

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: [Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK](#), HC 885

Wednesday 25 January 2017

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Members present: Mrs Maria Miller (Chair); Lucy Allan; Tracy Brabin; Philip Davies; Mrs Flick Drummond; Ben Howlett; Jess Phillips.

Questions 66–135

Witnesses

I. Lesley Irving, Head of Equality Policy, Scottish Government; Farooq Ullah, Co-Chair, UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development; Lynn Everson, Immediate Past President, Business and Professional Women UK; Dionne Nelson, Head of Business Development and Innovation, Women's Resource Centre.

II. Dr Carole Easton, Young Women's Trust; Pragna Patel, Southall Black Sisters; Natasha Walter, Women for Refugee Women; Katharine Sacks-Jones, Agenda.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Lesley Irving](#)
- [Business and Professional Women UK](#)
- [Women's Resource Centre](#)
- [UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development](#)
- [Young Women's Trust](#)
- [Southall Black Sisters](#)
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- [Agenda](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lesley Irving, Head of Equality Policy, Scottish Government; Farooq Ullah, Co-Chair, UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development; Lynn Everson, Immediate Past President, Business and Professional Women UK; Dionne Nelson, Head of Business Development and Innovation, Women's Resource Centre.

Q66 Chair: Good morning. Can I start by thanking you all for coming along today and agreeing to be witnesses in our inquiry? It is incredibly good of you to give your time and to prepare for this session. You are probably aware of what happens. We have a lot of questions that we want to ask you and, given that it is quite a big panel, I would be grateful if you could keep that in mind as we have quite a lot of ground to cover.

Before we start, for the benefit of people who may not have had the chance to know which organisations you come from, could you just say your name and the organisation you represent?

Dionne Nelson: Dionne Nelson from the Women's Resource Centre, the support organisation for the women's voluntary and community sector.

Lynn Everson: I am Lynn Everson from Business and Professional Women UK. I am also representing small businesses as Lifeline Language Services.

Farooq Ullah: My name is Farooq Ullah. I am the co-chair of a multi-stakeholder network in the UK called UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development focusing on domestic implementation of sustainable development goals.

Lesley Irving: Good morning. I am Lesley Irving. I am from the Equality Unit in the Scottish Government.

Chair: Lovely; thank you very much. Flick Drummond is going to start our questioning this morning.

Q67 Mrs Flick Drummond: I am going to start off with a general question. Business and civil society are supposed to make a significant contribution to the SDG. Is there any evidence that we are doing that and contributing widely in the UK? Perhaps I will start with Farooq.

Farooq Ullah: Thank you. Yes, there is a lot of evidence of activity around stakeholder engagement with the SDGs around both domestic and international spheres. I would say that that has been taken quite an ambitious way forward, including the set-up of the network that I represent, the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development, which now has 35 partners and over 250 supporters. The appetite from stakeholders in the private sector and civil society is enormous.

Unfortunately, their real impact is slightly negated by the fact that there are no formal Government mechanisms or plans to implement the SDGs.



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Anecdotally, we are hearing—particularly from the private sector, who have been the most active in getting going—that there is a bit of a waning interest from boards, because they feel that they have taken this as far as they can go, and without Government intervention and Government action, they are slowly drifting away. The policy window for the opportunity to engage stakeholders and really get going is closing.

Q68 Mrs Flick Drummond: Just elaborate on that: what would you expect Government to be doing?

Farooq Ullah: There are very clear examples from around the world. 22 countries this July presented their national voluntary reviews around the SDGs to something called the High-Level Political Forum at the United Nations, which is the highest level forum for sustainable development. These were very comprehensive and included Germany and Finland, which are two very close comparators to the UK, where they were very specific about action plans, the mechanisms that they were going to utilise for implementation, financing, reporting, stakeholder engagement modalities and programmes to engage in this stuff. Those are the kinds of specific details I would be looking for the UK to put forward, and to do so very soon, so that we have clarity about what their intentions are, which then helps stakeholders plan their activities much better.

We have seen very clearly in the documentation the rise of stakeholders, specifically in the private sector, as delivery agents of sustainable development. If Governments are asking us stakeholders to do these things, they have to give us the right operating environment, a very clear playing field and, of course, the support and resources to do so.

Q69 Chair: Farooq, you mentioned business interest drifting. Do you have any examples of that?

Farooq Ullah: Only anecdotal, which I do not think I can share, but we heard from a few of our partners—very big multinationals based in the UK—that they are struggling and that their boards are beginning to lose interest. There was a very high uptake initially but, again, this window of opportunity is closing as they do not see government action. The private sector is not going to take this seriously if they do not think that the Government are taking this seriously, and boards are slowly drifting away. There is a moment when these high-level people in organisations will take interest but, if they do not see it as a commercial advantage in any way or something that they need to be a part of, they will do other things.

Lesley Irving: I just wanted to offer some practical examples of work that we have been doing in Scotland in relation to business. We have the Scottish Business Pledge, which over 300 businesses have signed up to, and that is where businesses commit to doing a number of positive things, including trying to achieve gender equality on their boards as well as to pay the living wage, not use zero-hours contracts and so on. In that way, it is part of making the business case to businesses for gender



equality in particular as well as other socially positive things that businesses can be involved in.

We also have a 50/50 by 2020 campaign that works across private, third and public sectors, where organisations pledge to have a gender balance on their board by 2020. We have nearly 200 organisations signed up to that, including over 30 in the private sector. We need to do more building there with our private sector colleagues, but we have had very good take-up in the public sector in particular.

Those are quite practical ways in which business can be persuaded of the benefits of working towards gender equality in this instance as well as other socially positive moves. There are benefits to being part of the pledge and the campaign, as well as the feel-good factor of putting something back into society.

Lynn Everson: Building on that, as a small business, this is very much seen as corporate social responsibility. Tenders from European countries are starting to ask questions about the SDGs—as well as about price and general company ethos—but they do not mention them as “sustainable development goals”. This is something we can build on in tenders. If we can get public tenders in the UK to incorporate an element of this and use it as a differentiator in the selection process, that would be very powerful and would apply to small and big businesses.

Mrs Flick Drummond: Dionne, do you have anything to add?

Dionne Nelson: In terms of engagement with—

Q70 **Mrs Flick Drummond:** Yes, and awareness too. Do you want to add anything to the awareness and contribution of civil society, in particular, for you?

Dionne Nelson: I speak from the women’s sector perspective rather than the whole of the voluntary and community sector. In terms of awareness without a specific mechanism to engage the women’s sector, we have not really had much awareness raised on the SDGs. We know about CEDAW, because it was a recommendation that there should be some form of mechanism, but we do not feel that we have been engaged in the process of SDG 5.

Q71 **Mrs Flick Drummond:** Do you link in with any other countries as well?

Dionne Nelson: No, we are UK-based, because there is so much to be done here.

Lynn Everson: We do. BPW does. We have members in 90 countries. For this particular research here, we contacted several of them and asked them about SDGs on the ground in micro, SME and large business, as well as civil society organisations. With my BPW hat on, I would say that we are very engaged. We are going to the Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March.



Mrs Flick Drummond: You will see a lot of us there as well.

Lynn Everson: Excellent. The CSW Alliance and NAWO are very much part of a mechanism that we are trying to build in the UK so that we can have this ongoing dialogue with you. It is a bit fragmented at the moment. There is quite a lot of engagement on the ground, but I do not think you are seeing it.

Q72 **Mrs Flick Drummond:** Are we behind other countries, in your view?

Lynn Everson: Yes, you are behind some: Brazil, Finland, as we have heard, Germany and France.

Q73 **Jess Phillips:** To pick up from what Dionne was saying, it is not the first time we have heard on this Committee that the women's sector does not feel that it is particularly connected in. What should the Government be doing to improve that engagement between women's organisations and the Government?

Dionne Nelson: I have my notes here. We particularly were engaged with the Women's National Commission, a mechanism with teeth that looks at specific women's equality issues. If we are supposed to achieve SDG 5, there needs to be some mechanism to feed in from what is going on in the lives of women on the ground. We would like to see some kind of mechanism like that to pick up all the manifestations of inequality in women's lives. That is what we would like to see, if you are going to engage with grassroots organisations that are working with women every day and their struggles.

Jess Phillips: You are saying that having things like the Women's Commission, which I believe was got rid of in 2010, meant that grassroots women's organisations were more likely to be involved in the SDGs.

Dionne Nelson: Yes.

Q74 **Jess Phillips:** For what reason do you think that was more likely?

Dionne Nelson: That was more likely because we felt that they looked at sex, race and class, and they picked those types of oppressions up, not just the issues of violence against women and girls or health inequalities. They looked at a breadth of different things that impacted on women's lives. We would like to see something like that that has more influence in picking up the central work of the SDG. There is some disconnect, in our view, between the CEDAW, CSW and all these other frameworks that seem to be siloed on their own.

Q75 **Jess Phillips:** Do you think that grassroots women's organisations know about all of those things that you have just said about them?

Dionne Nelson: They know about CEDAW in particular because, WRC being a support body, we bring 46 organisations together to look at and critique the CEDAW report and present that.



Q76 Jess Phillips: It is the only one that I have ever heard of, and I have worked in the women's sector for years and years. There you go: you are correct.

Lesley, do you want to say anything about how women's organisations might be being better engaged in Scotland or if they are being engaged?

Lesley Irving: Thank you, yes. Indeed we feel that we engage well with the women's sector. We fund the Scottish Women's Convention, which was explicitly set up by us to be that channel of communication with women and to allow women's voices to be heard in policy-making. It is very successful in reaching really far-flung and remote communities in Scotland. They go out on the road and meet not just grassroots organisations but women who are not part of organisations, so they really are getting to the heart of our communities. They surface issues and they provide responses to consultations. They are very active in making sure that women all over Scotland are fully engaged with whatever is going on for them, including SDG 5 and the achievement of gender equality.

We also fund an organisation called Engender, which describes itself as Scotland's feminist organisation. It operates very much in a political sphere and it is very effective. Both of these organisations provide shadow reports to CEDAW and both of them will attend CSW.

