been progress in recent years on the disproportionate and harmful treatment of women accused or convicted of offences in the UK's different criminal justice systems. Action by NGOs followed by [commissions](#) and [reviews](#) have, in turn, led to government action and a greater recognition that policies and services designed for men are inadequate for women.

A clear consensus across the evidence we gathered, both written and oral, was that the women's sector has often been the vehicle for change, being able to respond nimbly and creatively to emerging issues. A [study](#) over three decades found that feminist movements globally are the single most important factor in driving long-term change on VAWG. Governments have also had a crucial role to play and so collaborations between governments and civil society, with funders and the private sector enabling and strengthening civil society, are all critical to make progress on gender equality.

PRIORITIES AND GAPS

The UK VAWG strategies are seen as a beacon of good practice internationally and offer significant protections. Further work is needed to address the differing levels of compliance with [international obligations](#) in the strategies, and the inclusion of key omissions in some – for example, the [Northern Ireland strategy](#) is limited to domestic and sexual violence and abuse. Others exclude prostitution, trafficking and sexual harassment. If these differing framings and definitions were made consistent it would support more coherent

policy-making and more effective outcomes for women and girls across the UK. In its June 2016 report on the UK, the UN Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights [noted](#) a lack of information about how the UK government's VAWG strategy effectively addresses violence against women and girls with disabilities, and has asked the UK to include this information in its next periodic report. Abuse of women and girls via social media is increasingly being understood in the UK, and [globally](#), as any other [VAWG](#), but there is still [much work](#) to be done on prevention, law enforcement and specialist support for survivors.

[Northern Ireland](#) has recently introduced its own version of the Sex Buyer Law (drawing on the experience of Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Canada and France), which criminalises the purchase of sex and decriminalises the sale. The purpose of this model is to tackle demand for sexual exploitation, decriminalise the sexually exploited and support those involved – mostly women – to exit. According to Europol, 'in countries where prostitution is legal and regulated, it is possible that sex work is affected by the demand for cheap labour' and in those countries 'it is much easier for traffickers who wish to use a legal environment in order to exploit their victims'. This is an urgent global issue; recent EU [research](#) finds that trafficking for sexual exploitation is still by far the most prevalent form of trafficking in the EU, with 95 per cent of registered victims being women and girls.

Despite excellent [international models](#) for developing interventions, prevention remains the [least developed](#) part of the UK government strategy. The opportunity to drive change through education as a universal service is still not utilised, and initiatives on men's and boys' role in preventing VAWG are little developed. A recent [stocktake](#) of work in this field highlights the need for research and evaluation. One stakeholder commented; '[a]n overarching gap is how to change social norms and attitudes which underlies progress on all the areas.' This gap has far-reaching consequences including, as one stakeholder told us, decisions by juries in rape trials. Women's organisations have sought to fill this gap with the development of [platforms](#), [resources](#) and specialist materials, including for preventing violence against [BME women and girls](#). In 2013, the CEDAW Committee called on the UK government to '[c]ontinue public awareness-raising campaigns on all forms of violence against women, including black and ethnic minority women.'

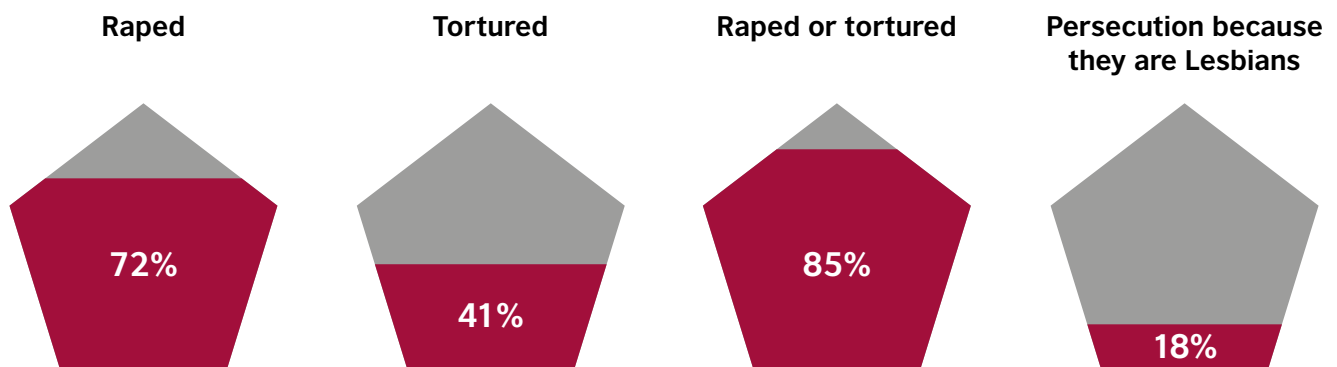
There are real opportunities for learning around the UK and internationally in order to level up UK policy and accelerate progress towards **targets 5.2 and 5.3** as well as **target 16.2 Ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children**. Prevention is a primary objective of the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act 2015 in Wales and there is excellent practice in Scotland too, including surveys about attitudes that tolerate or condone VAWG. According to the [Independent Commission for Aid Impact](#), overseas [programmes](#) funded by the Department for International Development challenge social norms that underpin VAWG, and are 'well designed and based on solid evidence and analysis'. The research funded by DFID is 'likely to make a significant contribution to global knowledge' in the coming years.

