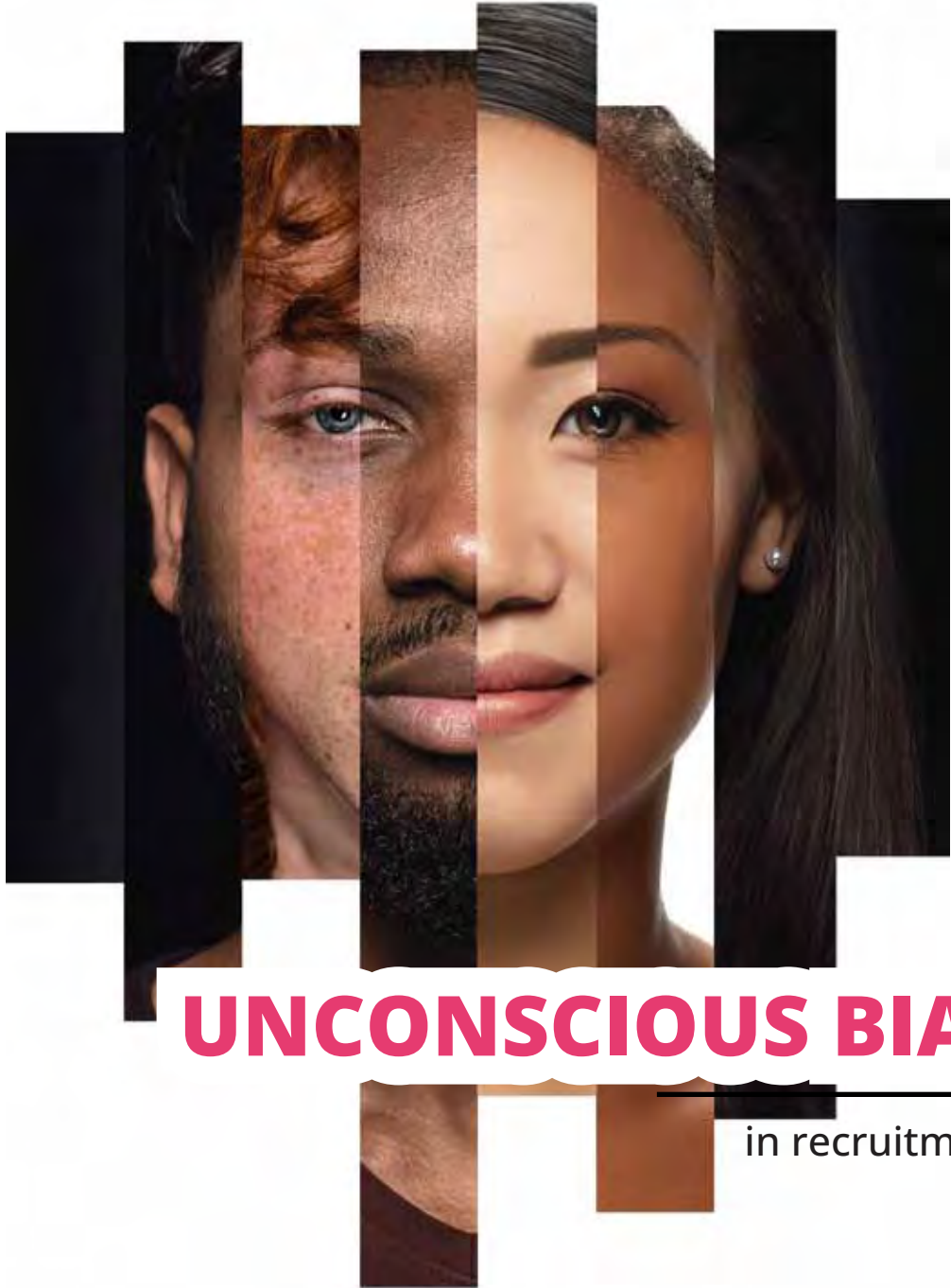


# PROGEDi

Promoting Gender Equality, Diversity  
and Inclusion in the workplace



## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

in recruitment



Co-funded by  
the European Union



**Generation 2.0**  
For Rights Equality & Diversity



# UNCONSCIOUS BIAS in recruitment

The “Unconscious Bias in Recruitment” Guide was created by Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity and was based on the content of the trainings addressed to Greek SMEs and non-profit organisations in the framework of the PROGEDI project.