When the Women's National Commission was in operation, there was a Scottish member of that. I think she found it quite difficult to make Scotland's perspective heard on that stage but certainly, in the Scottish Government, we have found the Scottish Women's Convention and Engender—those two organisations working in different spheres but in complementary areas—to be successful ways to engage directly with women.

Q77 Jess Phillips: Of all the panel members: if you feel you can comment on your views on the Women's National Commission, should we recommend going back to that?

Lesley Irving: I am not sure if going back is ever the best way forward. Certainly I know that the Government Equalities Office is very respectful of the Scottish Women's Convention and values the role that they play at a UK level as well as for us in Scotland. I acknowledge that we have a huge benefit in Scotland in being a smaller country, and those things are much easier to organise on a smaller scale. To have something like the Scottish Women's Convention operating nationally in the UK or even in England might be problematic. It might be better on some kind of regional basis, for example.

All I can say is that the Scottish Women's Commission works very well for us, and we think it is a good model and could be replicable elsewhere, though scale may be an issue.

Lynn Everson: We have the National Alliance of Women's Organisations; that does exist, and we do liaison with the GEO, so that is in place.



Q78 **Jess Phillips:** Do you think it works?

Lynn Everson: Yes, absolutely, I do think it works. However, we need to perhaps formalise and publicise this arrangement: the fact that you have direct access to women's organisations and all the breadth of expertise, as you have heard, because we are all specialists in different areas of equality. We want you to listen to us because our members have many years' knowledge. There is that mechanism, and there is the UK NGO CSW Alliance as well, focusing obviously on CSW, but we would like to mainstream that as well, because all these acronyms are very scary to people. We need to be aware of them but somehow get them into the community and into business without being a distraction.

Jess Phillips: For most women's organisations, this is not their core business, and they do not have either the resources or the time to be doing such a thing.

Q79 **Lucy Allan:** We talked earlier about awareness and how that is gradually growing. However, there is clear evidence, in terms of translating that into action, that businesses are not grasping this and going for it. Is that because it is simply seen as a tick-box exercise that is going to get in the way of commerce and is not going to be good for business? Is there more that we can do to change that kind of perception, if it indeed exists, Lesley?

Lesley Irving: I gave the example earlier of the Scottish Business Pledge and Partnership for Change's 50/50 by 2020. The way that we have been successful in getting businesses to engage with that is by showing the business benefit of gender equality. There is a strong case that increasing diversity—and, in this instance, gender diversity—on your board and throughout the senior echelons and, indeed, workforce of your organisation does have positive benefits. Business can understand that.

You have to be prepared to put your money where your mouth is on these sorts of things, and I am sure that Committee members will be aware that, when the First Minister came into office, she immediately appointed a gender-balanced Cabinet, which is one of only three in the developed world, so we are quite proud of that. Within the Civil Service in Scotland, we have a gender-balanced executive team, so we have an equal number of male and female directors general. There are things that Government can do to demonstrate the importance of this issue and that can help as part of a sell to business. But we all know that there are very clear benefits to increasing diversity, and that is a simple case to make to business.

Farooq Ullah: Can I perhaps add a bit of a nuance to this? That has not exactly been my experience. My job essentially is to travel the world and talk about the SDGs, and ultimately the nuance is that we have seen a lot of appetite from the private sector but more from large corporations and the multinationals, which truly get this. The SDGs offer them something unique in the sense that, for all of us, it is a lingua franca. We now have



a common framework by which we can operate and talk about sustainable development in very concrete and specific terms, whereas before sustainable development was a bit of an amorphous concept and, although we had Agenda 21, it was a phonebook and not something that people could easily talk about with each other. This is a real progress in terms of a performance and management system, and businesses have got on top of it. They understand it, they get why they need to do it and they get why it is good for business.

The nuance, however, is that what we are lacking—and Lynn can speak to this point a lot more—is the SMEs. Even in the UK, I have seen enormous take-up from the big companies and, in our network, which is growing very quickly, they really step forward—even more so than civil society and NGOs.

Q80 Lucy Allan: Is that because big companies feel that they have to do this for the sake of their reputation but are not necessarily buying into it, whereas the SMEs are thinking, “We cannot really do it and it does not really impact on our reputation, so what is the gain for us as a business?”

Farooq Ullah: I guess that is the point. The larger corporations are seeing this both as a reputational loyalty thing, where consumers are beginning to care about these things and make choices based on credentials around sustainability, but also that it is very good for business. You can dramatically reduce your costs in your supply chain, reduce your risks, have greater certainty of resources for operations and have better engagement with the community—the obvious things that we know about.

The risk here, linking to what Lesley was saying, is that what the Government need to do is provide a clear economic rationale for why the SDGs are a good thing to do, both by public sector and private sector alike. We have not seen that, and it needs to be done to clearly outline the costs and benefits of implementing the SDGs. Going to Tracy’s point, this would alleviate some of the concerns that many civil societies and corporates see this as an add-on—as an additional burden that they now have to undertake. They see these as costs but they are not costs. They should be seen as investments in the future. I would argue for any women’s group that not doing the SDGs, or not engaging in this dialogue and debate, would only be undermining your own work. This is a conduit or an avenue by which, if we are all engaged, we can accomplish a great deal. We should not get siloed into our own little policy agenda areas. We should embrace this, as it is comprehensive and it does cut across everything.

Government needs to provide a better economic business case for doing the SDGs in the UK, clearly explaining the costs and the benefits, as well as the timeframes. We then need a better programme to engage SMEs because they are very absent, particularly in developing countries, where they are the big rump of the private sector—and of course women are more likely to be engaged in SMEs.



Q81 **Lucy Allan:** Lynn, do you agree that you need different measures for SMEs than you do for large business?

Lynn Everson: You would use the same measures but you need to tailor them. It is quite simple. Personally, I would like you to ask the Chambers of Commerce to run a survey to see if their members have heard of the SDGs and are implementing them, and also ask the Federation of Small Businesses to do the same, because that would raise awareness.

We can build this in. We are only a small company; we have only 13 staff. We can use SDGs in what we are doing painlessly just by making slight changes to the way we operate and also publicising what we are doing. Certainly this corporate social responsibility is a big thing for SMEs, and obviously corporations, but SMEs can use this as a lever to bigger things and to build networks with other SMEs and be seen by the corporations we want to be working for.

Q82 **Lucy Allan:** What is the reluctance of the FSB and other federations or institutes? What is the problem there?

Lynn Everson: I do not know. Perhaps they just do not know about it. I think it is complete ignorance. We have not talked about this enough generally anywhere, to be honest. As Farooq has said, we need to start from scratch and do this loud and clear.

Q83 **Lucy Allan:** We need to keep talking about it—okay. Dionne, do you want to add anything to what has been said?

Dionne Nelson: Yes. The women's sector has not necessarily engaged with the SDG but that does not mean that we are not doing any work. Equalities is our business—that is what we do—and the women's sector has been born out of the women's movement to look at different inequalities. In a way, we see this as our business; we do not see it as something we need to bolt on.

In answer to what business should be doing more, it might not seem like a tick-box exercise to business, whether they are small or not, but there are some practical things that could be done a bit better. We all need to improve, so it is not just for businesses alone. It is great that companies with 250 employees need to report on their salaries, but we think that organisations that employ 50 or more employees should also report on that.

From women's organisations' experience, despite various statutory rights protecting mothers in the workplace, one in nine women, when they return to work, receive less support in their work. It is about the practicalities of looking at something in an international way when things are not working implementation-wise, and that is great. We could take better action to improve women's access and retention. Still, in senior roles, there are not that many BME women in leadership positions, so we would like to see that race and gender is looked at more, as well as



disability, within those organisations. Therefore, it is not a tick-box exercise: there are practical measures to address inequalities.

Q84 Lucy Allan: Do you think there need to be incentives, or is it coercion or just more education? What actual tangible steps should we be talking about? Would coercion not alienate people?

Dionne Nelson: It needs to be part and parcel of how we want to see the UK. I do not think people should be forced to do it. There are things that we can do to look at training on policies to include things like looking at unconscious biases and disability and understanding how to work with people. There are stereotypes that women do particular jobs and men do particular jobs, and those are unconscious biases that we have, for example with STEM. They are well-paid jobs, and yet most women seem to be in lower paid jobs. We could do things around getting the message out that, from a level of education, these areas of work are important. That will work to improve poverty as well. There are things that they can do. I do not think that they need to be pushed into it or coerced. I do not know—I do not work in business—but we would like to see that it is a framework that the UK Government take a stance on.

Q85 Lucy Allan: Farooq, do you think incentivising business to engage with SDGs would be helpful and how would we do that?

Farooq Ullah: Yes, it would be enormously helpful. I agree that nobody should be forced to do these goals. Sustainable development must come from the heart, not from some external factor. Beyond that, incentivising them would be very beneficial, and part of that needs to be linked to doing the right things, such as tax breaks in many way; they could be incentivised there. However, ultimately, it is just about creating a very clear business operating environment in the UK where they know what is going on. We saw, for example, a few years ago the solar feed-in tariff get cut, completely undercutting the renewables market in the UK. That was a change of policy by the Government, when we were very clearly heading down a certain trajectory around climate change, that really undermined the market.

This is where we need to be very clear on the risks in engaging with the private sector, which is the point that I wanted to make. If we are not doing it well, it could result in greenwashing or worse, which would of course exacerbate inequalities, and companies would take advantage of the SDGs and the goodwill that surrounds it to do these things. Part of what we see is that companies are really engaging in what they call mapping exercises, where they look at their positive contributions to the SDGs. That is a great starting point, but we must encourage them to go the full distance on this one. That is only one-third of the equation. They must also map their negative impacts against the SDGs—not just their positive contributions to the SDGs—and then we would like to see very clear mitigatory and remedial actions as the third step, i.e. “What are you going to do about this?” That is the sense by which we can really get the depth of this.



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The Government, instead of encouraging or forcing people to report through regulatory means, can incentivise them through this economic case to show them that there are very clear benefits specifically for SMEs in the UK. That is the level of detail I would like to see, as well as offering up guidance about how to do these things and support and resources to help companies do it. The incentive is there. I do not think we need to create it. It is very obvious to me. It seems very common-sense: creating a long-lasting world for future generations is good for business, because you simply would not have a private sector if the world does not exist.

