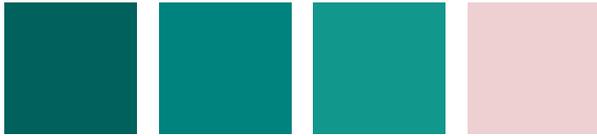
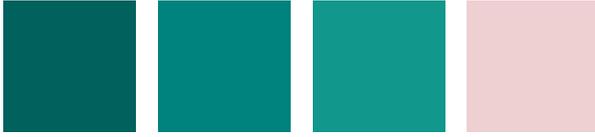


# Guidance for employers on taking an anti-racist approach to tackling women's workplace inequality



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## 1. Key messages

**Racism** and **sexism** are the causes of the inequality and discrimination that **racially minoritised** women face in their everyday lives. Employers are key actors in society and play an important role in shaping values, communities and the economy. You have the ability to take meaningful action and create change for women in your organisation and in the communities you operate in. You also have a responsibility to do so.

This guidance focuses on taking an anti-racist approach to tackling women's inequality at work. It speaks about the experiences of racially minoritised women both in and out of the workplace, and how racial and gender inequality combine to create barriers that set women up to fail.

Racism and sexism at work are issues for you and your organisation irrespective of the diversity of your workforce. Women face inequality and discrimination in the labour market every day. It's time to act.

These key messages are where you should begin. You can include them in staff training, or an all-staff communication about your commitment to challenge and prevent racism and sexism in the workplace, or as a starting point to think about what you need to do in your organisation.

### What you can do

1. You can show leadership by openly acknowledging that employers have a responsibility to challenge racism and sexism at work and communicating to staff the actions you will take to do this.
2. Racism in the workplace means that women may not feel safe disclosing that they've experienced racism and/or sexism at work. You can build trust by seeking honest feedback and reflections from staff, and demonstrating that you are taking action.
3. You can also build trust by showing that you're willing to be accountable. This means following through with meaningful actions and progress updates on your work to deliver equality for women in your organisation.

4. Action to tackle incidents of sexist and racist discrimination is only part of the solution. You should use this guidance to take an anti-racist approach to reviewing your workplace culture and employment practices. This means proactively identifying and tackling racism. This involves taking an objective view of your organisation and being honest about the challenges you face.
5. You can work with experts on racial and gender inequality to support progress towards your goals as you improve and expand action in your organisation.

## What you need to know about racism and sexism at work

6. Racist and sexist attitudes and behaviours, and biased employment policies and processes, combine to create intersectional inequalities for women in the workplace.
7. Just because you haven't received a report of racist and/or sexist behaviour or discrimination doesn't mean it hasn't happened in your workplace. A majority of racially minoritised women have experienced racism and/or sexism at work.
8. Racist or sexist bullying and harassment isn't just an isolated issue between two people but a part of a wider problem with workplace culture, and racial and gender inequality in the workplace.
9. Racism is embedded in workplace reporting systems, creating barriers to reporting. Most women won't report incidents of racism and/or sexism because they don't think their employer will take the matter seriously, or they fear a backlash for doing so.
10. Racially minoritised women still face deeply rooted prejudices and racism in their lives, which contributes to their inequality at work.

### Short-term actions

Change doesn't happen overnight. But with commitment and sustained effort you can create real change for women, and your organisation, and become a sector leader in equality, diversity and inclusion. In the short-term, you can achieve some quick wins by taking a few simple steps:

- **Start talking to racially minoritised women** in your organisation about their experiences of work. Listening to women's experiences is crucial, but it's important to be clear that listening is just your first step, and that you're focussed on creating solutions. You could

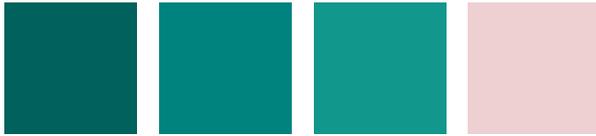
use an anonymous survey or convene a discussion group, or you could engage the services of experts on race and gender equality to facilitate this work in order to ensure participants' confidentiality. This will help build trust and confidence that you are committed to change. However, it's also important to consider the potential impact of such engagement on those women, and not to place the onus on them to find the solutions for you. There's more detail on this on [pages 19-20](#). Involvement is important, but taking action is your responsibility as an employer. This guidance will help you to do that.

- **Gather data on your workforce** to identify how different groups of women are represented in your organisation. If you aren't already gathering staff data that you can break down by gender and race (including data on learning and development and flexible working) you should start doing it. This will give you the building blocks you need to identify where to start.

**It's important to remember that data is not an end in itself. Some employers can become too focussed on this stage, leading to a delay in the work of culture and practice change. There's more information on how to use your data in our [Using data resource](#).**

- **If there are no racially minoritised women in your organisation, prioritise action on recruitment.** Some groups of people are underrepresented or not represented at all in many employers in Scotland. If this is the case in your organisation you can take positive action to tackle barriers and provide routes in. You can find out how in our [Level the playing field resource](#).
- **Share a message from leadership** that there is no place for racism in your workplaces. Make it clear in all-staff communications that you acknowledge that racism exists, you recognise racially minoritised women's inequality at work and you are committed to taking action to address it in your workplaces.

This will give you a strong foundation to build on and send a clear message that you are taking decisive action to advance racial and gender equality in your organisation. Make this commitment, and then follow through.



## 2. About this guidance

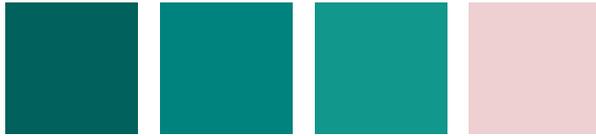
This guidance is for employers who want to take an anti-racist approach to tackling gender inequality in the workplace. It can be used alongside our **Close Your Pay Gap tool** for large companies who want to close their pay gap, and our **Think Business, Think Equality** resource for SMEs who want to improve diversity in their business.