Movement of people and migration, including as a result of conflict, is a global issue that has significant implications for women's and girls' equality. Progress needs to be accelerated in the UK if **target 10.7 on safe**

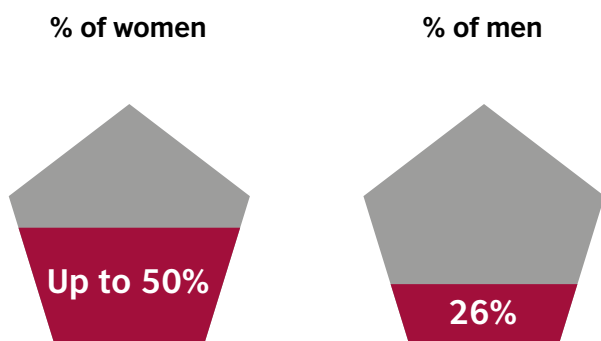
and responsible migration and mobility of people including through planned and well-managed migration policies is to be achieved. Stakeholders have pointed to inconsistencies between the foreign policy [response](#) to VAWG survivors who have fled conflict overseas and their [treatment](#) once in the UK. Immigration policies (reserved to the UK government in Westminster) are prioritised over VAWG policies, meaning that VAWG survivors with insecure immigration status do not have the same rights to protection and support as other survivors, including their detention. They are at risk of sexual and other violence during their [journey](#), face destitution and sexual exploitation if asylum is [refused](#), and risk sexual harassment and assault in some cases while in detention. [Studies](#) of female asylum seekers in the UK shows that the majority have experienced gender-based persecution, including high levels of violence in their country of origin, yet they face a culture of disbelief and [poor decision making](#). Other women in the [immigration system](#) with insecure status, such as those whose status is dependent on their husbands, are at risk of destitution and sexual exploitation.

Asylum seeking and refugee women

Experiences in home country of 46 women who had been detained



Asylum seekers whose initial refusal was overturned on appeal between 2007 and 2010



Source: *Unsustainable: The quality of initial decision-making in women's asylum claims* <http://d2t68d2r9artlv.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/unsustainableweb.pdf>

There is currently a [gap in compliance](#) with both equality legislation and the UN Bangkok Rules in relation to women accused or convicted of committing criminal offences in the UK. In [England and Wales](#) 85 per cent of women sentenced to prison have committed a non-violent offence. Despite evidence over many years highlighting the discriminatory impact of criminal justice policies on [women](#), and particularly BME and [migrant women](#) including victims of trafficking, there is still work to be done to meet **target 16.3 Promote the rule of law ... and ensure equal access to justice for all**.

A common theme throughout this report has been that implementation of policy remains a challenge. This is also identified by [UN Women](#) as a global theme: 'Even where gender-equal laws have been put into place, entrenched inequalities, discriminatory social norms, harmful customary practices, as well as dominant patterns of economic development can undermine their implementation and positive impact.' This makes the need for changing social norms on VAWG and shaping healthy attitudes through formal education and wider public education through the arts and the media, for example, even more critical.

Case study – Unlocking efficiency savings through good data collection

Flaws in data collection can hinder policy development and lead to gender-neutral or other unevidenced policies by masking the true extent of the problem, as highlighted by Professor Walby's work uncovering [the cap](#) on counting domestic violence incidents. Conversely, good data collection can unlock efficiency savings and identify where expenditure should be targeted. Walby's [work](#) for the EU on the costs of violence against women (based on work on domestic violence commissioned by the UK government) concluded that: '... gender-based and intimate partner violence place large costs on economy and society. It is likely that an increase in the currently small amount spent on prevention and mitigation of harms, by increasing spending on specialised services, would lead to a decrease in the extent and impact of the violence.' This work provides a model that could be

developed and adapted in other parts of the world and be a valuable collaboration between academia, civil society and governments.

The work of the women's NGO [Equality Now](#) on the prevalence of FGM in England and Wales, funded by the Home Office and Trust for London, will be critical for the development of more effective health, education and criminal justice policies, and therefore on promoting equality and empowerment of women and girls, especially those from minority communities that are most affected. The Department for International Development is supporting [research](#) to improve data around the economic and social costs of VAWG through their research funding, which will include studies in Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan.

A further strand running through the evidence we gathered is how policies in one area can have unintended consequences on women's and girls' equality, such as economic policy resulting in reduction of funding for specialist support services, and thus reducing women's means of escaping violent partners. Provision of specialist support services varies around the UK. Patchiness has been exacerbated by local control over budgets in many areas and commissioning processes that favour large generic providers offering lower unit costs but reduced quality. This greatly affects

specialist women's services, for example, in England and Wales. Between [2010–11 and 2011–12](#) the VAWG sector in England lost 31 per cent of its funding from local government. We were told that the larger non-specialist NGOs draw funding away from the specialist sector (despite often lacking the expertise of the women's sector providers), do not always take a consistent approach to gender equality and human rights principles, and sometimes use outdated approaches and language.

GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE UK:

Meeting the challenge of the Sustainable Development Goals

There has been a disproportionate impact on BME [women's services](#) and, following her mission to the UK in 2014, the [UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women](#) recommended: 'Ensuring that specialist services are available and accessible for black and minority ethnic women, for refugee and asylum-seeking women, as well as women facing particular barriers, such as women with disabilities and women from the LGBTI community, and dedicating "ring-fenced" funding for such specialist service.'

The UK has internationally lauded equality laws, welfare protections, [access to justice and legal aid](#). Stakeholders raised concerns that there should be no regression of these, particularly for the most vulnerable, reflecting statements by the CEDAW Committee that restrictions of Legal Aid (excepting Scotland, where no restrictions are planned) could push women, particularly ethnic minority women, into informal community arbitration systems, including faith-based tribunals that do not conform to human rights standards. As ultra-conservative religious ideas and fundamentalisms threaten women's rights globally, engagement about minority rights [must be directly](#) with women and minorities.

The lack of gender equality strategies in much of the UK means that critical connections may be missed, for example the link between poverty, disadvantage and VAWG. The most [disadvantaged women](#) are the most likely to suffer the most extensive abuse, and disproportionality in the criminal justice system remains a challenge. The following comments from one stakeholder working in the public sector explains the problem: 'Overall, there is a gender gap across government departments and there is no overarching gender equality strategy. Nothing is asked about gender and there is no work on the SDGs either ... The question about why [there is] a gendered VAWG strategy comes up repeatedly because there is so little understanding and there is a constant challenge to the title/framing.'



CULTURAL SECTORS: ARTS, SPORT AND TECHNOLOGY

Culture as an enabler and driver of sustainable development is recognised across the SDGs, with all members pledged to ‘foster inter-cultural understanding’, and within specific goals (4, 8, 11 and 16). Technology inevitably strongly features across them, as a key means of implementation in SDG 17, and specifically within SDG 5 (5.b), *‘Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women’*.

ARTS AND MEDIA

When asked, ‘If I could change one thing...’ stereotyping of girls and women features prominently for girls. A clear link is drawn between stereotyped and sexist representations in the media, and the unfair treatment of women in society. Cultural platforms shape the world in which we live through the stories they choose to tell us about ourselves.

Women are underrepresented in the production of the arts and media, although their level of engagement and participation as consumers of the arts (80 per cent) is consistently higher than men (74 per cent). The arts and media themselves reinforce women’s underrepresentation, stereotypical representation and gendered role segregation.

There is an entrenched gender gap in the production of UK arts and media:

- Women hold 36.1 per cent of jobs in the ‘creative economy’ (47.2 per cent of the workforce overall), and 18.8 per cent of the third of jobs in the sector that are IT-related.
- Women occupy 27 per cent of executive management positions in media organisations – significantly less than in both Nordic and Eastern European countries. Some 60 per cent of female journalists over 45 have experienced age-related discrimination; seven per cent of the total television workforce (on/off screen) are women.
- In UK films in 2015 women accounted for just 20 per cent of the six key production roles, with only seven per cent of those women being of BME identity; 23 per cent of films had no women in these roles. Numbers of working female film directors have not improved from 13.6 per cent in ten years, and in television 14 per cent of drama credits for director are women.
- As performers, male roles in publicly subsidised theatre outnumber female by an average of two

to one; Europe-wide research shows female performers are more likely to perceive ageing as a disadvantage to their career (49 per cent), have shorter careers, fall into the lowest income groups and consider parenting a career disadvantage (56 per cent) compared to men (15 per cent)

- In the visual arts female artists have fewer solo shows and commercial galleries represent fewer women than men even though 60 per cent of art school graduates are women; 70 per cent of the workforce in museums and galleries are women, yet just 37 per cent of director or chief executive roles are held by women in large publicly funded institutions in England, in Scotland 40 per cent and in Wales 50 per cent.
- The largest proportion of jobs held by women in the creative industries are in ‘music, visual and performing arts’, with over a fifth of women in the sector are employed here; men outnumber women two to one in albums shortlisted for the Mercury Music Prize; in 2010 1.6 per cent of conductors and 4.1 per cent of composers featured in the 2010 BBC Proms were women.

Across arts and media, women's stories and experiences are framed as ancillary and lesser. In news media women are subjects only 31 per cent of the time and are more likely to be offering popular opinion or discussing 'lighter' or domestic affairs. Women were the lead or co-lead, driving the plot, in less than one-third of UK films, and held only 37.9 per cent of speaking parts, according to a 2013 international study that placed the UK 'within international industry norms'. The poor portrayal of women in public life highlighted elsewhere in this report is echoed by the problematic portrayal of women and work in fictional representations: only 27.9 per cent of women characters are shown working (less than half the actual figure), and then in gendered occupations or with caring responsibilities; men are overwhelmingly cast in 'plot neutral roles' in positions of authority or expertise, e.g. doctors and police officers. An international study has found that 'powerful males in the cinematic world outnumber females by a factor of 13 to 1'.

A study of 'sexuality indicators' demonstrates women in film are more likely to have appearance comments directed at them, twice as likely as men to be shown in sexually revealing attire, and partially or fully naked and, 'there is virtually no difference in the sexualisation of female characters between the ages of 13 and 39 years of age'. For older women sexualisation decreases in favour of being portrayed as victims or witnesses and as socially passive in both film and television.

While older, white, middle-class women may be portrayed in a more positive light, older working class or women of colour are more likely to be negatively stereotyped.

SUCCESSSES

Stakeholders highlighted a rising number of strong and prominent cultural conversations across the UK actively challenging social norms in the representation of women; as one stakeholder put it, 'we're in the midst of a fabulous moment.' Initiatives convening and organising women and linking directly to social media campaigns and activism include Rewind and Reframe, Everyday Sexism and No More Page 3. Across arts and media organisations female leaders are using their platform to drive change in everything from gallery content, new writing, the Women Leaders in Museums Network, female writers of colour at Media Diversified and in 2016 at Glastonbury introducing a first women-only space. The Women's Room and now the BBC have built databases and training for women to realise platforms as experts in television and radio. These sit alongside a number of academic collaborations strengthening the analysis and challenge of gendered representation such as that led at Roehampton and the newly formed Centre for Gender Equal Media. The arts as a positive space for sharing the experiences of and raising awareness for migrant women has a long and continuing tradition across the UK, embedded within organisations including Women for Refugee Women.

Case study – Addressing VAWG through popular culture

In 2014 the daily BBC Radio 4 show *The Archers* began a domestic violence and rape storyline, due to conclude in early 2017. The show, with 4.7 million weekly listeners, was advised on the Helen and Rob Titchener plot by domestic violence experts from Women's Aid and Refuge. The story has been praised for its realism, with the daily format allowing for the slow development of controlling, coercive behaviour and isolation of Helen from work, friends and family, in a seemingly 'nice' community.

Coinciding with a new law to criminalise coercive control, the show has been credited with raising awareness. Related content appeared across BBC platforms from *Woman's Hour* to *Countryfile*.

The National Domestic Violence Helpline cited a 20 per cent increase in calls linked to the storyline in February 2016. Popular television programming in the UK has a record of portraying violence against women and girls and seeking expert advice on these storylines: Channel 4 soap *Hollyoaks*, which appeals to a younger demographic, partnered with the Home Office *This Is Abuse campaign* in 2013, and there was a 2015 rape storyline in *Eastenders*. While highlighted as a success story, this remains a developing area for programme makers and it is clear that the complex nature of these issues requires specialist advice to avoid unintended damage from inaccurate or prejudicial representations.

Case study – Women of the World

Women of the World is a growing global network of festivals that celebrate women and girls, founded by Southbank Artistic Director Jude Kelly. A powerful example of a space to convene women, the festivals ask the question, 'Why is gender equality taking so long to achieve?' and offer opportunities to share women's stories and inspire action through speakers, performance and mentoring. The British Council has collaborated with Women of the World to bring the festival to Karachi – one of 15 festivals in five countries to date.

PRIORITIES AND GAPS

Within the arts and media, there are strong examples of progress towards gender equality in production and a significant body of work spelling out clearly the detrimental impact of the way women and girls are portrayed. However, there is no consensus on the major change required to sustain a fundamental shift in the current paradigm; the entertainment industry is 'slow to progress in creating compelling and complex roles for females'.

In 2015 the LSE Commission on Gender Inequality and Power recommended the formation of a UK-wide standing committee tasked with addressing the flaws in data and analysis and commenting publicly in response to high-profile negative portrayals of women, and this offers a positive mechanism for best practice. More consistent gender expertise in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport would support the government to act across the cultural agenda and to address the links between media images and coverage and VAWG highlighted by the Leveson Report, which concluded: 'the images may reflect a wider cultural failure to treat women with dignity and respect and/or a practice which, intentionally or not, has the effect of demeaning and degrading women.'

SPORT

In the UK nations, policy conforms to the internationally held perspective that sport is central not only to the health agenda but advocated as a driver of social inclusion and good. Sport has the power to equip and empower girls and women to support progress in society.

Women in the UK participate in sport at a lower rate than men. Some 31.2 per cent of women take part weekly compared to 40.7 per cent men – a 1.7 million gap in participation rates of the over-16s. Only 16 per cent girls under 16 meet the guidelines for daily physical activity. This gap exists across the UK, and grows larger in competitive, formally organised and team sports; women's participation rates are particularly low in Northern Ireland but are higher in Scotland. Only 33 per cent of disabled women are likely to have taken part in sport in the last week; rates of participation are lowest for Asian/Asian British girls in Wales. Internationally, women and men participate equally only in the Nordic countries.

The gender gap opens in the later years of primary school, when girls of seven to eight years start pointing to gender stereotypes when defining their 'self' and what is important to them, and widens at secondary school, when 12–13 years is a key drop-out point. Social norms around being female and feminine are identified as a key factor affecting girls' attitudes and behaviour, with, notably: 'being sporty is still widely seen as a masculine trait'. As girls grow up, and as women age, barriers to participation are increasingly linked to body image, self-consciousness, and lack of confidence. Some sporting clubs in the UK remain men only: the Scottish government has made strong challenges to men only golf clubs.