Q86 Chair: Farooq, can I just press you a little bit further on that? You have said a couple of times that this is good for business. Could you spell out what the costs and benefits are to business of engaging with the SDGs? Give us some real, hard examples there.

Farooq Ullah: Sadly I cannot, because I have not seen such analysis done. There is much rhetoric around it, and I think I am quoting the rhetoric here, but I am encouraging this deep analysis; and I would encourage this Committee to call on Government to undertake these types of things and specifically look at these sorts of things.

For example, the benefits to operating costs in general and the security of supply chains would be enormous. This goes back to the point Lynn was making: these should be put into public procurement. There is a target in the SDGs for public procurement, and this is something that Government can clearly do. If they put these goals and these targets within tenders, and therefore into contracts, they will permeate throughout the UK as an economic tool as well as encourage people to do things. Even in DFID funding agreements, the SDGs should be quoted so that people who are receiving UK taxpayer funds to deliver humanitarian or other programmes on the ground should have to comply with the SDGs. These are the mechanical, technical ways. Again, I cannot give you the specifics that you are looking for, but it should be done and there are other sources. If I may come back to the Committee with some indications about firm facts and figures around this, I will.

Q87 Chair: Does anybody want to have a go at the costs and benefits? There is the obvious benefit of utilising women who now are leaving our education system with the best qualifications and not getting utilised to the right degree.

Lesley Irving: While not being able to remember it off the top of my head, there is ample evidence of the business benefit of having gender equality in organisations; and, again, I would be happy to provide that to the Committee.

I just wanted to make reference here to incentivising business and our National Performance Framework, which is being reviewed at the moment. That is a set of national outcomes that were put into place in 2007. They are being reviewed, as I say, at the moment. Business, academics, the third sector and a range of interests are involved in



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looking at those. However, the important point here, coming back to procurement, is that, through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, private bodies that receive money to carry out public functions are required to have due regard to the national outcomes. The national outcomes include things like eliminating the significant inequalities in Scottish society. Some of the indicators that lie beneath the outcomes are things like the gender pay gap being closed or the living wage being paid.

Through that mechanism of the National Performance Framework, private businesses that wish to get government contracts to carry out public services will be required to give due regard to our national outcomes, and the SDGs will be embedded very firmly in the next iteration of the National Performance Framework. That is very transparent. You can monitor our progress towards them on the website Scotland Performs. Through that, we have an opportunity to encourage businesses to incorporate the sustainable development goals in how they do their business.

Q88 Chair: I know that other colleagues want to come in, but is what you are talking about a burden on SMEs? Is that perhaps why they are not engaging?

Lesley Irving: We have had reasonable success in getting smaller organisations involved in our business pledge and our partnership for change, although I would acknowledge that many of them are larger organisations. Virgin Money, for example, was an early signatory to 50/50 by 2020. Lynn can speak more eloquently than I with her experience, but it is about making the case, which is a substantial and evidenced case, and it is about SMEs understanding that there is a whole range of benefits, as Farooq and Lynn have outlined, in working in this way and that it will ultimately be better for their business.

Lynn Everson: Make them stars—SMEs that prove their SDG credentials can have access to these tenders and publicise it on their website, and can be recognised publicly for this. The Women’s Empowerment Principles are a good framework to look at. This is a live set of UN-based principles, seven of which companies can deliver on, which are quite clear aims on how to be socially responsible. You are audited on that and the company CEO signs a statement saying that they adhere to these principles and they are listed on the UN website. They are called WEPs for short—Women’s Empowerment Principles. That might be a useful framework to give business something to aim at. That is on their website, and they can use the logo to say, “We are good guys.”

The fact that this is a very public admission, if you like, and a commitment to engaging in these principles is very good. SMEs could do that quite simply. They are very broad statements that you can adhere to no matter what your size. You can tailor it according to your size of business.

Q89 Chair: Would they not hope that they had done that anyway?



Lynn Everson: Yes, of course.

Farooq Ullah: Can I offer one more example that might help? In Germany, the German Council for Sustainable Development has produced something called the German Sustainability Code, which is an articulation in business terms of what sustainable development in Germany should look like in line with the existing legislation and policies. It has been very successful. I believe 180 companies of all shapes and sizes have signed up to it, and there have been about 350 reports against it. These companies are very much favoured by the Government in terms of procurement. They are vetted in annual parties and fairs and things like that. I would have to speak to my colleague, Günther, who is the Chair of the RNE—the German Council for Sustainable Development—but I am sure he could offer some very specific and tangible benefits and results that we could draw on. Germany, as I say, is a close comparator to the UK in sustainable development terms, although they have outstripped us now, because we basically tore up most of the infrastructure that we created over the last 15 years in the last five years since the change of Government.

Q90 **Jess Phillips:** I am a big fan of the idea of the commissioning argument and the contracting argument. As someone who has filled in millions of tenders—it seems like millions—we were always asked those questions about environmental sustainability. I wonder if you think that that has made any difference to environmental sustainability, because, as somebody who filled them in, I sometimes felt that it was a bit of a check-box or a burden, and the organisation that I worked for could never compete with the likes of people on bikes making smoothies in their offices. I wonder how you think this would be different, because I never perceived that as being a big part of the tendering process.

Lynn Everson: You need input on your tendering and how you phrase your tenders, for starters, because you are right: on the environmental issue, when we see that in tenders, we think, "What can we do? We are in an office in Preston. We are not generating masses of CO₂. We are just in an office in Preston." We do not have a lot to say on that, so it is the way that the questions are asked in these tenders that is crucial, and you need to engage with the Chambers of Commerce and small business groups to think about what you are asking procurement-wise, because they are often phrased in such a way that you cannot give the right answer. The questions—especially with these online portal things—do not provide the room to add what you want to say. The questions that you are asking are wrong, so you need to reconsider.

Jess Phillips: Carbon off-setting and so forth. I do not know whether I carbon-offset.

Lynn Everson: That is right. It is completely irrelevant. You are making it a tick-box exercise, I am sorry to say, in some cases.



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Lesley Irving: There is no doubt about it. It is not just the questions that are in the tender documents but also the weighting that is given to the answers to those questions when they are being reviewed. If you comparatively weight down the answers to those questions, then it is possible that the outcome of the exercise is that an organisation gets a tender that has not placed a high value on those things. You need to weight them sufficiently so that the process will come out with the answer that the people who get the contracts are those who are genuinely committed to this type of work.

Jess Phillips: In my experience, it was the desires of the commissioner. If the commissioner was really big on the environment, it would have been weighted more. It is not, I suppose, that the Government have to front-end the desire and those commissioners.

Q91 **Tracy Brabin:** As you were talking about companies, it sounds like such a good idea—like Creative Skillset had the tick—that the company that delivers these is preferred. However, part of the SDG call is to establish domestic accountability mechanisms to assess progress towards these goals, because obviously not every company is there yet. Farooq, maybe you could tell me what opportunities there are for business in terms of monitoring this progress.

Farooq Ullah: The opportunities are quite profound, because nothing has been decided or even mooted yet. There are many opportunities to feed into this. The primary one would be with the Office for National Statistics. Earlier in the year, we ran a joint consultation with ONS—UKSSD and ONS—to get the initial shaping of what stakeholders believe reporting for the UK around the SDGs should look like. They were going to launch an official consultation, now that they have been resourced to do this, at the end of November and early December, but it was postponed. We are hoping that they will re-run it in February. Again, I need to be a bit discreet here—I can sometimes be a bit of an insider—but it was really around the fact that they did not feel they had traction within Government and there was no sense in running an official consultation around this when reporting—

Chair: They received £6 million to do it.

Farooq Ullah: They did, yes. They received a big chunk of money. I guess that was for the entire resourcing. I do not precisely know the budget allocation. They are resourced to do it, but of course there is no point in doing a formal consultation if the Government are simply not there and not listening. This is the ONS collating the data but ultimately they will stop short of analysing performance and offering things. They will only produce the data. Who then is going to actually do the reporting? What does that look like? Again, this is all very much up for grabs. One nuance around this, of course, is that the ONS believes that we have about 60% of the data required to report on the SDGs. There is a very large data gap; of course, in other countries that is much larger.



Q92 **Chair:** Sorry, who has analysed that there is only 60% of the data available?

Farooq Ullah: The ONS. One of the key things that we are looking at with the ONS—and that the ONS is going to look at in this inquiry—is how we can harness what we call non-official data sets or data sources. Academia, civil society and particularly the private sector will have reams of data around different aspects of the SDG targets and indicators. How can we get that and how can it be properly quality-assured so that it can be used in the data set? This is a huge opportunity for private sector and civil society to very much be active in the reporting and not passive at all—not just waiting for a report on progress and then trying to do advocacy around it but very much being a part of the process.

There is of course something very important that also needs to be included around shadow reporting. This is a very broad, comprehensive framework and there is a lot of detail. Having specific stakeholder perspectives within the reporting to give anecdotal evidence will be equally important. We really need to understand the challenges and difficulties that the private sector and civil society are facing in the implementation of the SDGs. If they are being asked to be a delivery agent, they need to be supported in that way.

Now is the time to really put some thoughts forward about what reporting needs to look like and what accountability needs to look like, bearing in mind that this is not a legally binding framework. It is entirely voluntary.

Q93 **Chair:** Can I just interject there? I have never heard that figure of 60% before. Where does that come from?

Farooq Ullah: I will have to find it for you. Again, I am quoting off the top of my head. I believe this is what the ONS has told me.

Q94 **Chair:** If ONS have information that 60% of the data is available and there is a 40% gap, we would be most grateful if you could give us the reference to that.

Farooq Ullah: Yes, I will try to dig it out. Please do not quote me on the exact figure until I give you the exact numbers.

Chair: Unfortunately you are being broadcast so I cannot control who may or may not quote you. That is beyond my pay grade.

