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## Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5: The Achievements, Concerns, and Workplace Bias against Women

**Abstract:** This paper discusses the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 5 in relation to their aims and ongoing progress. It examines how these aims influence change in some areas of the world. The achievement of the stated desires for the education of all girls, equally with boys, and the move to women's equality globally are discussed by the use of a broad literature search on the achievements and failures so far in the realisations of these goals and their sustainability. The treatment of females and their striving for equality in the workplace, and in areas such as leadership in politics and business and the sharing of domestic and caring responsibilities in the home, are also explored. The paper investigates the reasons that these aims for the advancement and fair treatment of girls and women have not as yet made a marked effect on global attitudes towards the education of girls or women's equal status with men. Progress has been slow and, in some cases, virtually non-existent, particularly noted in Goal 4, Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), and the sustainability of both goals is in grave doubt. This problem is studied by a specific discussion of how bias, unconscious and conscious, affects women in multiple ways and by focusing on one specific aspect of its manifestation: bias in the workplace. Current ongoing research on anti-female bias in the workplace is presented, with evidence from a variety of professions highlighting the problems women face in achieving success at work. The conclusion is that the SDGs will not be achieved, nor will sustainable development occur, unless girls and women take their rightful place in the world as equal members of societies. In addition, they must be educated on the effects of bias and the part that education/training can play in overcoming its effects and sustaining the move to equality.

**Keywords:** UN SD Goals 4 and 5, girls/women, social expectations, workplace attitudes, education/training

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Essay

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## Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) aimed globally to attain by 2030 a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in order to achieve an improved life for humans and better care for our planet. In particular, two of these goals, Goals 4 and 5, are targeted towards universal education and the advancement of equality for women and girls. However, the goals are interlinked, and all need to be achieved in order to help sustain a good quality of life for all people.

- Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. (United Nations 2015;18).

This paper explores these aims in relation to practice at the present time (2021) in various countries, and how near we are to achieving these aims. Laudable though these SDGs are, the achievement of high-quality education for all, with the ability to continue that learning throughout life, coupled with the goal of equality for women in all societies, are still a long way from being met. This brings into question their sustainability: will they be achieved or fail? The intention was to ensure, through the achievement of these goals, a more sustainable future and better lives for the people of the world. The progress report on the SDGs (United Nations 2020a) highlighted the effect of the global Covid-19 pandemic, stressing that children and women were suffering disproportionately from its effects compared to males. This was particularly the case in the provision of health services, such as vaccinations, and the lower availability of nutritional support services, which led to many more than average deaths of mothers and children under five. In addition, the report noted the rise across the world in violence against women and children in many countries. As a result of these and other issues, the loss of incomes resulted in more evidence of child labour, early marriage, and child trafficking. The report claimed that efforts to reduce child labour were likely to be overturned for the first time in twenty years. In addition, millions of children were denied education because of school closures due to the pandemic, leaving

ninety per cent of children in the world with no on-site educational provision at times. The lack of schooling had also resulted in children going without the provision of school meals, on which many depended for good nutrition. Internet-based learning, provided in many developed countries, was not possible in disadvantaged societies and to less affluent families in developed societies, due to lack of equipment and inability to pay for Wi-Fi provision. The empowerment of women has been severely affected in many cases, as many have lost their employment and therefore their ability to give their children a steady and improving start in life. The United Nations also reported that women and girls have been more adversely touched by the pandemic than males in areas such as loss of employment and need to become not only the mothers but the educators of their children, as schools closed (United Nations 2020b). In the UK, it was reported in the press that school closures were affecting women twice as much as men, in that they were the ones undertaking the home-schooling of their children and that as a result, many were losing income (Topping and McIntyre 2021).

This downturn in achievement of the goals is a great disappointment, as previously, the UN SDGs Report (UN 2020a) (prior to the pandemic) had noted some successes. However, the world was not yet looking as if the goal of Equitable and Inclusive Education (SDG 4) would be achieved by 2030, as many children were still not attending even basic school, and others were not completing secondary education. SDG 5 demonstrated some progress prior to the pandemic in the areas of women's equality and empowerment. International efforts to improve the lives of females have shown results – namely, in the lowering of the occurrence of female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage and in the increased presence of women in high political roles in the world. However, the report was doubtful that all barriers – social, legal, and economic – that hinder females from gaining equality would be removed and sustainability achieved in the goals for girls and women by 2030.