Women are less likely to watch, volunteer, work in or take part in decision making. Sport is one of the UK's most prominent cultural platforms, yet women's sport receives just seven per cent of all sports media coverage. In print media, female by-lines average 1.8 per cent. Yet six out of ten sports fans want to see more coverage of women's sport. Commercial investment in women's sport has grown since 2011 but accounts for just 0.4 per cent of all sponsorship value, covering approximately five per cent of all deals recorded. In 2013 the most valuable deal for women was £450,000 (Continental/FA Women's Super League), while the men's was £280 million (Adidas/Chelsea).

Case study – This Girl Can

In 2015 Sport England launched [This Girl Can](#), a campaign to change behaviour and get women aged 14–40 years to be more active. The campaign was grounded in a sophisticated approach to using data and insight on women's lives, and adopted cutting-edge marketing techniques; the resulting film was televised during prime time and highlighted women's fear of judgement in relation to being active. The campaign curated a diverse range of women's experiences, and used social media platforms for women to share their own stories, and to empower girls and women to be active; 8,000 sports organisations across England signed up as campaign partners and 2.8 million women were

inspired to be more active. Among other awards #ThisGirlCan was [presented with a Grand Prix for Good by the UN](#), recognising a specific contribution to the UK's progress towards the SDGs and the empowerment of girls and women. Since being invited by the Foreign Office to speak at the Women in the World Summit in 2015, Sport England has worked with other nations to emulate the campaign including [Brazil](#), Vietnam, [Australia](#), Mexico and Botswana. The success and reach of the campaign has opened up platforms within the advertising and marketing industry to discuss women's portrayal more widely.

SUCCESSES

The UK was active in the production of the first international framework for women's sport, set out in the [Brighton Declaration](#) 1994. The London Olympics in 2012 spurred government, business, governing bodies and civil society to focus on using the [power of women sporting role models, leadership and sporting platforms](#) to address gender inequality. Public funding for elite athletes and para-athletes in the nations of the UK is awarded solely on the basis of performance, and stakeholders believe that the public investment in attracting international competition to the UK should take into account how this will positively promote women's sports and female role models. [England will play host to women's cricket, netball and hockey world cups](#) from 2017 to 2019, [with Northern Ireland hosting the Women's Rugby Union World Cup](#) alongside Ireland in 2017.

There is a wide range of grassroots, national and UK-wide initiatives to increase participation in women over 14, based on making sport and activity relevant to women's lives, such as [Girls Active](#), [Street Games: Us Girls](#), and sport-specific programmes like [Breeze cycling](#) and [Back to Netball](#). The UK government-instigated Women's Sport Week encourages increased coverage; the broadcast media are widely recognised to have improved with [ten per cent coverage of women's sport](#), and significant growth in women as sports broadcasters. A focus on governance has increased the numbers of publicly funded governing bodies [meeting the requirement for 30 per cent women on boards, and executive teams are up from 21 per cent women in 2009 to 40 per cent in 2015](#). Women in Sport supported these developments with the [Checklist for Change](#). Looking to sport for lessons in performance has long been part of the corporate lexicon, and increasingly, this serves gender equality, for example the analysis of the [propensity of women who are high-performing senior leaders to also play sports](#), and the models of sport to business mentoring delivered by [Women Ahead](#).

PRIORITIES AND GAPS

Challenging the social norms associated with sport at a younger age, tailoring initiatives to meet women and girls' diverse identities, and engaging men and boys are all cited by the sector as priorities. There remains a significant gap in the investment and coverage of women's elite sport; there is considerable hope that the Rio Olympics in 2016 will provide further momentum. Stakeholders highlight the continuing gap in leadership roles, in particular within coaching at all levels: women account for only 17 per cent of the qualified workforce, and only 12 per cent of highly qualified coaches; there has been no shift within governing bodies on the numbers of women as performance directors; and yet 63 per cent girls aged 11 to 16 would like to be sports leaders.

TECHNOLOGY

The centrality of technology to achieving both sustainable development and gender equality has been spelt out since the Beijing Declaration. The UN Commission on the Status of Women (2010) prioritised three ways to ensure girls and women benefit from technology: participation in education and employment, access, and integrating a gender dimension into research and product design.

A parliamentary committee said that despite the all-encompassing impact of digital technology and 'big data' throughout consumer and public services, the benefits are not equally shared, and technology is actually contributing to the emergence of new inequalities. The paucity of girls' and women's participation in STEM education and employment has already been noted elsewhere in this report. UK Women represent only 15 per cent of ICT professionals (the European average is 18 per cent), and less than 30 per cent of the whole ICT workforce – proportions that are at best seen to be static. Globally the number of chief female technology officers has remained static for the past ten years.

Access to technology requires a multi-faceted approach, looking at psychological factors, materials, skills and usage. The UK Digital Inclusion Strategy focuses on the skills and capabilities required to maximise benefit from planned 95 per cent superfast broadband coverage by 2017. Digital exclusion heat mapping shows women (74 per cent) are less likely than men (80 per cent) to have basic digital skills. This is most marked for older women and those living in rural and deprived areas; Wales has the lowest levels of both internet access and basic ICT skills of the UK nations.

Being 'digitally fluent' is considered within business to support gender equality and women's career advancement. Stakeholders recognised that the 'flexible' working offered by wi-fi and mobile technology has benefited the lives of many women: 64 per cent of women agree that women will thrive in the digitally enabled workplace and 37 per cent agree that it has increased job opportunities. Research on the long-term impact of this technologically enabled shift on the structure of work and family life for both sexes and gender relations remains limited, but a 2015 Scottish review highlighted concerns with individual control over the pace, location and time of work.