DISCLAIMER: Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

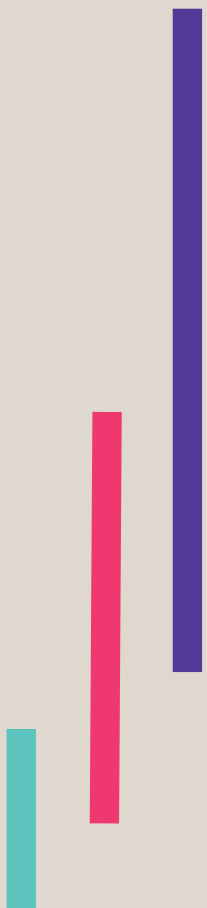




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# To Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity

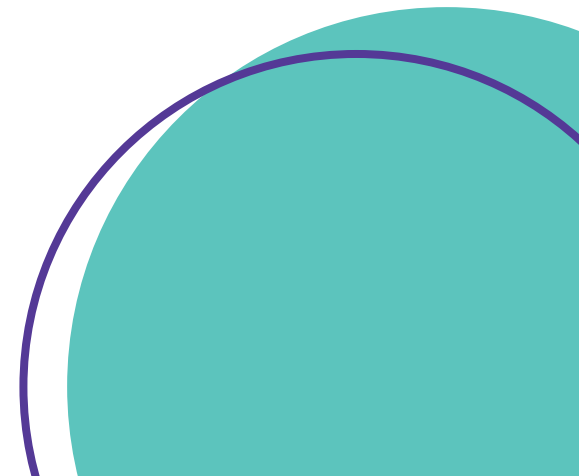
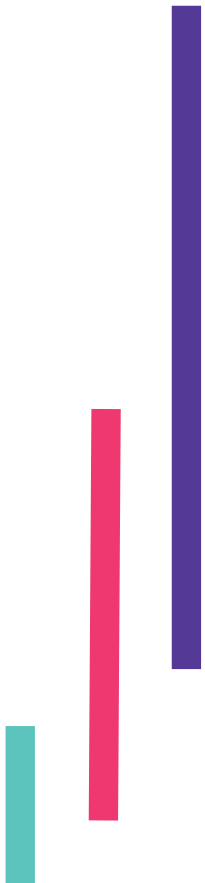
[Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity](#) is a non-profit organisation based in Athens, consisting of people with different origins, working together to promote equal participation in a multicultural society through community empowerment.

It combines action and research with the ultimate goal to promote human rights, equality, diversity and the fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination in general.

The organisation has over 10 years of experience in social action, sociological and legal research, project management, and cultural events. Generation 2.0 RED participates and collaborates with the largest human rights networks in Greece and Europe to advocate for the rights of minority groups regardless of their origin, nationality, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

Among the numerous initiatives and activities of **Generation 2.0 RED**, [Diversity in the Workplace](#) was launched in 2017 aiming to the equal inclusion of people with migrant background in the Greek labour market. **Diversity in the Workplace**, through a free-of-charge

pre-selection service, recruitment counselling, the [Diversity Charter](#), trainings and educational materials on Diversity and Inclusion, aims to support organisations, both for-profit and non-profit, to create equal and inclusive work environments. From January 2023 to April 2024, it delivered activities addressed to employers in SMEs and non-profit organisations under the European project **Promoting Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace - PROGEDI**.





## The PROGEDI project

The project **PROGEDI** (Promoting Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace), co-funded by the European Union, was implemented by the **International Rescue Committee Hellas, Generation 2.0 for Rights, Equality & Diversity** and the **Cell of Alternative Youth Activities (KEAN)** aiming to:

- a) strengthen the capacity of HR and managerial staff of selected SMEs and of public sector officials in central and local government bodies in Greece on diversity management and inclusion practices.
- b) increase awareness on multi-dimensional diversity in business through strengthened links between SMEs, CSOs, the academic and research community, underrepresented groups and policy makers.
- c) motivate and engage companies, public sector agencies and organisations to further endorse the Diversity Charter in Greece.
- d) strengthen national and transnational cooperation on diversity management among private companies, civil society organisations and community-based organisations.

The “Unconscious Bias in Recruitment” Guide, available online and in hardcopy, was created in the framework of the project on strengthening capacity building on DE&I practices for SMEs and non-profit organisations. More specifically, the Guide was based on references and tools and on the content of the corresponding training session, implemented by Generation 2.0 RED between December 2023 and March 2024, with main participants Greek SMEs and non-profit organisations.

The aim is to support organisations in Greece in implementing inclusive recruitment procedures, at all phases, while having minimised the impact of unconscious bias.

It includes an introduction to biases and information on how they are developed, whereas it focuses on how to recognise them, with a reference to the most prevalent types, as well as on their consequences through the different stages of the recruitment procedure.