### **Girls' right to education**

Article 28 of the UNCRC was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and updated in 1995 (United Nations Human Rights 1995). It says that children and young people have the right to education, regardless of race, gender, or disability; if they are in detention; or if they are refugees. Children and young people have the right to both primary and secondary education and should be able to choose different subjects when in secondary school. This should include the option of technical and vocational training, so they should not have to focus on academic subjects if they do not so wish. In addition, higher education should be accessible to all those who have this academic ability. However, in any area of the world, for a multitude of reasons, these aims have not been met, particularly for girls. Many reports have demonstrated that sustainability is not being achieved for females in these two goals. The Save the Children Fund reported in 2017 (Global Partnership for Education 2021a) that twenty-eight million girls in

Central and West Africa had no access to education; only 70 per cent of girls attend primary schools, with only 36 per cent finishing lower secondary education. Poverty is one reason, resulting in the prioritisation of boys for school attendance, but so is gender-based violence, gendered teaching materials that favour boys, and lack of sanitary provisions in schools. In other parts of the world, such as India, girls' education is improving, but there are still 129 million girls who receive no education worldwide, nearly one in three poor adolescent girls has never attended school, and in lower income countries, the number of girls who fail to finish either primary or secondary school is still high (Global Partnership for Education 2021b).

UNICEF and the World Bank have made education for girls a strategic development priority. Girls have less access to education than boys. Even if they attend school, some social practices and norms imply girls are less important than boys, adversely affecting girls' education. Violence against girls and women is common and, in some cases, affects educational possibilities. It has increased in all countries as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Actions such as FGM and underage sexual exploitation and violence against women in the home are common in many countries (Grose et al. 2021). In addition, in some parts of the world, taking girls and women hostage to extract money from governments is occurring on an alarming scale. In armed conflicts, women and girls are frequently attacked by invading armies, often resulting in the rape and murder of those females, who are then commonly perceived as disgraced by their own societies when they were, in fact, victims. The World Bank (2022) is working to convince and persuade countries that educating girls through all the stages of the education system helps to fight poverty and improve security and gender equality, which will bring prosperity to their peoples. In 2018, the World Bank Report on girls' education (Thompson Reuters Foundation 2018) announced that 132 million girls across the world were not in school and 500 million are illiterate. This failing, the report claimed, has resulted in immense costs to the world in lost earnings and productivity. Secondary school attendees are more likely to work and earn twice as much as those who have not received an extended education. The *Gender and Development Network* (2019) reported that girls are 1.5 times more likely than boys to be completely excluded from primary education, and at the end of 2015, less than half of all countries had achieved gender parity in education at the secondary level. This is regrettable, as completion of secondary education results in later marriage, lower birth rates, and lessening childhood mortality, and there is less domestic violence against well-educated women. Urgent action is needed to improve the number of well educated girls and therefore women internationally. Educating a girl will educate the family and increase the prosperity of that family – a well-known result, yet often ignored when considering the importance of girls' education. However, the aim to achieve the goal for girls' education has not been sustained in many areas, and it is unlikely that Goal 4 ESD will be achieved by 2030.

### *The effects of early marriage*

Early marriage also holds women back, in that it affects their health, particularly if they become pregnant before their bodies are ready, and results in them being removed early from education even if they had acquired access to it. The rise in child marriage in refugee communities led to a UN Report titled *New Study Finds Child Marriage Rising Among Most Vulnerable Syrian Refugees* (United Nations 2017). UN SDG 5 aims at the eradication of child marriage. Access to good education is essential for decreasing the possibilities of FGM, early marriage, and too-early childbearing. UnitedWorldSchools.org., a charity whose efforts to end child marriage are supported by the UK government, claims that one in every four girls globally is married before the age of 18, and this is one of the main reasons why the global struggle to improve the educational level of girls has proved so difficult to attain (Armishaw 2021). On the charity's website this author claims that early marriage is linked to school dropout, resulting in a lower standard of education for girls. They are removed from education before completion. South Asia has the highest level of early marriage, and the author claims that this is proving difficult to change. A good secondary level of education results in girls being three times less likely to marry early. Causes of child marriage and dropout from education are complex, including the gender inequality so rife in many societies. Poverty, along with parents' relief at having one fewer children to provide for, also have a strong influence. However, early marriage can be seen as a violation of equality and against the UN declaration of the rights to education for girls and can result in physical damage, or even death, from a too-early pregnancy. The World Bank Report of 2017 showed that early marriage reduces girl's opportunities for education, reduces income possibilities for herself and her family, and reduces the country's GDP (World Bank 2017; UN Women 2018). Girls who receive a good full education not only avoid the problems stated earlier but also participate more in making decisions about their lives and futures (Somani 2017).

