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**GENDER STATISTICS AND KEY INDICATORS OF
WOMEN'S POSITION IN BRITAIN¹**

In this paper we outline the framework of gender statistics in Britain and the development of a key set of statistical indicators designed to map women's position relative to that of men. The key indicators are wide ranging, and include population trends, economic activity, work-life balance, education and training, financial resources, participation in public life, health, crime and transport. The development of the indicators has been led by the Women and Equality Unit (WEU), whose aim is to work across Government and with others to reduce and remove barriers to opportunity for all. The indicators provide a current baseline against which to measure change, and will be disseminated widely to provide a sound and reliable basis for public debate on gender issues and for evidence-based policy-making. The process of devising them has also helped identify gaps in information, which the UK's national statistics institute, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is working to fill.

After briefly outlining the respective roles of the WEU and ONS in the development and provision of gender statistics in the UK, we go on to detail the stages of the key indicators project, including the criteria adopted for their selection and their use in government research and policy making. We provide a brief guide to some of the main findings from the baseline census of the recommended key indicators - including recent trends. This is followed by a summary of the strategy for updating them, which will to a large extent draw on the wide range of gender statistics provided by ONS.

The key indicators project also points up gaps in our information on the position of women in Britain relative to men. First, is a lack of time series or systematic statistics in particular topic areas, with some data being available but only as a one-off, for example. Second, are gaps that reflect a genuine lack of data and information in specific issues relating to the position of women in Britain. Third, is the fact that longitudinal survey series often do not take place at the same time, so it may be difficult to find a common reference date. Collating statistics based on different time points can be problematic, as they are not strictly-speaking comparable and may reflect different social and economic contexts.

An ONS review of official gender statistics is providing information on a fourth gap - a lack of a detailed understanding of the needs of users of gender statistics. We briefly outline the current ONS review, and flag up initial findings, including possible future developments. In concluding we bring together an appraisal of the current system of official gender statistics in Britain and how they have been used to devise a coherent framework of indicators for monitoring progress. We also outline the potential for the future development of gender statistics and the key indicators more specifically, both of which will aid in monitoring and understanding women's position in Britain.

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