## The consortium partners



### ► International Rescue Committee Hellas

[International Rescue Committee \(IRC\) Hellas](#) started operating in Greece in 2015, on the island of Lesbos, in response to the unprecedented number of refugees arriving on the island at the time. Since the start of programming in Greece, the IRC has provided support and protection services to people living in camps and urban settings. Directly, or in collaboration with partners, we have provided and continue to support shelter, emergency supplies, access to hygiene facilities, vital, reliable, and up-to-date information, protection for people with vulnerabilities, legal assistance, case management, mental health and psychosocial support, as well as employability and entrepreneurship services to refugees, asylum-seekers and other vulnerable individuals in Greece.

Our team of professionals is currently engaged in the city of Athens and on the island of Lesbos, and we also provide nationwide up-to-date reliable information through the Refugee.Info platform. In Lesbos, we provide Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), while in Athens, we provide a variety of Child Protection, Mental Health and Psychosocial Support, Women's Protection and Empowerment (WPE), Legal Support, Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI), Advocacy and Economic Recovery and Development services.

### ► Cell of Alternative Youth Activities

[Cell of Alternative Youth Activities \(KEAN\)](#) was founded in 2004 in Athens, with the aim to upgrade the lives of young people and vulnerable social groups, combat social exclusion and poverty, promote a better organised society with respect for human rights and the environment and promote the spirit of volunteerism and familiarity with the new technologies.

KEAN, the representative organisation of the Diversity Charter in Greece, promotes diversity management in the business environment in Greece by providing information regarding the Charter, its implementation, and its commitment, as well as training to employees on issues of diversity, diversity management and integration.



# Introduction

In 2023, under the PROGEDI project, a survey was conducted by **Generation 2.0 RED**, with the **support of International Rescue Committee** and the **Cell of Alternative Youth Activities**, regarding Diversity Management in the workplace and the existence of inclusive work environments in SMEs and non-profit organisations in Greece.

Only 37% of respondents (out of a total of 70 participants) said that at their organisation there is a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) practice in place - almost equally in both the for-profit sector (39%) and the non-profit sector (37%). The most common DE&I practice was the “Unbiased candidate selection and hiring” (for 73% of those with a DE&I practice at the workplace).



Thirty-one per cent of respondents believe that at their organisation possibly exist practices which exclude certain people/groups. Some qualitative data on the above finding<sup>1</sup>:

- “It mainly concerns the exclusion of people with disabilities. I do not know if there has been such discrimination at recruitment (e.g. if there have been candidates with this profile and they have been rejected), but I am not aware of any colleagues with disabilities” an employee in another department (other than HR) at a non-profit organisation stated
- An employee in another department (other than HR) coming from a for-profit organisation said: “Appearance is a particularly important element for the company I work for and, as a result, people who do not meet the requested requirements have been excluded”
- “They avoid hiring women who are at the ‘age of marriage’” said an employee in another department (other than HR) at a for-profit organisation

<sup>1</sup> Generation 2.0 RED, 2023, *Baseline Assessment Report - Perspectives on the added value & benefits of Diversity & Inclusion in the workplace, current DE&I practices, and organisational needs of SMEs & Non-Profit organisations in Greece*, p. 21. Available [here](#)

- Another comment by an employee in another department (other than HR) at a for-profit organisation was that: “No preference is shown for recruiting/collaborating with people of certain nationalities”.

While acknowledging the efforts made by various organisations, mainly large and multinationals, in recent years regarding diversity management, we cannot overlook the fact that, at small and medium-sized enterprises<sup>2</sup>, practices aiming at the creation of equal and inclusive environments are rare and perhaps done in an unofficial way.

Whereas discussion about combating discrimination at work is frequent -there is a legislative framework in Greece anyway-, and with some corporate efforts made to minimise discrimination, the mention of unconscious bias is not frequent. This can infiltrate and affect even the most “officially” equal and inclusive environments, for two reasons:

- Firstly, because no individual is “immune” to unconscious bias.
- Secondly, even when DE&I procedures are in place, at an individual level, unconscious biases probably remain unidentified, or there are more to be done to minimise them.

It is widely accepted<sup>3</sup> that all individuals, due to culture, social and family environment, mass media and other factors that consistently contribute in shaping our social perceptions and beliefs, have unconscious biases, more or less, related to specific aspects of the broad spectrum of diversity.

Therefore, when and if we talk about developing and implementing Diversity Management policies in the work environment, all individuals involved in this process should consider that it is not enough to establish inclusion policies and practices for everyone without exception, but they should, also, aim at raising awareness on unconscious biases at an individual level, which possibly interfere with a very conscious organisational effort.