The *UN Sustainable Development Report (2021)* claims that child marriage is expected to rise as a result of the pandemic, preventing any sustainable movement towards its eradication.

### *Equality and women's rights to citizenship*

It is not just in education that women and girls are set aside and become »second-class«. This is a common attitude in many societies, and as a result, women's rights to citizenship are denied. Alexander (2011) discusses Yuval-David's argument considering how different nations in the world are constructed and organised. Nations and the men who run them have distinct understandings of male and female roles. Women's roles have, the author claims, become second-class and unimportant. This results in effectively hampering women from acting as full citizens, as their roles are seen as domestic, and their social habits have to be controlled by socially or religiously accepted norms, whose guidance is strictly

applied. The author (Ibid) presents an argument that in nations, public and active roles are played by men, while women are moved to the side lines, constricted by sexual mores, and are restricted to supporting and promoting men. She believes that to some extent, women themselves are to blame for adopting these assigned roles, which removes them from positions of influence and control. It appears highly unlikely that the aim to sustain the move towards and achieve equality for women will occur by 2030.

In order to achieve equality, we need to educate women to be confident, assertive, and seize the opportunity to express their opinions and take part in national debates. In too many parts of the world, women are silenced and treated as incapable and of little importance. Criado Perez (2019) points out that women are viewed as »not male« in many countries, rather than seen as positively female. These long, deeply held beliefs are transmitted from generation to generation, with few questions being asked (Giuliano 2020). Much of this can be put down to the bias which is so strongly embedded in communities and their perceptions of females when assessing their abilities and their weaknesses. García-González et al. (2019) clearly demonstrate that men and women in two different countries perceive inequality differently and that gender bias training for men and women is essential.

### *Bias and its effects on women at work*

The struggle to be educated and to gain equality with men is not a new one for women, but we are now moving, albeit slowly, to a more equal society. We have to consider why women are still not rising to pinnacles in employment or receiving recognition, high rewards, and appreciation. In order for the UN SDGs 4 and 5 to be achieved, we must not only provide the finance, infrastructures, and laws required but also change societies and attitudes so that women can take an equal place in their rights to education, employment, and standing in communities. We are still very far off from achieving those aims, as the UN progress reports on SDGs 4 and 5 admit. At the heart of all of this lies prejudice and social attitudes, which are out of date but strongly embedded in most societies. Bias in all its forms adversely affects the female sex, and unless this is challenged, acted upon, and made unacceptable, girls and women have no hope of equal treatment. The UN goals are admirable, but to achieve them, there has to be a radical change of beliefs about women and girls in most parts of the world. Bias against the female sex is still rife in society and in some religious belief systems. Women have to be educated, supported, and shown how to refute these misconceptions, develop support networks, stand up for their rights, and learn how to challenge male domination in many areas. Women in the main are not asking for special treatment or positive discrimination, but fair and equal treatment, although countries such as Ireland have enacted positive discrimination to overcome years of prejudice against women academics and their lack of progression in university hierarchies (Hilton 2019).

### *What is bias?*

Bias may be conscious and intentional or unconscious and applied without thought. Unconscious gender bias is defined as unintentional and automatic mental associations based on gender, stemming from traditions, norms, values, culture, and/or experience. Automatic associations feed into decision making, enabling a quick assessment of an individual according to gender and gender stereotypes (ACT/EMP 2017, p. 3).

