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Biased:

A blueprint

for **change**



Foreword

by Debbie Akehurst

It is not acceptable that women still encounter so many barriers to getting into, and thriving, at work. By breaking down those barriers we can create a better and more productive economy for all. That is why Central District Alliance (CDA) launched Un_Biased.

Central District Alliance is the Business Improvement District (BID) for Holborn and Clerkenwell, in central London, UK. It is a partnership between businesses, local authorities and the third sector. We work in conjunction with our levy paying members, the local community, Camden and Islington Councils and many other stakeholders bringing together private, public, and third sector to work collaboratively.

Our footprint is one of the world's major economic areas with more than 160,000 employees and 17,000 businesses. The area is a global epicentre of business, enterprise, tourism and culture. We hold a responsibility not only to improve the work-life experiences of our residents, workers and visitors, but to show how this can be done in such a dense city centre as our own patch of London and put forward a blueprint for better urban living elsewhere.

One such priority has been the work-life experiences of women.

We know that inclusive workforces perform better: companies with more women on their boards outperform their rivals.¹ But we also know up to 1.7 million women are prevented from taking on work due to the cost of childcare resulting in £28.2 billion of lost economic output annually.² For the women who do work, they are still paid less than men for doing the same job, in effect working two months free a year.³

There is clearly a discrepancy which needs urgent attention.

This is why on International Women's Day 2022 we launched the Un_Biased project, with our partners PRD. This report is the result of a year's worth of conversations and focus groups with local workers, businesses and stakeholders.

An economy that everyone can access means more talent, more creativity and greater diversity of thought and experience – all of which leads to happier and more productive teams and better outcomes.

Our ambition is that the recommendations in this report will help drive good, sustainable economic growth, whilst unleashing the full power of the whole workforce. The recommendations will have far-reaching effects motivating us all to engage, share and discuss.

This report is just the beginning.

Debbie Akehurst
CEO, Central District Alliance

¹McKinsey, Diversity Wins, 2020 • ²Centre for Progressive Policy, 2021 • ³GLA Gender Pay Gap Reporting, 2021

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This report was produced by PRD and London Communications Agency (LCA) on behalf of Central District Alliance (CDA).

PRD is an independent social and economic research consultancy focused on inclusive economies, and LCA is a full-service PR consultancy that delivers campaigns, consultations and content to clients across the built environment sector. Together, they led the research for the Un_Biased project.



CHAPTER 1

What is Un_Biased?

Un_Biased is a research project focused on understanding the barriers to an inclusive and fair economy for women and what can be done to remove or mitigate these barriers.

The economy in London is facing significant challenges. The combined impact of Covid-19 lockdowns, Brexit, political instability and the war in Ukraine have led to a cost-of-living crisis, soaring interest rates and record high vacancies, particularly in sectors such as hospitality, leisure and health & social care. These economic impacts disproportionately affect those marginalised in society, including women, ethnic minority communities, people with a disability and those from low socio-economic backgrounds. The need to be bold and creative to drive economic growth, and to ensure society benefits from that growth, is paramount.

Creating a fairer economy that more people can access, thus unleashing the full power of the workforce, directly contributes to growth. Research suggests that up to 40% of GDP growth between 1960-2010 in the USA can be attributed to the greater participation of women and people of colour in the labour force.⁴



As we chart the recovery, we need to make sure that women play a key role in decisions shaping our future.

This is an opportunity to build a gender-equal recovery, and to effect change in a lasting way.⁵



The context of post-pandemic recovery and a heightened national focus on driving growth gives us an important opportunity to achieve change now and to re-shape a more inclusive economy for the future.

The Un_Biased report responds to this challenge. It is particularly focused on identifying the barriers to economic participation for women in central London and finding practical opportunities to overcome those barriers.

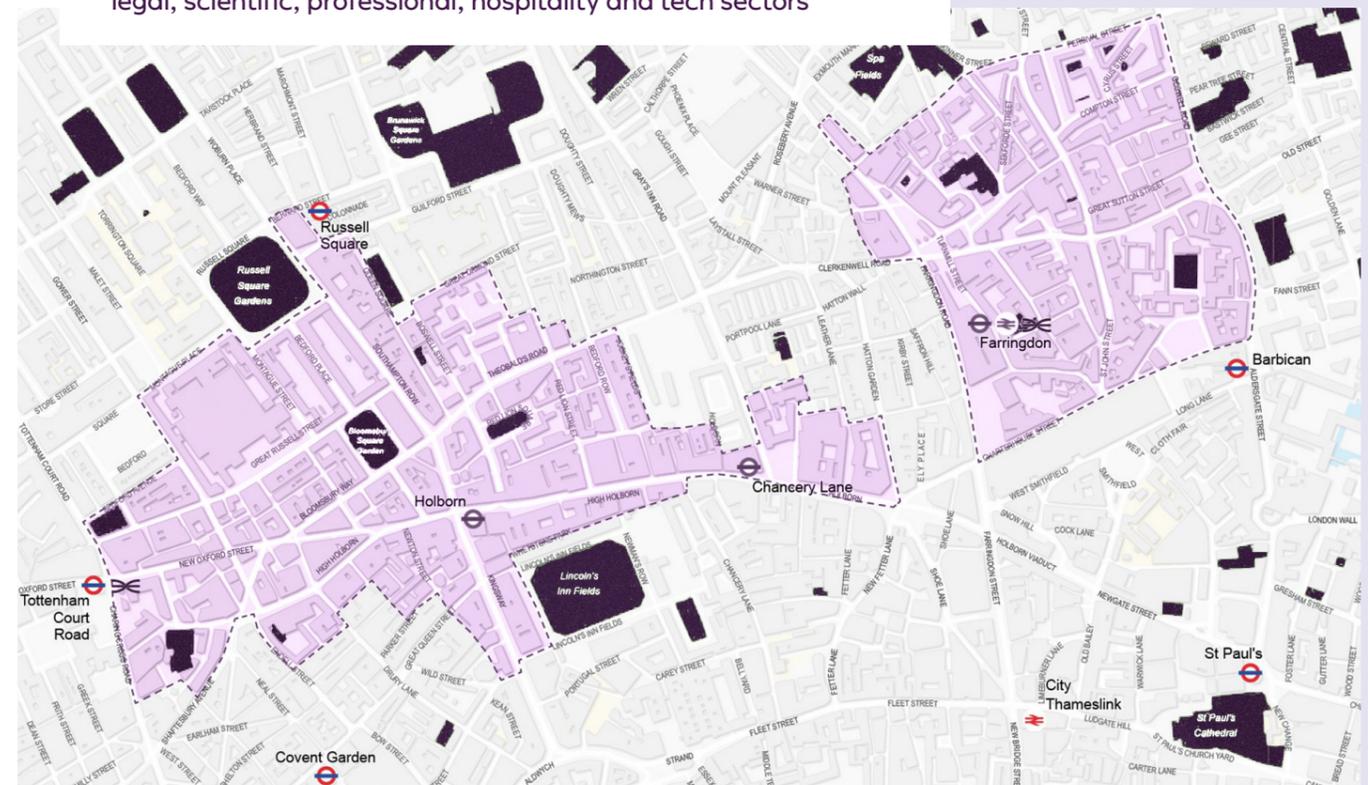
The project is being led by Central District Alliance (CDA), a Business Improvement District (BID) that represents businesses and acts as a collective voice for over 400 organisations within the heart of central London. This is one of the world's major economic geographies and is a global epicentre of business, enterprise, tourism and culture. Pre-pandemic, the businesses in the CDA area contributed 1% of UK GDP.