<sup>2</sup> According to a [speech](#) by the Bank of Greece Governor, Yannis Stournaras, on 22/09/2023, in 2022 SMEs constituted 99.9% of enterprises in the non-financial sector, whereas employing 83.5% of the employees in Greece or 2.2 million people, while 94.5% of enterprises fall under the category “very small” - up to 10 employees.

<sup>3</sup> Imperial College, *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*. Available [here](#)



## ► Diversity aspects



*“Regarding the concept of Diversity, 43% feel very familiar with, while 37% feel quite familiar. Fifty-six people out of 70 were able to provide a definition. In some cases, there has been some confusion with the concept of inclusion, and ‘uniqueness’ was suggested as a more precise term by some individuals.”*

*“Diversity has to do with variety, contrasts, and different characteristics among people, cultures, ethnicities, groups, and ideologies.” (Senior HR employee at a non-profit organisation)<sup>4</sup>.*

<sup>4</sup> Findings from the PROGEDI Baseline Assessment Report (2023), p10-11. Available [here](#)

<sup>5</sup> Marilyn Loden & Judy Rosener (1991), *Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource*

<sup>6</sup> Gov.gr (2022), Equal treatment. Available [here](#)

## What is the legislative context in Greece?

In Greece, according to law 4443/2016, discrimination “on the grounds of race, colour, national or ethnic origin, genealogical descent, religion or other belief, disability or chronic condition, age, social status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender characteristics in the field of work and employment”<sup>6</sup> is prohibited.

This prohibition applies to all persons, in the public and private sector.

Diversity is defined as “otherness or those human qualities that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet present in other individuals and groups”.

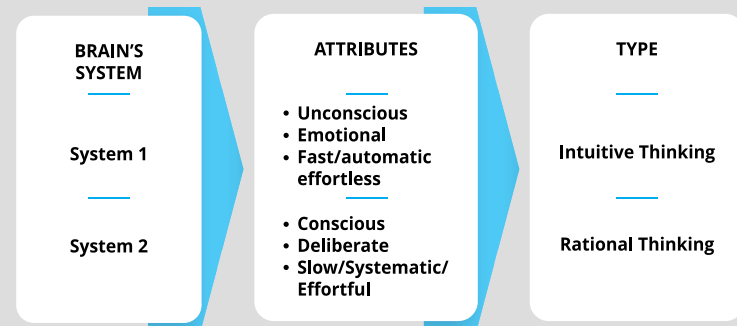
“Dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to: age, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, sexual orientation, educational background, geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, religious beliefs, parental status, and work experience”<sup>5</sup>.



# Our brain's Systems

The two hemispheres of the human brain operate quite differently, resulting in handling, also, different aspects of activity, however naturally complementing each other.

Daniel Kahneman, professor of Psychology, received the Nobel prize in Economic Science, in 2002, for his contribution in understanding critical thinking and decision making under uncertainty. In his book "Thinking, Fast and Slow" (2013), he describes how our brain works and he calls the right hemisphere "Automatic System 1" and the left one, "Effortful System 2".



These Systems, for him, correspond to the Intuitive and Rational thinking. System 1 works quickly and automatically with minimal effort, whereas System 2 requires concentration and mental effort. Because it requires a lot of energy, we tend to use it less, trusting System 1. It has also been found that System 1 strongly affects System 2 when the latter is busy with another function or tired.



Kahneman called this phenomenon "ego exhaustion" and it is this that also allows to impulsive thoughts to prevail, through the associative thinking mechanism of System 1, which more or less works as follows:

- 1) It collects information (stimuli) and categorises them into broader categories
- 2) It creates associations (between stimuli)
- 3) It offers to the brain the chance to "fill in" the picture of a situation with the slightest fragments.



## How are unconscious biases developed?

An individual may assume that by not being a racist or homophobic, they are, also, free of unconscious biases and stereotypes towards specific social groups. It is widely accepted, however, that, first of all, every person has unconscious bias<sup>7</sup> and, secondly, that they can affect us without even realising it.

Unconscious biases are inherent, simply because our brain functions in a way of quick stimuli associations and with subsequent generalisations in order to interpret the world around us in favour of survival, even if the stimulus, objectively, is not a real danger.

As aforementioned, the natural inclination of the brain is to sort, classify and categorise information about the world around it, even with partial information, a fact which gradually leads to the development of unconscious biases, which we “carry” with us in every aspect of our lives. Let’s take a closer look to the factors which contribute to bias development:

### → *We tend to seek out (familiar) patterns*

It is in our human nature to seek sociability, to live within a group with which we share common characteristics and in which we feel secure. While trying to achieve this, in order to manage to integrate smoothly, most of the people follow social norms, whereas when the desired integration is achieved, they unconsciously connect with anything that seems familiar in order to maintain the safety of homogeneity.