Delivering workplace equality makes good business sense. Having fair and flexible working practices allows you to attract and retain the best talent, reduce recruitment and training costs, and makes your business more productive, more innovative, and more profitable. You'll also position your organisation as a leader on gender and racial equality and benefit from an enhanced organisational reputation.

The business case for gender equality is clear during economic recovery. Ensuring your new way of working takes account of the specific barriers faced by racially minoritised women in the workplace will also support your organisation's recovery. Making small changes to your employment practice can make a big difference to your people and your organisation.

This guidance sits alongside **additional quick-read resources** to support the action you take in your organisation:

- **Key messages**
- **Level the playing field**
- **Core actions for key people**
- **Capacity building for key roles**
- **Using data**
- **Action plan checklist**



### 3. Terminology

**This guidance is focused on how racism shapes women's experiences of work.**

It describes the inequalities and discrimination faced by particular groups of women because of the colour of their skin or other characteristics that are racialised.

**Race** is a social construct: this means that ideas of what constitutes whiteness or blackness are not rooted in biological reality, but are socially created. This doesn't mean that race doesn't exist – it does, but in a very different way from how many think it does. Race doesn't describe actual biological difference, but socially assigned difference. Ideas of racial difference underpin the power imbalance in society.

**Racialisation** is a complex social process through which groups of people are designated as being part of a particular race and treated differently and/or discriminated against as a result.<sup>1</sup> It's important to recognise that all people are racialised, however this impacts differently on specific groups. White people are racialised based on ideas of what it is to be white. The critical difference is, being white is associated with greater power and status than other racial groups. White people therefore don't experience inequality and discrimination as a result of racialisation, or racism.

There are many different terms used when talking about racially minoritised women. Some may use the term women of colour, Black and racialised women, or BME women (Black and minority ethnic). Others may use the term BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) or minority ethnic. **These terms are often used to describe discrimination on the bases of race and ethnicity.** Many women will identify with more with one term and feel less comfortable with others. Some will feel uncomfortable with any term. It's important to acknowledge this, and to recognise that women are not a homogenous group and women with different backgrounds and heritages have divergent and specific experiences of employment.

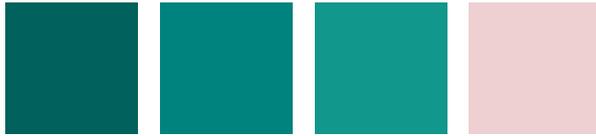
**This guidance will sometimes use the term racially minoritised women to denote how racism shapes those women's experiences of work, recognising that white women are differently racialised and have different experiences and outcomes as a result. However, it will more often simply use the term women.**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aclrc.com/racialization>

## Intersectionality

Employers should take an intersectional approach when considering and responding to the barriers experienced by women in the workplace. An intersectional approach recognises that women are not a homogenous group and do not experience inequality in the same way. Different groups of women experience multiple, intersecting inequalities and discriminations that overlap and combine to create different levels of inequality. For example, sexism, racism and **Islamophobia** together shape racially minoritised Muslim women's experiences of inequality and discrimination. In another example, Jewish women's experiences will be shaped by sexism and **antisemitism**.



## 4. What you need to know about women's inequality at work

The gender pay gap is now much more prominent in discussions around equality, diversity and inclusion, and many employers are taking action to tackle its causes. Women face a range of **gendered** barriers in entering and progressing in the workplace including:

- a lack of flexible working;
- disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care;
- biased and untransparent recruitment, development and progression practices;
- male-oriented workplace cultures;
- occupational segregation; and
- discrimination in pay and grading systems.

While these barriers are common to women in general, some women also have distinct experiences based on their race and gender. This is called **intersectional inequality** and describes the ways in which race and gender interact to shape women's experiences of employment, and their lives. For some groups of women, their experiences will also be shaped by their religion or belief.

### Example

- Racism means that Black women may experience racialised sexual harassment, because they are characterised as being 'more sexual' than white women.
- Racism and/or religious prejudice means that Sikh women may face comments, prejudice or bullying at work if they wear traditional clothing.
- Racism and/or Islamophobia means that Muslim women may be questioned by colleagues on whether they have a choice to wear hijab or not, because of a lack of understanding of Islamic practices.

*Note: these examples are not exhaustive and represent only a small number of ways in which women experience intersectional inequalities.*

Racism causes the deeply rooted prejudices and discriminations that racially minoritised people experience in their lives, which contributes to their inequality at work. For example, being in the minority in a majority-white country means they are routinely passed over for opportunities, as people are more likely to hire or promote someone who they see as 'like them', known as affinity bias. For women, these inequalities overlap to create an ever larger set of barriers that see them facing racist and sexist attitudes and behaviours, and employment policies and practice that sustain their inequality at work and in wider society.

Gender inequality means that women still have less power and status than men in the workplace; this power imbalance is even more acute for women who are racially minoritised. This creates an environment in which microaggressions are dismissed or minimised, in which women are told 'it wasn't meant that way', and in which they aren't believed. It's also why harassers are rarely held accountable and discrimination goes unaddressed.

As a result of women's inequality in the labour market, there were multiple gendered dimensions to Covid-19 job disruption. Women's unemployment rose twice as fast as men's at the start of the crisis; women shouldered the burden of the increase in childcare and care for adults and responsibility for home learning, making it more difficult to combine caring with paid work; and women accounted for the majority of key workers where they were underpaid, undervalued and under-protected. Black and racialised women were disproportionately impacted.

**Black and racialised women were:**

- more likely to work in a sector that was shut down,
- more likely to be in low-paid and insecure work which put them at increased risk of losing hours and earnings, and
- more likely to report rising financial precarity as a result of the crisis.

