



# Talking about ethnic diversity **in the workplace**

A guide to foster understanding of cultural heritage and inclusion  
of ethnic minorities

2023 Edition

# Introduction

## First, thank you for being here

A bold conversation about ethnic minorities in the workplace has needed to happen for a very long time. Pushed by the #blacklivesmatter protests, that conversation is happening around the world now and like any good conversation needs some people to speak, others to listen and some collective efforts to make positive change happen.

These conversations are deeply personal and oftentimes emotional. As we engage in them with colleagues, clients and other stakeholders, it is important to frame the dialogue in a way that creates a safe, affirming space for all.

This is a global responsibility, a business responsibility, and everyone's responsibility.

**Fostering inclusive behaviours and empowering talented colleagues to succeed as they are, is not only the right thing to do, but is integral to how we work, add value for our clients, enhance our brand and grow our business.**

At AllianzGI we aim at nurturing a healthy workforce and looking at diversity from the perspectives of **gender identity, disability, ancestry and ethnicity, sexual orientation, age and social background**. And because we are all defined by more than just one of those traits, **we make sure to address our I&D challenges with an intersectional lens.**

This guide is meant to be a document\* to **inform you and provide you with some perspective that will make**

**you more confident in addressing conversations around inclusion of ethnic minorities in the workplace.**

No one marginalized group has ever successfully advocated on behalf of themselves alone to enact change. It takes informed and empowered allies to tip the scales, and we thank you for understanding that and seeking a way to better lend your voice.

We may not be able to change everything overnight, but wouldn't it be great if we all made a start?

We would like to make this guide a "living" resource, so please let us know any ways that we can make this more helpful. Feedback is always very welcome.

Allianz Global Investors Executive Committee

\*This guide provides guidance incorporating global leading practice, hence country specific requirements may vary and will need to be taken into consideration before using.

# Some tips around terminology

Terminology around race and ethnicity has evolved over time and varies significantly from country to country as a result of legal and cultural histories.

It is common to see the terms “race” and “ethnicity” used interchangeably, but generally speaking the meanings are distinct.

As far as the term “race” is concerned, in the biological and social sciences the consensus is clear: **race is a social construct, created to classify people on the arbitrary basis of skin colour** (black, white for instance) and other physical features (height, eyes, hair for instance). Today, scientists prefer to use the term “**ancestry**” to reflect the fact that **human variations do have a connection to the geographical origins of our ancestors** and unlike the term “race,” it focuses on **understanding how a person’s history unfolded, not how they fit into one category and not another**. Even if most scientists reject the concept of “race” as a biological concept, race exists, undeniably, as a social and political concept, and **racial identity and its impact on lived experiences is in some countries very real**.

**Ethnicity** is also a social construct, but it more often relates to a group identification, based on a person’s cultural heritage, including their language, religion, nationality, regional culture, dress and customs (for instance: African American, Chicanx, Celtic, Galician, Hmong, Romani, Tamils).

It is important that we all discuss our respective cultural heritage and ethnicity in a way that is appropriate, inclusive and sensitive to how ethnic groups identify themselves. It is important to be familiar with the current terminology to support that. However, if in doubt, be guided by the ‘platinum rule’ – “treat people the way they would like to be treated” and ask. Ask people about their heritage and strive for respectful accuracy that observes how people self-identify ethnically. Learning that a good conversation starter can be “What’s your cultural heritage?” as opposed to “Where do you come from?” can make a big difference.



That said, here are some terminology tips you might find useful:

**Name the specific group/ethnicity you are referring to.**

Ethnic Minority is the collective term which is most widely used and accepted globally. In the US the term BIPOC is used to refer to Black, Indigenous and People of Color. The UK tend to use the term BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or BME – Black and Minority Ethnic. Some countries, such as France and Germany, prefer to avoid the terms race and ethnicity and refer to diversity of origins or people with immigrant backgrounds.

However, the acceptability of these acronyms has been called into question as people of ethnic minority backgrounds are not one homogenous group and experience social inequalities and stereotyping in different ways that require different interventions. That is why it is a better practice to name the group/ ethnicity being referenced.

**Avoid using the term ‘Non-White’.**

The term ‘non-White’ is generally not well received, as it defines ethnic minorities solely by reference to the White majority. We do not use the term ‘non-Black’ when describing the White group, so why should we say ‘non-White’ when describing ethnic minorities? Also, do not forget that ethnic minorities include White minorities (for instance: Gypsy, Irish travellers).

**Watch out for “us/them” syntax.**

We all do it sometimes, but it will harshen your sentiment, even when speaking to white people. Define your prepositions.

**You can say “black,” and not with a whisper.**

It’s not a bad word. “It’s not a bad word, so it’s not necessary to lower your voice when you say it. The same approach can be applied to other appropriate and respectful racial identifiers.”

**Say Latino/Latina/Latinx\* rather than Hispanic.**

The term “Latino” is preferred as less derivative of colonial lineage.

# Ethnic minorities and well-being

Underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the corporate world, especially at senior levels, is bad enough. But even worse, according to extensive research, is the lived experience of ethnic minorities, who continue to face both explicit racism and

subtle racism on the job. They can manifest in several often-overlapping forms and, like other types of discrimination, they can lead to a profound feeling of pain, harm and humiliation among members of the target group, often leading to exclusion.