### → *The brain’s tendency to create shortcuts*

The human brain consumes a great deal of energy while trying to process the multiple and diverse information it receives. In an effort to save energy during the process of interpreting multiple stimuli and for it to be effective towards stimuli which often require fast decision making, the brain has developed a mechanism of creating cognitive shortcuts. Cognitive shortcuts, because they work based on association between at least two events/stimuli but also because of repeatability, take place in a fast and unconscious way. For instance, the green colour has been associated with “moving ahead” because of the multiple times we have come across traffic lights, and the red colour is associated with “danger” and “attention”.

### → *The power of our experiences and social influence*

Unconscious biases that our brain generates are affected by our experiences, even though sometimes they may not be a direct result of a personal encounter but mostly stemming from observation and social influence. The way a social system works, the prevailing broader culture, the mass media depictions and the upbringing can contribute to the associations that people make for members of other social groups, with whom they believe they don’t have much in common.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer Raymond (2013), *Most of us are biased*. Available [here](#)



## ► “If I have unconscious bias, that makes me a racist?”

The term bias “describes the inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group resulting in unfair treatment and benefits for others. This includes conscious and unconscious beliefs usually grounded in social norms and stereotypes, and results in upholding and replicating structural inequities”<sup>8</sup>.

Since an early age, our brain with its inherent function of developing bias (which can be positive or negative towards people, groups, situations, etc.) interprets somehow the complicated world around it and, thus, responds instantly to arising needs.

According to the Office of Diversity and Inclusion of Harvard University, unconscious biases are “snap judgements we make about people and situations based upon years of subconscious socialisation”<sup>9</sup>.

Unconscious bias should not be identified with racism, homophobia, sexism, etc., neither with discrimination, since it occurs on an unconscious level, whereas aforementioned negative biases are conscious. Specifically, racism is “the prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed toward someone of a different race, based on the belief that one’s own race is superior”<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> ENAR (2022), *Structural Racism in the Labour Market*, p. 6. Available [here](#)

<sup>9</sup> Harvard T.H. Chan, School of Public Health–Office of Diversity and Inclusion (2022), *Understanding Unconscious Bias*. Available [here](#)

<sup>10</sup> ENAR (2022), *Structural Racism in the Labour Market*, p. 8.

Examples of unconscious bias’ expressions in the workplace may be a female employee being interrupted during a meeting while she is talking or when a manager tends to favour people with a similar educational profile to their own without realising it.

Another example concerns a lot women and their value in the workplace, resulting in a better treatment of a man in the job interview phase or even later, with a promotion, despite the fact that this could be happening on an entire unconscious level, even for women at decision making positions.





# Types of unconscious bias

As previously mentioned, the human brain has always developed biases. However, thanks to the development of technology, it is only in recent years that more systematic efforts have been made by researchers and scientists, in order to develop tools that allow us to observe and record the mental processes and content that are out of the conscious awareness and control.

In the year 1998, three scientists, Dr. Tony Greenwald (Washington University), Dr. Mahzarin Banaji (Harvard University), and Dr. Brian Nosek (Virginia University) created the “Project Implicit”.

In the framework of this project, the test for unconscious bias (in essence the brain’s associations), the Implicit Association Test (IAT) was born, aiming to “measure the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good words, bad words) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy)”<sup>11</sup>.

By analysing multiple statistical data obtained from this test, Dr. Mahzarin Banaji, along with other scientists<sup>12</sup>, observed, among other things, that even people without conscious biases displayed results that indicated an unconscious inclination (positive bias) towards the social group they belonged to or the “dominant” social group, whereas people from minority groups often seem to have internalised the prevailing negative biases for their social group.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> From the Project’s website. Available [here](#)

<sup>12</sup> Kirsten N. Morehouse & Mahzarin R. Banaji, “The Science of Implicit Race Bias: Evidence from the Implicit Association Test”, *Daedalus* (2024). Available [here](#)

<sup>13</sup> National Academy of Sciences. *Member Directory-Mahzarin R. Banaji*. Available [here](#)

According to a categorisation by the Harvard University’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion<sup>14</sup>, there are 6 common types of unconscious biases in the workplace:

## Affinity bias

The tendency to gravitate towards people who remind us of ourselves, either because of characteristics or because of common experiences, etc. In the workplace, affinity bias could be hidden behind a favourable inclination towards a candidate with the same educational background to us.