The ambitious recommendations presented in this report are focused on what CDA and the businesses in its area can do to drive change, including practical initiatives and policy changes that can get more women into work and subsequently enable them to stay in work.

The aspiration is to use this important district as a beacon for change, and to create a blueprint for a fairer and more productive economy that can be adopted across London, and potentially further afield.

Spotlight on Central District Alliance

- 1.114 km²
- 160,000 people working in the area
- 17,215 businesses, of which 99% are micro and small enterprises
- Businesses operate across the creative, property, educational, legal, scientific, professional, hospitality and tech sectors



⁴'The Case for Inclusive Growth', McKinsey, 2021 • ⁵'Focus on an inclusive recovery', OECD, 2022

CHAPTER 2

Why is Un_Biased needed?

Whilst some progress is already being made, we still have a long way to go to overcome the barriers women face and to increase economic participation.

Below are just four of the reasons why we need change:

1 As a result of the pandemic, the female unemployment rate in London is once again higher than the male unemployment rate. This comes after an unprecedented two years of being lower.⁶

Despite small improvements pre-pandemic, the female unemployment rate in London is again higher than the male equivalent. Women were more likely to work in sectors that were the most affected by the pandemic, and more women were furloughed. Across the country, 232,000 fewer women were employed in the last quarter of 2020 than just before the pandemic began – this comprises both women who are economically active but not in work (i.e. looking for work), and those who are leaving the workforce entirely. A reduction in part-time work has also contributed to this drop in employment.⁷

Research has found that women felt more exhausted, burned out, and under pressure than men at work after the start of the pandemic; and women in heterosexual dual-career couples, who have children, reported larger increases in their time spent on household responsibilities since the pandemic began.⁸

2 In 2021, female employees in London were paid 16% less per hour than men. The London gender pay gap is also higher than the UK average gender pay gap.⁹

Women systemically face more barriers and challenges than men not only when seeking employment, but throughout their careers. The gender pay gap has long been recognised (and criticised), but despite years of work towards closing it, current rates of progress still put us over 20 years away.

At present, the average woman in paid employment effectively works for free for almost two months of the year compared to the average man.¹⁰ In 2022, 24% of young women said they'd been paid less than male colleagues to do the same/similar work, and 11% of HR decision makers had seen women in their organisations being paid less than men for the same work.¹¹



I'm senior in my job and I love what I do, but my child's nursery is closing, and I can't find anything else with space or that I can afford.

So, I am going to have to quit my job. I feel like I have no choice.

Female surveyed as part of the research, aged 35-39



3 1.7 million women are prevented from taking on more hours of paid work due to childcare issues, resulting in up to £28.2 billion lost economic output annually.¹²

Women want to be in work, and working women contribute to the economic growth and prosperity. However, the extortionate cost of childcare in the UK, the second most expensive in the OECD, is pushing many parents to leave the workforce rather than pay for childcare. Recent research by Coram found that annual childcare in London can cost on average £15,000 and can be up to 50% of take-home pay.¹³

This burden is disproportionately affecting women, who are often the ones to leave work as they already have a lower salary due to the gender pay gap. These challenges are exacerbated by insufficient provision of affordable and accessible childcare settings, high job vacancies in the childcare sector and limited statutory maternity, paternity and parental leave protections. Lengthy campaigning by groups such as Pregnant then Screwed have brought these issues to the forefront of political conversation.

Childcare was a key focus of the UK Government's 2023 Spring Budget, with the government increasing their childcare support through an expansion of free childcare provision, investment in wraparound childcare at schools, and increased Universal Credit childcare caps.¹⁴ While these are much-needed interventions that will help to address the issue in the longer term, there will still be short-term challenges that women continue to face and need support with until the policy comes into effect.

4 1 in 10 women who worked during menopause have left a job due to their symptoms.¹⁵

The challenges facing women extend throughout their careers. Stigma around female health, particularly periods and menopause, means many women may suffer in silence at work for fear of raising taboo topics or to avoid validating the stereotypes of women being 'unreliable' due to health concerns.

Women tend to adjust to their symptoms and find ways of coping with them, despite research showing that menstrual period symptoms might be linked to nearly nine days of lost productivity every year through 'presenteeism'. However, the real impact on women is underestimated and poorly appreciated.¹⁶

Following a landmark piece of research by the Fawcett Society, in February 2023 Labour committed to requiring all large employers to write, publish, and submit menopause action plans alongside their gender pay gap reporting each year.¹⁷

⁶Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2022 • ⁷House of Commons Library, 2021 • ⁸McKinsey & Company, 2021 • ⁹GLA Gender Pay Gap Reporting, 2021 • ¹⁰TUC, 2023 • ¹¹Young Women's Trust, 2022 • ¹²Centre for Progressive Policy, 2021 • ¹³Coram Childcare Survey 2023 • ¹⁴HM Treasury, 2023 • ¹⁵Fawcett Society, 2023 • ¹⁶BMJ, 2019



CHAPTER 3

Understanding the barriers

The focus of Un_Biased was to understand and interrogate the barriers associated with:



Pathways to Employment



Progression in Work



Public Space

These statistics are just four examples that highlight how women face multi-faceted barriers across their lifetimes and careers. These barriers, whilst interrelated and complex, can be generally categorised as related to:



Pathways to employment: recruitment, careers advice, access to work and education



Work-life choices: parental leave policies and returning to work



Progression at work: pay, promotion, training and mentoring



Everyday working conditions: culture, safety at work and sexual harassment



Care for others: childcare, unpaid work and care in the home, and care for family



Public space: transport, access to work, safety in public spaces and sexual harassment



Personal health and wellbeing: periods, menopause, mental health and wellbeing

Whilst a significant amount of work around these seven themes does already exist, Un_Biased is championing a different voice in the conversation. Much of the research and studies undertaken to date focus on what central and local government can do through policy intervention. Un_Biased is uniquely focused on the role businesses can play and what they can practically do to drive change in the central London context.