Farooq Ullah: The fact is that this is not a legally binding initiative, as opposed to the Paris climate change agreement, which is legally binding and has been ratified by a number of countries. This is not the same. We therefore need very strong reporting mechanisms given that it is a voluntary framework, including of course the accountability that we are going to provide. That is not to say that any country could not choose to legislate nationally for the SDGs or any part of the SDGs, and that should not be dismissed out of hand. For example, around equality and women's rights, there could be further work done and we could put additions or



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amendments on to existing legislative frameworks that could add some teeth and impetus to it and link it closer to the SDGs, but I do not know of any country that is going down the legislative route yet. However, that should not be dismissed out of hand, because it would provide a much stronger level of accountability.

Q95 Tracy Brabin: Do you think that, with global multinationals, there is not a great appetite for domestic detail?

Farooq Ullah: Yes and no. Even the UN has decided that the annual report of the SDGs will not be disaggregated by country type, which I find very alarming and very much against any sort of accountability. Equally, companies may not want to report on the nuances of their different activities but the issue is that, if they have done it right, the data is available. Even in the case of the countries, the member states of the UN, they will have to report to the UN Statistical Commission. The data will exist; they are just choosing not to report it in a form that breaks it down by country type, because they do not want to get into a situation of league tabling and naming and shaming.

They will, however, in line with the principle of leaving no one behind, disaggregate by demography. You will see the different SDGs around women or sexual preference or ethnicity or income, but we will not see countries broken down. Again, we really need to focus on what reporting we want in the UK to truly understand the different moving parts that are necessary for this and to hold the Government to account for a commitment that they clearly made in our name at the UN in September.

Q96 Tracy Brabin: Looking more broadly at the civil society and women's groups, how do we see that monitoring progressing?

Dionne Nelson: The women's organisations would need some kind of guidance on that, and therefore we would welcome a mechanism and a body to make that happen so that you would be able to understand what those standards were. To be frank, women's organisations are, by their nature, collecting data on the issues that women are facing, whether that be sexual violence, health inequalities or lack of pension. They are collecting data around those areas. However, they probably need to be able to say, "How does that fit in with the SDGs?" More could be done for us to understand our place and our role and how we can support this area of work, because I am sure that the sector is doing a lot. There are approximately 20,000 women's organisations. Surely we must be able to support the Government in this role to achieve that. We just need more information on how the standards should be kept.

Tracy Brabin: Lynn, do you have something to contribute?

Lynn Everson: I would agree with that. I agree that you have the information, as Dionne said, with all of the women's organisations before you. As we have said, we have specialist areas. If you give us the



framework, we can report it. However, as we have all said, we need the framework.

Q97 Tracy Brabin: Lesley, you were saying that in Scotland there seems to be quite a lot of monitoring already in place. How is that funding allocated and how does that work?

Lesley Irving: I am glad you asked that question. That was the very point I was going to raise. If you want the women's sector to engage, you need to be resourced to do so. As Dionne has said, they have a whole range of very important work that they are doing in supporting women, and therefore you need to have that properly resourced. We provide funding, as I have said, to the Scottish Women's Convention and Engender. We also fund Close the Gap, which is an organisation that works around, as you might expect, trying to close the gender pay gap. We fund Equate Scotland, which is what was the Scottish Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology. We took over their funding when the UK body lost their funding, and we saw that as an important stakeholder to have in the landscape and we were luckily able at that time to support them.

Funding and resourcing is a really important point here. You are not going to get that interaction, monitoring, feedback and scrutiny unless there are organisations that are funded to be able to do that. I mentioned that the Scottish Women's Convention and Engender provide shadow reports to CEDAW and attend CSW and so on and, while we do not fund them directly to do that, they are able to do that because we core fund them such that they can use other income that they manage to generate to perform those very important functions. Adequate resourcing for the women's sector and for organisations such as the one Dionne represents is really crucial.

Q98 Tracy Brabin: As you said, the scrutiny and the feedback is really important but the funding is not comprehensive. Is there any other result that we will get from not funding this progress report?

Dionne Nelson: How much do you want to achieve?

Tracy Brabin: We will lessen our ambitions.

Dionne Nelson: I can use CEDAW, because that is where we have done work and where we continue to do work. Regarding women's organisations, we put that shadow report together for nothing at the moment, because we are passionate about the impact of inequality on women's lives. That is what we have done, but of course we would love to be resourced for it, and women's organisations have contributed £1,000, £500 or whatever to make that happen—to bring 46 organisations together—because they are passionate about their area of work. Yes, we would love to be resourced to do that and to support all the areas of these instruments that we have that are interconnected but seem to be disjointed. There has to be a better way.



Q99 **Tracy Brabin:** Farooq, did you want to come in on that?

Farooq Ullah: Yes, specifically on the data and monitoring point, the challenge and solution is disaggregation, or specifically the ability to disaggregate. There are two key principles of the SDGs: this point of universality—that all countries, and I also say all people, need to be involved in this programme; and the “leave no one behind” principle. Key to leaving no one behind is understanding who these people are, where they are at currently, and what impact the SDGs or any related programmes have on them. Understanding what levels we want to disaggregate to will help us ensure that we are not missing key communities.

That, of course, is a risk. We need the data. We need that level of information to disaggregate down to that level. It is the only way that we can really, truly capture that information and ensure that no one is being left behind. That is why this ONS consultation and getting their mechanics of this reporting and data collection right is so vitally important. How far do you want to go? Will we be able to understand the needs of a young Pakistani woman in northern England as opposed to some other woman in that same sort of situation? Can we get to that level of granularity to understand these things? If we are serious about these things, I suppose we have to. That level of aggregation will then have to aggregate upwards to get a nationwide perspective as well.

One of the recommendations that I would make to this Committee and to others is that we do not necessarily need more one-off inquiries but rather that we need to work together to produce a comprehensive reporting system: a “state of sustainable development in the UK” report done annually or periodically that really captures all of these things and is underpinned by an enormous database of evidence, which could be rolled up and rolled out as the user wishes, so that you can find that young Pakistani woman in the north of England or you can look for anything else that you wish to. Understanding and having that data available in a truly open-sourced way—so not just available but accessible—that people can manipulate to look for all sorts of things, and that civil society and the private sector can use as well, is going to be huge. Data is going to be one of the key challenges and one of the key solutions around SDG implementation, and we have to get it right from the beginning because, once we begin reporting, it will be hard to change things and adapt them.

That also needs to link to the fact that this needs to be aggregated not from a local British perspective but into a large regional EU—for now, anyway—UN and global perspective as well. There needs to be a high degree of comparability and compatibility of data as well. You cannot just simply do whatever you want. The UK needs to understand that we need to ensure that we comply with international data standards and reporting standards around this all as well, while, at the same time, finding the reporting mechanism that speaks to people in the UK. One of the things that we are still working on is getting these indicators. As you probably



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know, the SDGs are goal target indicators. The global indicator is not yet even finalised, so we are still dealing with very much an incomplete framework and, of course, as is always the case, the devil is in the detail. In this case, the detail is in the indicators. There will then be another tranche of national indicators that we choose to use to report and understand SDG progress ourselves.

There is a long way to go here and there is a long way to shape these things. People really need to speak up and say what they want from this process and what key reporting outputs they need to see.

Dionne Nelson: I would add the caveat that there is room for monitoring data as long as the data is not open source, because some of the people that the women's organisations work with are vulnerable and they do not want to be found, for obvious reasons. We just need to be mindful of that data and how it is encrypted if information is shared across government departments or wherever.

Q100 **Chair:** Can I bring you back to the examples you gave earlier of Finland and Germany being so much further ahead? Presumably they have also had to tackle this issue of data collection and data gaps, so to what extent could we look to those countries for a model? Would that be something that could be done?

Lynn Everson: I think you should. Brazil, in particular, is very good and possibly slightly ahead of Finland and Germany, because they have really publicised the SDGs right down to microbusinesses. They have engaged the whole commercial population.

Q101 **Chair:** I am thinking particularly of the collecting of data and how that is achieved.

Lynn Everson: They have then implemented a reporting system that is easy to use. I do not have the details, but I agree with Farooq that the ONS is a good way to go because, as companies, we have to report our export data etc. and we could report our SDG data at the same time.

Q102 **Chair:** We were quite interested in the amount of money that the Government have committed to gathering data on this. Would there be a mechanism to subcontract some of that to civil society? We know that civil society will be a necessary part of filling that 40% gap that you have identified.

Lynn Everson: There must be. There are companies out there that basically crunch numbers and gather these statistics. I am sure that they could all be used. Farooq has some more concrete examples.

Q103 **Chair:** We could see, perhaps, ONS commission women's organisations and other organisations to input some of that data for them.

Lynn Everson: Yes.



Farooq Ullah: It is much larger: we really need a data revolution in the world and in the UK. The things that we are not measuring yet are not the easy things to measure; they are the hard ones. We are not measuring them because they simply are things that we struggle to measure. We need a much more sophisticated way of understanding what progress is, what progress for humanity looks like, and to try to articulate that in real concrete terms around indicators and targets and, of course, the data that is therefore required—and how it is collected. We talk about incentives: this is a good way to incentivise people to act.

Chair: It would be very interesting to know how much Brazil, Finland and Germany are spending on data collection. Going back to the £6 million, that sounds like quite a lot of money to be spending on data collection. Is it getting to the right places?

Ben, you have the last question of the first session.

Q104 **Ben Howlett:** Thank you. Sorry about being late. The joy of being an MP is rattling around as many things as possible in one short space of time. What single recommendation would you have for businesses and civil society to support and encourage the implementation of the SDG 5? Dionne, would you like to go first?

Dionne Nelson: One single thing?

Ben Howlett: If you can.

Dionne Nelson: Women's organisations and the women they work with would say that decision-makers need to reverse the current gender-blind policy-making because, in doing that, we will be able to recognise that there is unfair practice. At the moment some of the policy-making is having a detrimental impact on women and girls. If we put a gendered lens on those policies and have a gendered analysis of those policies before they go out, we are more likely to meet SDG 5 and others.