Bias against females can manifest alone or be combined with other biases, such as those of ethnicity, class, and/or age. Unconscious bias occurs when we fail to question what is influencing our decisions and attitudes, when we discriminate against or show favour to someone without realising why we are doing so. In the home, even in developed countries, it may be manifested by outdated but deeply ingrained expectations as to who undertakes what roles in the management of the household and in the amount of work expected from each sex. Women still spend far more time working on household chores and caring roles than do men (Weisholtz 2020). This is still true when both partners are in full-time work.

Unconscious bias at work also has a large impact on how we relate to colleagues and make decisions about issues such as recruitment, promotion, access to flexible working, maternal and paternal leave after childbirth, and treatment of women returning to work after childbirth. Without challenging these assumptions, companies lose out on hiring diverse talent and stifle workplace inclusion. Successful companies train their teams about the problems caused by biased responses, and approaches in areas such as recruitment, interview strategies, and chances of promotion/leadership roles, obtained via measurable achievements and well-managed appraisal and training. ACT/EMP (2017) and Howard (2020) detail the many types of bias workers may suffer, which they claim are rooted in outdated assumptions and natural preferences.

### *Results of bias at work*

Bias in the workplace may be conscious or unconscious, but it has the same effect. Women who are subjected to either type of bias are less likely to be promoted, achieve high salaries, or have their contributions be taken seriously. Trehan (2019) discussed the lack of women at the top of finance organisations when government reports stated that gender diversity on company boards was inadequate; 23 per cent of company boards were composed of women, and only 14 per cent of executive committees of companies.

Government research described this problem in the finance industry as a pyramid model with far fewer women in positions of power. Much of this discrimination appears to arise from unconscious bias against women at work. The ILO ACT/EMP (2015) report noted that five of the barriers to women's advancement in work leadership were related to unconscious bias or outright discrimination. Social roles were the second most often cited barrier, the third was a masculine

corporate culture in which management is perceived as a job for men. Stereotypes and bias in recruitment and promotion were also mentioned. Masculine performance appraisals, reflecting stereotypical male-type criteria, also mitigate against women moving forward. These are often coupled with masculinely biased assessments of leadership capabilities. These included the problem of the overburdening of women with domestic responsibilities not suffered by most men.

### *Bias and SDGs*

The Equal Measures 2030 Partnership (2019) published a report on the SD Goals Gender Index. With only eleven years until 2030, the evidence collected showed that nearly 40 per cent of the world's girls and women were living in a country that is failing on gender equality. In fact, the evidence clearly demonstrated that in some countries, the attitudes towards women were going backwards and bias was rising. In a report by the United Nations Development Programme, the gender social norms index discovered that almost half of the people surveyed in 75 countries and home to 80 per cent of the world's population considered men to be better than women in politics and 40 per cent that men are better as heads of large businesses. The empowerment of women does not appear to be moving forward (UNDP 2020). In only six of the 75 countries studied did most people hold no biases against women.

In the *Bureau for Employers Activities Report* (ACT/EMP 2017), unconscious bias against women, particularly as they rise up the employment ladder, was reported. To overcome this, the report suggests methods of acting within a company to counteract this bias against women employees, including a gender survey, a consideration of the language used in documents for promotion or recruitment, and avoiding suggestions that the expectations and character of the person employed have a masculine bias. Performance systems are also criticised, together with advertisements for employment. Organisations are urged to assess unconscious bias in their workplace and examine its impact on women and women's opportunities to interact with senior management, in comparison to men. Women, the report says, do not demand or negotiate salaries as men do and need support to do so. In particular, women with children appear to face bias at all levels.

This and many other reports clearly demonstrate the presence of strongly entrenched biases in the working environment, particularly in STEM areas, and the need for a rapid change if the UN's SDGs 4 and 5 are to be met. In addition, this report suggested ways of mitigating this bias against women, including the education and training of the workforce to perform more equally in the consideration of promotion, pay awards, etc. McKinsey and Company (Huang et al. 2019) profess that employees have to not only be introduced to the topic of unconscious bias but also be taught strategies to overcome their own unconscious biases and learn to challenge those seen in others.