## Attribution bias

The tendency to attribute our failures to external factors, and our own success to our skills. Yet, when it comes to other people, usually this tendency is reversed, meaning that the success of others is attributed to their network and good luck, whereas their failures to incompetence. Moreover, this type of bias is responsible for attributing the mistaken/inappropriate behaviour of a person to their bad personality or attitude.

## Confirmation bias

The tendency to show more confidence to pieces of information that support our pre-existing views (for a person/group) and instead ignore data that contradict them. In the phase of job interviews, if a candidate is likeable to the hiring manager, then they could receive a very easy final question to confirm the predefined choice of the person opposite them.



<sup>14</sup> Harvard T.C. Chan, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, School of Public Health (2022), *Understanding Unconscious Bias*. Available [here](#)



### Cultural bias

The tendency to interpret people of other cultures based on ours, without examining their actual skills or performance. Research<sup>15</sup> has shown that candidates who are part of the dominant culture tend to find themselves at an advantageous position in the job interview phase.

### Halo effect

The tendency to form a general impression about an individual on the basis of a single one characteristic. In a work environment, this bias could manifest itself in the face of a new person joining a team, who did very well on a project from the very first days of work. Based on this performance, from that moment onwards this newly arrived person is considered a “talent” in the eyes of their manager regardless of results on other projects.

### Horn effect

It is the exact opposite of the Halo effect, namely the tendency to form a negative impression about a person based on a single negative attribute. An example regarding the workplace could be that a manager’s opinion of an employee could be negatively affected by the fact that the employee may have a “sloppy” appearance.

## Are there any coping mechanisms?

The absence of negative unconscious bias would signal that our societies have fundamentally changed, in a direction that does not seem familiar at all, considering the data so far. However, because our brain’s innate function ultimately aims at protecting us from external dangers, and since our societies are still riddled with well-established stereotypes and prejudices that constantly are reproduced, unconscious biases keep dominating the thinking of modern humans as well. But this should not mean we should rest on our laurels when in fact this brain function affects our decision making in important areas of our lives and leads to discrimination as well as to less productive work environments. Especially in an era when building inclusive environments is becoming an increasingly urgent need and a goal of multiple action fields. Thus, how could we learn to address the unconscious biases that all individuals have?

The Psychology professors Calvin K. Lai, Allison L. Skinner-Dorkenoo and Erin Cooley studied 17 ways aimed to change implicit racial bias and assessed how successful they were<sup>16</sup>.

The most successful ones appealed to emotion or were experiential, including one of the following:

- Introduction of “positive” Black role models and “negative” white ones
- Concrete steps to overcome bias
- Repeated association of black-positive stimuli and white-negative ones
- Reinforcement of intercultural interaction

The less successful methods were the ones emphasising on the significance of equality for the society, and those which encouraged people to try seeing things from the perspective of a Black individual.

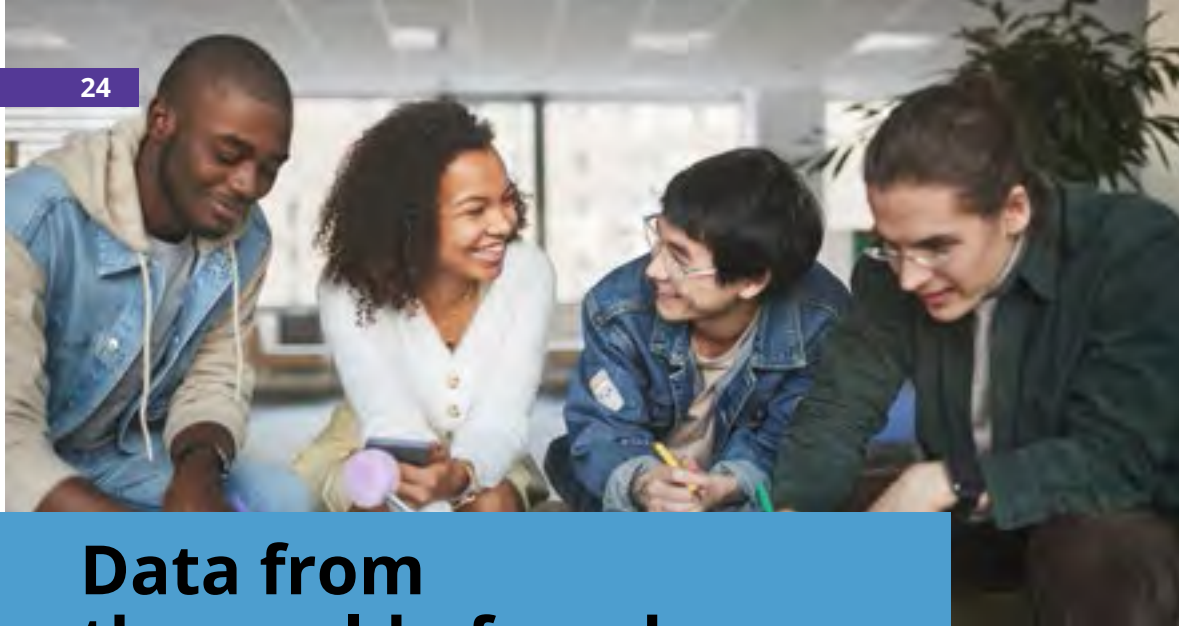
In a second round of experiments, it was found that unconscious biases can be altered instantly by the aforementioned interventions, but their effect does not last more than a few days. An additional finding was that those interventions do not alter the conscious racial bias. However, researchers point out other surveys which indicate longer lasting effects when interventions are introduced in childhood.

