

Church of England Country Report for CSW59

Priority theme: Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

A Note on Terminology

England is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which also includes the nations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The land area of the UK is 241,930 km² (World Bank), of which England's land area is roughly 130,400 km².

Some laws and structures are the same throughout the whole of the UK. Some, however, are not, as Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have devolved governance structures which exercise powers in areas such as health, education and the environment. In the material that follows, some statistics and comments relate to the UK as a whole. Where statistics or policies are particular to England, this is noted.

Women in The Population

The most recent estimate of the UK's population is 64.1 million people, of whom about 53.87 million (84%) live in England. The UK gender breakdown is roughly 31.5 million men (49.19%) and 32.6 million women (50.81%); the gender ratio at birth is 1.05 male/female. In the UK, roughly 13.6 million people are under 18: of these almost 7 million are boys and 6.6 are girls. ([Office of National Statistics \(ONS\) 2013](#)) Women's life expectancy at birth is estimated at 82.69 years; men's at 78.26 ([Index Mundi](#)).

Key Successes

In its [review for UNCSW 59](#), the Government of the UK lists its key successes in implementing the Beijing Platform as occurring in four areas:

- helping women to participate in the economy
 - The UK government is providing support for men and women to start businesses; “encouraging women,” including lone parents, into work and “ensur[ing] it is financially beneficial” for women with children to work; reforming legislation to allow all people the right to request flexible working; providing a number of free childcare places (15 hours a week) for 2,3 and 4 year olds and a variety of credits/allowances towards childcare; abolishing pay secrecy clauses to make comparisons of men's and women's pay – and enforcement of equal pay legislation - easier; and working to eradicate the gender pay gap, which as of 2014 stood at roughly 10%.
- having more women who hold power and decision-making positions
 - In 1992 60 Female MPs were elected to Parliament; in 2010 147 women were elected. Government has been “encourag[ing] organisations to bed an equality agenda in their corporate culture” through the Think, Act, Report programme. It is working to increase the number of women on company boards (currently women constitute 22% of the largest [FTSE 100] boards) through initiatives such as requiring quoted companies to disclose numbers of men and women on boards, in senior management and in business as whole. In the public sector, it has set a target of ensuring that by 2015, 50% of public appointments (people appointed to boards of public bodies) are women (by 2014, the [figure had reached](#) 44%).
- work towards ending violence against women and girls (VAWG)

- In terms of domestic strategy, the UK Government has introduced a national action plan to tackle VAWG (since 2011, renewed annually), a trafficking strategy (2011), a Crown Prosecution Service national rape action plan (2013) leading to increases in prosecutions; and is requiring police forces to have action plans on domestic abuse and violence as of 2014. The UK is also signed up to the Council of Europe's convention on preventing and combating VAW and domestic violence. The Modern Slavery Bill, currently under consideration, addresses issues of human trafficking, including of women and girls for sexual and other forms of exploitation.

Laws to combat VAWG include the Sexual Offences Act (2004), criminalisation of forced marriage and FGM (including FGM carried out in another country), offences relating to stalking (2012), the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (allowing police to disclose information about previous violent offenses to prevent new partners from being victims of violence), and Domestic Violence Protection Orders, which prevent offenders from returning to a residence. The Government has also established Rape and Serious and Sexual Offence units with specialised prosecutors and offers training for lawyers on stalking and cyber-stalking.

Recognising the importance of attitude shifts, the government has started a “This is abuse” campaign to help teens realise that violence in relationships is unacceptable.