Given the scope and length of the Un_Biased project, and the aspiration to develop detailed and actionable recommendations, the research primarily focused on three priority themes: *Pathways to Employment*, *Progression at Work*, and *Public Space*. These were selected as they align with day-to-day activities and strategic aspirations of the CDA BID.

Findings from existing studies were reviewed alongside listening to the stories and lived experiences of people living and working in the CDA area to identify locally relevant recommendations.

The eight month programme of research between July 2022 – March 2023 included:

- **A detailed literature review** of existing reports, research and studies (a full list of reviewed reports can be found in Appendix A).
- **A questionnaire** for people working in or looking for work in central London. The survey was completed by 115 people (98 women and 17 men) and it asked respondents to think about the factors which impact on their career and progression.
- **Listening to women** and collecting their stories. Six women of different ages and backgrounds working in a cross-section of the local economy (IT, property, gardening, education, public sector, marketing) were interviewed about how they made and make the choices which have impacted on, and continue to impact on, their career pathways.
- **Stakeholder interviews** with a range of businesses and organisations, including members of the Central District Alliance, and stakeholders such as Local Councils to discuss what steps they are making to deliver an inclusive workplace and support an equal economy.
- **A focus group** with 12 women currently looking for work in Camden, to understand the barriers to employment and the challenges they would face in work.
- **A coffee shop takeover** where 40 people working in Holborn dropped in to share their experiences and recommendations for the future. Being located physically in the geography enabled conversations with individuals working in the hospitality & leisure sector in the area, which had been a difficult group to engage.
- **Global Entrepreneurship Week event** listening to Westminster Kingsway College students aged 16-18 about how they think their gender will impact on their futures.
- **Exploring potential recommendations** and ideas for change with 60 people from across businesses and the public sector in an event on International Women's Day, Wednesday 8th March 2023.



Research findings

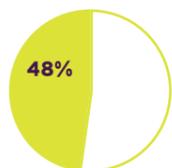
The research findings detail some of the biggest barriers women face to participating in the economy. Flexibility, caregiving, culture, recruitment biases and how gender barriers change as people progress through their careers are all highlighted as significant challenges to women being able to access employment and progress.

The findings presented in this chapter are a snapshot of the research but identify the most pressing trends and challenges to respond to.

Pathways to Employment

2 in 5 young women have experienced discrimination in work, or when looking for work.¹⁷

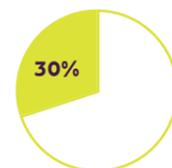
A number of factors impact women's pathways to employment. When asked about the factors that negatively impact their pathways into work, respondents to the Un_Biased survey highlighted the following issues as most important:



Poor careers advice



Biased recruitment processes



Limited opportunities

Fewer than 1 in 20 girls, compared to 1 in 5 boys, consider a career in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM), despite similar academic performances.¹⁸

Better careers advice and the importance of seeing people who look like you in the fields in which you want to work were highlighted as important in our conversations with women. Wider research, such as a 2014 study by City & Guilds, found that careers advice is routinely delivered along old-fashioned stereotypes, with girls being directed towards nursing, care, and teaching, and boys towards IT and engineering.

There is also evidence¹⁶ that girls lack the same self-confidence as boys in maths and science subjects, which is further compounded by a choice and interest gap born out of deeply engrained social and cultural beliefs around gender roles, and a lack of role models in some industries. The importance of clear, concise and usable careers information as well as visible female role models was spoken about by a number of women.



I started in planning and housing – on a degree course that was 95% men. When I came out of university, I was competing with men to get a job in property and construction.

I ended up falling into marketing property, which was a more female-dominated industry and thus more easily accessible.

Female survey respondent



Women were almost 34% less likely to receive pay for their internships than men.¹⁹

Stereotypes from an early age contribute to the development of the gender pay gap, as careers in male-dominated industries such as IT and engineering are often in high demand and high paying.

The prevalence of unpaid internships further adds to this financial disadvantage and can be a barrier to participation for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Unpaid internships are commonplace in female-dominated industries such as fashion, social sciences, health sciences, communications and media, and arts and humanities.



I do think there are some people that will disregard my CV when they see I am a woman. In the past I have lost out on roles to men I know have less experience than me.

**Story interview:
43 year old gardener**

In 2014, Hewlett-Packard found that men apply for a job when they meet 60% of the qualifications but women only apply if they meet 100%.²⁰

Biases in recruitment and hiring processes can also prevent women from accessing work. A large-scale study of British recruitment adverts²¹ revealed how stereotyping is embedded in job descriptions.

The use of male-biased wording, or lack of salary on job listings, can decrease the likelihood of job applications from female candidates, further exacerbating the fact that women tend to be less likely to apply for jobs than men. Implicit gender stereotypes and bias have been found to still play a role in female applicants' interview performance and employers' interview-based decisions, with women's competency subjected to more scrutiny and a higher bar.



¹⁸OECD, 2015 • ¹⁹Binghamton University, 2020 • ²⁰People Management, 2017 • ²¹TotalJobs

Kelsey, 31
Asset Manager in Property

Kelsey explained that she had no careers advice in school and ended up doing a legal secretarial course because she knew people who had done the same and said to herself “I’ll just do that.” Following the completion of her training she “ended up as a secretary for a property company.”

It was in this role that “a male member of staff suggested that I build on my interest in property.” She had been concerned that not having an undergraduate degree she wouldn’t be able to do the relevant training.

However, with support from her workplace she was able to do a postgraduate degree and achieve chartership. This led to her current role.

She reflects that her gender feels most significant when attending events and activities. She noted that there were only four women from a class of over 30 on her graduate scheme; that property tends to be a more “male sector” but that “slowly, slowly it is becoming more diverse.”

Lack of transparency, inconsistent assessment methods, nepotism, word-of-mouth recruitment and lack of data on the diversity of applicants have been highlighted as challenges from research across a number of sectors.

The women interviewed shared these concerns, and some said that they felt their CV would be disregarded because of their gender. Those who did find work in male dominated fields – examples given included property, law and finance – often spoke of getting to the point where they felt it was not the right fit for them.

