Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry into the Government's plans for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5

Girlguiding response - December 2016

**About Girlguiding**

1. Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with over 500,000 members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls’ confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (5–7 years), Brownies (7–10 years), Guides (10–14 years) and The Senior Section (14–25 years). Registered Charity No 306016. [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)

**About Girlguiding’s evidence**

1. Girlguiding’s submission focuses on evidence from the Girls’ Attitudes Surveys and the personal testimony of young members. We also reference other research where outlined.
2. The Girls’ Attitudes Survey canvasses the opinions of over 1,600 girls and young women from age 7 to 21, inside and outside guiding across the UK each year. This is the largest survey of its kind and is a platform for girls’ voices on the issues that matter to them. For more information and data see [www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes)
3. Girlguiding’s response is also influenced by the Girls Matter campaign – Girlguiding’s member-led campaign that profiles girls' and young women's calls for change. For more information see <http://new.girlguiding.org.uk/report>

**Overview**

*“Speaking as a young woman today, I understand the hardship young girls face due to gender inequality. We are under-represented in so many areas of life that young girls are growing up believing they can never be an engineer, or a scientist, or work in roles of leadership. However, we are starting to see this change.*

*We are still so far away from equal rights for girls and boys, women and men, but I know we can get there. To do this we should be encouraging and supporting girls to step forward and be who they want to be, do what they want to do and love how they want to live.”*

**Maddie, Girlguiding Advocate**

1. Girlguiding welcomes the Women and Equalities Committee’s inquiry into the Government's plans for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 – to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. We recognise the work of the Rt. Hon. Justine Greening in her role as international development Minister in securing a commitment to gender equality and believe this is a critical addition. Our most recent Girls’ Attitudes Survey shows that 70% of girls aged 11 to 21 in the UK think sexism is so widespread it affects most areas of their lives. There is clearly a long way to go before all girls and women enjoy equality and feel empowered in this country.
2. To achieve all the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5, gender equality must be central. Our evidence around gender equality therefore can also help to inform the implementation of other goals such as:
   1. Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages - promote mental health and well-being; and By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes
   2. Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning - provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
   3. Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all - By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value
   4. Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries - By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
   5. Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies - Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere; and Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

**SDG5 TARGETS**

1. The targets to meet SDG 5 are all important indicators of gender equality. Girlguiding’s evidence provides insight in to the ways in which many of them are far from achieved and what girls and young women say they want to see change this. In particular this response focuses on:
   1. End all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere
   2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls
   3. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership
   4. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights
   5. Enhance the use of enabling technology to promote the empowerment of women
   6. Adopt and strengthen sound policies and legislation for the promotion of gender equality
2. Key to tackling all the SDG goals is the need for social and cultural change so that girls’ voices are heard, their contributions valued and gender is no longer a barrier to achieving their aspirations. We believe that all government departments play a crucial role in securing girls and women’s empowerment. However, our young members tell us that their empowerment requires actions in particular from the Department for Education and its role in providing a curriculum that meets their needs as girls growing up today through PSHE and sex and relationship education; and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to address the unfair, sexist and stereotypical representation of gender in the media.
3. We support the need for a clear strategy of how SDG5 will be achieved and agree with the International Development Committee’s report in June 2016 that this should be embedded in departmental strategies to be both an effective and efficient way to progress their respective areas of work they have a responsibility for.