Recent political and civic campaigning against racism, most prominently represented by the Black Lives Matter movement, has raised public awareness of the inequalities faced by people who are racially minoritised. It is not enough to simply 'not be racist', organisations must take an anti-racist approach to create real change. An anti-racist approach means proactively identifying and tackling institutional racism. In other words, it is not about individual incidents of racism but rather recognising the structures, policies and practices in place that discriminate against, and disadvantage, racially minoritised people.

There's a growing business imperative to be visible in promoting racial equality within your organisation, so that employees, clients and service users, and other stakeholders understand that it's a priority.

## Racism at work

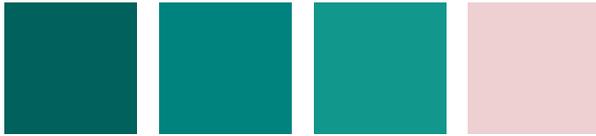
Research by Close the Gap found that almost three-quarters (72%) of racially minoritised women in Scotland have experienced racism, discrimination, racial prejudice and/or bias in the workplace<sup>2</sup>. Further findings include:

- More than half (52%) don't report these incidents as they don't think their employer will take the matter seriously, or they fear a backlash for doing so.
- Around half (49%) felt they had been overlooked for a job, promotion or development opportunity as a result of racism and gender inequality.
- Almost half (42%) had experienced racist and gendered bullying, harassment or victimisation in the workplace.
- Almost half (47%) had experienced racism, discrimination, racial prejudice, and/or bias in the job application process, while 41% reported that they had experienced this at a job interview.
- Almost two-thirds (62%) said that their caring roles have affected their ability to work or do their job.
- Fewer than half (42%) reported that their employer provides clear development opportunities.

By being a sector leader on anti-racism and gender equality you can attract and retain the best talent, making your organisation more productive, more innovative and more profitable. You'll also demonstrate to your workforce that you're committed to equality, diversity and inclusion, building trust and loyalty in your customer or service user base.

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<sup>2</sup>. Close the Gap (2019) *Still Not Visible: Research on Black and minority ethnic women's experiences of employment in Scotland*



## 5. What you can do

Many employers want to take action but may not be sure where to start. This section sets out your five key areas for action, and includes **guidance** and **practical actions** that you can take to increase the diversity of your workforce and support women in your organisation. By tackling racism and gender inequality together, you'll also be contributing towards greater equality for racially minoritised people and women more widely in your workplace. Taking an intersectional approach is necessary to advance equality for all groups that face discrimination.

### Creating your action plan

The key to creating positive change is developing your own action plan. You might want to start with the short-term actions on **pages 4-5** to build an understanding of what your priority areas are. However, these actions are intended as a starting point only. Only taking action in one area, or choosing simpler actions like including a statement encouraging different groups of women to apply in your job adverts isn't enough. You need to have a plan that **includes action from each of the key areas** and sets out what you plan to do and when, who will be responsible, and how you'll know if it's working. We can provide support to employers who want to create a bespoke action plan – **get in touch** for more information.



## 6. Demonstrate anti-racist leadership on gender equality and drive change

Strong leadership is critical to tackle racist and sexist workplace cultures. Including equality, diversity and inclusion as a key priority in your business strategy is one way to support this. You can position yourself as a sector leader by building anti-racism and equality, diversity and inclusion into senior leaders' responsibilities, creating a step change in driving action throughout your organisation.

The tone of your workplace culture is set from the very top. **The way senior leaders behave, and the behaviours they tolerate, is the strongest indicator of workplace culture.** Senior leaders taking a proactive and visible stance on anti-racism and gender equality is a necessary step. This can be demonstrated by communicating to your employees that sexism and racism are unacceptable, and publicly committing to action to tackle them in your organisation.

This shouldn't just be a one-off; you should issue regular communications to make it clear that it's an organisational priority. Sharing information on what steps you have taken is a good way to demonstrate transparency and accountability. This will help build confidence and trust among women in your organisation.

You can also include a section on your website, and/or in your annual gender pay gap information report, to tell your customers and clients about the action you are taking on gender and racial equality. This will send a clear and public message on your commitment to action and position you as a leader on equality and diversity.

It's your responsibility to act to tackle racism and gender inequality at work. The changes you make can make a real difference in the lives of women in your organisation and in the wider labour market. It's time to lead.

## The top three core actions for leadership on delivering equality, diversity and inclusion

### 1. Include an objective on anti-racism and tackling gender inequality in senior managers' performance management framework.

This is a practical and measurable action that will demonstrate leadership and organisational commitment on progressing gender equality and tackling racism and discrimination. It will also ensure managers are clear on what's expected of them and enable progress to be measured and managed. This is a particularly important action for boards who wish to ensure their Chief Executive Officer or equivalent is committed and accountable on progressing racial and gender equality in the organisation.

### 2. Set targets to demonstrate accountability.

You should set targets on tackling racism and gender inequality in the workplace, and measure progress against those targets annually. For example, an increase in the proportion of women from racially minoritised groups in senior roles, or in a particular type of job. You will find engagement with representative staff groups and organisations (for example trade unions), along with work on other areas in this guidance, useful to help identify targets that are realistic and achievable for your organisation.

### 3. Develop an anti-racist action plan on gender equality in your organisation.

The best way to ensure you can deliver on your objectives and targets for race and gender equality is to set them out as part of an action plan. An action plan will enable you to set a pathway towards greater equality, diversity and inclusion in your organisation, supporting long-term change.

[Download our action plan checklist.](#)



## 7. Understand and improve your workplace culture

Racism and sexism create and sustain workplace cultures that often don't feel inclusive to women. While there may not be any intention to exclude anyone, cultural norms at work can result in some people being put at a disadvantage, particularly when they are in a minority. This can manifest in some women being passed over for a promotion or development opportunity, which can make it more difficult for them to progress and leave them working below their skill level and unable to utilise their full talents.