In the UK as internationally, technology is radically changing the face of health and social care for service users, healthcare professionals and paid and unpaid carers, through online user forums reducing isolation, life-saving interventions and apps designed by carers to organise and share information. The long-term impact of these rapid advancements on both the quality and nature of care and on the (overwhelmingly female) caregivers is acknowledged as a current uncertainty in information technologies trends.



SUCSESSES

There is an upsurge in women, both professionals and non-professionals, taking the initiative to promote, support and develop in tech – from international to local, and general to niche disciplines, such as [BCS Women](#), [Geekettes](#), [Stemettes](#), [Women 2.0](#) and [Black Girls Code](#). This is alongside wide-ranging initiatives to bring girls and women into STEM education and employment.

Digital technology has opened up new spaces across the UK, epitomised in the rise of [Mumsnet](#), for women's voices to come together virtually and be heard, get advice and support, and to campaign for change. Tech has enabled high-profile, wide-reaching and successful campaigns by women, notably the [£5 banknote campaign](#), stopping the [removal of women and feminism from the Politics A level syllabus](#), and the criminalising of rape porn following a [72,000 signature petition](#). In 2016 [a petition](#) to make it illegal to require women to wear high heels at work easily reached, in a matter of days, the 100,000 benchmark needed to [trigger](#) a parliamentary debate.

PRIORITIES AND GAPS

Technology can increase women's voice, influence and power by enabling individual and collective action, but there is [only limited evidence](#) that this is as yet fundamentally challenging gender-based power structures. Conversely, it can also be used to perpetrate misogyny and abuse towards women and girls, and there is increased risk to women's safety, equality and rights through technology-facilitated abuse.

Women are largely absent from the development and deployment of technology, and this makes it less likely to meet women's needs, marking a significant [loss to society and economy as a whole](#). While there are examples of technological solutions for women, [notably in women's health](#), there are significant gaps; one stakeholder cited the lack of technological solutions for parenting as a clear example of the failure of developers to consider life from a woman's perspective. Globally there is a [demand for tech development to be more participatory and user-driven](#); [women need to be perceived as 'active users' of ICT, not just passive recipients](#), for technology to be truly empowering. The exponential increase in 'big data', computing power and data analysis has unrealised potential to promote gender equality. The UK needs to scale up activity on STEM education and employment initiatives for girls and women and make the internet a safe space for girls and women of all ages.

Case study – TechMums/Women's Digital League

[TechMums](#) provide workshops for mums in deprived areas of England to gain a basic tech education. This group of women often lack the skills essential for most employment, or to become entrepreneurs. Founder Dr Sue Black emphasises the life-changing power of addressing the exclusion gap that arises from not having skills that 'most people don't even think about, because it's so easy,' and the power that enabling mums to be tech role models can deliver. Dr Sue Black, who has advised the UK Government Digital Service, passionately advocates for better tech education for all to address exclusion.

In common with TechMums, the [Women's Digital League](#) in Karachi, Pakistan promotes education in digital work, but also operates as a virtual digital assistance company, providing freelance digital services to businesses from women at risk of high unemployment. [Described as a 'virtual assistance company'](#) the Women's Digital League works in both rural and urban areas; the project focuses on individual empowerment and community development, as well as economic opportunities. Stakeholders in Wales told us they are exploring the potential for the model to be developed to support women in areas of high unemployment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

'Realizing gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets. The achievement of full human potential and of sustainable development is not possible if one half of humanity continues to be denied its full human rights and opportunities. Women and girls must enjoy equal access to quality education, economic resources and political participation as well as equal opportunities with men and boys for employment, leadership and decision-making at all levels. We will work for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap and strengthen support for institutions in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women at the global, regional and national levels. All forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls will be eliminated, including through the engagement of men and boys. The systematic mainstreaming of a gender perspective in the implementation of the Agenda is crucial.'

Declaration, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Women and girls in the UK have taken huge strides forward across all areas of their lives. From the top levels of government and the professions, women are changing perceptions about their roles and capabilities. The evidence gathered for this report clearly shows where this progress has been greatest and where there is more work to do to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls in the nations of the UK. The SDGs represent a vital strategic framework to accelerate our progress.

In this section we highlight some of the strengths in the UK that have contributed to the achievements, as well as the gaps and priorities that remain. We make some recommendations for actions to build on our successes and address the gaps to support the full implementation of the goals within the UK by 2030, particularly through the three-way partnership between government, business and civil society to which the UK has signed up under SDG 17. We also highlight how stakeholders, including the British Council itself, can make a contribution to achieving the SDGs through international engagement.

STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES

In the global context, the UK's legislative platform on women's equality is a beacon of good practice. The Equality Act that covers England, Wales and Scotland, and the equality duty included in the Northern Ireland Act, the Public Sector Equality Duties, employment rights for pregnant women and new mothers, regulations on transparency and reporting on equal pay and other legal protections combine to create a framework of rights.