Lynn Everson: I would start off by running that survey with the Chambers of Commerce and the FSB just to gauge the awareness of the entire commercial population in the UK of the SDGs. From that, you can decide what to do next in terms of publicity. You have to raise awareness generally about the SDGs and show that you are backing them and that they are totally relevant to everybody in the business sense of every size of company. From there, you can decide how to roll it out. You can also engage with the professional associations, not just the Chambers of Commerce. There is a whole load of people out there with knowledge who will be able to take this forward.

Farooq Ullah: I have a few points. One would be to try to reconceptualise key terms and concepts, particularly economic terms such as the ideas of the household, the family or producers that very much undermine women's roles in non-formal economies like caring. If



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these things were properly accounted for, women would be more greatly empowered through financial means and everything else in the economy.

Their participation in governance really does matter. I am also a part of Future Earth. One of my colleagues is a scientist. She has done a lot of work around geospatial analysis to show that, where you get women involved in decision-making modalities up to the range of 25% to 33%, you have greater environmental protection. This is very evidence-based science and science should be utilised better—and I can link you up with my Future Earth colleagues around this—to show that we should be reaching a minimum of 33% in all corporate boards, public offices, committees and everything else. We are not doing very well even in this esteemed House: it is only 29% women.

Chair: 30% now.

Farooq Ullah: Okay, these are 2015 figures. Wales is doing the best at 42% but that still leaves the UK at 49th in the world, at least on my figures. Participation in governance matters. What can be done to encourage and help that? Is that a target that we need to set for all boards—public boards and everything else?

There are three themes that I would suggest as focal areas for the Committee. The first is around women's political and governance participation and leadership. The second is around economic empowerment—the key terms I mentioned—but also property ownership. I was very surprised to see that I could not find disaggregation of property ownership in the UK by gender. I did a very simple Google search but it was not forthcoming. I did a lot of digging, and it would be interesting to know what proportion of women own property or have property rights in the UK in terms of assets and ownership. The third thing is integration in the sense that I would really encourage this Committee to look beyond SDG 5. The Executive Director of UN Women has mentioned that there are gender dimensions in other SDG areas around poverty, hunger, health and education.

Chair: The term of reference that we are dealing with is SDG 5. We have to be quite focused.

Farooq Ullah: I realise that, but the key to sustainable development is taking an integrated and truly systems-based holistic approach where you really derive co-benefits. What we are not going to see in any country, even the most progressive, is, with 169 targets, a one-for-one policy ratio. We are not going to have 169 targets and 169 policies. We may get a handful at best, so we have to make sure that they are integrated and systems-based and tackle everything. This links to something called interlinkages.

Lastly, I would suggest, as a meta-recommendation, that we all push for the UK to undertake and deliver an SDGs national voluntary review at the UN by 2018 or 2019. I believe that, if we all ask for this big



meta-recommendation, many of the things that we need—action plans, supporting mechanisms, data collection—will have to follow as a matter of course. In the process of preparing to report, they will have to design many of these elements that we are so desperate for.

Q105 **Ben Howlett:** Lesley, do you have a single recommendation?

Lesley Irving: I agree with all that my colleagues have said. I also think it is important that Government are an exemplar in this. If we hope to engage with civic society and business on this, we have to make sure that our own house is in order. I mentioned earlier that we have a gender-balanced Cabinet, for instance, in Scotland. At the top of the Civil Service, our executive team is gender-balanced. We are also using new powers that we gained recently through the Scotland Act to bring forward a Bill about gender representation on the boards of public bodies; that will be introduced into the Scottish Parliament in June of this year. We also carry out and publish an equality budget statement, which is published alongside our budget every year. We are the only Government in the UK to do this, and that does not just look at gender but also considers the impact of our spend as a Government across all the protected characteristics. I also mentioned earlier the National Performance Framework against which we can be measured. We also have Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights. Those two mechanisms are the way in which Government will be measured in our performance on the sustainable development goals. Be an exemplar, get your own house in order and put your money where your mouth is—those sorts of things.

Chair: Can I thank you all for such an excellent session this morning? It has been very interesting. There have been some very good examples there. There are a couple of things that people will get back to us on and we would be very grateful for that. Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Carole Easton, Chief Executive, Young Women's Trust, Pragna Patel, Director, Southall Black Sisters, Natasha Walter, Founder and Director, Women for Refugee Women, and Katharine Sacks-Jones, Director, Agenda.

Q106 **Chair:** We are now moving on to our second session on sustainable development goal 5. We have a new panel and can I thank you, on behalf of the whole Committee, for taking the time to be with us here this morning? Just for the benefit of those who have not seen the companies that you come from, perhaps you could introduce yourselves and say the company you are from.

Dr Easton: I am Carole Easton and I am Chief Executive of Young Women's Trust.



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Pragna Patel: I am Pragna Patel. I am Director of an NGO called Southall Black Sisters.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: I am Katharine Sacks-Jones. I am the Director of Agenda, which is an alliance for women and girls at risk.

Natasha Walter: I am Natasha Walter. I am the Director of a charity, Women for Refugee Women.

Chair: That is brilliant, and can I thank you in advance for taking the time to be with us this morning? We know you are all very busy and we are really grateful to you for being here. Lucy is going to start our questioning.

Q107 **Lucy Allan:** Thank you. Good morning. As an overarching theme, what is the relevance of “leaving no one behind” to the UK? Perhaps, Katharine, can you start and say what is the relevance to the UK and how should the UK Government interpret that theme?

Katharine Sacks-Jones: It is important that we recognise that at the moment in the UK a lot of women are left behind. From a gender perspective, some women face multiple disadvantage: extensive abuse and violence, both as children and adults, on and off across their lives, combined with inequality and poverty.

Q108 **Chair:** Sorry, can I interrupt you? Would you be able to sit forward a bit? The gentleman who is trying to make sure that everything is heard is having a few problems.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: Is that better?

Chair: That is very kind, thank you.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: I was saying women who face multiple disadvantage—abuse on and off across their lives, inequality, poverty and also other issues, like poor mental health, substance misuse and homelessness—are a particularly disadvantaged and, currently, left behind group. Research that we have done found that 1.2 million women in England, which is one in 20 of all women, face the most extensive abuse, which is both physical and sexual abuse, as both children and adults. That is a recurring theme throughout their life and, as you might expect, that group has very high rates of mental ill health, over half have a mental health disorder, one in five have been homeless and one in three have an alcohol problem. This is a group who cannot enjoy their full rights at the moment, for whom services do not really work and who are particularly excluded within society. If we are talking about leaving no one behind, it is really important that we have a focus on the most marginalised, and I would argue that this group is among those.

Q109 **Lucy Allan:** Natasha, what is the relevance to the UK, specifically from your background and experience?



Natasha Walter: I would echo everything that Katharine said. There are a lot of women in the UK who face multiple disadvantage, and the women we work with, who are women who have sought asylum in the UK, are such a pressing and urgent example of that. The vast majority of the women we see who have sought asylum in the UK are victims of extreme sexual violence or torture in their countries of origin. They have often made very traumatic journeys to get to the UK, but when they get here what we so often see is that they are not able to avail themselves of the protections that might be available to British women, to citizens. They really struggle to get any support for the trauma they have passed through.

In fact, often what we see, sadly, is that they are even re-traumatised by the asylum process. I know that is quite a difficult thing, in a way, to get one's head around, but we see it over and over again that women face a very adversarial process, often without proper legal support, that can drag on for years. During the asylum claim, they are not allowed to work, so they are completely cut out of the labour market, pushed into really extreme poverty, sometimes into absolute destitution. They may go through periods when they are in receipt of no benefits, have no right to work and no right to housing. We see often that they are also detained during the asylum process, which is very re-traumatising for women who have already experienced human rights abuses.

We feel there is a lot of work to be done to ensure that women seeking asylum do not get special treatment but are just brought into the orbit of some of the advances that have been made in terms of protecting victims of sex- and gender-based violence in the UK, and supporting women into education and employment. Our written evidence goes into some of that in a bit more detail.

Q110 **Lucy Allan:** Pragna, what would your views be on that in terms of your experience?

Pragna Patel: The phrase "leave no one behind" is so significant, and it is particularly significant for the group of women that I work with, which is black minority women, who, historically, have never had a voice, not in their communities, not in wider society. We are in our 38th year of working to try to make sure that the most marginalised black minority women are brought into the centre of their communities and have a stake, as citizens of society. That is an incredibly difficult task for us.

For us, the UK lauds itself on being a supporter of values we should live by—common decency, humanity, compassion, equality—and yet what we are seeing in the UK are areas where subgroups of women are left behind and marginalised. What worries me is that the current economic and political developments, particularly in the last decade or so, that have, to some extent, led to progress for some women have had the opposite effect for other women. The progress that we have made as a category, as women, in respect of violence against women, better institutional responses to violence against women, better understanding of sexism in



the workplace, has not been shared equally. There are marginalised groups—refugees, migrant women, women who are in minority communities who have very little voice and young minority women—who are not only not sharing in that progress but are probably now, I would say, facing real threats to their chances of being able to express freedom, equality, and being able to survive in a way that is dignified in our communities and in our society.

For me, the notion of “leave no one behind” is really important, and if it can be embedded across Government, across social policy formation, that is a good starting place to try to make sure that nobody is left behind.

Q111 **Lucy Allan:** You are saying that the progress that has been made is having a detrimental effect on the most disadvantaged and marginalised women.

Pragna Patel: It has not touched some of the most marginalised, and contradictory social policies, law developments and institutional responses have also widened inequality and heightened marginalisation for some subgroups of women.

Q112 **Lucy Allan:** Dr Carole, what are the challenges then of reaching these most marginalised groups of women?

Dr Easton: Quite considerable. I would support my colleagues, and I would like to add that I see sustainable development goal 5 as having enormous relevance for the UK. I would like to think, and there is evidence for this, that we think it is important whether that sustainable goal is there or not and that we value women’s equality and empowerment in this country already. The signs of this Select Committee and GEO indicate that it is terribly important and that we would be doing something even more about it with or without that sustainable goal. But this obviously adds then weight and leverage, and particularly about women not being left behind.