### What is workplace culture?

Workplace culture can be difficult to define, but it's generally considered to be a combination of the processes, attitudes, values and behaviours that exist within a workplace, and that impact upon the organisation and its staff. The culture might be largely determined by expectations of management, or may have evolved over many years among staff, and is often accepted without question.

It's hard to 'see' workplace culture in your own business because you work in it every day and it just becomes the norm. Workplace culture has a significant impact on racism and sexism in a workplace, and how it is dealt with. It can create and sustain an environment in which racist and sexist comments are normalised, and in which women aren't believed if they report them. It's also why harassers are rarely held accountable.

This is why it's essential to take a step back for an objective view of the culture in your business. You need to be willing to be challenged and to honestly confront any issues you identify. Taking an anti-racist approach to improving workplace culture is critical to preventing and addressing racism and sexism and creating a safe and inclusive environment for your staff.

## What creates racist and sexist workplace cultures?

Racism and gender inequality both create the barriers faced by racially minoritised women in recruitment and promotion, training and development, and access to flexible work. These all contribute to workplace cultures that exclude and discriminate. Organisations that don't recognise this may be unintentionally creating an environment in which women feel that their skills and contributions aren't valued and are unable to progress in their career.

Workplace cultures can also include harmful behaviours which can be overt, but are also often subtle. This creates a hostile environment for women, sending a message that they're not valued and reducing their trust in their colleagues and their employer. For some women, this damages their mental health, which can mean higher levels of sickness absence. In some cases, women will leave the organisation because of a toxic workplace culture.

### Microaggressions

Microaggressions are the brief and everyday verbal and non-verbal behaviours, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudices. These can be racist, sexist or both, and can also reflect other prejudices, such as Islamophobia or homophobia. Whilst they are referred to as 'micro' that does not diminish the significant negative effect they can have on an employee's life and experience at work.

#### Examples of microaggressions experienced by racially minoritised women

- White British colleagues giving them a nickname or changing their name to something that is said to be 'easier to pronounce'.
- A colleague asking to touch a Black woman's hair.
- White colleagues treating her as though she is less intelligent than them.
- An employee making racist comments about the food their colleague has brought into workplace.
- A Muslim woman being asked by a colleague if she is forced to wear hijab.
- Stereotypical assumptions about the type of work or position she works in, for example presuming she is working in a lower grade job than she holds.

- Comments on their accent, for example a brown woman of Indian heritage who doesn't have a strong accent being told they "speak very well".
- Colleagues labelling a Black woman as "angry" when she is assertive in a meeting.

Microaggressions can happen both in an informal or social context as well as in formal spaces, such as staff meetings. Even where they are not motivated by malice, they can still be experienced as dehumanising and intimidating.

Microaggressions are a form of racism. Where they go unchallenged, or employees' experiences of them are minimised, this sends a strong signal to women that they don't matter. When women are told they "shouldn't take it seriously", that "it's just a joke" or "I didn't mean it like that" it provides tacit consent to the use of racialised language and other microaggressions. Failings in grievance or other reporting processes mean that racially minoritised women will often not report microaggressions, because they won't be taken seriously and nothing will happen as a result.

Microaggressions add up to create a toxic workplace culture. The problem of racism at work doesn't always involve a formal complaint or a tribunal claim. More often the gradual impact of toxic environments sees employers losing talent and trust because microaggressions aren't being tackled.

### Indirect exclusion

This is reflected in the failure to consider the diversity of employees' needs and preferences in relation to particular events, for example ordering a team lunch without checking if anyone may require halal, kosher or vegetarian options, or booking a venue for a work event that doesn't have prayer facilities. It's critical to ask your employees about their requirements in situations like this – this is a simple step and should be a standard part of your processes.

### Ineffective handling of reports of discrimination and harassment

Institutional racism embedded in reporting processes results in discrimination and harassment in the workplace being under-reported, often because women don't feel safe to report, or don't think it'll make any difference. Women report having a lack of confidence in reporting procedures, feel their complaint will be minimised or that there will be no action will be taken. If their manager or colleagues don't speak up if

they witness racial discrimination, harassment or microaggressions this signals that racism is tolerated in the workplace. Racism means that women are often penalised for making a complaint, affecting their job and/or their relationship with colleagues.

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion policies have an implementation gap**

Most organisations have a policy setting out a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, but often these have no real impact on workplace culture. Culture change can only be created through tangible and consistent action.

### **Racism going unchallenged**

Many organisations set out clear standards of behaviour expected of staff, but without consequences for racist behaviour and discrimination these have little or no impact. Women often don't report racism at work because they think there's no point in doing so as nothing will change.

### **A lack of, or ineffective, equality, diversity and inclusion training**

While many organisations deliver training on equality, diversity and inclusion, it can have little impact on workplace culture and practice and may be viewed as a box-ticking exercise. Training often focuses on a description of equality law, however it rarely includes capacity building on racism and sexism, or the inequalities experienced by other protected groups, specifically.

Delivering a short generalised session on equality is not an effective use of resources. It's important that your employees and senior leaders are able to face up to racism and sexism in their organisation and understand how both individual behaviours and organisational culture can cause and sustain inequality and disadvantage. Organisations with expertise in race and gender may be able to provide support to ensure you are delivering high quality, good value equality training in your organisation.

Good quality training is important, but it's not on its own an effective measure to promote equality, diversity and inclusion. It must be part of wider programme of action to address racism and sexism in the workplace, including discrimination and bias.

There's more information on dealing with microaggressions on [page 21](#).

## What you can do

Taking steps to create an anti-racist and inclusive workplace culture will help tackle sexism and racism, and enable all staff to perform to the best of their ability. This is good for the workforce and good for business. There are three core actions you can take.

### 1. Engage with women from racially minoritised groups in your workforce, and with organisations that represent them, to better understand the problems and solutions in your business.