**The committee’s questions**

1. **How well understood are the Goals in the UK and what more can be done to promote them?** It is our impression that charities working in international development are more familiar with the goals than those with a UK focus. A charity sector conference for those operating in the UK on the SDGs may help youth charities, like Girlguiding, in particular to understand the goals more thoroughly.
2. **What more do individual government departments need to do to prioritise Goal 5 targets?  What practical steps need to be taken?** Our Girls Matter campaign is a girl-led campaign which was the result on consultation with over 2,500 young members on what they wanted to change to improve the lives of girls and young women. They told us they wanted:
   1. All Government departments to listen to girls and young women, take them seriously and make sure their voices count. They should regularly consult with girls and young women from all backgrounds and ensure their views are considered in policy decisions that affect their lives
   2. The Department for Education to ensure that all schools take a zero-tolerance approach to sexual bullying and harassment. That they promise to introduce guidance that all schools must use to tackle this issue.
   3. The Department for Education to call on all schools to teach body confidence and gender equality. That they promise to make Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) compulsory and urge all schools to include lessons on body confidence and gender equality.
   4. The Department for International Development to make girls’ rights a priority in the UK’s approach to international development. That they promise to focus on equality for girls, including advocating for girls’ rights to be central to the post-2015 sustainability development agenda.
   5. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport to work with partners to stop children’s exposure to harmful sexualised content in mainstream media. That they promise to bring print and online media in line with the principles of the broadcast watershed.
   6. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport to empower girls and young women to speak out and be heard on the impact of media sexism and stereotyping.
   7. The Department for Education to modernise Sex and Relationship Education so all young people can make informal decisions and stay safe. That they promise to make Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) compulsory in all schools and update the curriculum to include health relationships, sexual consent, online safety, violence against women and girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships.
   8. A guarantee from all political parties that they will take steps to ensure women are equally represented in Parliament by 2020.
3. **Which targets under Goal 5 are the most difficult to measure progress against? How can the Government ensure that the hard to measure targets are not neglected?** Currently sexual harassment in schools cannot be adequately monitored because there is no duty on schools to record and report this. This makes the target to ‘Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls’ difficult to measure progress against with regard to sexual harassment. Implementing such a duty would support implementation of SDG 5 by more effectively supporting schools to tackle violence against women and girls.
4. **Which targets/issues under Goal 5 have been hardest to make progress on and why? Which require a greater emphasis?** The target to ‘Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights’ has been difficult to progress in the UK because the provision of high quality relationship and sex education that covers relevant topics important to young people today is not a mandatory requirement. For example, in 2015 of girls aged 11 to 16, we found that 84% said they thought they should learn about all their choices if pregnant, yet only 53% had learnt about this. 82% thought they learn about consent but only 49% had. 84% thought they should learn about healthy relationships but only 45% had. Non-statutory status means that not all young people in the UK receive the information and support the need to stay safe and make informed choices about sex and relationships. The consequences of this have been comprehensively outlined in previous responses to recent Government consultations, for example we refer the Committee to Girlguiding’s submission to the committee’s inquiry into on sexual harassment in schools. Girlguiding’s young members have called for the Government to make PSHE a statutory subject including high quality mandatory SRE.
5. **What role does the private and third sector have to play in achieving Goal 5 in the UK and how effectively are these roles supported by the Government?** The third sector can play a key role in achieving goal 5. For example, Girlguiding’s programme supports girls and young women to develop leadership skills, confidence and raise their aspirations, which supports the target to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership. We have responded to the particular issues girls face in today’s society by developing peer education programmes delivered by young women around ‘body confidence called ‘Free Being Me’ to challenge beauty myths and build girls confidence; and ‘Think Resilient’ to support girls mental wellbeing. The third sector also has an important role to play in representing the views of their beneficiaries, as well as supporting their beneficiaries to speak out themselves, with regard to policy and social change that would benefit them and promote their interests. This activity is likely to directly contribute to supporting the Government to make good decisions to ‘Adopt and strengthen sound policies and legislation for the promotion of gender equality’.

*“As a Girlguiding Advocate, we know how important it is to empower all girls and young women. The implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 means this can be done. It means we can tackle the discrimination and inequality girls’ face, which continues to diminish their confidence and stops them from being able to have the same opportunities as boys.*

*If the UK government is committed to equality and eradicating discrimination they need to take this forward and give a positive message to girls and young women that they will be given a better chance and will be supported to achieve their dreams.”*

**Imogen, Girlguiding Advocate Imogen, Girlguiding Advocate**

**Participation, power and leadership**

1. Women continue to be underrepresented equally in Parliament and in other positions of decision-making power. Girls tell us this negatively impacts on their aspirations and what they feel is open to them in the future as girls growing up in the UK.
2. Our 2016 Girls’ Attitudes Survey showed that 63% if girls aged 11 to 21 want to be leaders in their chosen job and that girls have a diversity of aspirations for the futures. Yet 45% of girls say that when they hear there aren’t enough women in leadership positions, it makes them feel they have less of a chance of succeeding.
3. Our 2014 Girls’ Attitudes Survey showed that 67% of girls and young women think there aren’t enough female MPs and that all political parties should make sure there are more female MPs.