What cuts across what we have heard is economic disadvantage and the disempowering effect of not having financial independence, financial access, and financial opportunities. Obviously, at Young Women’s Trust I am particularly concerned about access for young women and young women’s voices being heard, so that we do not write off a generation of young women too with additional and cross-sectional disadvantage. That engagement of young people now and young women is absolutely crucial. Some of the issues we are talking about affect young men as well, but if we can do something about the financial crisis facing young people, it will disproportionately benefit young women.

Q113 **Lucy Allan:** Do you think there is an awareness issue as well in that people are simply not aware? Pragna was saying that because we are making progress, it kind of leaves others further behind. Do you think there is an awareness issue as well?



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Dr Easton: Yes. Although I absolutely applaud women on boards or women in Parliament, that work is not necessarily touching those most disadvantaged, and if we do not pay attention to that, there can be an illusion of job done.

Q114 **Jess Phillips:** I want to focus on what the Government have done for marginalised groups and what more they could do. Pragna and Natasha, what action have the Government taken to address gender inequality in the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

Pragna Patel: That is a very interesting question, because in some ways, as part of the wider role of government strategy, say in my area of work, which is largely around violence against women and girls, we have seen some incredible changes and progress being made. We have seen action plans and strategies that have been adopted, which seem to look at all the areas of prevention, investigation, prosecution and so on. We are looking at ways in which progress has been made for women in terms of reporting and exiting from abuse, being taken seriously when they do approach institutions and better engagement with, say, the criminal justice system.

Having said that, we have also seen some improvement largely as a result of contestations by black minority women. This is not something that the state itself has had insight into until there have been campaigns, but through campaigns and struggles we have seen better responses to issues like forced marriage, honour-based violence, FGM and so on. These are achievements and they are not to be underestimated.

Having said that, we are now facing a situation where other, contradictory developments undermine that attempt to bring about gender equality, which underpins those initiatives. The economic climate is certainly a very challenging one at the moment. Austerity cuts bite. They have manifested in different ways, and black minority women's organisations, for example, have really faced cuts in the funding of their services. There is no ring-fencing of funding for those services. Local authorities are moving towards commissioning structures that tend to favour generic providers as service providers. Therefore, specialist smaller services led by BME women are being left aside. Cuts to legal aid have disproportionately impacted on the most marginalised black minority women, which makes it harder for them to provide the evidence they need to, for example, meet the gateway criteria to obtain legal aid and, therefore, they cannot seek justice in relation to escaping violence.

We have seen another major contradictory development in the way in which the state is beginning to deal with minorities through the prism of religion. The question that is never asked is: when you set up multi-faith or interfaith forums or encourage service provision by faith organisations, are you gender equality-proofing the way in which funding goes to those services and their outcomes? Are they trying to achieve substantive gender equality or is it a mask to promote gender inequality? These are



some serious threats that we are facing and particularly black minority women are facing.

Dame Louise Casey's report recently talked about how some black minority women in some parts of the UK that have faced industrial decline are trapped in abuse and isolation. The kind of contradictory social policies that are being implemented are going to heighten that feeling of entrapment in abuse and isolation, leading to further segregation, and that worries me. It worries me that minority women's needs and aspirations are filtered through the prism of religion rather than through the prism of the human rights and equality framework.

Q115 **Jess Phillips:** What would you suggest the Government do to counteract that?

Pragna Patel: They need to seriously review the approach to minorities by encouraging religion and faith leaderships to take centre stage in the regeneration of communities, in the formation of social policies and so on. When they are working in partnership with faith-based or religious organisations, they need to seriously ask questions about gender equality and whether the outcomes of those organisations are going to lead to more gender equality or inequality. There is a serious review to be had into the ways in which the Government themselves are seeking to partner with civil society organisations that happen to be, in my view, the wrong ones.

Natasha Walter: On what the Government are doing, it has really struck me over the last few years working on this issue that we do see movement from the Home Office in terms of this rhetoric around the need to be more gender-sensitive in the asylum process. For instance, in the *Call to end violence against women and girls: action plan*, there is a list of actions that the Home Office is committed to taking in the asylum process. We have been campaigning against detention and have had some responses from the Government on, say, a time limit on the detention of pregnant women. For the first time, in the adults-at-risk policy, we have the statement from the Home Office that victims of sex- and gender-based violence should not be detained, so we do get these responses. We should feel good about that. We should feel positive about that, shouldn't we?

The thing is we do not. Constantly we find that these measures are not fully embedded, because we never really see the change of culture in the Home Office away from a very rigid enforcement culture towards one that is more based around protection. Do not get me wrong; I am not saying that anyone who comes into this country saying, "I experienced sex- and gender-based violence," should just be given a free pass. Obviously, we need a proper asylum process that weighs that story, but it has to be one that is supportive, humane and dignified through the process, and that is not what we are seeing. At the moment, I just feel that, yes, I could give you a list of things that the Home Office has done—and we have all felt incredibly positive about them when they have come in over the last few



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years—or they have said they will do, but either we are not seeing any action on the ground at all or, where we do see it, it is so marginal that it is not really having an effect on women's experiences.

If I could quickly go back to the commitment around detention, we had the commitment in the new adults-at-risk policy that victims of sex- and gender-based violence should not be detained, yet when we go and meet with civil servants, we cannot find if they have any strategy at all for monitoring this: for finding out how many women in Yarl's Wood Detention Centre, say, have said they are victims of gender-based violence and, if they have, what support there is or whether they are on a pathway then to release or immediate removal. We are just not getting the follow through.

We feel it would be wonderful if, under this umbrella of the sustainable development goal or whatever other pressing goal we can map this to, we can say this has to be weighted better in the asylum process. You cannot treat these women as less than human, less than women, just because they crossed a border. You cannot treat them in such a punitive way because they have crossed a border. There has to be some dignity and some humanity built into the system.

I am not saying that nothing has been done and I do feel there is this conversation just beginning, but I feel that if we just pushed a bit harder, a lot could happen quite quickly.

Q116 Jess Phillips: Do you think that, for instance, the Modern Slavery Act made a difference to those very marginalised women?

Natasha Walter: I am sure it has made a difference to some women, but, sadly, we still meet women who have been victims of trafficking across borders for forced prostitution or other types of forced labour who still find themselves in a very adversarial and punitive system, which really does worry us. Tell us, what are the Government doing? As you were saying, there have been quite a lot of improvements in, say, the criminal justice system—the learning there about how you respond to victims of violence—that just have not been carried through into UKVI.

Q117 Chair: How does the Modern Slavery Act need to be used differently to be more effective?

Natasha Walter: I am not an expert. I would not feel I could answer. Our feeling is that, at the moment, as I said, we are still meeting people who have fallen through and are not being recognised as victims of trafficking despite their experiences and being forced to cross borders.

Q118 Jess Phillips: If I could be so bold, I would say it is the 45-day limit on the amount of time that one is allowed to stay in asylum before your case—it is limited, if you are a victim of trauma.

Natasha Walter: There is often this problem of credibility in the asylum process. A lot is thrown at women in order to try to break down their



story, and we do often see women who have very poor memory of what has happened to them and need more support, as you say, to gather their wits and their evidence. Although I know that training is meant to have been brought in on the effect of trauma on memory loss, in terms of the decision-makers in the Home Office, I was in a tribunal hearing recently with a victim of sexual violence who was really being rubbished by the representative of the Home Office because of her poor memory for dates and places. With a bit less of an adversarial and punitive system, it would have been easier for her to speak out and to gather that evidence and bring her case.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: On the point about trafficking, there needs to be broader recognition of trafficking and trauma and the impact of that on women, not just within the Home Office but within the criminal justice system. Women can often end up in the criminal courts, and the awareness of what they have been through is often quite limited, the support is often quite limited and the window is quite small during which they can access support, which does not always work. There are systemic failures around that and, instead, women end up going down quite a punitive route with little recognition of their histories of trafficking and of trauma.

Q119 **Jess Phillips:** Carole, I will start with you since you did not speak in that last bit. Data seems to have been identified as one of the big gaps. Does the Government's data collection on the most marginalised groups of women ensure that policy can meet their needs, specifically around young women?

Dr Easton: Certainly data is a huge issue: obviously, if you do not know what is happening, you cannot do anything about it, both at a central level and at a local level. Local strategies for addressing NEET and exclusion are very important, and certainly it is a real struggle at the moment to find that cross-cutting data that shows it by gender, by age, by other characteristics, so that you can then build a strategy locally and centrally to address the groups that are being excluded. We would definitely support greater effort. We hope it will do the job internally for the UK as well as for the SDG 5, not duplicating effort but making sure that there is, particularly, follow through for young people.

There are large numbers that are getting lost. If you look at what happens, there is "young people in school"; there are big proportions of young people where there is a "not known" category. This varies county by county, but it can be a substantial number of people. We do not know what is happening to them, and particularly for those impoverished, they may not be claiming benefits, so they get completely lost. Economically inactive women outnumber men considerably and, likewise, they can get lost from the count, let alone the additional characteristics that they might have.

Pragna Patel: One of the problems with data collection in respect of black minority women is the fact that many women are going to be too



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cautious about how that data is being used by institutions. We are finding that, for example, immigration enforcement has now pervaded so many of the institutions at a local level that people are worried about whether that data is being collected to meet their needs or being collected for other, immigration-control purposes.

Let me give you some examples. If a woman is facing domestic violence but also has insecure status and needs accommodation to exit from the violence, she might turn to private landlords. Private landlords now need to check immigration status. Whether they have the competency to do so is another matter, but they are required by the immigration laws to check status. Many women are fearful not because they are illegal—in fact, many of them have rights to stay as victims of domestic violence.

Jess Phillips: They do not know that.

Pragna Patel: And they do not know that. They do not know, and landlords will sometimes exploit those positions of power, will retain women's documents and use them over them if they complain about the conditions of accommodation and so on. Schools are now required to collect data, which is really worrying, on children—again, for what purpose? Whether that purpose is right or wrong, people are fearful in a climate where they feel that they are under siege.