It's easy to think that racism and sexism doesn't happen in your business. You may never have had an employee report them to you. However, an absence of reports doesn't mean it isn't happening.

Racism and sexism embedded in workplace cultures make it extremely challenging for women to raise their experiences of discrimination and harassment at work. This is because many employers assume that racism in the workplace is not a problem in their organisation. You should create space for open and frank discussion so that women are able to report incidents and raise concerns, and commit to taking action to address them.

Open engagement with women, and with organisations that represent them, is an important first step in building confidence among staff that you're prepared to look honestly at your workplace culture and are committed to change.

#### However, there are some considerations you must be mindful of in engagement work:

- Don't place the onus on racially minoritised women to solve the problem for you. Tackling prejudice and inequality in the workplace is your responsibility as an employer. Women shouldn't be expected to tackle the issues that impact them. The purpose of engagement is to provide a space for women to share their experiences if they wish to, and for you to take these into consideration in developing action in your organisation.
- When women participate in work on equality, for example as a member of an employee network or similar, this often results in them having to take on extra unpaid labour on top of their job to do this. How you deal with this and reward their effort is critical, for example you can set aside protected time for them to participate in work connected to a network and adjust their workload to reflect this.
- Engagement work is valuable if you ensure it has genuine influence on the action you take in your organisation. Engagement work that doesn't lead to change damages the trust that women have in your organisation.

- You may have staff equality networks in your organisation. Networks are only useful if they have the power, influence and resource to create change in an organisation. If they don't, there's a risk that they may be viewed as tokenistic, rather than doing something substantive.
- You may have a very small number of women from minority ethnic groups in your organisation, or possibly only one. In this case, engagement would place an intense focus on them, which may not be welcome. It's important to balance this with your aim to include their perspective. It would be helpful in this case to engage with experts on race equality for support on how to proceed.

Listening to women's experiences of racism and sexism and how these intersect is crucial, but it's important to be clear that listening is just your first step, and that you're focussed on creating solutions. The women who participated in Close the Gap's research spoke of their frustration at being asked by employers about their experiences, only for nothing to happen as a result. You should build trust by following through on your commitments.

## **2. Ensure there's a clear and objective process in place for reporting racial and gender discrimination and/or harassment.**

Having a clear and effective reporting process is key to creating a safe working environment and tackling racism and sexism at work. Equally important is that women have trust in the process, so that they have confidence that their complaints will be taken seriously. This can be supported by regular communications from leadership that makes clear what racism looks like the workplace, and that there is no place for this in your organisation. Setting clear expectations on staff behaviour will also support those tasked with handling reports of discrimination and harassment.

## **3. Build capacity in staff handling complaints to enable them to better understand racially minoritised women's experiences of discrimination and harassment.**

Capacity should be built in staff tasked with handling complaints of discrimination and harassment. It's particularly important that staff understand the intersections between gender and race, including microaggressions, racism and sexism and how to identify this in the workplace.

Bringing in gender- and race-competent external expertise can be particularly effective, and ensures that the organisational focus is targeted and that best practice is integrated into your approach.

**[Download our action plan checklist.](#)**

## Microaggressions

How you deal with microaggressions matters. Raising awareness of racism and sexism in the workplace, and what microaggressions look like, will help colleagues to better understand their impact and can help prevent microaggressions from happening in the first place. However, your process for dealing with reports of racial discrimination and/or harassment should also take account of microaggressions. It should include a mechanism for recording them: including explicit reference to microaggressions can help prevent them from being normalised and minimised.

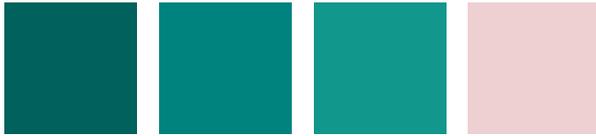
You should also ensure all employees are well informed on reporting processes. Often the only time information on these processes is shared with employees is when they first start with an employer, or when a new policy is introduced. If a woman experiences microaggressions regularly in your organisation this sends a message that it's accepted and nothing will be done about it. This will prevent her from reporting, regardless of whether she was initially informed of your reporting process. You should regularly raise awareness about reporting mechanisms, for example through all-employee communications, as a way to show that microaggressions and other forms of racism are taken seriously, and to encourage reporting.

You should be prepared to investigate incidents of microaggressions in the same way as you would any other complaint of bullying or discrimination. You should ensure that managers and other employees who may be responsible for dealing with reports have a clear understanding of microaggressions and how they can be tackled in the workplace.

However, tackling racism in the reporting process is not the only response. You shouldn't wait for a complaint to be raised before taking action. Being proactive and taking wider steps to tackle racism and sexism in the workplace can also help to address microaggressions. This is what anti-racist action is.

The cumulative and ongoing impact of microaggressions may be just as damaging to an individual as more overt racist bullying or harassment. If you're committed to being anti-racist it's critical that microaggressions do not go unaddressed in your workplace.

There's more information on microaggressions on [pages 16-18](#).



## 8. Tackle racism and improve gender equality and diversity in your recruitment & promotion practices

Stereotypical attitudes about racially minoritised women still influence recruitment and promotion decisions, whether consciously or not. Women also face pay discrimination and may be appointed on lower pay than a male comparator. Recruitment and promotion mistakes can be costly, and recruiting the wrong people can lead to increased staff turnover, reduced productivity and lower staff morale.

### What creates inequality in recruitment and promotion?

Women face a range of barriers in securing employment and gaining promotion, driven by explicit and implicit behaviours and attitudes within organisations, which are underpinned by racism, racial prejudice and sexism. These influence decisions that are made throughout the recruitment and promotion process that disadvantage women, especially those who are racially minoritised. This is exacerbated by recruitment and promotion practice that is not based on clear, objective and transparent processes, which allows bias to creep in and sets women up to fail.

### Racism may be present at all stages of your organisation's process:

#### Role advertisements

The language and pictures used in advertisements sends a clear message about who is seen as suitable for the role, for example pictures that only show white people, or men. This may discourage talented women from applying to work for your organisation.

#### Applications

There's evidence that some people may discount C.V.s or applications from women for particular roles, and/or people with 'foreign-sounding names'. This can be enabled if your organisation doesn't have a structured interview selection procedure, such as a standard matrix for scoring applications.

## Interviews

Racism means that racially minoritised women candidates often face prejudice at interview due to the colour of their skin. Hiring managers, and other staff, may make assumptions about an individual's English language skills based on their name or accent, despite that individual being fluent. This is a particular issue for migrant women, for example a first generation migrant Sikh woman whose first language isn't English, but who speaks English well, may still be penalised at interview because of an interviewer's prejudice. This presents a significant barrier to employment for particular groups of women.

## Appointments

Prejudice and assumptions made during interviews influence appointment decisions. If your organisation doesn't have a transparent decision-making process, where reasons for appointing or rejecting candidates aren't recorded, this can prevent a woman from being appointed even where she is the best candidate. Also, recruitment panels that aren't racially diverse may be less likely to appoint a black or brown woman.

## Post interview

Women who are unsuccessful at interview may receive non-specific or unclear feedback that fails to help them identify how they can develop to improve their chances in future.

## What you can do

There are three core actions you can take to build an anti-racist approach to recruitment and promotion:

### 1. Standardise your application process.

This involves:

- using anonymised applications for shortlisting,
- having a job description and person specification for all roles,
- scoring applications against standardised criteria only.

### 2. Equality-proof your interview process.

This means:

- ensuring women and people from racially minoritised groups are appropriately represented on interview panels where possible;
- asking all candidates the same questions, based on the job description and person specification;

- ensure questions aren't potentially discriminatory, for example,
  - asking whether a woman has or intends to have children,
  - asking a question about a woman's hijab,
  - asking where a woman is 'originally' from,
- scoring interviews against standardised criteria only, and
- keeping a record of decisions.

### **3. Build capacity in key people on equality and anti-racism in recruitment.**

Support staff involved in hiring decisions to understand how racism and sexism manifest in recruitment and promotion, and their role in creating change. This will help ensure your new equality-proofed process is put into practice consistently.

Key people in your organisation may include:

- Staff in your HR team
- Hiring managers
- Decision-makers on pay

**[Download our action plan checklist.](#)**

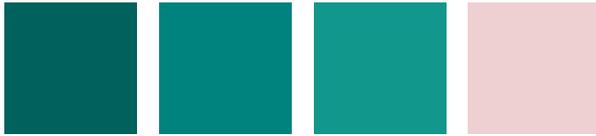
Taking an anti-racist, gender-sensitive approach to recruitment and promotion processes will help to create a diverse workforce and will mean that you don't miss out on women's skills and talent. Increased workforce diversity – at all levels – drives diversity of thought, greater productivity and innovation. Your organisation will also be better able to develop products and services that meet the needs of everyone.

## Level the playing field

The law says that if you have identified that certain groups are underrepresented within a particular role or area within your business, you can take targeted action to help address this. This doesn't mean giving someone an unfair advantage. It's mitigating the disadvantage caused by racism and sexism, to put them on a level playing field with their counterparts. Actions to level the playing field:

- Add a statement to your job adverts saying you particularly encourage applications from women from racially minoritised groups.
- Use images of different groups of women in your adverts.
- Don't just use standard recruitment websites for your external vacancies. Advertise through recruitment sites or organisations which target women and minority groups, for example Equate Scotland's Career Hub, and the Scottish Minority Ethnic Women's Network.
- Offer pre-interview information or training sessions for potential applicants to learn about your business and the skills required for the vacant post. This can include sessions targeted specifically at women from racially minoritised groups.
- Offer work shadowing opportunities and/or internships which challenge stereotyping. For example, engineering and construction placements for young Black women.
- Provide induction training for women returners whose family related career breaks may mean recent work experience is limited.

**[Download our full Level the playing field resource.](#)**



## 9. Ensure learning and development are accessible to all

Persistent gender inequality means that women have less access to both formal and informal training and development in the workplace, and racism compounds this. Men in operational and senior roles are more likely to access training, particularly the type of training that leads to increased pay or promotion. If this is happening in your organisation, you can't be sure you're developing the right talent or making the best use of your resources.

### How does racism create barriers to accessing learning and development?

There are a range of barriers that make it harder for women to access training and development opportunities. Racism means that these are more acute for racially minoritised women. It's important to understand how and where this manifests in your organisation.

#### Racial prejudice and discrimination

Staff who make decisions regarding access to learning and development opportunities may make racial and gendered assumptions about some women. For example, making biased assumptions about English language fluency because of a woman's name or her accent. This may make them less likely to select her for a training opportunity.

#### Untransparent access & informal networks

Often learning and development opportunities are discussed in informal networks and settings, from which many women are routinely excluded. Opportunities are not always communicated widely through formal staff communication channels. This can lead to small groups of the same people, often white male employees, having preferential access to training and development opportunities. Where line managers have discretion over decisions on access to training, there's further scope for bias to creep in.

## Occupational segregation – low paid work

Due to the combination of racism and sexism, racially minoritised women are over-represented in the group of workers least likely to be offered learning and development opportunities in the workplace – part-time, low-paid women. As a result, they're more likely than white women to be in in-work poverty. Part-time, low-paid women are also the most likely to be over-qualified for their job. This is one factor behind the glass ceiling, that prevents women from accessing more senior roles and therefore making the most of their skills and talents.

## Occupational segregation – the glass ceiling

Racism drives the underrepresentation of particular groups of women in senior roles where they would have more access to development opportunities. When women are trapped in jobs for which they are over-qualified it prevents them from making the most of their skills and talents. It also limits their visibility in the workplace and means they are more likely to be passed over for promotion. Racist and sexist stereotypes about women's suitability for leadership also create a barrier to their progression.