There is effective machinery for benchmarking, measurement and enforcement through independent, professional, expert bodies. Agencies such as the EHRC and the Equality Commission Northern Ireland monitor compliance with equalities law, and issue legal guidance and compliance notices, while the Office for National Statistics and the UK Statistics Authority together provide assurance that we can measure the gender equality gaps, and our progress in closing them, accurately.

There are structures for democratic engagement: despite some losses, the UK government and national governments across the nations of the UK continue to consult and work with partners and community groups to address women's equality and empowerment. Most recently the Women and Equalities Select Committee has been set up in the UK parliament to hear evidence from experts and women's representatives and make recommendations to government. Similar focal points exist across the UK.

Women and girls from all backgrounds have a voice, and create change, through a vibrant energetic and independent women's sector, through their professional organisations and trade unions, and through their own businesses. For example, young women speaking up from within practising communities have changed attitudes to FGM.

PRIORITIES

Like all countries, the UK still has work to do to meet the SDGs in relation to gender equality and empowering women and girls.

Key areas of work include tackling the gender stereotypes and prejudice that continue to underpin discrimination, despite the familiar [refrain](#), especially prevalent among men and younger people, that gender equality has been achieved. While this report was being prepared, the killing of MP Jo Cox as she was on her way to meet her constituents sent shock waves around the world. It took place against a backdrop of xenophobic and racist public debate and of women in public and political life facing abuse, threats and harassment, especially on social media. Violence against women and girls remains the most extreme manifestation of women's inequality in the UK. Strengthening civil society and encouraging partnerships across government, civil and private sectors would bring greater leverage to this issue and the challenges presented by the wider SDGs.

There are particular groups of women and girls who are often overlooked in policymaking, and about whom there is insufficient information, including women with mental health needs, insecure migration status, and girls and women who have experienced care, as well as those with 'protected characteristics' as defined in UK equalities law. Furthermore, as stakeholders told us in our focus groups, policies and services targeted at men and boys rarely incorporate education on gender equality, despite their attitudes being pivotal.

Finally, bringing all these initiatives together under the single umbrella of a gender-equality strategy would offer the same benefits delivered by the VAWG strategies: investment in prevention work, co-ordination, targeted interventions and partnerships.

We make the following **recommendations** to achieve the SDGs in respect of women and girl's equality. Each is in two parts: first, how we can achieve the SDGs within the UK; and second, how we can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs internationally. All of them are grounded in women having a voice in decision making and leadership.

PLANNED ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY, LINKED ACROSS NATIONS AND SECTORS

SDG 17.9 Support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals

A gender equality strategy across the UK based on the SDGs, in every nation and at local level, would deliver strong co-ordinated action. These strategies would be supported by appropriate machinery, including independent advisory groups with gender equality expertise. Stakeholders from across the UK told us about variability in expertise on gender throughout governments. The lack of an overarching strategic approach for gender equality for the UK, or within any of the nations except [Northern Ireland](#), has emerged as a major barrier to progress. Delivery against the SDGs would be embedded through mainstreaming gender into policymaking, through positive action, and by routine training for public officials and ministers on gender equality, building on the focal points of expertise in each of the four nations.

The UK has developed good practice in the form of effective strategies to address women's inequality in a number of policy areas, which could be shared internationally. Examples include the Northern Ireland Gender Equality Strategy, which includes a gender advisory panel and a gender mainstreaming tool, and the UK strategy against VAWG, which includes an annual action plan setting specific targets and a reporting framework.

THE PRODUCTION OF WORLD-CLASS STATISTICS THROUGH JOINT WORKING BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS AND ACADEMIA

Goal 17.18 Increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts

Accurate monitoring of SDG progress, and the interventions that are needed, depends on good data. UK statistics are already world class in some areas but there have been cuts in others. The EHRC notes the need to build better disaggregated data. Relying on high-quality data, UK academics have been able to create sophisticated models for valuing care in the economy, for comparing economic benefits for men and women of policy interventions, and for the cost of failing to address VAWG. They have also shown how barriers to gender equality intersect with race and ethnicity, nationality, migration status, age, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic and parental status. 'Big data' also offers great opportunities, [for example to 'design out' bias within education and recruitment](#). Only through these multi-layered statistics can this fine-grained detail become visible.

The UK's best statistics allow us to uncover an accurate picture of problems in women's equality and inform the development of effective interventions, which could be replicated internationally. For example, the Crime Survey for England and Wales regularly surveys a sample of households, asking them about their experience of crime. When we compare this to the number of crimes that are reported to the police, we see a high level of discrepancy, particularly on crimes of violence against women and girls. Only by collecting data in these different ways and comparing them has the UK been able to truly understand the extent of underreporting of these crimes. Using this information, we are able to improve our response to violence.

A STRONG AND VIBRANT WOMEN'S MOVEMENT WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH GOVERNMENTS, FUNDERS AND BUSINESS

The SDG Declaration: A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

Women's voice and leadership is key to full gender equality and to removing the barriers to women's empowerment. The [Gender and Development Network](#), which co-ordinates advocacy on core issues linked to gender, contributed to the widespread support in government for a standalone gender goal within the SDG framework. The impact of such networks demonstrates how effective a single and unified voice can be.