Grant Thornton Global (2018) found that though women's presence on leadership teams of companies had significantly increased, at the senior level in those

same companies, the number of women had declined. Specific actions are needed, such as guiding women to support each other in meetings when key points are made by them and ignored by men. Communication is used differently by the two genders, and help is needed to aid women in working together, to overcome male bias in meetings and discussions, by amplifying each other's points. This is training to empower women. However, there are concerns about the availability of training for women at work. The Learning and Work Institute Report (Smith et al. 2019) showed that the gender balance in training courses was equal for men and women at 33 per cent. However, a survey by the training provider Avado (Parker 2021) demonstrated the existence of gender bias in training. The findings showed that employers were much more likely to invest in and pay for work-based training for male employees than female ones. This appears to be linked to women not demanding promotion or training as men do. Even if they are offered opportunities, because of their busy lives as workers, carers, and homemakers, adding training to their work schedule is often impossible. The discrepancy appeared to be highest in male-dominated industries such as car manufacturing. In addition, women tend to be under-represented in higher positions in the workplace, and companies are more eager to train their senior staff. The answer appears to be more flexibility in what and when training is offered to women to help them access it and fit it into their overcrowded lives. Also, more women work part-time, and this can exclude them from training provided out of hours or not on their work-days (Ibid).

### **Research into women's individual experience of workplace bias**

The British Federation of Women Graduates has undertaken research into bias against women in the workplace. The research attempted to answer the question: What effects does anti-female bias have on women at work? How does it manifest? How do employers respond to this problem? What place do education and training have in overcoming bias? A case study approach was used to question women in a variety of workplaces on experiences of bias at work, as this allowed in-depth discussion of the respondents' experiences. The sampling approach was purposive and targeted at women in a variety of professions of varying ages. Respondents were approached via BFWG members or agreed to take part after hearing about the research. The questions, documentation, and processes for the research were approved by the BFWG ethical committee, and confidentiality was assured to all participants. Open questions were asked to allow respondents to share their experiences and reactions and included respondents' age, employment category, and position. They were asked to share any experiences of anti-female bias at work they had faced or observed directed at others and the type of bias that occurred. In addition, they were questioned about the company's reactions to any complaints made about bias and the training on bias offered to employees. If no bias had been suffered by respondents, they were asked to consider what had been done in their workplaces to prevent anti-female bias occurring? Questions

were also asked about the amount and type of anti-bias training they had been offered/experienced, its use in the company as a whole, and their opinions of the effectiveness of the training. If these were rated unsatisfactory, respondents were asked to suggest how it could be improved.

## Findings

So far, in-depth results have been obtained from 22 women working in many different areas, including architecture, the music industry, recruitment for a government quango, the health service, a union, law, and graphic design and journalism, to name a selection. This is a short summary of some of the findings about the prevalence of workplace bias and women's experiences. Most spoke emotionally of anti-female bias in their workplaces, and it was, on occasions, coupled with bias related to age or ethnicity. This, they believe, had resulted in a lack of promotion and a feeling that, because they were female, they were less important than male employees. Several spoke of being expected to take on women's stereotypical roles such as making tea and coffee, typing, and photocopying and being excluded from decision making, despite their high qualifications. This was particularly so in male-dominated professions such as architecture and graphic design. Women with children also spoke of how work colleagues' attitudes towards their skills and abilities changed when they became mothers. »They expected me to have changed, not be a driving force like I was before, not being interested in moving up in the company. This, despite that after motherhood, I earned several national awards for marketing campaigns I ran« (Music Industry).

One respondent who writes and lectures on women in film in Europe discussed the low ratio of female film directors in comparison to men, particularly of feature films. She claimed that from all available evidence, it is clear that when women direct films, »females are portrayed in a more realistic manner, rather than the stereotypes of whore or saint«, in films provided for entertainment. In most feature films, there are also fewer roles for women, and those roles are of less importance than male ones. Females too, though less in number, are more frequently violently attacked or feature in sex scenes than males. The average age of female actors is younger than for male actors, displaying solid evidence that older women are not wanted equally with older men in film work, only young, attractive ones. Shallow portrayal of women's characters occurs; they tend to be mothers, girlfriends, wives, or victims, rarely the main character in feature films, and their personalities are not developed. »There are fewer film scripts written by women than by men and women writers are paid less than males. In addition, women who work in films tend to do so in traditional roles of costume design, makeup, and services, rather than in technical roles which are better paid.« Things, the respondent said, are improving, but slowly, and a great deal of bias still exists against women taking on the leading role of director, particularly for big feature films, for which funding is hard to find. Meanwhile, the public in general have little interest, she believes, in the sex of a film director (Lecturer in Film).