## When learning and development takes place

One reason part-time workers are least likely to access learning and development is that opportunities are often scheduled to align with full-time hours. In some cases, staff are asked to undertake required training in their own time. Many women report finding it difficult to access training opportunities that they cannot complete during their work hours as they have greater responsibility for unpaid care

## Allocation of work

Women are less likely to be assigned high profile projects that facilitate development and progression both through the work itself and by exposing employees to more senior and specialist staff. Women are more often given projects with lower visibility and impact, which holds back their progression, and this is a particular problem for racially minoritised women. This is a significant factor behind the glass ceiling.

## Qualifications gained in another country

Many employers are unwilling to accept qualifications that migrant women have gained in another country, or to support them to convert their qualification to one that's required. This means those women may have to retrain and/or work in jobs that are below their skill level, which is a loss of talent to employers.

## What you can do

There are three core actions you should take to advance equality for racially minoritised women in training and development:

### 1. Ensure you have a transparent process for accessing learning and development.

It's a quick and easy step to make sure learning and development opportunities are communicated to all staff through a formal process. You should also build capacity in staff involved in decision-making around learning and development so they understand the barriers created by racism and sexism and how they can take an anti-racist approach to their own practice to create change.

### 2. Offer a broader range of learning and development opportunities.

Offering a wide variety of development opportunities makes it easier for your people to access the right progression pathway for them and for your organisation. You should consider:

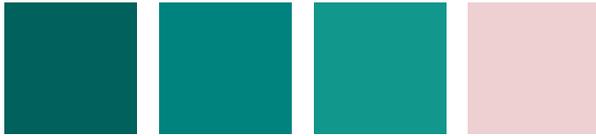
- formal face-to-face training,
- online courses,
- supporting staff attendance at seminars, conferences and professional networking events,
- good quality, gender- and race-sensitive mentoring,
- role shadowing,
- supporting staff to study for a work-related formal qualification, or to convert their current qualification.

It's important not to fall into the trap of the **deficit approach**. This is characterised by training offerings that focus on 'improving women's confidence'. **This assumes the issue is with the women, and not with racism and sexism and how they cause unequal access to learning and development.** You should value women's talent and skills and enable them to access learning and development that allows them to fulfil their potential.

### **3. Provide opportunities that are accessible to employees who work part-time or flexibly in another way.**

You should look at how development can be scheduled to accommodate part-time and flexible workers, and employees who may not be office-based. Remote working offers a great opportunity to widen access and do development differently. Having a wider range of learning and development options makes it easier to offer accessible opportunities – for example, it’s easy to plan part-time role shadowing. It’s important to ensure staff can participate during their working hours and aren’t expected to give up their own time in order to develop, as women are more likely to have constraints on their time outwith work because of their propensity to have caring roles.

**[Download our action plan checklist.](#)**



## 10. Create better quality flexible working for all

Women still do the vast majority of unpaid childcare and care for older or disabled people. Women are four times more likely to give up employment because of multiple caring responsibilities. A key reason for this is a lack of adequate flexible working options, which limits women's employment opportunities, and it means employers lose female talent.

### How does racism affect women's access to flexible work?

Barriers to accessing high quality flexible work affect all women, but are often more acute for racially minoritised women. Many organisations now offer flexible working, but in many cases this is limited to part-time hours. If this is the case in your own organisation, women are likely to experience barriers to progression and poorer wellbeing at work.

#### Childcare

Women do the vast majority of unpaid childcare, which impacts on their ability to participate in the labour market. Women find it difficult to plan work around childcare with women often forced to use sick leave and annual leave to manage their caring roles due to the inflexibility of both working practices and childcare provision. Balancing work with childcare is particularly challenging for women who are single parents, because of the need to find secure employment that fits with school and/or nursery hours.

Racially minoritised women overall are more likely to be in a single parent family than white women, which creates additional challenges in managing childcare. This increases inequality.

#### Unfair refusals of flexible working requests

Racism can manifest in decision making around flexible working requests. Some managers may be less likely to approve requests from black or brown women. It doesn't matter if this is conscious or unconscious: it is discriminatory, it holds women back in their careers and contributes to toxic workplace culture.

## Returning to work after maternity leave

Returning to work after having a child, or a career break to provide care, can be a difficult time for women if they are unable to access flexible working. Many women are unable to return to the same job or level if flexible and part-time options are confined to only certain roles or grades. By providing good quality flexible and part-time options at this time you can ensure the women in your organisation are able to move back into the workplace and make the most of their experience and abilities.

## Care for adults

While women in general have responsibility for the vast majority of care for older relatives, and other adult relatives who require support, there are strong cultural expectations in some minority ethnic communities that women should meet the care needs of family members.

## What you can do

Making flexible working work for women in your organisation starts with support from senior leaders. It helps if there is clear messaging from senior leaders, perhaps in the form of an all-staff communication setting out your organisation's commitment to flexible working. You could also nominate a senior leader to act as a flexible and part-time working champion.

The pandemic has seen a dramatic increase in the number of employers using a more flexible approach to work, giving workers greater autonomy over where, when and how they work. This is a great opportunity for your organisation to build on this to create a truly flexible culture.

There are three core actions you need to take to ensure racially minoritised women can access the benefits of flexible work in your organisation:

### **1. Offer part-time and other flexible options at all levels of your organisation.**

Supporting managers to be more creative around work and resource planning can help you to expand your flexible work offering. Clear messaging from senior leaders on your organisation's policy on flexible work will also help to drive change. You may wish to offer additional support with childcare. This could include an onsite creche, childcare allowance, and/or discounted childcare through a partnership with a local provider.