**Gender stereotyping**

1. From early on in life girls have already begun to see parts of the world as not for them. Our 2015 Survey showed that 57% of girls aged just 7 to 10 thought boys are better at building things and 29% thought boys are better at science than girls. At the same time, around 60% thought girls were better at looking after children, cooking and being caring – roles that in our society are often under-valued and low paid. Yet girls are clear they want this to change – in 2016, 78% of girls aged 11 to 21 said they wanted to live in a world without gender stereotypes.

**Education**

1. Despite girls performing well overall in education, there are still areas where girls face barriers and gender stereotypes that impacts on their choices. This includes how girls and young women learn about the role of women in history and in different academic subjects. For example, our 2016 Survey revealed that only 31% of girls aged 11 to 21 say they’ve learnt about the role of female scientists at school as well male scientists.
2. We also know that girls continue to face barriers when choosing subjects in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM). In 2016 more than half of girls aged 11 to 21 said they thought these subjects had an image of being more for boys than for girls (52%). Just under half (45%) of girls aged 11 to 21 told us there are too few female role models working in related careers and 31% said they didn’t know what jobs they could do with these subjects. For more than a third (35%) there are too few women teaching these subjects.

**The workplace**

1. Girls’ perceptions of the world of work still include concerns around gender inequality. In 2016 the vast majority of girls aged 7 to 10 (86%) said they thought girls and boys have the same chance of succeeding in their chosen job. However, this dramatically falls for older girls with only 54% of girls aged 11 to 16 agreeing with this, and even fewer aged 17 to 21 (35%). More than half of girls aged 11 to 21 (55%) think employers prefer men over women and only 39% of girls think having children will not have an impact on their careers. There must be more effort to address these issues to support and encourage girls to have the chance to fully particulate in our economy.

**Wellbeing, self-esteem and body confidence**

1. Our annual research has shown that girls’ wellbeing is going in the wrong direction and that without positive wellbeing, girls and young women’s aspirations and ability to thrive will be hampered. Girls tell us they are under persistent pressures around how they look, how well they do at school and in their relationships. Over the past five years, the number of girls who say they are unhappy has nearly doubled from 9% in 2011 to 16% in 2016. A significant number of girls say they don’t feel like they are good enough (69% of girls aged 7 to 21), and 80% of girls from as young as 7 to aged 21 say they feel anxious often or sometimes.
2. Girls also tell us they are under huge pressure around their appearance – in 2016 47% of girls aged 11 to 21 say the way they look holds them back most of the time. Girls as young as 7 tell us they feel embarrassed by the way they look (40%) and that people make them feel that how they look is the most important thing about them (36%). Girls’ body confidence significantly impacts their lives and fear around their bodies being criticised stops girls from doing the things they want to such as taking part in sport (41%), speaking up in class (39%) or going to certain places (36%).

**Sexual harassment in school**

1. Not only do girls face gender stereotyping and assumptions about what subjects they should do at school negatively impacting on their aspirations, the prevalence and scale of sexual harassment in schools has a huge impact on their ability to learn in a safe environment. Our research shows that 59% of girls and young women aged 13 to 21 had experienced some form of sexual harassment at school or college. The devastating impact of this includes girls restricting what they do. For example, anxiety about experiencing sexual harassment stops girls from wearing what they want (55%), feeling confident in themselves (39%) and speaking in class (25%).

**Sex and relationships**

1. Central to girls’ happiness, wellbeing and ability to thrive, is their experience of healthy relationships. Yet girls tell us that they aren’t learning what they need to learn to prepare them in life at school. In 2015 of girls aged 11 to 16, we found that 84% said they thought they should learn about all their choices if pregnant, yet only 53% had learnt about this. 82% thought they learn about consent but only 49% had. 84% thought they should learn about violence against women and girls but only 47% had. 84% thought they should learn about healthy relationships but only 45% had; and 68% thought they should learn about pornography but only 25% said they had.