One broadcaster of popular historical programmes talked of outright bias in working for television, particularly as, she said, she was the »wrong age, not attractive, but confident and not afraid to speak my mind, which men don't much like.« She was, however, in the »lucky state of having my programmes liked by the public, so I have some power against the male dominated team at the top of the [name of a media organisation]«. She was also aware that men doing similar work were paid at a higher rate than she was, but she had not raised the issue, as her broadcasting work was the »cream on top of my regular earning, I don't have to live on it«.

Two different women, one employed in the newspaper industry and one who is a media coach who owns her own business, talked of how men in positions of power take longer to trust women employees, whereas men have their trust and respect immediately. The business owner said that often, men in a situation where she is pitching for work ignore her and direct their discussion to her male lawyer. She finds this most frustrating, but it appears »men prefer to discuss ideas and listen to other men, rather than women«. She knows that as a coach, she earns less than men in the same role, though she knows she is equally successful with the people she works with. This was a common theme mentioned by many respondents.

One employee in recruitment in a government quango raised a problem mentioned by several of the interviewees: that women do not support other women in areas such as promotion, advancement, or allowing them to use their expertise to advance in the company. There appears to be a desire to repress ideas from other strong women, possibly from fear or jealousy. There are far too few mentors for women to offer support and guidance as to how to work in what in many cases is a man's world. Hilton (2019) observed this problem, particularly within universities. This lack of support from other women to aid others in sustainable advancement gives real cause for concern.

All respondents who claimed to suffer bias, whether it was being ignored in meetings, having their ideas discarded, or being put aside in the promotion race, were frustrated and angry that so little is being done to change these entrenched attitudes and that women are in some ways not able to work and contribute in the same way as do men. The unconscious bias they all felt they have suffered, to different extents, is annoying and so little is being done to make males question their own biased assumptions about women. Douglas and Leite (2016) and Douglas in a video presentation (2021) discuss the psychology of conspiracy theories, seen by some as a malevolent plot, orchestrated by powerful groups. In her presentation, Douglas (2021) inferred that middle-aged white males were a group who particularly tended to believe in these conspiracy theories. This may be therefore linked to the treatment of women, particularly those who demand equal rights in the workplace and appear to threaten the power of males by doing so. Some males do appear to feel threatened by women who question treatment, stand up for their rights, and are labelled as »feminists« by some males, who appear to feel that there is a female conspiracy to undermine their control and power in the workplace.

When discussing workplace training in confronting and overcoming bias, most of the respondents agreed that what was given was often very poor, superficial, and not embedded in workplace culture. In several cases, no such training was mentioned for any employee. In other situations, staff members were not obliged to undertake such training, as it was voluntary. There were many negative assessments of online training in particular, as during the pandemic, this was the most used approach. Women suggested that training should be specific regarding behaviours and comments observed and immediately reviewed in a debriefing session. This would encourage people to examine their own unconscious biases, so important in areas such as interview questioning, appraisals, promotion demands, and disciplinary processes. This, they believed, was the only way to really pinpoint areas that need to be addressed and attitudes that need to be changed. However, one respondent who had followed a compulsory anti-bias course as part of her training to work in a university praised the intentions of the programme and how it made her consider her own biases and responses. The course enabled her to examine her own responses and learn more about unconscious biases. One of the expectations of her university is that a driving licence was essential for employment, as there were three different sites that involved travelling. She realised that this was discriminatory for certain groups – the disabled, non-drivers, etc. She was introduced to differences between direct and indirect discrimination and subconscious bias and, more importantly, she claimed, »recommended strategies for trying to identify and combat such patterns of thinking – e.g. looking back to situations where one was surprised to find a certain person in a certain situation (e.g. a woman in a highly physical line of work) and think about why this was surprising. Thus, such patterns of subconscious bias can be identified«. She also compared this with what she had noted in her home country in Eastern Europe, where often pre- or post-interview processes are used to avoid discrimination law, so as to discover if women of childbearing age are intending to have children at some stage. This ploy was not used in the case of male interviewees.