← **Read Kelsey’s story**



Progression at Work

Progressing and succeeding in a career relies on both formal and informal support. Clarity on role descriptions and the milestones needed to advance sit alongside the advice, support and championing that helps an individual achieve those milestones. Women disproportionately face barriers when it comes to progression in their jobs and careers, with poorer progression opportunities further contributing to income inequality between genders. The disparity begins at early career stages, with a ‘broken rung’ at the first step up to manager often holding women back.

When asked what factors the Un_Biased survey respondents thought had been barriers to their career progression, they selected:

-  Lack of clear standards for promotion (55%)
-  Lack of clear standards for pay (50%)
-  Promotion via social cloning e.g. people in power champion people who are like themselves (46%)

Procedures for promotion are often informal and subjective, especially in smaller organisations, and can rely on an ability to work long hours or connect and build personal relationships with senior management. The Workforce Empowerment Index developed by PwC showed that there is a “significant gender empowerment gap at work” and highlighted the importance of empowerment as a lever for improving gender equity and driving women’s progression in the workplace. Empowerment is driven by transparency, particularly around standards for pay and promotion.

When starting from a base where men already significantly outnumber women at the highest levels, this means there can be a lack of role models or clear pathways for women. As a result, there end up being too few women to promote to the senior leadership positions, which reinforces the problem and means that women can never catch up.



I knew I was getting paid a lot less than people in the same roles. The men were also getting promoted and I wasn’t. I had to fight hard to get equal pay with them.

Female survey respondent

Has my gender ever been an issue [that impacted on my progression at work]? Honestly no, but I appreciate everyone has a different experience.

Male stakeholder interviewee



Out of the 413 directorships held by women across the FTSE 100, just nine were CEOs, 18 were Chairs, and 377 were Non-Executive Directors.²⁰

In November 2022, Ernst and Young reported an “alarming lack of women in executive roles, despite FTSE 350 improving boardroom gender diversity”. 21% of FTSE 100 companies and 32% of FTSE 250 companies had not met the 33% target of women on their boards, and even more concerning was the number of women holding executive positions at board level. On the FTSE 100 and FTSE 250 only 13.7% and 11.3% of women, respectively, hold executive directorships, and there has been criticism of the slow progress towards getting more women into significant decision-making roles such as Chair and CEO.²²

The large underrepresentation of women in leadership is being further challenged by the shifts in working practices and culture post pandemic. Research by McKinsey in 2022 found that women are now demanding more from work and leaving their companies in unprecedented numbers. A bad workplace culture, being overworked and unrecognised, and seeking more flexibility were all highlighted as reasons why women are choosing to leave.

In the USA, for every woman at the director level who gets promoted to the next level, two women directors are choosing to leave their company.²³



²²EY, 2021–2022 • ²³McKinsey, 2022

Emma, 57 Head of Marketing and PR

When asked about the impact of her gender on her career Emma felt there had been an underlying issue but that she couldn't necessarily give specific incidents in her career. She did have a time when a colleague in a third sector organisation emphasised the need to separate work and homelife, which on reflection Emma felt was wrong.

"I used to work for a female boss who I admired greatly. She made it clear not to talk about your homelife at work; to not risk being pigeonholed as a wife or mum. In hindsight she was wrong. You can't switch off from who we are. The values I have as a mother are reflected in the values I have at work."

For Emma the most critical decision in her career progression was having children; "You are vulnerable in your career when you have young children; you have to find a balance you feel happy with. It is a myth that you can give 100% to work and 100% to family."

After her first child she opted to work freelance so she could have more flexibility, acknowledging that she was in a position of privilege to be able to do this. When her children were old enough to be at school, she returned to work full time. She never asked for special treatment as a mother at work, explaining "I never expect or ask for extra consideration as a mother. All parents are equal. You need to think about how to find a balance of your needs as a parent and what your team needs from you as a colleague."

Emma thinks the next important decision in her career pathway will be the decision to retire. This decision will consider a variety of different factors such as her financial position.

²⁴UK Government's Equalities Office, 2020 • ²⁵UK Government's Equalities Office, 2019 • ²⁶PwC, 2023

"Offering flexible working in senior positions can enable women who are not available to work what may be considered a standard, full-time week, to progress despite the reduction in hours."²⁴

← Read Emma's story



Where is the flexibility?

I don't want to work from home all of the time. Give me the flexibility so I can be home to take my daughter to the doctors, or if I need to get to parents evening. Schools don't take into account working parents so now I have to take time off.

Coffee shop drop-in participant



67% of women value having a workplace where they can truly be themselves²⁵

The progression of women at work is also significantly impacted by wider life decisions, such as the decision to have children. Children, childcare and other unpaid care/work (such as for elderly relatives or work in the home) is consistently raised across the literature and throughout our interviews, surveys and focus groups as the most important barrier for women when making decisions about work life balance.

This issue is complex and multi-faceted. Statutory paternity leave and pay is very low (up to two weeks at £156.66 per week for most fathers) which is among the lowest in Europe. Only a third of fathers take up paternity leave in the UK because many families can't afford for them to take it. These challenges, alongside high childcare costs, are pushing the burden of childcare predominantly onto women, taking them out of the workforce for longer and slowing their career progression as a result.

Research by the UK Government found that a woman who goes back to work with the same employer after childbirth is far less likely to progress to higher occupations. It is associated with their career stalling.²⁶ This is not the case for men, who are twice as likely to have progressed upwards after five years post childbirth than women. Nonetheless, the shift to flexible working post-pandemic has been significant, allowing many women and parents to balance working with childcare/other care in a way that works better for them.



Public Space

A lot of research and evidence shows how long-standing urban development processes have excluded the experiences, needs and realities of women, resulting in public spaces that are not genuinely accessible due to a lack of provision of basic facilities such as adequate lighting across the day and night, play spaces for children, or safe public transport infrastructure. This results in many women feeling inconvenienced, ill-at-ease or sometimes endangered in these environments²⁷. When public spaces do not sufficiently prioritise the wellbeing and safety of women in their design, they spatially reinforce inequality.

97% of young women in the UK have experienced sexual harassment in public.²⁸

This is a significant challenge for women who are navigating London and its public spaces in order to go to work and to participate in the economy. Creating an inclusive economy needs to be founded on an inclusive city and urban environment to ensure everyone can access all the opportunities available to them.

A Centre for London survey found that women were nearly twice as likely as men to mention personal safety as a barrier to walking and using public transport, including opting against using the tube for fear of sexual harassment. Research by Arup for their Designing Cities for Women report found that experiences of violence on public transport and in public spaces reduce women's economic opportunities.

Poor and unsafe transportation reduces women's participation in the labour market by up to 16.5%.²⁹

Creating safer cities, therefore, makes economic sense. Urban environments that are safer and more inclusive lead to increased economic participation and economic activity, resulting in greater income generation and higher spend.

