

# Prohibiting Racial and Ethnic Discrimination in the Workplace



**WORLD Policy  
Analysis Center**

## NUMBERS TO NOTE

**24%**

*of countries globally have no protection from discrimination at work based on race/ethnicity*

**72%**

*of countries globally do not prohibit workplace harassment based on race/ethnicity*

**51%**

*of countries globally have no protection from retaliatory action for reporting workplace discrimination based on race/ethnicity*

## ABOUT THE DATA

This fact sheet presents findings from the following article:

Jody Heymann, Bijetri Bose, Willetta Waisath, Amy Raub, and Michael McCormack (2020). [Legislative Approaches to Non-Discrimination at Work: A Comparative Analysis Across 13 Groups in 193 Countries](#). *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*. DOI: 10.1108/EDI-10-2019-0259.

## Work and Race/Ethnicity

- Decent work is one of the most promising ways to lift families out of poverty and create better opportunities for future generations to end cycles of poverty.

- Yet racial and ethnic discrimination at work is a persistent problem in countries around the world that contributes to marginalization.

- In the U.S., the wage gap between black and white workers has increased since 2000. In 2018, controlling for education, age, gender, and region, black workers earned 27.5% less than white workers.
- In the United Kingdom, racial discrimination at work costs the economy an estimated £24 billion per year.
- In Canada, more than half of black Canadians reported ongoing experience

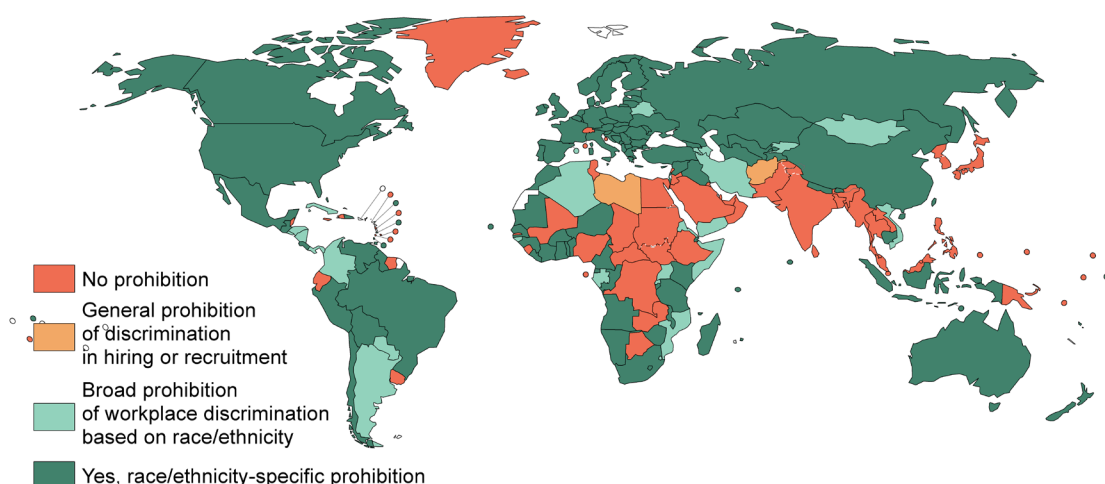
with racism, with workplace discrimination being frequently reported.

- Legal protection from discrimination at work is a critical first step to ensuring equal opportunities for economic success.

## Ensuring Protection from Discrimination at Work

- Despite persistent evidence of workplace discrimination, nearly a quarter of countries globally (24%) have no explicit legal prohibition of discrimination at work based on race/ethnicity.
- Protecting workers from racial and ethnic discrimination is not a question of resources. In fact, lower-income countries more frequently include explicit legal protections from discrimination at work based on race/ethnicity than high-income countries.