### **Analysis of the findings**

This small and limited study has produced information that agrees, in most areas, with the literature discussed above. Women are suffering from discrimination, lower salary rates, slow advancement, frustration related to childbearing, unequal expectations about household responsibilities when also working outside the home, and a lack of opportunities for training and equal treatment. In addition, women in the group also complained about bias related to age (both young and older respondents) and bias against those of different ethnic backgrounds, which was combined with the anti-female bias. Possibly the most disturbing conclusion from this small sample was their feelings about the anti-bias training offered, or not offered, by the companies who employed them. Training in virtually all cases was considered poor, not changing attitudes, not made compulsory for all employees, and, in many cases, non-existent. There appeared to be little chance

of redress, or even interest in women's complaints about biased actions by their employers. In addition, there were entrenched biased beliefs about women's roles as mothers and carers, which were not applied to male employees.

Respondents also commented on the lack of support from other women regarding opportunities for promotion, often citing men as offering more support and help in advancing their careers, which echoed earlier research by BFWG on women in academic life (Hilton 2019). However, difficulties with being taken seriously when addressing a male audience were mentioned by several respondents, which made them feel belittled and frustrated, as they were ignored and males accompanying them were immediately perceived as being »in charge«. Discrepancies in salaries, compared to men in similar positions but often less experienced than the respondents, were raised by most of these women. Three women mentioned that the idea of the male breadwinner is still perceived as the norm, which they objected to, as they being more highly paid than their male partners, were their family's main financial provider. There was general frustration that bias against women at work was still so prevalent, with little evidence of it having disappeared in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, despite equality laws. Much discussion occurred on the effects of bias in the media, some workplace training and concern within trade union and government reports. Only one respondent, who had come to the UK from Eastern Europe to work in academia, was delighted by what she saw as a much less biased attitude towards women in universities in the UK than in her country and that the training she had received was very good. She was the lone dissenting voice amongst the respondents who had all suffered from, or had observed, bias in their workplaces and who seriously questioned the organisation of and effects of any training on counteracting bias they had observed. The sample here is very small, but professionally wide-ranging, and the lack of progress or perceived effectiveness demonstrated by the education and training initiatives in the workplace, in actually challenging workplace bias against women, is of extreme concern in the UK that purports to champion equality.

## **Conclusion**

All these examples from the literature and from the interviews show the frustration of females worldwide regarding how slow the change in attitudes and beliefs about the female sex is, as well as in their rights to equal treatment, good education, protection from sexual exploitation, early marriage and restricted career possibilities. The UN SDGs set a clear vision of a world where women are valued as equal, if different, beings, in the furtherance of prosperity and safety for all citizens. However, women's experiences of education, work, treatment in marriage, childbearing, health issues, equality as citizens, and opportunities to be successful leaders do not yet match the UN aims for the betterment of the lives of girls and women globally. Girls and women are still being oppressed and denied freedom to make their own life decisions, enjoy the same educational opportunities as do males, and receive equal treatment at work and have health considera-

tions that take into account the different makeup and function of women's bodies. At present, too many females lack equal life chances; they do not achieve their full potential and are still treated as weak, often hysterical, ruled by their hormones and needing protection from men. These outdated attitudes lead to whole families being in poverty all their lives, when, if women's abilities were harnessed, they and their nations could be moving forward to prosperity. Males and females must re-examine their own and societies' long-held beliefs about the place of women and if they are still applicable now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Additionally, males need to be helped to perceive the need to change their expectations about their own roles, particularly in terms of the equal share of caring responsibilities and running a home. This would allow women the opportunity to achieve their full potential and aid in the forward movement of equality in the world. The *UN Report* (2021) on the effects of the pandemic on sustainable progress is disturbing, claiming that decades of development have been thrown off track by the Covid-19 pandemic and that if the move towards sustainability had been greater pre-pandemic, the massive world suffering could have been, to some extent, reduced. In particular, the report comments on the negative effects on the drive for sustainability in Goals 4 and 5. »There is a risk of a generational catastrophe regarding schooling, where an additional 101 million children have fallen below the minimum reading proficiency level, potentially wiping out two decades of education gains [...] Unpaid and underpaid care work is increasingly and disproportionately falling on the shoulders of women and girls, impacting educational and income opportunities and health.« (UN 2021, p. 4)