In recent years greater action has been undertaken by stakeholders in London to highlight and address the issues facing women in public space. In 2022, Publica launched the Safer Streets initiative, developing practical tools to address violence against women and girls in the city in partnership with landowners and Business Improvement Districts. The narrative is also, rightly, shifting away from a focus on what women can/should do and towards a focus on stopping the perpetrators of sexual harassment. New conversations have emerged about the roles that men and passers-by can play.

Transport for London launched a new campaign in January 2023 which set out guidance on how customers can safely intervene if they witness incidents of sexual harassment, and the Mayor of London created the 'Have a Word' campaign aimed at challenging the behaviour of boys and men.

Read Rachel's story →

Rachel, 42 Legal Secretary and Waitress

Rachel works two jobs in order to support her children. She works Monday to Friday as a legal secretary and is a waitress at the weekend. She does not feel that her gender impacted on her pathway into work: "gender has never hindered me - it might be because I'm a secretary and waitress, which are very female careers."

She works in central London, because the salary is better but cannot afford to live locally which means a 2.5 hour round trip to work.

"The tube is quicker, but the bus is half the price. I need to take the cheaper option." In the winter and autumn when it gets darker earlier, she feels unsafe travelling to and from work. She would like more flexibility in part so "I can travel when its lighter and I feel safer." She has raised this with her boss in the past but fears "getting a reputation for being gobby if I ask for change. It's like I'm not being heard."

The long travel time also means that she gets to spend less time at home with her children. She feels guilt about "how much responsibility I have to put on my girls. They have to cook because I'm not getting home until about 7pm and I'm exhausted."



²⁷Publica, 2022 • ²⁸UN Women, 2021 • ²⁹International Labour Organisation



Priority demands for change

Based on the findings from the research, a number of priority demands for change emerged across the three themes for women in the CDA area that the recommendations will need to respond to.

1. More flexible working:

A consistent request by the women interviewed was for greater flexibility. This doesn't necessarily mean working from home or hybrid working. Women are looking for the flexibility to enable them to balance their work and home lives, which includes part time work, job shares or flexible shifts.

“Employers are getting better at offering flexible working but I still think there is work to do. Employers need to offer flexible working patterns to support childcare, such as school pick-ups etc. This would improve productivity and morale.”

Survey Respondent, aged 40-44

“The biggest issue for getting the women we support into work is flexibility.”

Employment Strategy Manager, Good Work Camden (Camden Council)

“We are hiring people right now for the Christmas season and we have decided to break up the shifts to make them more flexible to try and make them more attractive to women.”

Local Theatre



Our firm is now outsourcing secretarial work to South Africa, yet I'm not allowed to work from home occasionally.

I don't get how that works. They treat you like you're just another cog even if you've been there for years.

Coffee shop drop-in participant



2. Address the motherhood penalty:

Among the women we spoke to, many felt the most important decision in the context of their career would be whether or not to have children.

Maternity leave was seen as insufficient, and women who were yet to have children talked about the fear of the unknown of what was to come, and increasingly checking maternity policies when thinking about whether or not to take a job.



A decision about having children will 100% be a decision in the context of my career.

Asset manager, aged 31



“Statutory maternity is awful. But that's in part the Government's fault. If they set a poor statutory level, businesses can just get away with the bare minimum.”

IT Account Manager, aged 27

There is a perception that motherhood can stymie opportunities for progression; that unaffordable childcare can result in women being unable or reluctant to return to work; that career gaps taken to have and raise children can result in time lost to move along a career path. Whilst skills are developed as a new mother, these are not perceived as valuable within the traditional workplace.

“Don't assume that women who can't or chose not to work due to childcare responsibilities do not contribute to the system. They are raising the future work force and should be helped to do so to the best of their ability.”

Survey Respondent, aged 30-34

“I lost my 12 month contract because I was pregnant.”

Survey Respondent, aged 40-44

3. Have more role models, mentorship and support:

The need for support, guidance and advice was consistently highlighted. Women spoke of the need to “see it to be it” in fields like construction, computing and finance. Being able to make informed decisions shaped by support is important to women.

“I have benefitted from female mentors who have made me feel less ‘alone’ and have helped me recognise that the strengths I bring, while different to many men I have worked with, are different and in some cases more valuable. I needed this support and confidence to be able to be myself and thrive.”

Survey Respondent, aged 30-34

Targeted programmes that focus on enabling women to consider all opportunities open to them were suggested. Other recommendations included making it easier to find apprenticeships and creating networks that bring women together to help each other.

4. Change the culture of conversation:

Women celebrated the positive changes that have been made but acknowledged there is still a long way to go. Being able to talk openly and honestly about the challenges women are facing, and what solutions can be found within specific workplaces was cited as a needed change.



We as women don't help ourselves. We know it's an issue, but we don't talk about it. We don't talk about it with each other. We don't talk about it with our male colleagues. We need to be at ease to have that conversation. To create the space to have an honest discussion about it.

Hospitality sector manager



While some women felt comfortable talking to their managers and colleagues, others raised significant concerns about being seen as “a troublemaker” or worrying about losing shifts if they raised issues or asked for flexible working. Women acknowledged that not every change will work for every workplace but they do want to be able to have a conversation about what could help them.