However, government machinery for women's engagement has reduced since the abolition of the UK Women's National Commission in 2010. We were told, 'there is no unified voice to government'. The reduction of government structures dedicated to gender equality and bringing civil society expertise to governments was repeatedly raised as having a detrimental effect on the ability of experts in the women's sector to inform policy and respond to emerging issues. Nevertheless, devolution has led to the creation of new spaces for engagement at country level, where more gender-equal legislatures are developing, and the flourishing of women's and girls' voices on social media platforms also provides a space for dialogue.

Women's organisations in the UK and globally are seen to be key to progress on gender equality and culture change, but are short of resources and need support, particularly in developing countries. The British Council's networks across the world could do still more to bring women's organisations together, facilitating exchange and effective initiatives and strategies, and sharing what works. Direct partnerships between women's organisations – for example, like that between Imkaan (UK) and The Pacific Islands Safety and Prevention Project (New Zealand) – enable two-way learning.

LEVELLING UP OF RIGHTS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE UK

SDG Declaration: As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognising that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society.

The theme of 'no one left behind' runs strongly throughout the SDGs. There are some areas where the rights of women and girls vary across the UK. These differences include severely restricted rights of access to abortion services for women (mainly low-income women) in Northern Ireland. The UNSCR Committee has recommended that the UK amend its laws in this area.

A critical contemporary issue globally and in the UK is the movement of people and migration and how it affects gender equality. The evidence we gathered indicates that migrant women in the UK, especially those experiencing or fleeing violence or torture, are not routinely able to enjoy the same standard of rights as many other women. The adoption of the SDGs provides renewed focus on these groups.

The protection and promotion of women's equal rights will need to be at the heart of negotiations on any renewed settlement with the EU and any new constitutional arrangements in the UK.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS, CIVIL SOCIETY, BUSINESS AND THE MEDIA TO CHANGE THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL NORMS THAT UNDERPIN GENDER INEQUALITY

SDG 17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships

The SDGs are designed to be transformative, and this requires partnerships between all sections of society, including government, civil society, business and the media, to change the cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality. Progressive policies and laws are not always effective because the culture remains hostile. Stakeholders consistently raised this, for example calling for 'Messaging from schools throughout every level of government on sex equality.' A culture that is hostile to women in leadership needs to be transformed to a culture that supports female leaders in political, economic and public life.

Although we have not achieved parity, the UK has achieved much of its progress towards gender equality through collaborative partnerships across sectors. There is a strong appetite among many NGOs, businesses and official agencies to engage with the overseas visitors hosted by the British Council, and to work collaboratively overseas, particularly around the theme of women's voices in decision making and leadership, where women parliamentarians, business leaders and policymakers have useful experience in what works and what doesn't in transforming and modernising to achieve women's equality.



REALISING THE POWER OF INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

SDG 17.16 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries

We found a strong consensus around SDG 17.16 and the value of international collaboration for promoting gender equality. UK stakeholders recognise that those working on gender equality globally are learning to do things differently, with changing local structures, and are building the evidence that gender balance is better for sustainable development. Gender-balanced panels, parliaments and workforces mean that the skills of both halves of the population are harnessed. Where there are joined-up strategies and conversations, progress is greater. Researchers, women's organisations and businesses, as well as the government, working on gender equality need to join up with others overseas.

Academic stakeholders working on women's equality are clear that the British Council can help them to strengthen their networks, foster international evidence-based knowledge exchange, and help grow cross-sector global networks. The British Council could be a vehicle through which people can connect with innovators outside the UK to achieve the SDGs on women's equality in the UK.

This global progress offers a huge opportunity for mutual learning and knowledge exchange, which is currently under-exploited. Transnational learning programmes like those held with Timor-Leste and Liberia allow the UK to explore how, for example, these countries are increasing their numbers of female councillors. Women from Northern Ireland are working with Syrian women on their common experiences of conflict. The Welsh government has a relationship with Lesotho, which enabled the sharing of work on women in public appointments.

Technology platforms present significant opportunities for re-imagining collaboration across borders and hold great promise for the promotion of gender equality. Research, good practice and evidence could be captured and shared internationally in new ways. Successful small-scale interventions for gender equality like the [Everyday Sexism Project](#) in the UK have already demonstrated the possibilities for effective dissemination through technology and the international networking that technology enables.

Stakeholders raised the need to consider how we engage in international collaboration meaningfully, placing emphasis on the importance of equal relationships, which are mutually beneficial – something which aligns closely with the British Council's cultural relations approach.

Our research suggests that creating more opportunities for building mutual knowledge and understanding of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls across the work of the British Council would be strongly supported and powerfully symbolic.

While technology facilitates regular and low-cost communication across great distances, there remains a distinctive power in convening people in the same physical space, particularly through conferences and residential retreats where they can talk informally, as well as through collaborative projects. Connections between women are at their strongest when they are able to share their experiences and ideas face to face. As one of our stakeholders said, 'Magical things happen when you create spaces for people to talk to each other.'

REFERENCES

Over 400 research documents were reviewed for this study. Throughout the document, hyperlinks in the text direct readers to online sources and resources for further information. A searchable comprehensive bibliography, including hyperlinks and other identifying information about resources, has been published online by the British Council and is available to download from <https://www.britishcouncil.org/society/womens-and-girls-empowerment/gender-equality-uk/research-references>

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