- internationally – VAWG is one of the Department for International Development (DfID)'s priorities. The UK has been heavily involved in the drafting and strengthening of UNSCR 1325. It has a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which covers not only protection, but also women's participation in decision-making around conflict, prevention of conflict and VAWG within it, ensuring women and girl's needs are met in conflict and post conflict humanitarian situations, and building UK capacity to implement work in this area. The Foreign Office's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative has undertaken innovative work to address issues of impunity, including creating a team of experts to offer support in conflict areas and creating a protocol for the reporting of sexual violence in conflict.
- Investing in the future of women and girls
 - The UK is working to alleviate child poverty through child tax credits and other initiatives; revised statutory guidance to ensure that educational and career services prevent gender stereotyping in the advice they offer; creating mentoring and apprenticeship programmes to encourage women– who at a general level currently outperform men in secondary and tertiary education - to study and seek employment in areas where they are underrepresented; and consolidating equalities legislation and extending employment equality legislation to cover pregnancy and maternity. A Minister for Women in cabinet and the Government Equalities Office (GEO) have responsibility for equalities strategy and legislation across government.
 - Internationally, the DfID Strategic Vision for Women and Girls supports women's “voice, choice and control”. This includes challenging cultural norms – with a focus on child, early and forced marriage and FGM - and working to four key target areas: support for girls’ completion of primary and secondary education (the UK has started

a dedicated fund for girls education and supports innovative programmes to encourage girls to stay in school); economic empowerment (including support for access to financial services and reforming labour rules and practices that negatively impact women); the ability to live free from violence (see above); and promotion of universal sexual and reproductive health and rights (DfID has a focus on maternal and child health in funding; the UK government was involved in the launch of the FP2020 initiative to increase access to contraception)

The International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 mandates that before providing development assistance, consideration must be given to how it will contribute to reducing gender inequality; requires consideration of gender-related differences in needs before provision of humanitarian assistance, and introduces a new annual reporting duty on progress towards achieving the MDG 3.

Key Challenges

The Government of the UK lists its key challenges as being:

- Responding to challenges facing children and their parents. These include work-life balance for parents, child obesity as a result of sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy food, body-image pressures, underachievement of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and internet safety – all issues that affect girl children and their life opportunities.
- Reducing the UK budget without having a disproportionate impact on women
- Making further progress on the gender pay gap and the number of women in senior positions
- Ending VAWG: despite the measures noted above, data published by the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that an estimated 55 million women were victims of domestic abuse in 2011/1, 76 women were killed by a partner or ex-partner in 2012/13, and over 330,000 were victims of sexual assault. Internationally, discrimination remains endemic in some areas and women suffer in distinct ways from the effects of violent conflict.
- Ensuring that women and girls from groups that have suffered discrimination (on grounds of race, disability, ethnicity and country of origin, or sexual orientation) are offered the assistance they need to fulfill their potential

Comment

There have clearly been some major improvements in women's rights and options over the past twenty years: some areas – participation in education, health screening, rights to flexible work, increased parental leave, changes to the state pension, and countering FGM at home and abroad – are very positive, and many areas are improving. But there are also several areas of concern: while encouraging women to work can be a part of a strategy of economic empowerment, it can also be a reflection of a culture that values people primarily for their economic productivity, which can lead to tensions and pressures upon women, men and their families. There is mounting evidence that the challenge of protecting the vulnerable – including vulnerable women – from the impact of budget cuts is not being fully met. The legal and procedural tools to fight VAWG are good, but need to be embedded in actual practice; all too often, women's fears and complaints still are not taken seriously enough by authorities. There are significant concerns about the grooming of vulnerable girls for sexual exploitation and the trafficking of women and girls within the UK and from outside. And there

are serious cultural issues relating to gender stereotyping of children's materials, sexualisation of women and girls, unrealistic body images, and misogynistic use of the internet, where women who speak out on issues are targeted, often in terms that are threatening.

These issues often intersect: for example a woman with children who has left an abusive partner may be required by new benefits rules to work, but may find that access to childcare is difficult locally because of cuts and may face delays in accessing benefits – all of which increase her vulnerability.

Responses of Church of England

Within the Church of England, the dominant discussions relating to women have surrounded women's ordination as priests and consecration as bishops. The Church of England ordained its first women priests in 1994, and numbers have increased rapidly; by 2012, 23% of clergy were women.

Last year the church voted through changes that enabled women to become bishops. The first woman bishop, Libby Lane, Bishop of Stockport, was consecrated in January. New legislation will “fast-track” women bishops into the UK's House of Lords, where 26 bishops – five by the nature of their post and the rest, historically, by seniority of appointment – hold a place.