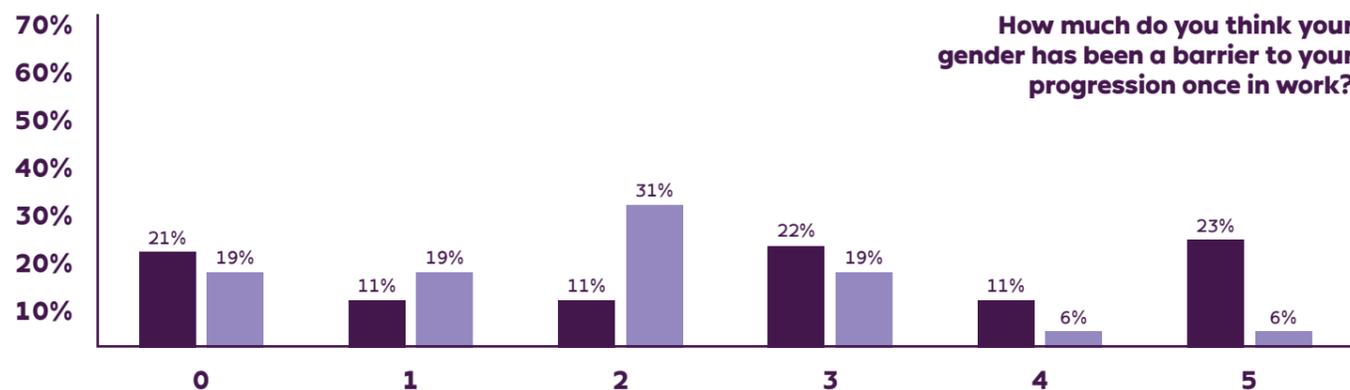
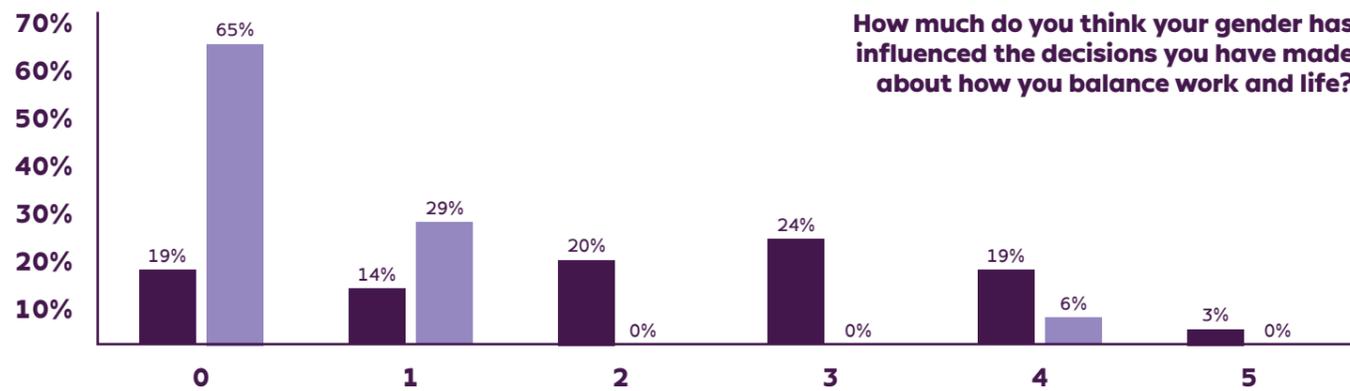
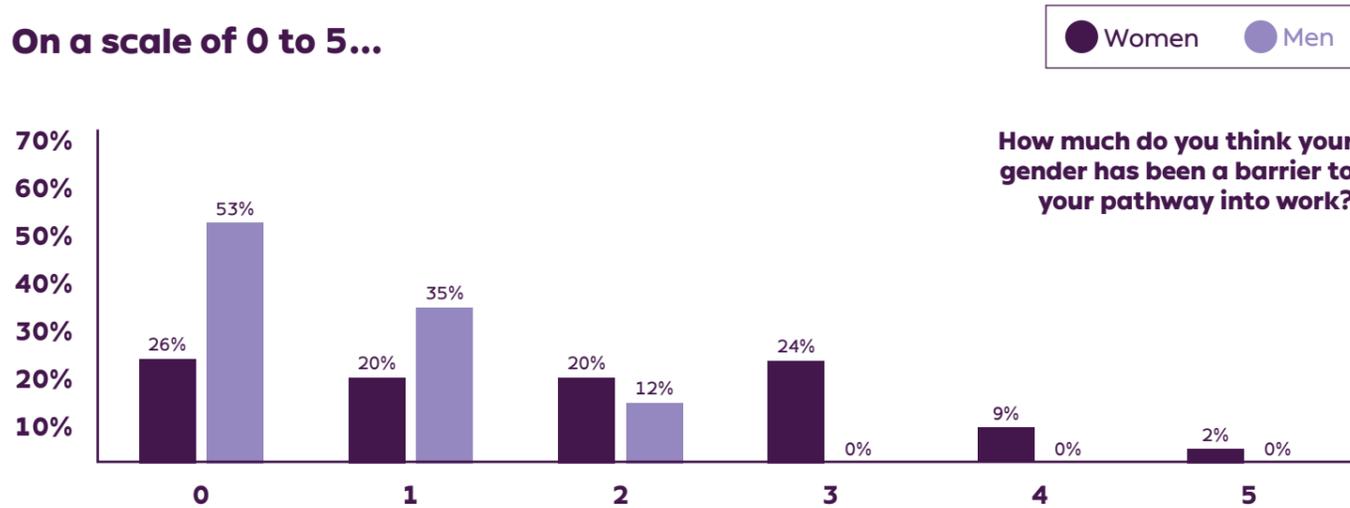
5. Understand how gender barriers affect women, and men, over the course of their careers:

Respondents to the Un_Biased survey were asked to rank from 0 to 5 how much their gender had been a barrier to their pathways into work, progression once in work and their work-life decisions.

The findings show that women tended to experience more barriers than men as they progress through their careers and when faced with work-life decisions.

Work-life decisions were defined as decisions to have children, to take time out of work, to move to a different type of job, to shift to flexible working, or to retire. Whilst this was much greater amongst women, the 17 men who filled in the survey also reported that work-life decision making was where gender was likely to have the biggest impact.

On a scale of 0 to 5...



CHAPTER 4

Recommendations

Six overarching recommendations have been identified that directly respond to the most pressing challenges and barriers to economic participation that women face in the CDA area. The recommendations have been developed to focus on what CDA as a business member organisation can do, as well the role that the businesses themselves can play.

These recommendations alone won't solve the problem. There are many important issues (for example around physical and mental health, the experience of trans and non-binary people, or how class, race, age, sexuality and disability intersect with gender) that this research hasn't been able to focus on. Many of the longstanding systemic barriers faced by women need solutions led by government at a national, and even international, level.

However, Un_Biased has created an opportunity to stimulate conversation and action amongst the business community in central London. By encouraging businesses to be part of the solution, it provides a blueprint for others to follow, a solid foundation to drive real change.

Six overarching recommendations:



Pathways to Employment

- 1. Make sure women know about and can easily access good quality jobs and training opportunities locally** – including careers advice, connecting residents to job vacancies and championing well paid and secure work, recognising the broader intersectional biases that can affect women's access to opportunities (e.g. race, sexuality etc).
- 2. Build support networks for women living and working in the area** – through role models, mentoring, confidence building and networks of social support.



Progression at Work

- 3. Educate local businesses and encourage them to adopt the most inclusive policies and practices** – including flexible working, transparent standards for pay and promotion, health and wellbeing policies, and practices to reduce bias in recruitment.
- 4. Confront and address the barrier caregiving can present for those wanting to join, re-join or progress in the workforce** – including parental leave policies, supporting access to local and affordable childcare, and recognising the burden of invisible caregiving labour.
- 5. Enable culture change within businesses** – focusing on creating the space for conversation and raising awareness of the barriers and biases faced by women in the workplace.