## Is discrimination in hiring or recruitment prohibited on the basis of race/ethnicity?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, *Discrimination at Work Database*, 2016



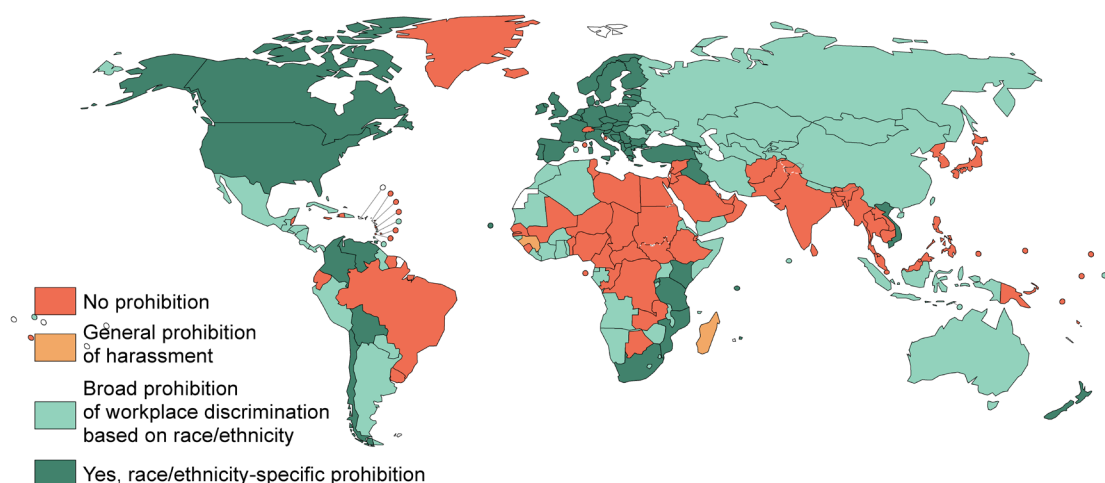
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- While 28% of high-income countries do not explicitly prohibit discrimination at work based on race/ethnicity, only 19% of low-income countries and 23% of middle-income countries lack protections.
  - While countries in all regions explicitly protect workers from discrimination at work based on race/ethnicity, there is significant regional variation.
    - Gaps in legal protection are greatest in South Asia (62% of countries), East Asia and the Pacific (60%), and the Middle East and North Africa (42%). By contrast, only 9% of countries in the Americas and in Europe and Central Asia, and 15% of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, fail to prohibit any form of workplace discrimination based on race/ethnicity.
  - Legal protections alone are not enough without effective enforcement mechanisms, as workers may not report discrimination due to fear of retaliatory action.
    - More than half of countries (51%) fail to provide any legal protection from retaliatory action for reporting workplace discrimination based on race/ethnicity.
- an interview when the person did not have a racial/ethnic majority-population name.
- Globally, nearly half of countries (46%) do not explicitly prohibit discrimination in hiring based on race/ethnicity.
  - Rigorous studies controlling for individual-level factors find persistent wage gaps for racial and ethnic minority workers in a range of countries.
    - Yet more than half of countries (55%) do not explicitly guarantee equal pay based on race/ethnicity.
  - Access to on-the-job training and equal opportunities for promotion are critical for enabling workers to advance in their careers, earn better wages, and have access to better work schedules.
    - However, 61% of countries do not have explicit protections from discrimination in vocational training based on race/ethnicity.
    - Likewise, 61% of countries do not have explicit protections from discrimination in promotions and/or demotions based on race/ethnicity.
  - Harassment in the workplace because of an individual's race/ethnicity significantly impacts workers' quality of life, mental health, and workplace performance.
    - 72% of countries do not explicitly prohibit workplace harassment based on race/ethnicity.

## Protections in Specific Areas

- In a review of 37 studies across 18 countries in Europe, the Americas, and Asia and the Pacific, 34 studies found that otherwise equivalent applicants were less likely to be contacted for

## Is discriminatory workplace harassment prohibited on the basis of race/ethnicity?



Source: WORLD Policy Analysis Center, *Discrimination at Work Database*, 2016



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## ABOUT THE METHODOLOGY

This analysis relies on a systematic review of original legislation and statutory guarantees extended to the private sector as of August 2016 for all 193 United Nations member states. It excludes instances where case law has extended the application of more general prohibitions to specific areas of work and to cover additional social groups. Updates of these data are currently in progress.

Further details on full methodology can be found at: <https://www.worldpolicycenter.org/topics/equal-rights-and-discrimination/methods>.

## ABOUT WORLD

The **WORLD Policy Analysis Center (WORLD)** aims to improve the quantity and quality of globally comparative data on policies affecting health, development, well-being, and equity.

With these data, **WORLD** informs policy debates; facilitates comparative studies of policy progress, feasibility, and effectiveness; and advances efforts to hold decision-makers accountable.

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