Q120 **Jess Phillips:** What can the Government do to collect that data? We have a chicken and egg issue, where we are saying they do not have the data. I entirely agree with the concerns about the collection of the school data. However, one could argue, on the flipside of it, we are telling them they need to have data about marginalised groups and they are trying to collect the data. In France, I know there is this to and fro over whether you should identify or not. What would your solution be?

Pragna Patel: There needs to be better and greater transparency within institutions as to why they are collecting data, what it is for, and in demonstrating that the data that is collected is to inform policy, strategies and plans and not for any other purpose. That lack of transparency adds to the culture of fear.

Q121 **Jess Phillips:** As we heard in the previous session, there is the possibility of the ONS using civil society to collect some of the data. Do you think that more trusted organisations, like Southall Black Sisters, could work within the specific data standards of the ONS in this, to reach a better understanding than would be done by a blanket GP check?

Pragna Patel: Yes, maybe, but also we need to feel confident. We really need to feel confident, because we do not know where a lot of the data goes. We need to have more open and transparent government at local level and at the national level. A lot of organisations like mine would also be quite cautious about how the data is being used, so we would have to feel confident.



Katharine Sacks-Jones: There is an issue as well with gender blindness in a lot of data collection—just not thinking about it. To give you an example, annual homelessness statistics for rough sleeping were released today. The way they are recorded is that when they do a count, workers literally go out one night and count or local authorities have to provide an estimate of the number of people sleeping rough. They record information on both ethnicity and gender, but when it is reported centrally by Government they do not report that. You just get a number. It does not tell you how many women and how many men or what the ethnic breakdown is of people who are sleeping rough.

That just seems a very straightforward missed opportunity. Why are we not looking at these things? Surely, if we want to advance gender equality, we need to understand homelessness, for example, and how that breaks down by gender. You find that, in both data collection and in policymaking, people are just not thinking about how this impacts on men or women, and how we can design policies that help both men and women.

Natasha Walter: You often feel that there is quite a lot of data there that would be really useful if it was disaggregated by gender and, for us, so useful if it was disaggregated by migration status, which government departments will have, but they are not transparent about sharing data at the moment, which is a real pity. Say in the asylum process, if we are looking at, for example, outcomes for women seeking asylum in terms of their asylum decisions, it is always such a struggle to get any data out of the Home Office. We would really like to know more about, say, employment outcomes for women seeking asylum. If those things could be disaggregated by gender and migration status, it would be incredibly useful to organisations working in this field.

When we want to make a case for reform to the Home Office, we have found it is down to us, as a tiny little charity, to resource, research and then we take it to the Home Office and say, "Look, we have found that X% of women in Yarl's Wood, say, say that they are victims of sexual violence," for instance. We know perfectly well that, as a tiny charity, we are not able to take a representative sample; we are not able to track the outcomes for those women over time. We know the limitations of the data that we are collecting. All we can do is say, "This is the best we can do. We will share ours with you. Will you share yours with us?" but it does not seem to work that way.

Q122 **Chair:** When you ask for that data, what reason is given for it not being available?

Natasha Walter: There are all sorts of reasons. For instance, on the time limit on the detention of pregnant women, Women for Refugee Women has put in three freedom of information requests to the Home Office, simply asking for these very simple facts: how many pregnant women have been detained and what are the outcomes of their detention, i.e. were they released back into the community or removed?



On two of those three occasions the Home Office did not respond and the Commissioner had to issue a breach order against the Home Office. We have had to put down Parliamentary Questions to try to wrinkle that information out. We do not know why the Home Office sits on it. It has put forward various reasons: the data is not robust enough, commercial interest for Serco.

It seems to be, I would say, there is just a culture in that part of the Home Office, sadly, that it is better off not saying something if it cannot say it. In fact, we want that data to go on working with the Home Office, to try to make sure that pregnant women are routed away from detention, to support them. We are not doing it just to sit there throwing stones. We want to be able to work in better and more transparent partnership.

Dr Easton: It is not just collecting it; the communication of the data is really important, and I do think Government has a role. Another example, if I may, is apprenticeships. The rhetoric is: "More women do apprenticeships; job done." The job is not done. They are getting paid less; they get worse outcomes. If we only count ins and not outs and outcomes, we are going to look like job done for women.

I would say the same on gender pay gap. I was with a very intelligent young woman last night and she said, "Gender pay gap means people are not paid the same for doing the same job." No. That is not what the gender pay gap is. If a very intelligent woman does not understand what the gender pay gap means, and the fact, in my view, that it is faulty, because it does not include all the women who are not in work, it does not point out that women are generally in lower paid, part-time roles. But what we get is the rhetoric of "job done" again—no gender pay gap between 20 and 30.

We both have to look at how we gather the data—and on apprenticeships there is a glowing opportunity at the moment to say Government can make sure that we are not just looking at ins but looking at sectors, and whether women are represented in those sectors or we are just repeating the status quo—and how can we do more to communicate the real meaning of those statistics.

Q123 **Ben Howlett:** I have a very brief supplementary. We have talked an awful lot about what we would like to gather, but let's bring this back to SDG 5 here for a second. There is an array of different pieces of data that we are obligated to collect, and I am just wondering how much data you are being asked for from Government that fits in with SDG 5. It sounds to me as if there are a lot of "would likes", but is it necessarily relevant to what we are supposed to be implementing in the first place?

Dr Easton: I am very delighted to have the opportunity to talk with Government. We do not get funding and we are not commissioned, so there is no regular reporting that I am obliged to do to Government. As I say, I am delighted to have input and to make sure young women's



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voices and their issues are heard and raised, so I am not quite sure how to answer that question.

Q124 **Ben Howlett:** Are any of the panellists being asked by Government?

Natasha Walter: No.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: No.

Q125 **Ben Howlett:** Potentially, this could be a fundamental problem in itself, in that you are on the front line and you are not being asked in the first place. Given the fact that we are supposed to be finding out what is happening on the ground, we are not seeing that.

Pragna Patel: The only way the data is reported in my organisation—I do not know about others—is for funding purposes. In fact, it is the other way around; it is us seeking data always from the institutions that we are engaging with, and there are two fundamental problems. First, there is a move towards gender neutrality now, which is making it very difficult for us to even determine in a local area how many men and women are subject to domestic violence.

One of the problems there I have seen is the way in which police are reporting incidents. If, for example, they are called out to a domestic violence situation and then there is a cross-allegation made, usually by the perpetrator, instead of probing that a bit and checking who is the real victim, usually because there would be a history of violence, the police tend to classify both as DV victims. That then skews the data, because that then comes back in local authority data as so many men are also subject to domestic violence, which then starts skewing how the funding of services takes place. There is a move towards gender neutrality in that domestic violence, for example, is no longer necessarily seen as a gendered phenomenon but as something that happens equally to men and women. That then skews data collection; it skews the responses to data. That is one.

Secondly, there is gender blindness, so those institutions are not looking to collect data around women, for example. I wanted to ask the Home Office how many domestic violence-related homicides involved black women. The reason we wanted that question answered is because we feel anecdotally that homicide rates in black and minority communities towards women are higher, but we do not know for sure. We asked the Home Office, because of the homicide reviews that are carried out whereby they collect that data, for that information, and the response was, "We do not keep that data on how many of those homicides related to black women." They did not keep data on race. They kept data on gender, but not race.

Here are examples of the problems we are encountering both in terms of gender neutrality, which impacts on how data is collected, and gender blindness, which impacts on how data is collected.



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Q126 **Jess Phillips:** You have touched on this a little, but I just wondered if you, or any groups you know of that you work with, have been approached by Government to work on specifically SDG 5. No? That was a quick answer.

Pragna Patel: I was talking to Natasha earlier and, if we are very honest, we did not know about this, and that, in itself, tells you that there is a problem. This is not what is being discussed in the third sector. In the voluntary sector, there is no understanding, awareness or language around the idea of SDGs. You will get blank looks if you try to go into the third sector and ask about SDGs, to be honest.

Q127 **Tracy Brabin:** That takes us on to the fact that partnership working is considered really important to deliver SDGs, and the idea that some organisations do not even know about it is obviously a worry. I suppose the question is, how should Government, business and civil society work together to try to overcome the challenges of leaving no one behind? You have touched on it slightly: more transparency and more communication from the Home Office.

Natasha Walter: Absolutely. It would be great if the outcome of this work was to produce more partnership working, and not just among the kind of women represented here—the experts. One of the things that Women for Refugee Women is very keen on is bringing the voices of those directly affected by current policies—refugee and asylum-seeking women themselves—into shaping policy with the Home Office. The Home Office needs to understand the effects of its policies on those most directly affected and listen to them, in order to build a system that is genuinely responsive to women's needs. There is a huge need for it. As I said, one of the issues on asylum is that there is still this culture of enforcement rather than protection predominantly and if we are going to move away from that, we need to build more partnerships, definitely.

Pragna Patel: We need to review entirely how local authority works, because that is where we are located. We need to see this SDG culture embedded in the way in which local authorities commission services and partnership working with local organisations. SDGs need to be embedded, so that every time they are looking to commission a service or provide grants, they are looking to see what those SDG outcomes are going to be as part of that process. We need to see that both at local authority level and certainly at national level, and that would really help.

It would help in terms of making sure that policies that are worked through or services that need funding or need to be provided are equality-proofed. We need to make sure that every time somebody puts their hand up and says, "We would like to provide this service and we would like to work with you, as the Government, in partnership," the Government are making the criteria of achieving those SDG outcomes as part of that process. We need to see that embedded.



You are not going to get a culture unless we embed and we integrate the objectives to be achieved under the SDGs together with a wider human rights culture that protects principles of equality and human rights and human dignity and human security. These are all principles that underpin the SDG goals themselves, but we need to embed a human rights and equality culture in both policy formation and delivery of services.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: Civil society has potentially a huge role to play in this. For women who face multiple disadvantage, they have often had quite negative experiences of public services, so the culture and ethos of civil society organisations can be a much more helpful environment for them to be in. They are much more likely to engage with voluntary organisations than statutory services, which they might have had quite negative experiences of previously, so there is that potential there.