The UN SDGs are to be applauded, but they are not enough. Women need action and change from themselves and also the men they care for, support, and work with. Until this happens, those UN goals, which would improve the lives of females and their families globally, will not be achieved. For this global change to occur, we need to alter societies' and individual's attitudes and, in friendship and cooperation, move to change the world. This is not the first time that a woman has looked at the dreams of gatherings such as the UN and found them wanting. In a speech in 1922, Professor Caroline Spurgeon (the first female professor of English literature in England) promoted the idea that a worldwide friendship of university-educated women might well be more successful than the attempts of the League of Nations to bring about international friendship and thereby prevent conflicts (Caroline Spurgeon Papers, Royal Holloway, no date). She, jointly with other women, founded IFUW, now Graduate Women International, and strongly believed that discourse and friendship were the answers to the world's problems. Spurgeon argued in many speeches in England and the USA that international relations were not the prerogative of statesmen but could be undertaken by cooperation in international organisations, such as IFUW (now GWI). It is possible, therefore, that women working together across the world can help to bring about the successful adoption of the UN SDGs 4 and 5 and immeasurably improve the lot of girls and women.

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#### **CILJA TRAJNOSTNEGA RAZVOJA 4 IN 5: DOSEŽKI, POMISLEKI IN DISKRIMINACIJA ŽENSK NA DELOVNEM MESTU**

**Povzetek:** Članek obravnava 4. in 5. cilj trajnostnega razvoja Združenih narodov glede na njun namen in trenutni napredek. Analizira, kako cilja vplivata na spremembe v posameznih predelih sveta. Članek obravnava doseganje ciljev za izobraževanje vseh deklic, enakopravno z dečki, in prizadevanje za enakopravnost žensk na svetovni ravni s pomočjo obsežnega pregleda literature o dosedanjih dosežkih in neuspehih pri uresničevanju teh dveh ciljev in njuni vzdržnosti. Članek obravnava tudi odnos do žensk in njihovo prizadevanje za enakost na delovnem mestu ter na področjih, kot so vodilna mesta v politiki in gospodarstvu, ter delitev gospodinjskih in skrbstvenih obveznosti v družini. Analizira razloge, zaradi katerih cilja za napredek in pravično obravnavo deklic in žensk še nista bistveno vplivala na globalni odnos do izobraževanja deklic in enakopravnega položaja žensk in moških. Napredek je počasen, ponekod pa ga sploh ni, kar velja zlasti za 4. cilj (izobraževanje za trajnostni razvoj), obenem pa je trajnostnost obeh ciljev pod velikim vprašajem. Članek se problema loti s posebno razpravo o tem, kako nezavedna in zavedna pristranskost na različne načine prizadene ženske, in s poudarkom na posebnem vidiku njene pojavnosti: diskriminaciji žensk na delovnem mestu. Prispevek predstavi sodobne študije o diskriminaciji žensk na delovnem mestu s primeri iz različnih poklicev in opozarja na ovire, s katerimi se ženske srečujejo na delovnem mestu. Sklepna ugotovitev je, da cilji trajnostnega razvoja ne bodo doseženi in trajnostni razvoj ne bo mogoč, če dekleta in ženske ne bodo postale enakopravne članice družbe. Poleg tega jih je treba izobraziti o učinkih diskriminacije in o vlogi, ki jo lahko ima izobraževanje/usposabljanje pri premagovanju njenih učinkov, ter nadaljevati z zavzemanjem za enakost.

**Ključne besede:** 4. in 5. cilj trajnostnega razvoja ZN, dekleta/ženske, družbena pričakovanja, odnosi na delovnem mestu, izobraževanje/usposabljanje

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