A report in 2018 by Britain’s Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)<sup>17</sup>, based on 18 publications on the importance of trainings on unconscious bias, shows that training programmes are effective in raising awareness, but the behavioural change is short-term.

<sup>16</sup> Lai, C.K., Skinner-Dorkenoo, A.L., Cooley, E. Et al., Reducing Implicit Racial Preferences: II. Intervention Effectiveness Across Time. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 145, 1001-1016 Accessed Mar 22, 2024. Available [here](#)

<sup>17</sup> Doyin Atewologun, Tinu Cornish and Fatima Tresh (2018), *Unconscious bias training: An assessment of the evidence for effectiveness*. Available [here](#)

<sup>16</sup> Dave Cornell and Peer, Reviewed by Chris Drew (2024), 12 *Cultural Bias Examples*. Available [here](#)



## Data from the world of work

In a globalised labour market characterised by high mobility as well as intensive production and creation needs, the recruitment procedure, most often, moves in such pace, that first impressions and quick, intuitive decisions are what significantly determine the outcome of the procedure for candidates and work environments. As a result, inequalities and homogeneity are perpetuated, and the development of substantially diverse workplaces is obstructed.

In this section, we will make an effort to identify ways in which unconscious biases can infiltrate into the different stages of the recruitment process without us being aware, whereas actually we aim to create an equitable and inclusive environment.

For instance, the Mercer's Global Report (2020)<sup>18</sup> showed that the higher a person moves up on the hierarchy ladder, the fewer women they will encounter.



©Desola Lanre Ologun / unsplash

<sup>18</sup> Mercer (2020), *When Women Thrive 2020 global report*. Available [here](#)

In 2019, Deloitte company (2019)<sup>19</sup> surveyed 3,000 individuals working in large organisations about their experience in the workplace and their perceptions of prevalence and manifestation of bias.

Here are some findings:

- 39% said they experience bias frequently - at least once a month
- 83% characterised the bias(es) experienced and/or witnessed in the workplace as subtle and indirect, or as a microaggression<sup>20</sup>
- 68% stated that witnessing or experiencing bias themselves has had a negative impact on their performance.

Researchers Patrick M. Kline, Evan K. Rose & Christopher R. Walters, in 2021, as part of their survey<sup>21</sup>, sent out 80,000 fake job applications, for entry-level positions to 100 different companies in the USA. One of the findings that stood out was that CVs sounding "black" or with Afro-American names received less callbacks than the ones with "white" sounding names. White candidates, when put in comparison to black candidates, had a 9% increased response. Another significant finding was that almost half of the overall discrimination against black candidates was attributed to 20% of the organisations.

Similarly, from November 2016 to December 2017, British Academy researchers<sup>22</sup> in London conducted an experiment during which they created fake CVs and cover letters and they sent them over to 3,200 job ads (job ads concerned both manual and office jobs – including software engineers, marketing officers, chefs and store assistants).

All CVs shared the same competences and work experience, and the sole exception was the different origin implied by certain names.

It was found that "candidates" with common Pakistani and Nigerian names had to make 60% more job applications, to receive the same number of callbacks as "candidates" with British-sounding names.

<sup>19</sup> Deloitte (2019), *The bias barrier - Allyship, inclusion, and everyday behaviours*. Available [here](#)

<sup>20</sup> "Commonly occurring, brief, verbal or nonverbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate derogatory attitudes or notions toward a different "other"" (APA Dictionary of Psychology). Available [here](#)

<sup>21</sup> Patrick M. Kline, Evan K. Rose & Christopher R. Walters (2021), *Systemic Discrimination Among Large U.S. Employers*. Available [here](#)

<sup>22</sup> Haroon Siddique (2019), *Minority ethnic Britons face "shocking" job discrimination*. Available [here](#)



# Unconscious bias in recruitment



## 1. Job advert creation

Even from the first stage of recruitment, the advertisement creation for a job opening, it is very likely that one person's unconscious biases will infiltrate while writing the text, if they are not aware of them, and especially when this procedure requires speed or when a template is used.

