
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Liz McKeown
Director of Public Policy Analysis
Office for National Statistics
(by email)

23 March 2022

Dear Liz

Sustainable Development Goals article

I am writing to you about the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') 2019 publication [What is the difference between sex and gender?](#). You have told us the article was produced as an exploratory article to set out the interpretation of the terms sex and gender which the ONS and UK government bodies use to assess how the UK is progressing towards the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This was considered necessary because of the complexity of reporting in this context, and the fact that the terms sex and gender were being used interchangeably for this purpose.

Thank you for the time your colleagues have taken to speak with my team. We discussed that this article is being used beyond its original intended purpose. It has also not been updated since it was published in February 2019. Since then, there has been high profile debate about the measurement of sex and gender. In my view, the article has the potential to cause confusion.

You have now added an information banner clarifying the article's intended purpose. This will reduce the risk of the article being applied for purposes other than reporting for the Sustainable Development Goals.

The new banner is, as you recognise, only a stop-gap until new guidance is produced which offers a consistent view on the use of sex and gender in statistics. This will support producers and users of data who often look to ONS for guidance on best practice.

We welcome that the new banner signposts readers to the workplan of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonisation Team based in the ONS. The work of the GSS Harmonisation Team will be very important. Our expectations are that this will be treated as a high priority by ONS, and my team will be liaising with the team as it develops its planned activities over the coming months.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation