



UK performs fifth in the world on sustainable development goals

Ingrid Torjeson

London

The UK is ranked fifth in the world on its performance against the sustainable development goals for health, the first global analysis has shown.

The analysis, unveiled at a special event at the UN General Assembly in New York on 21 September and published in the *Lancet*, showed that Iceland was ranked first of 188 countries, followed by Singapore, Sweden, and Andorra.¹ The poorest performers were in Africa—Central African Republic followed by Somalia, South Sudan, Niger, and Chad.

The sustainable development goals are 17 universal goals, 169 targets, and 230 indicators set by the United Nations in 2015 to prompt action on a range of pressing problems, including food and water security, poverty, and climate change, up to 2030.² They follow on and expand on the millennium development goals, which expired at the end of 2015. Health is at the core of the sustainable development goals—the third goal is to “ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”—and health related indicators feature in 11 of the other 16 goals.

Worldwide, good progress has been made towards some of the health related goals since 2000, particularly in reducing under 5 and neonatal mortality, family planning, and the rollout of universal healthcare. However, few inroads have been made in areas that were not covered by the millennium development goals, for example hepatitis B incidence rates have hardly improved, and childhood overweight, intimate partner violence, and harmful alcohol consumption have worsened.

Using data from the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors study between 1990 and 2015 researchers at the University of Washington, Seattle, estimated the current status of 33 of the 47 health related indicators, giving each an index ranking from 0 to 100 to enable easier comparison.

The areas in which the UK performance was lowest were the rate of new HIV infections, the prevalence of smoking and alcohol use, the proportion of children aged 2-4 who were overweight, and death rates from suicide and interpersonal violence.

Overall progress varied widely between indicators. Whereas over 60% of countries have met the 2030 targets on reducing maternal (less than 70 deaths per 100 000 live births) and child mortality (25 deaths per 1000 live births), no countries have met any of the nine health targets, including the full elimination of diseases like tuberculosis and HIV and the reduction in prevalence of health outcomes like childhood overweight and intimate partner violence to 0%.

The authors warned that, given the modest progress in reduction of HIV and tuberculosis over the past 25 years, the vision of ending these epidemics in the next 15 years was highly unrealistic. “A substantial change in the current trajectory of HIV and tuberculosis incidence will be needed—likely requiring major technological leaps coupled with universal delivery—to meet this target,” they said.

Less than a fifth of countries have met the 2030 target to eliminate stunting and wasting in children under 5, only around a quarter of countries have achieved the target to substantially reduce exposure to household air pollution, and less than a fifth of countries have achieved universal access to safe and affordable water and sanitation.

1 GBD 2015 SDG Collaborators. Measuring the health-related sustainable development goals in 188 countries: a baseline analysis from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2015. *Lancet* 2016; published online 21 September, doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(16)31467-2.

2 Gulland A. UN adopts new global health targets to supersede the millennium goals. *BMJ* 2015;351:h5177. doi:10.1136/bmj.h5177pmid:26416224.

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>