Unconscious biases are expressed through the words we choose to use and which, depending on the meaning they carry in each society and era, may inadvertently attract or discourage a particular part of the population or with certain social identities (for example, gender, age group or origin), resulting in homogeneity, among candidates who have made an application for a specific job advertisement.

Moreover, educational requirements, when they are not actually necessary for someone to perform a specific job or when specific years of experience are required, those criteria could exclude people or, in general, social groups, who for various reasons might not have had the opportunity to study (due to their socio-economic situation or a migrant profile) or do not possess a recognised educational title or are people of young age (in case of the work experience requirement).



## 2. Sourcing

Organisations, in an attempt to balance the widened pool of eligible candidates and the workload of a CVs pile, may often choose to post a job advertisement on their own website or on their LinkedIn page, and possibly on one more job adverts' platform.

With this tactic of using few communication channels, it is very likely that the candidates who eventually apply for a job position form a homogeneous group, and other potential candidates with equally important and appropriate competences are excluded due to the fact that they are not on LinkedIn or are not aware of a specific platform.



## 3. CVs selection

Through the CV screening, the first contact takes place between recruiters and candidates. Everyone who has ever been involved in this procedure probably recognises that, very often, scarce time is spent in this phase compared to the volume of CVs received, and considering the significance of this phase. In addition, this procedure, in large companies, can be carried out by an AI software.

Studies<sup>23</sup> have shown that a professional could spend on average 6-7 seconds on each CV, despite the fact that this is a very crucial stage and it is where most unconscious biases may be hidden.

For example, a person in charge of the recruitment procedure, who receives and reviews numerous CVs, may unconsciously prefer CVs of candidates whose names sound familiar (common origin), possibly ignoring people who are qualified but of a different cultural background.

In cases where a software is used for the first selection of CVs, the reproduction of biases is, also, a very likely risk because people from minority groups may be "blindly" excluded for specific sectors and roles. For instance, a software can learn to consider as "successful" CVs those that have common elements with those of the existing employees.

In a workplace, such as a technical or technological company, one or more social groups, e.g. women, could traditionally be underrepresented, and, therefore, with the use of a software which reproduces biases, they will remain underrepresented.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed (2024), *How Long Do Hiring Managers Look at a Resume?*. Available [here](#)



#### 4. Job Interview

In the job interview phase, bias could affect the behaviour and, of course, the integrity of the procedure, resulting in an assessment, which instead of valuing competences and soft skills, ends up being based mainly on that “intuitive” element that is often mentioned about how a candidate “clicked with us” or “seemed to fit into the team”. This usually maintains homogeneity in a group, which often prevents an organisation’s progress, with less innovation and problem solving, or prevents it from being in line with the market’s needs. It could, also, mean that, possibly, not the right choice for the role has been made.

An expression of unconscious bias in this phase could be the extra effort an interviewer can put so that a specific candidate feels comfortable based on the belief that they share common characteristics (affinity bias); or based on the assumption that an individual is capable for a role, the interviewer is collecting information through questions which confirm this bias (confirmation bias) and pushing away information which contradict it.



#### 5. Onboarding

Having moved on with the recruitment of a person, next follows a training and induction period in the organisation and the work circumstances, the so-called “Onboarding”. This phase is crucial for the smooth integration of a new employee in the workplace but also for their own experience the workplace.



For instance, unless a proper onboarding procedure takes place, unconscious bias, which could dominate the mind of some colleagues when there is a newcomer, from a minority group, would be behind the assumption that that person was recruited in the context of a Corporate Social Responsibility programme, totally ignoring the newcomer’s competences and work experience. The resulting ambience would be possibly perceived by the newcomer with various negative consequences.







## Summing up...

The brain's natural inclination is to sort, classify and categorise information about the world around it, even with partial information, a fact which gradually leads to the development of unconscious biases and eventually affects the way we function in different aspects of our life.

Taking for granted that unconscious biases are inherent, we can still try to alter them and minimise their influence in our daily lives. Such a thing could be difficult enough or even short-term due to our constant interaction with the outside world and the social norms, however if we wish to change how our societies perceive people who live in these systems, we, foremost, must change the way we perceive others by staying open to new experiences, new cultures and by collecting as many information as possible on the "Other" to build step by step the associations that unite us all.

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