



YEAR OF BLACK WORKERS

Establishing legacy to
generate change

Negotiating for race equality: insecure work

The widespread problem of insecure work disproportionately affecting Black workers

There is no single accepted definition of insecure work, but the term is generally used to refer to forms of work that are precarious, unprotected or low-paid. People on zero-hours contracts, agency workers without regular shifts, and workers who are self-employed but low paid are all defined as being in insecure work.

For many workers, these types of insecure work are a last resort rather than a positive choice. In 2021, an [estimated 6.2 million workers](#) (19.8% of the UK labour market) experienced severely insecure work with more than 1.5 million workers in part-time or temporary work reporting they had been unable to obtain full-time or permanent work.

Using ONS labour market data from 2000 to 2021, [the Work Foundation UK insecure work index](#) found that “Ethnic minority workers are more likely to be in severely insecure work than white workers (24% versus 19%). Men from ethnic minority backgrounds are 10 percentage points more likely to experience severely insecure work compared to white men (23% versus 13%)... Ethnic minority women (26%) are most likely to be in severely insecure work among all worker groups.”

TUC research has also shown that nearly [1 in 6 of Black men are likely to be in insecure work](#) and [Black women are twice as likely to be on zero-hours contracts as white men](#).

Why is it vital to challenge racism in the type of work contract offered?

Because

- [Black](#) workers in insecure work are more likely to be on low pay and be exploited, and less likely to have union representation
- insecure work has an impact on the health of [Black](#) workers with it being linked to depression, exhaustion, anxiety, and self-reported ill health
- insecure work has an impact on job satisfaction and the career progression of [Black](#) workers with lower levels of autonomy and limited access to training and development
- it will help address deep-rooted discrimination and reduce unfair treatment
- it will help recruit new members and activists, of benefit to all the membership and contributing to the growth and future strength of your branch
- it will place public authorities under a proactive duty to identify activities to help address any inequality in the workplace.

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.

How can branches help make sure employers provide more secure work for Black workers?

- Educate yourselves. Make sure union reps have the knowledge and skills to notice, deal with and report racial discrimination in the workplace. Make sure Black members are properly represented amongst reps and branch officers.

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>

When representing members with race discrimination cases individually, refer these cases under UNISON's [race discrimination claims protocol](#).

- Push for all staff including managers to receive mandatory equality and diversity training that specifically includes anti-racism. Ensure that your employer undertakes equality impact assessments for all its strategies, policies and procedures to ensure they promote inclusion and anti-racist principles.

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

- Urge the employer to undertake monitoring and collection of ethnicity data in the workforce so that they can identify areas where changes are required. Ensure monitoring data covers all staff so includes bank staff, agency workers, temporary staff and those on zero hours contracts. Are Black workers being disproportionately given these types of contracts? Ask for information for a set number of past years (such as 5) so that you can see if there are any trends.
- Is there a trade union agreement on the employment of temporary, fixed-term, casual and agency staff? Are there any instances where jobs of a similar role or grade are undertaken by staff on permanent contracts? Are there any instances where temporary contracts are automatically renewed?
- Double-check the real status of the zero hours or casual workers – does the relationship with their employer and any regularity of their work suggest a 'mutuality of obligation'? Are workers genuinely casual or should they really be employees and have full employment rights?

More information in UNISON's [Types of contracts and negotiating for more secure work](#)

- Are these workers receiving the same pay and conditions as permanent members of staff? Will the employer consider providing at least some of the same benefits as permanent employees, such as being able to use the disciplinary and grievance procedures, to receive paid sick leave, incremental progression and unsocial hours payments? Do these workers receive the same training opportunities and staff development as permanent staff?
- If genuine casual work is being offered, will the employer consider offering a choice of moving to a permanent employment contract (probably part-time, possibly fixed-term) or continuing on a casual contract, after a period of time working with the organisation?
- Check that the employer isn't misusing fixed-term contracts as an extended trial period or probationary period, so that staff can be easily dismissed if they don't like them.
- Will employers ensure rotas for casual or zero hours workers are organised well in advance with last-minute changes avoided wherever possible, so that workers can be better able to balance work life with domestic arrangements?
- If casual work is unavoidably cancelled at the last minute, is there some compensation for the worker? If the worker does not accept work offered by the employer, are they continued to be treated fairly and do not suffer any detriment?
- Work with senior management to champion diversity in the organisation, to properly scrutinise any concerns raised and to promote progress in working for real change.