However, at the moment, the way that specialist services working with women are funded is patchy at best; I think that would be a rather generous description. This is particularly the case for organisations that work with women who face multiple issues, so things like women's centres, which provide a whole range of services around health, criminal justice and experiences of abuse. They might be getting 50-plus funding streams to work with a relatively small number of women, all requiring different outcomes, all on different contract lengths that tend to be quite short term, and having to report separately to each of those different funding streams. A quite small organisation can spend a disproportionate amount of its time just servicing these commissioning arrangements, which just do not work for anyone.

The idea of joined-up commissioning really does not happen at a local level, so there is definitely a role for local government to think about its relationship with the third sector and particularly about how it commissions services, to make sure that it is a better use of its money. If organisations are spending a huge amount of their time and resources just servicing these contracts, they are not getting the best value for money they could in terms of service delivery. It would also give some surety to these organisations about their future and about what they can deliver if they are employing staff and so on. That is a big thing, but there has to be leadership from central government as well in terms of the relationship with the third sector and to give a clear signal that the third sector has an important role to play in partnership with Government in delivering on this.

Q128 **Tracy Brabin:** Have you seen any third sector working with businesses in trying to reach the most marginalised women?

Katharine Sacks-Jones: Businesses do play a role, certainly in terms of their corporate social responsibility agenda, in supporting organisations, often financially. I am not personally aware of other initiatives with this group.

Q129 **Tracy Brabin:** Have you seen any examples of best practice for this sort



of collaboration between all these different groups: business, third sector and so on?

Dr Easton: There are about three questions, if I may. First, for me, the importance of working in partnership is undoubted.

The question before was about awareness of SDG 5 in the sector. I am a great fan of the SDGs, but I would be just as happy if women in this country felt there was a real commitment to women's empowerment and equality and SDG 5 was the lever. Actually, I had never heard of that, but I can see that we have a real commitment to making a difference, particularly for marginalised women in this country. If it translates in that way, then job done.

The third sector does have a big role in working. It is women's voices that have a big role, and there was discussion earlier about whether we can create some strategic partnership that it makes it easier for Government to engage, because we have to own it is a fragmented sector. It is a huge and fragmented sector at the moment, so how can we come together, too, in a strategic partnership, maybe something a bit like the commission we had in the past, to bring you women's voices? We work with very financially disadvantaged young women. MPs themselves have told me they do not get to hear their voices, so can we mediate? Can we make that happen? We need to make that happen.

There is a golden opportunity we heard about this week: the industrial strategy. Surely there needs to be leadership in that where we can make sure that women are not left behind—that this does not end up being something where there are all sorts of opportunities for men and economic opportunities for men and nothing for women. There are opportunities presenting themselves, if we can bring the women's sector together and say, "These are the priorities that you need to put into a strategy like that to build fair financial futures for women."

Q130 **Tracy Brabin:** Just to move on from that, what resourcing or mechanisms are needed to enable this partnership working?

Dr Easton: It would be commissioning some sort of body, strategic leadership from the sector, and linking then with key members of the Government, so that there are conduits. Small groups will not have the resources to do it legitimately, so there has to be a way. I am not saying we have the ideal solution, and I myself would like to know more how the commission worked in the past, but that is absolutely crucial.

Katharine Sacks-Jones: There is the question of whom we are talking to in Government as well, because some departments undoubtedly do a much better job or think a lot more about gender and about women than others do. You asked at the beginning about what Government have done. They have shown leadership around violence against women and girls. There is still a long way to go, but there is undoubtedly leadership



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coming from the Home Office and, to some extent, the Department for Communities and Local Government.

It has historically been viewed as a criminal justice issue, and I think that is where we have made the most progress. Even though the most recent strategy on violence against women and girls has a central part in it about the impact on women's physical and psychological well-being, I do not see Health around the table in the way that it should be on this, and I do not see the other government departments that need to be there.

When you talk about gender equality more broadly than just around violence against women and girls, which we need to do, there is very little. We think about gender equality in narrow pockets, on certain issues. There is not a cross-cutting strategy that shows how these issues are interlinked, which there needs to be. Yes, we need the right mechanisms for civil society to talk to Government, but we need to make sure we are talking to the right people in Government as well, not those departments that already, to some extent, get it. We need to be talking to those departments that are not even thinking about gender at all, which is most of them.

Q131 Tracy Brabin: How important would you say that UN or other international commitments are to delivering this gender equality for marginalised women but in the UK? Are there any bridges there?

Katharine Sacks-Jones: They are helpful, but it has to be owned domestically. There is a danger, even with where responsibility for this sits—in International Development—that we see it as an issue for “over there” and not for here, but it is a huge issue here and we need to recognise and address that, and I am not sure that is happening. The international frameworks are really helpful, but we need the domestic leadership, transparency, accountability, monitoring etc. to make it a reality as well.

Q132 Tracy Brabin: Natasha, obviously the issue of refugees and asylum seekers is international.

Natasha Walter: It is, exactly. If we are going to look at any long-term solutions for refugee and asylum-seeking women, we cannot just look domestically. It is about linking up some of the international commitments and the domestic commitments, and thinking about how that affects women who cross borders. If we are thinking about a woman who left her home in Sudan and travelled through Libya and faced sexual violence on that journey, it is not something we can just solve in the UK. This has to be, in the longer term, obviously, about international co-operation.

Talking about the strategies for partnership, I suppose quite a lot of small organisations feel quite beleaguered. We feel it is about just holding the line and trying to shore things up. There have been a lot of cuts to legal



services: the women we work with, their benefits may be sanctioned; they are living in destitution. It is often about holding the line.

If we are really going to join together and think about how to deliver on this big vision—leave no woman behind—there has to be leadership from Government, but obviously it cannot just be rhetoric at this point. I think we would all agree there has to be some sort of resourcing for that partnership, so that people do not feel, “Oh, we have another thing to do, yes, yes. We have to reform the SDG 5—oh my God.” There has to be some sort of push there so that civil society organisations feel that, yes, Government are working with them on this. Do you know what I mean? They have to feel there is some sort of support for bringing together. I think a lot of NGOs feel that, in some places, we have been left to fill gaps that often should have been areas where Government and local authorities should have been working.

Q133 Mrs Flick Drummond: Under the Modern Slavery Act, £33 million has been given specifically for international working on trafficking. Surely that is an example of where it is beginning to work, and that is going through DFID.

Natasha Walter: Yes, exactly. There are examples. At Women for Refugee Women, we were very positive about the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. A lot of the women we work with are fleeing sexual violence in conflict, and this felt really important to a lot of the women we work with. However, we felt there was not the joining up with what was going on out there: the need to support women in conflict areas and end impunity for perpetrators. Women who fled across borders and landed up in the UK would go through this very punitive system, and nobody ever said to them, “Those soldiers who raped you in eastern Congo that you are talking about, do you want to think about giving evidence against these perpetrators? They cannot just escape.” There was never any linking up like that and there never has been. We would love to see more linking up of the domestic agenda and the international agenda, and there are such good ideas out there.

Q134 Mrs Flick Drummond: That is what the Commissioner has put in his priorities for 2017—to link in and to stop it at source—so I think that will help.

Pragna Patel: The international framework is vital for the work we do. If we are looking at trying to give a voice to the most marginalised, trying to empower the most marginalised, then there is no other alternative, no other language, than the human rights language and the human rights obligations that this country is signed up to and that internationally there is a consensus around.

International partnerships are going to become even more important and significant in a globalised context. In a globalised world where borders are not so clearly demarcated, we are seeing processes of migration, mobility and marriage that all mean that people are existing more and



more in transnational spaces. One of the challenges that that brings for us, as an organisation, in terms of equality and empowerment is: how do you respond to the needs of people who live in transnational spaces?

Natasha talks about women as refugees. I work with women who are married and have links to countries of origin, but sometimes perpetrators will forum shop in terms of where the best place to commit violence is and will often take women who were born and brought up here abroad to kill them abroad, because they know that they can get away with it in one country, whereas they may not get away with it in the UK. I am talking about British nationals.

We need to see better co-operation even across countries and partnership mechanisms, so that laws are enforced. For example, honour-based violence committed in the UK is a crime, but an honour-based violent crime committed against a British national by her husband abroad would be seen as a private family matter. That cannot be right. It cannot be right that that same act of violence is seen as of public interest in one country and a private matter in another country. It requires countries also coming together to ensure that there are robust mechanisms for implementing laws, whether they be criminal justice issues or around other civil rights. We are not seeing that, yet we are seeing more and more women who are being subjected to violence in transnational spaces.

These are emerging problems, but they are problems and they raise challenges for us, because it is not just about what we do domestically; it is how we create those partnerships internationally, too, which also impacts domestically. Reciprocal relationships have to exist at an international level and, at the domestic level, we have to see robust implementation of laws, which, at the moment, are very patchy.

Q135 Tracy Brabin: That was a really good example of how we can support SDGs more globally, but do you have an example of how the UK's other international commitments and obligations should support the achievement of our goal of SDGs in practice?

Natasha Walter: As I just briefly mentioned, the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative has implications for women who are seeking asylum here. Where women have fled those conflict areas and come to the UK, they should be supported as witnesses to those abuses abroad. Too often they are just disbelieved. I am thinking of a woman I know who was raped during the conflict in the eastern Congo and fled to the UK. She was raped by soldiers repeatedly and imprisoned; she fled to the UK. She was detained in Yarl's Wood Detention Centre, and while she was in the detention centre she saw William Hague and Angelina Jolie visiting her home area on television, talking about the women raped in conflict there. No one ever said to her, "You have evidence of this issue that we are trying to work on—that we are trying to deal with." That is a real gap. It is as though women who cross borders disappear.



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Katharine Sacks-Jones: I would agree with that. Just to reiterate, it is about the international frameworks and, particularly with issues like that, international co-operation, but on some of these it is also about domestic leadership.

Dr Easton: For the young women we talk to, they are concerned about their rights and their access and opportunities domestically. As I say, if some of that does originate internationally, that is great, but what they want to see is that their voices are heard here.

Chair: Thank you very much for an incredibly useful session. It was good to hear your perspectives on this very important part of our inquiry. Thank you for your time and your patience today with our questioning.