Within the church these discussions have been, at their best, opportunities for profound theological reflection on what it means to be a Christian man or woman, the ways in which God calls both men and women to live as members of the Body of Christ and the nature of priesthood and episcopacy.

While the mind of the majority of Church members on these questions is clear, there are men and women whose theological views differ from the majority. The Church has struggled to find ways both to express a full commitment to women's ministry in all orders and to maintain the breadth and diversity of the church. The current Archbishop of Canterbury has noted (eg here) that the final settlement, which both is clear about the Church's commitment and makes provision for those who disagree, is itself important as a way of expressing reconciliation, mutual love, and the ability to “disagree well” within the family of God.

In terms of engaging with women's issues more broadly, at the national level the church has done significant work on gendered violence and domestic abuse, and the national Mothers' Union has worked on the sexualisation of children, including gender stereotyping. In addition the national church's work on education, poverty, and trafficking emphasises the dignity of all human beings and contributes to the equality and well-being of women.

Gendered violence and domestic abuse

- General Synod debated the issue in 2004, and issued pastoral guidelines on domestic abuse in 2006. Reports on adult safeguarding and responding well to victims of sexual abuse have provided a further basis for pastoral responses.
- In terms of advocacy, in 2013, Mandy Marshall, co-director of the international Christian alliance Restored, which works to transform relationships and end violence against women, attended UNCSW 57 on behalf of the CoE and reported to General Synod. In 2014 Synod debated and approved a motion which welcomed the good work being done by churches in the UK and around the Communion, recommended increased training on the issue for UK clergy, and asked churches to engage with the White Ribbon Campaign and the 16 Days.
- The national church has also worked with the UK Government on international programmes, such as its Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative. In so doing, it has drawn on the resources of the Anglican Communion and the “We will speak out” coalition to help the

Government recognise the vital role faith groups can play in helping to tackle underlying issues and provide effective support to victims.

Sexualisation of children

- The MU's Chief Executive, Reg Bailey, was asked by Government to lead an independent review on the commercialisation and sexualisation of children. This produced an influential report, which has produced some significant changes, although gender stereotyping of children's products remains a live issue.

Education

- The CoE is committed to “the provision of education as a common good, open to all and of benefit to all.” The CoE's inclusive model for its schools, which enrol about one million children, seeks to enable both girls and boys to flourish to their full potential. Special care is taken to encourage girls from cultures where women are traditionally less likely to be expected to do well academically.

Poverty

- The CoE continues to engage seriously with issues relating to poverty in the UK, undertaking [collaborative work with Parliament](#) on food poverty, [backing the Living Wage](#) (the Archbishop of York chaired the [Living Wage Commission](#)), and exploring issues of inequality.

Trafficking

- In the UK, the Church of England is developing a comprehensive approach to the prevention of human trafficking for forced labour and/or sexual exploitation through awareness raising and by providing protection and support to its victims. The Church is also looking to eradicate the practice by encouraging businesses to clean up their own supply chains.

The Church is also working with Anglican Communion bodies to develop a more coordinated Anglican response to this global phenomenon. Through the Anglican Alliance and the Global Freedom Network it is working with other churches and faiths around the world to eradicate modern day slavery and human trafficking by 2020. Information on these areas can be found [here](#).

At a more local level, dioceses and individual parishes have undertaken pastoral care, project work and advocacy relating to some of the above themes, and there is much good practice. So, for example, [one diocese](#) recently worked with Restored to raise awareness of the ways in which domestic violence affects women in our communities and our churches, helping those trained to identify signs of abuse and help those affected. Many UK churches support anti-trafficking NGOs such as Stop the Traffik. And churches have been at the forefront of moves to alleviate poverty.

At the same time, in some areas there is considerable scope for improvement; overall, for example, churches are less likely to work programmatically to oppose domestic violence than they are to address other social issues; they also tend to be relatively silent on some of the issues surrounding women and the media.