

2023

YEAR OF BLACK WORKERS

Establishing legacy to
generate change

Negotiating for race equality: bullying and harassment

Numerous surveys and research have shown that racial harassment and discrimination continue to exist throughout many workplaces. For example, according to [research published by the TUC in 2017](#), “more than a third (37%) of Black or minority ethnic (BME) workers have been bullied, abused or singled out at work.”

Why is it vital to challenge racist bullying and harassment in the workplace?

Because it will

- help address deep-rooted discrimination and reduce unfair treatment
- 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 activities to help address any inequality in the workplace.

Harassment and bullying at work have a devastating effect on **Black** workers, often leading to ill-health and work-related stress and affecting both their work performance and personal life.

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.

Harassment is where the harasser engages in unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating the worker's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. Bullying could be a form of harassment.

Harassment related to race is unlawful. Race is defined as: race or colour; nationality (including citizenship); ethnic or national origins. More information in UNISON's [Harassment at work](#) and [Tackling bullying at work](#)

How can branches help create a more open and inclusive workplace that treats all with dignity and respect?

- Educate yourselves. Make sure union reps have the knowledge and skills to notice, deal with and report racial harassment and bullying in the workplace.

Contact your regional education teams and / or LAOS to find out what training and resources are available to assist you with negotiating with your employer or promoting the issues in this leaflet with your members <https://learning.unison.org.uk>

- Listen to Black members; never dismiss or trivialise their lived experience of racism. Encourage members to communicate with branch officers and workplace reps. Make sure Black members are properly represented amongst reps and branch officers.

- Always take complaints seriously and deal with them effectively and promptly, making sure that the member feels supported. Are they aware of any wellbeing support available to them such as through the employee assistance programme? It is also crucial that confidentiality is respected at all times. Lack of confidentiality can prevent Black workers from reporting harassment and bullying.
- When representing members with race discrimination cases individually, refer these cases under UNISON's [race discrimination claims protocol](#).
- Raise awareness about bullying and harassment to all members, which can help them to recognise the problem when it occurs.
- Encourage members to keep records of any incidents and copies of any relevant documents or any medical help sought, and to identify any possible witnesses.
- Check on how the employer handles a complaint of harassment or bullying. Is it dealt with incompetently, unsympathetically, or unfairly? Is it handled less seriously than they would handle a comparable complaint by a white worker? Such treatment may also amount to further harassment or acts of direct discrimination or victimisation.
- Check on whether the alleged perpetrator is treated more favourably during any investigation, such as being provided with more information and earlier in the process? Does the employer suspend or transfer the member who complained of harassment, rather than the alleged perpetrator? If the employer punishes the member in any way for alleging harassment, this may be victimisation or further harassment.
- Push for all staff including managers to receive compulsory equality and diversity training that specifically includes anti-racism. This should be part of the induction process, with refresher courses available.
- Make sure there is an anti-harassment and bullying (dignity at work) policy in place. It should cover harassment by staff as well as from patients, service users, clients, visitors and contractors.
- Ask that the employer ensures that all staff are aware of the dignity at work policy, that they understand their responsibilities, know how to report racist behaviour witnessed or experienced, and know where to go for support.
- Ensure that your employer undertakes equality impact assessments for all its strategies, policies and procedures to ensure they promote inclusion and anti-racist principles, as well as zero tolerance of harassment and bullying.

More information in UNISON's [Model equality impact assessment flowchart](#)

- Are all patients, service users, clients, visitors and contractors aware of the anti-racism policy within the organisation and the consequences of not abiding by it? This can be through notices on premises and on websites, and in other communications with third parties that unlawful discriminatory behaviour is not acceptable.
- Highlight to the employer the need to consider how racist behaviour, discrimination and harassment may operate outside of the physical workplace environment, e.g. via online communications, in social media platforms, in online training and hybrid working practices, and how this should be addressed in the anti-racism policy.
- Don't be a bystander; if you witness someone's racist behaviour, 'call out' the problem and let them know that their words or actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Racism, in any form, should never be overlooked or excused, regardless of someone's position or title. Watch out for comments, nicknames, so-called 'banter', 'jokes' and abuse which are race specific or which would not be said to a white person.