

Negotiating for race equality: recruitment and selection

Why is it vital to challenge racism in recruitment and selection procedures?

Because it will

- ensure **Black** workers have equal access to career progression, good quality jobs and pay
- help address deep-rooted discrimination and reduce unfair treatment, including stereotyping
- recruit new members and activists, of benefit to all the membership and contributing to the growth and future strength of your branch
- place public authorities under a proactive duty to identify and publicise opportunities to promote equality and diversity.

No workplace where racism is allowed to flourish can ever be effectively organised. That's why anti-racist work must be part of all branch activity.

It is unlawful to discriminate in recruitment or employment because of race. Race is defined as: race or colour; nationality (including citizenship); ethnic or national origins. More information: '[Equality and diversity guide](#)'

Ethnicity employment gap

[Analysis of the 2021 England and Wales census by the Office for National Statistics](#) found that unemployment was highest for people who identified within "Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African" and also some "Mixed or multiple ethnic groups". People who identified as "African", "Caribbean", "White and Black African", and "White and Black Caribbean" had unemployment percentages just over two times higher than that of the whole population.

Analysis by the TUC published in May 2023 revealed that "the unemployment rate for Black, minority and ethnic (BME) workers is currently more than double (2.2 times) that of white workers. The unemployment rate for BME women is 8.1%, compared to 2.8% for white women, worse now than in 2008."

The TUC stress that "BME workers faced a higher unemployment rate before the pandemic, were hit harder during the pandemic itself, and are now seeing a slower recovery than white workers. The pandemic has widened the gap in unemployment rates between white and BME workers to the widest it's been since 2008."

How can branches make recruitment and selection in the workplace fairer?

- Has the recruitment policy and procedure been equality proofed? Is the trade union involved in the equality impact assessment? Does the policy and procedure impact adversely on Black workers even unintentionally?

More information: [UNISON's model equality impact assessment flowchart](#)

- Does the composition of the workforce reflect the local population and if not, is any monitoring being carried out to determine whether Black people are applying for job vacancies or promotions? If not, where is the evidence? Are Black people employed across all grades or disproportionately at lower grades or on more insecure contracts?

More information: [From Acas 'Equality, diversity and inclusion: Monitoring forms and surveys'](#)

- Have you undertaken a staff or members' survey about experiences of the recruitment and selection process? What action has been taken where discrimination has been found? Collecting this sort of information will not only provide a measure for progress but can indicate where barriers exist and therefore where action needs to be taken.

More information: [UNISON's 'Negotiating fair recruitment and selection procedures'](#) covering

specific issues from advertising through to interviews, internal appointments, references and much more.

- Have all staff involved in the recruitment and selection process been trained to operate it fairly and non-discriminately? Is this training mandatory? Does it include unconscious bias training?

[Acas](#) explains how we think can depend on our life experiences and sometimes we have beliefs and views about other people that might not be right or reasonable. This is known as '**unconscious bias**' or '**implicit bias**' and includes when a person thinks:

- better of someone because they believe they're alike
- less of someone because that person is different to them, for example, they might be of a different race, religion or age.

- If the employer uses a recruitment agency, are they confident that they also comply fully with the equality laws and the employer's equality and diversity policies and procedures?
- Will the employer agree to avoid the use of all forms of casual work and zero-hours contracts? Do they recognise the barriers they produce for job seekers, and are they aware of the potential problems for their organisation created by offering insecure work?

The [Work Foundation's analysis](#) shows that Black workers are 2.7 times more likely than white workers to be on zero-hour contracts; and those from multiple/mixed backgrounds are 2.3 times more likely than white workers.

TUC research has also shown that [Black men are almost twice as likely to be in insecure work as white men – and Black women are more likely to be insecure work compared to white women. More than twice as many Black workers are now in insecure work - that's a 132% rise since 2011.](#)

- Are all posts advertised as open to flexible working to encourage more Black people, particularly Black women, to apply for work, remain in work and progress? Has a review been carried out of where vacant posts are advertised?

['Who Cares?'](#) research from Business in the Community (BITC) shows that "Black, Asian, Mixed Race and other ethnically diverse" people were significantly more likely than others not to have applied for a job or promotion, or to have considered leaving or actually left a job, because of challenges combining paid work and care.

- How are training opportunities advertised to staff? Is it open access? Is the training and development programme truly accessible to all employees equally?
- How are promotions, secondments or acting up and career progression opportunities made known to staff? Is it open access or does it depend on who you know?
- When considering fair recruitment and selection procedures, does the employer include internships and apprenticeships?
- Does the employer operate a graduate recruitment programme? What is the take-up of Black applicants and those successful in being recruited?
- If Black people are shown to experience disadvantage during recruitment exercises and continue to be under-represented in the workforce despite measures undertaken, will the employer consider positive action in the recruitment and selection process?

Under employment legislation, employers cannot positively discriminate in favour of Black workers. However, **positive action** is allowed. It means taking specific steps to improve equality in the workplace, by meeting the particular needs of Black workers, lessening a disadvantage they might experience or increasing their participation in a particular activity. More information: [Equality and Human Rights Commission 'What is positive action in the workplace?'](#)