

Race discrimination

The law on race discrimination

Race is one of 9 'protected characteristics' covered by discrimination law (Equality Act 2010).

Race discrimination includes direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Race discrimination can happen in any aspect of work. It can result from decisions made at work or from how people behave towards each other.

It could be a regular pattern of racist behaviour or a one-off incident. It can happen in the workplace, at work social events or when people are working remotely.

Terms used around race

The language around race changes over time. And terms that some people are comfortable with might be offensive to others. There's no one term that everyone will prefer.

In this advice, we use terms that are generally considered acceptable at the time of writing. We use the terms white, black and ethnic minority. We also refer to specific ethnic and national origins.

What race means by law

The Equality Act 2010 says that people must not be unfairly discriminated against because of:

- colour
- nationality
- ethnic or national origins

Someone's race is made up of a combination of these things. For example:

- white, British, of Polish national origin
- black, British, of African ethnic origin and Nigerian national origin

Colour

This means skin colour.

Hair colour is not covered by the law.

Nationality

This means someone's current nationality or citizenship, for example British. This can change. Someone's nationality might not be the same as where they were born.

Ethnic origin

Someone's ethnic origin is defined by the ethnic group they belong to.

An ethnic group is a group of people with a shared history and culture. The group may also share language, religion or geographical origin. People can belong to more than one ethnic group.

Whether an ethnic group is protected from discrimination can sometimes depend on it being recognised by the courts.

Examples of recognised ethnic groups include:

- Irish Travellers
- Jewish people
- Romany Gypsies

English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh people are all recognised as separate ethnic groups within the UK.

Not all ethnic groups have been recognised as protected by the courts, for example some Gypsy and Traveller groups.

National origin

National origin usually means where someone was born or where their parents are from. It can be different from nationality. For example someone could have Chinese national origin and British nationality.

Racial group

This is a term used in the Equality Act 2010 to describe any group of people who share one or more aspects of race.

Discrimination because of more than one aspect of race

Discrimination can happen because of one or more aspects of someone's race.

For example, someone born in the UK with Nigerian parents could be discriminated against because of any combination of:

- their black skin colour
- their British nationality
- their Nigerian national origin

Who is protected by race discrimination law

At work, the law protects the following people against discrimination:

- employees and workers
- contractors and self-employed people hired to personally do the work
- job applicants
- former employees – usually around providing references

Understanding more about discrimination

[Find out about the different types of race discrimination](#)

If you need more general discrimination advice, you can read [discrimination and the Equality Act 2010](#). This includes advice on employer responsibilities and on other protected characteristics.

Contact the Acas helpline

If you have any questions about race discrimination at work, you can [contact the Acas helpline](#).