## **2. Deliver capacity building for staff who make decisions on flexible working.**

Line managers are important gatekeepers when it comes to flexible working requests and, as with any process, where there is discretion involved in decision-making on flexible working, there is scope for bias to creep in. You can check if there's an issue in particular departments or teams by gathering data on flexible working requests. For example, if you notice that racially minoritised women are less likely to have a flexible working request approved you should investigate this further.

It is important to ensure line managers with such discretion have the skills and capability to manage different modes of flexible working in their teams. Capacity should also be built in line managers on how discrimination, assumptions and stereotypes can affect decision making, and understanding how to ensure they treat all staff fairly.

## **3. Provide additional support to women returners.**

This may include:

- developing a women's returners programme,
- offering returnships,
- providing refresher training for women returners whose family-related career breaks may mean recent work experience is lacking.

You can monitor success by gathering data on the destination of women returning from maternity leave.

**[Download our action plan checklist.](#)**

# 11. Action plan checklist

## Demonstrate leadership and drive change

1. Include an objective on anti-racism and tackling gender inequality in senior managers' performance management framework.
2. Set targets to demonstrate accountability.
3. Develop an anti-racist action plan on gender equality in your organisation.

## Understand and improve your workplace culture

1. Engage with women from racially minoritised groups in your workforce, and with organisations that represent them, to better understand the problems and solutions in your business.
2. Ensure there's a clear and objective process in place for reporting racial and gender discrimination and/or harassment.
3. Build capacity in staff handling complaints to enable them to better understand racially minoritised women's experiences of discrimination and harassment.

## Tackle racism and improve gender equality and diversity in your recruitment & promotion practices

1. Standardise your application process.
2. Equality-proof your interview process.
3. Build capacity in key people on equality and anti-racism in recruitment.

## Ensure learning and development are accessible to all

1. Ensure you have a transparent process for accessing learning and development.
2. Offer a broader range of learning and development opportunities.
3. Provide opportunities that are accessible to employees who work part-time or flexibly in another way.

## Create better quality flexible working for all

1. Offer part-time and other flexible options at all levels of your organisation.
2. Deliver capacity building for staff who make decisions on flexible working.
3. Provide additional support to women returners.

## 12. Supporting resources

Key messages

Level the playing field

Core actions for key people

Capacity building for key roles

Using data

Action plan checklist

## 13. Links to useful resources on intersectionality

### Film

#### **What is intersectionality?**

A short and easy to follow guide to the concept of intersectionality, its origins and how it is applied in practice. This is useful to employers who want to use this guidance to develop anti-racist action on gender inequality in the workplace and want to understand how to take this work further.

### Podcast

#### **Intersectionality Matters! with Kimberlé Crenshaw**

Intersectionality Matters! is a podcast hosted by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and a leading scholar of critical race theory. This is useful for anyone, but particularly for key people, who wants to learn more about the concept of intersectionality, its impacts and solutions.

## 14. Glossary

### Anti-racism

Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and eliminating racism by changing systems, structures, policies and practices and attitudes, so that power is redistributed and shared equitably.

### Antisemitism

Antisemitism is defined as hostility or discrimination against Jews as a racial or religious group.

### Diversity

The recognition and valuing of difference, in its broadest sense. It's about creating a culture and practices that recognise, respect, value and harness difference for the benefit of employers, employees, clients, customers and service users.

### Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to perceived cultural differences between groups.

### Equality

Equality doesn't mean that women and men, or that racially minoritised women and white women, will become the same but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities won't depend on whether they are born male or female, Black and racialised or white. Equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of different groups are taken into consideration and reflected in social structures.

### Gender

A socially constructed set of norms, roles and relationships that is constituted in our social mores, laws, processes, and policies. It's time- and culture-specific and functions as a hierarchy.

### Gender sensitive

This term describes approaches, policies and practices which have been developed considering gender and don't have an unintended negative impact on women or gender equality as a result.

### Intersectionality

An intersectional approach recognises that women are not a homogenous group and do not experience inequality in the same way. Different groups of women experience multiple, intersecting discriminations, that overlap and combine to create different levels of inequality. For example, racially minoritised Muslim women's experiences of inequality and discrimination will be inflected by not only sexism but also racism and Islamophobia. In another example, Jewish women's experiences will be shaped by sexism and antisemitism.

### Islamophobia

Islamophobia is defined as hostility or discrimination towards Muslim people because of their religion.

## Minoritised

The process or act of making a person or group subordinate in status to a more dominant group or its members. This term recognises the structural nature of racism, and that people are actively minoritised by others rather than naturally existing as a minority.

## Occupational segregation

Refers to the clustering of men and women into different types of work (horizontal segregation) and into different levels of work (vertical segregation – also known as the ‘glass ceiling’).

## Race

Race refers to perceived biological difference linked with physical characteristics such as skin colour and hair texture.

## Racialisation

The process or act of designating a person as belong to a particular race. As with the term ‘minoritised’, this term recognises the structural nature of racism, and that people are actively racialised by others.

## Racism

Racism is prejudice or discrimination based on race. Racism describes covert (and sometimes implicit) and overt activity that places the importance and value of one group’s identity, appearance, culture or way of life above others.

## Sexism

Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender, which primarily impacts women and girls.

## 15. Acknowledgements

Over the course of the development of this guidance, Close the Gap worked with many women from racially minoritised communities and organisations that represent them. Their expertise and insight has been essential to our work and we would like to recognise and thank these women for contributing their time and energy. It would not have been possible without them.

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Abrdn

Amina, the Muslim Women's Resource Centre

Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights

Educational Institute of Scotland

Heriot Watt University

GMB Union

Royal College of Nursing Scotland

Scottish Parliament

Shetland Islands Council

Skills Development Scotland

Talat Yaqoob, Independent Consultant

Close the Gap works in Scotland on women's labour market participation. We work with policymakers, employers and unions to influence and enable action that will address the causes of women's inequality at work.

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Close the Gap

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