**Violence against Women and Girls**

1. Sexual harassment, abuse and threats to their personal safety continues to affect many girls lives. In 2016, 79% of girls aged 11 to 21 said they don’t feel safe when they‘re out on their own most of the time or sometimes, and for the majority of these girls (67%), they respond to this by changing their own behaviour. We also found that 63% of girls’ have experienced being intimidated by groups of boys, 50% had experienced unwanted sexual comments directed at them and 50% had experienced street harassment. Around half of these girls feel they have to change their own behaviour to avoid experiencing these examples of harassment.
2. In 2015 our Survey revealed that some young women were in coercive and controlling relationships - of girls aged 13 to 21, 18% said their boy/girlfriend had checked up on them on their phone; 14% had controlled who they spend time with; and 13% of young women aged 17 to 21 felt frightened of their partner.

**Online abuse**

1. We know that for the majority of young people, participating online offers important ways in which they can get information, make connections with friends and develop their sense of identity and participate in social life. Yet some girls are facing abuse and harassment when they do - in 2016 half of girls said they think sexism is worse online than offline and in 2014, 66% of girls aged 11 to 21 said they often or sometimes see or experience sexism online.
2. In 2016, 23% of girls aged 11 to 21 said they’d had threatening things said about them on social media; 21% had sexist comments made to them; and 16% of girls aged 7 to 10 had someone they didn’t know contacting them. Half of girls (49%) aged 11 to 21 say fear of online abuse makes them feel less free to share their view online, and 15% of girls aged 13 to 21 say they’ve been trolled for expressing their views. For a small but significant number of girls (7% aged 16 to 21) they’ve been threatened with sexual violence. Girls are facing widespread harassment, abuse and sexism online and 80% of girls aged 11 to 21 in 2016 say more should be done to tackle sexism and abuse online.

**Pornography**

1. In 2015, 60% of girls aged 11 to 21 had seen boys their age viewing pornography on mobile phone devises or tablets. By contrast, only 27% of girls said they see girls their age viewing pornography. The majority of girls think that children can access too much sexualised content online (71%). This year, 20% of girls aged 13 to 21 had unwanted pornographic imagers or film sent to them, and of girls aged only 7 to 10, 16% had seen rude images that upset them.
2. The majority of girls and young women feel pornography has a strongly negative effect on their lives, on gender equality and that access to it is damaging young people’s views of sexual relationships. In our 2015 Survey, we found that the majority of girls aged 13 to 21 think online pornography is damaging young people’s views of what sexual relationships are like (73%). Half (53%) of young women aged 17 to 21 said they think girls are coerced into sex acts because boys are copying what they see in pornography. In 2016 the overwhelming majority of girls and young women aged 13 to 21 (75%) told us they are supportive of age-verification controls for online pornography.

**Women and the media**

1. Girls tell us they feel the way women are represented in the media is too often stereotypical, overly sexualised and not diverse enough. In 2016, 75% of girls aged 11 to 21 said women are too often shown as sex objects in the media and online – and for 61% of these girls, this makes them feel disempowered.
2. In 2014, 55% of girls felt there are not enough positive female role models in the media and the portrayal of women and girls impacted on how they felt about themselves. Of girls aged 11-21, 37% felt they should try to look more like the pictures of girls they see; 33% felt more likely to be successful if they look like celebrities and 45% felt ashamed of the way they look because they are not like girls in the media/adverts (14% aged 7-10). Of girls aged 13-21 49% said the portrayal of women restricts what they aspire to. This year we found 66% of girls aged 11-21 compare themselves to celebrities.

For more information please contact Zoe Palmer, Research and Pubic Affairs Manager on [zoe.palmer@girlguiding.org.uk](mailto:zoe.palmer@girlguiding.org.uk) or call 020 7834 6242 ext. 2065