Public Space

- 6. Design and manage spaces that are safe and inclusive** – combining safe and inclusive public spaces across the day and night (beyond CCTV and policing) with inclusive working environments and the services and amenities needed for women's daily lives.

What CDA will do

These recommendations require collective action from across business, local government and wider partners (such as education institutions). Whilst CDA cannot hold others to account, it has the power to take the first step to drive change forward and to lead the way for partners in the area to follow.

Therefore, under each recommendation, practical actions have been identified that CDA will deliver to catalyse change. These are split into three categories which align with the day-to-day activities of the BID:

- a) Lead by Example:** commitments that CDA will directly deliver.
- b) Drive the Conversation:** actions which form part of CDA's role in knowledge sharing and leading campaigns amongst businesses across London.
- c) Enable and Partner with Others:** actions that align with CDA's role in convening partners and business and supporting local organisations.



Pathways to Employment

1. Make sure women know about and can easily access good quality jobs and training opportunities locally

Including careers advice, connecting residents to job vacancies and championing well paid and secure work, recognising the broader intersectional biases that can affect women's access to opportunities (e.g. race, sexuality etc).

a) Lead by Example

- In partnership with Good Work Camden and Islington Working, run a programme of mock interviews with local women looking for work.
- Pay individuals undertaking work experience/internships at CDA fairly for their time.
- Continue to run the annual programme of Careers Fairs across the year with key local partners (Good Work Camden, Islington Working, Capital City College Group and others), with a focus on supporting local women into work and on good quality, secure job opportunities for everyone.

b) Drive the Conversation

- Lead the conversation on apprenticeships, focusing on informing businesses how they can use their apprenticeship levy and explaining benefits of apprenticeships to businesses.

c) Enable and Partner with Others

- Work with Good Work Camden's and Islington Working's Apprenticeship schemes to connect local businesses to apprentices.
- Connect local women to vacancies in the CDA area by acting as link between Good Work Camden/Islington Working and local businesses looking for employees – this could include passing on member businesses job adverts to the Councils.
- Work with Capital City College Group to expand visibility and accessibility of formal training opportunities for women (for example the new free coding course for women) and work with member businesses to find work experience opportunities for women completing training.
- Explore the opportunity to support incubators and programmes that help female entrepreneurs.



Progression at Work

2. Build a support network for women living and working in the area

Through role models, mentoring, confidence building and networks of social support.

a) Lead by Example

- Set up a 'CDA Female Champions' programme of inspiring women who work in the area, including the CDA's female Chief Executive, Debbie Akehurst. Raise their profiles through external communications and campaigns, and connect them to local community groups, schools and colleges to give talks to young girls about the range of roles and opportunities in the area.
- Collaborate with partners so the CDA team can contribute to mentoring programmes, such as the Girl's Network.
- Explore the opportunity to support existing initiatives in the area focused on mentoring for female-led small businesses and female entrepreneurs. For example, courses and mentoring delivered to local women via Capital City College.

b) Drive the Conversation

- Campaign on the importance of support networks for women, especially in relation to peer support around stress, mental health and burnout and the impact this can have on progression at work. Partner with organisations such as Dress for Success Greater London to deliver this, for example by supporting their Personal Development programmes.
- Share learnings and successes with other BIDs and area network organisations so they can replicate support in their own footprints.

c) Enable and Partner with Others

- Connect member businesses and their employees to mentoring schemes which support young women and girls.

For example, The Girl's Network →

- CDA has already supported Dress for Success Greater London to find new space in the CDA footprint. Build on this support and their new presence in the area by connecting Dress for Success with local business partners. This will enable more bespoke package programmes to be developed, such as Personal Development / Employability events, work experience, work trials, sector-specific workshops for industries such as IT where women are under-represented, and more.
- Continue CDA's work supporting refugee women by facilitating the delivery of courses which support refugee women with making a smooth transition into local employment (such as Personal Development Programmes, Bespoke Interview Techniques, IT workshops, ESOL). This will be delivered alongside overall wellbeing support and confidence workshops.

The Girls Network

A charity that works with businesses and individual professional women to provide mentoring for disadvantaged young girls across the UK.

The Girl's Network partners with secondary schools and colleges to match girls aged 14-19 with volunteer female mentors.

The role of the mentors is to inspire and empower the young girls, and give them access to a network of professional female role models.

The one-to-one mentoring scheme is a year-long programme, and businesses of all sizes can sign up as corporate partners.



3. Educate local businesses and encourage them to adopt the most inclusive policies and practices

Including flexible working, transparent standards for pay and promotion, health and wellbeing policies and reducing bias in recruitment.

a) Lead by Example

- Work with CDA owner Primera to update the CDA recruitment policy and adopt best practice approaches in recruitment which aim to reduce bias e.g. name-blind recruitment; gender-neutral job descriptions; advertising all jobs with pay and salary details; no longer asking candidates for previous salary history which can lead to young women being trapped in low paid roles; adopt alternatives to traditional CV/cover letter application (for example competency-based questions, practical tasks, blind assessment) and collection of equalities monitoring data from applicants.
- Introduce a formal CDA flexible working policy.
- Introduce a new inclusion question as part of CDA procurement processes to formally score suppliers on their inclusion practice.
- Introduce a minimum criteria supplier pledge which commits to only working with businesses that meet certain criteria.

b) Drive the Conversation

- To coincide with the change in legislation around flexible working, make flexible working the priority focus theme for an event series. This should include leading the conversation around what 'flexible' means (hours, part time roles, and job shares) and shifting the culture in how flexible working is viewed by employers.
- Share best practice on changes that have been made and the benefits that this can bring, including addressing the perception that flexible working is only for desk-based roles.



We are hiring people right now for the Christmas season and we have decided to break up the shifts to make them more flexible to try and make them more attractive for women.

Theatre based in the CDA area



c) Enable and Partner with Others

- Procure training for members as part of CDA's Business Breakfast events series, focused on:
 - o Removing bias from recruitment – partnering with organisation like Applied
 - o HR support for policy changes
 - o Workplace health and wellbeing policies
 - o How to gain accreditations such as London Living Wage, GLA Good Work Standard
- Provide tailored advice/support to SMEs as part of the wider SME support programme to understand and implement best practice.
- Work with a partner organisation (such as Fawcett Society or Pregnant then Screwed) to offer negotiation and confidence training for women working in the area around employee rights and confidence to ask for pay rises/flexible working.

4. Confront and address the barrier that caregiving can present for those wanting to join, re-join or progress in the workforce

Including parental leave policies, supporting access to local and affordable childcare, and recognising the burden of invisible caregiving labour.

a) Lead by Example

- Undertake further detailed research on childcare need in the local area by working closely with businesses to understand their employees' childcare requirements and identify practical solutions. This will be in the context of the changing childcare policy nationally, and understanding what that means for employees in the CDA area.
- Connect local member businesses to pilot a programme of shared in-house creche provision to pool resources, especially to support employees of small and medium sized businesses.

b) Drive the Conversation

- Work with partner organisations (such as Pregnant then Screwed) to contribute to the national conversation about the barrier that unaffordable childcare and poor parental leave policies can present for parents finding /returning to/ progressing in work.
- Focus on bringing the perspectives of businesses to the conversation, particularly in light of the recent announcements around childcare changes in the Spring Budget 2023.
- Undertake an awareness campaign to better signpost parents who live and work in the area to available support (e.g. childcare bursary schemes in Camden and Islington, tax free and free childcare and the future support announced in the Spring Budget 2023).

Aviva: Equal Parental Leave

Aviva became one of the first UK employers to introduce an equal parental leave policy, offering new parents in its UK business 12 months' parental leave, with six months at full basic pay.

The company introduced the policy to help remove barriers to career progression, challenge traditional gender roles and level the playing field for women and men at home and at work when a new child arrives.

Since introducing the policy, 80% of men have taken at least five months out of work when a new child arrives, and 79% of men have taken over five months for subsequent births.

In addition, the average length of paternity leave taken has increased, and the average length of maternity leave has decreased.

Metrobank: MFamily

To support inclusion and enable their staff to raise issues or concerns, Metrobank have established a range of groups including MWow (women of work), MPride (LGBTQ+), MBrace (Diversity and Inclusion) and MFamily.

Each group has an executive member who ensures that ideas and feedback are considered at a corporate level.

MFamily enables parents and carers to discuss their experiences and discuss potential solutions. For example, MFamily has listened to staff and worked with the wider team to explore what flexible working should look like for branch staff.

c) Enable and Partner with Others

- Work with local businesses and the planning authorities (using new Section 106 powers) to explore the establishment of childcare provision within the CDA area in order to bring childcare closer to places of work.
- Reach out to existing providers of co-working spaces with integrated childcare and encourage their establishment in the area. Explore their needs and risks, and work collaboratively to connect them with businesses in the area.

5. Enable culture change within businesses

Focusing on creating the space for conversation and raising awareness of the barriers and biases faced by women in the workplace.

a) Lead by Example

- Within CDA, develop an Un_Biased framework to check all internal projects and activities against to ensure the recommendations from Un_Biased have been considered as part of all projects.

b) Drive the Conversation

- Share best practice by setting up a CDA Responsible Members Committee, with a remit to cover priority themes from Un_Biased research as well as wider ESG activities.
- Run a programme of business events (as part of wider Responsible Members Committee remit) where members can share ideas / best practice and learn practical advice from each other on what works.
- Run a campaign on the most prominent issues of culture raised through the research and support people with the vocabulary needed to discuss prominent issues:
 - o Discrimination and harassment in the workplace
 - o The taboo of periods and menopause

c) Enable and Partner with Others

- Provide guidance on how businesses could start the conversation in their own workplaces – for example creating employee networks where issues can be raised and potential solutions discussed as well as working with partners to provide guidance on language and approach for raising ‘taboo’ subjects.



Public Space

6. Design and manage spaces that are safe and inclusive

Combining safe and inclusive public spaces across the day and night (beyond CCTV and policing) with inclusive working environments and the services and amenities needed for women’s daily lives.

a) Lead by Example

- CDA Security Patrols currently include a Security Team that delivers an enhanced level of safety across St Giles, Bloomsbury, Holborn, Clerkenwell and Farringdon. Undertake training for the Safer Streets Patrol teams on dealing with violence against women and girls (VAWG) and extend this to business members so local security guards and bouncers can attend.
- Alongside collection of footfall data, CDA will regularly monitor local crime data and perceptions of safety to inform decision making and understand where issues exist in the area.
- Review CDA-led public space improvements and other street interventions including lighting schemes, green spaces and pedestrian improvements with gender-inclusion in mind, seeking professional expertise where appropriate (for example, organisations like Publica or Make Space for Girls).
- Look to achieve Purple Flag accreditation for the area. Purple Flag is a night-time economy accreditation, showing an area meets the standards of excellence in managing its night-time economy. The scheme takes into consideration safety, movement including transport and pedestrian routes, diversity of the night-time offer, placemaking, and local policy.

b) Drive the Conversation

- Convene local businesses to share best practice for inclusive working environments for women, including a consideration of changing needs at critical stages of the life course, including pregnancy (e.g. parking and ‘Last Mile’ public transport considerations), early parenthood (e.g. provision of dedicated breastmilk fridges), and menopause (cool-space retreats).
- Explore how the evening economy can better support and encourage women’s presence through facilitating dialogue between employees and businesses, paying particular attention to spaces of leisure – gyms, restaurants, bars and pubs – as well as everyday necessities – e.g. pharmacies, hairdressers, food shops, dry cleaners – which might be supported in extending their hours of operation, and allow women to accomplish everyday errands within the district and extend their stays.

c) Enable and Partner with Others

- Continue to support the Safer Streets campaign, led by Publica, which CDA supports as a Primera BID member.
- Support the Mayor of London to raise awareness of the Women’s Night Safety Charter within CDA’s business community, working together to contribute towards London’s commitment to the UN Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces global initiative.
- CDA Security Team will continue to partner with the Met Police, undertaking joint patrols to make the area a safe and welcoming place to visit and work.
- Working with partners (such as Susy Lamplugh Trust) to support businesses to talk to their staff about personal safety whilst working and put in place the right support.





CHAPTER 5

What next?

The ambitious recommendations detailed in this report are just the first step. CDA will deliver against its commitments, but needs businesses and other partners in the area to take action in order to achieve change at the scale that is needed.

There are some practical next steps that CDA will put in place to enable actions to be delivered and new partnerships to be built, including:

- Ringfencing internal resource to lead and oversee the delivery of the recommendations. This will be the CDA Team, who also lead on the BID's wider ESG commitments.
- Developing a detailed action delivery plan which is aligned with wider CDA business planning.
- Undertaking an annual review of the Un_Biased actions and priorities, and reporting against progress to BID members.
- Working with the other Central London BIDs to scale actions where possible to maximise impact.

CDA are looking forward to working with partners to tackle this challenge head on!

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Breaking **the bias**

Un_Biased: A blueprint for change