# Examples of these can include (but not limited to)

## Bias:

Bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner (or sometimes consciously). These biases, which encompass both favourable and unfavourable assessments, are often activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. These associations develop over the course of a lifetime beginning at a very early age through exposure to direct and indirect messages.

Automatic associations, assumptions and stereotypes about individuals from ethnic minority groups on occasions can produce blocked opportunities such as being denied a promotion. Stereotypes can place additional pressure on groups to 'conform' which can impact self-confidence.

## Microaggressions:

Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults towards ethnic minorities. The "micro" in the term "microaggressions" does not refer to a smaller impact. Rather, it refers to interactions on the micro-scale, rather than on the systemic/structural, macro scale.

Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with ethnic minorities. In most cases, when individuals are confronted with their micro aggressive acts, the perpetrator usually believes that the victim has overreacted and is being overly sensitive. Often described as "death by a thousand cuts," the emotional, behavioural, and cognitive impact of microaggressions is cumulative and over time results in harmful psychological and physiological effects for targeted individuals.

# Examples of racial microaggressions:

what you might say and what might be heard.

"There is only one race, the human race", "I don't see colour."

## Message:

I refuse to acknowledge your reality.

Assuming that people from ethnic minorities are foreign- born by asking "Where are you from?" or saying "You speak English well."

## Message:

You are a foreigner.

"I'm not racist. I have several black friends.", "As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."

## Message:

I am denying racial biases, I am immune to racism because I have friends of colour, your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression, I can't be a racist, I'm like you.

"From my perspective, ethnic minorities have the same opportunity as anyone else if they work hard enough, and race and ethnicity do not play a role in life successes."

## Message:

"I am unable or unwilling to recognize and admit that just by being born a certain ethnicity, I have benefited from certain privileges or advantages that are not afforded to ethnic minorities."

Asking to someone who is not like the dominant group:

"Why do you have to be so loud/ animated? Just calm down." Or: "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal."

## Message:

Please assimilate to dominant culture, leave your cultural baggage outside.



# Responding to microaggressions and bias

Despite an increased awareness of racial microaggressions, observers witnessing someone perpetrating microaggressions against another person often do not know what to do, experience a sense of shock or surprise and struggle to determine how to respond quickly and effectively. This occurs because observers are typically unsure

about what actually occurred, are concerned about negative repercussions that may occur if they do respond, perceive that it may be better do to nothing, or somehow convince themselves that what observed really did not happen. Consequently, racial microaggressions often go unchecked and result in racial battle fatigue.

When a microaggression occurs, we all have a moral duty to respond and here are some tips on how to do that:

**Restate or paraphrase.**

"I think I heard you saying (paraphrase their comments). Is that correct?"

**Ask for clarification or more information.**

"Could you say more about what you mean by that?"  
"How have you come to think that?"

**Separate intent from impact.**

"I know you didn't realize this, but when you (comment/behaviour), it was hurtful/offensive because... Instead you could (different language or behaviour.)"

**Share your own process.**

"I noticed that you (comment/behaviour). I used to do/say that too, but then I learned..."

**Express your feelings.**

"When you (comment/behaviour), I felt (feeling) and I would like you to..."

**Challenge the stereotype and/or offer alternative perspectives.**

"Actually, in my experience..." "I think that's a stereotype. I've learned that..." "Another way to look at it is ..."

**Promote empathy.**

Ask how they would feel if someone said something like that about their group, or their friend/partner/child.

"I know you don't like the stereotypes about (their group), how do you think he feels when he hears those things about his group?", "How would you feel if someone said that about/did that to your sister or girlfriend?"

**Tell them they're too smart or too good to say things like that.**

"Come on. You're too smart to say something so offensive."

**Pretend you don't understand.**

As people try to explain their comments, they often realize how silly they sound. "I don't get it...", "Why is that funny?"

**Remind them of the rules or policies.**

"That behaviour is against our code of conduct and could really get you in trouble."



# The role of privilege

Privilege refers to an unearned advantage or entitlement based upon an individual's characteristics, including (but not limited to) their ethnicity, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or religious belief. It influences systemic and social norms, resulting in inequalities that tend to serve and benefit some groups over others.

Having privilege does not mean you have not worked hard to get to where you are, or you have not encountered your own personal struggles during your life; having privilege is recognising that your cultural heritage, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation or other demographic characteristics have not been one of the factors that has made your life more difficult as a result.

Here are **some examples of white privilege** – in predominantly White cultures- based on daily experiences that we often take for granted, in the hope it offers a better understanding of this complex subject:

- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people who look like me widely represented.
- I can take a job without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
- I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my ethnicity would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.
- I can speak in public to a powerful group without putting my origins on trial.
- I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my ethnicity.
- I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my cultural background.
- If I have low credibility as a leader I can be sure that the colour of my skin is not the problem.
- I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
- I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
- I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person who looks like me.
- I will feel welcomed in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.



It should be noted that having privilege based upon one set of characteristics does not cancel out one's other marginalised identities. For example, a person can be a woman and still have white privilege. Not having male privilege does not cancel out one's white privilege. A person can lack economic privilege but still have white privilege. Not having wealth does not cancel out white privilege.

Understanding how our privilege impacts others is an essential step to build empathy and addressing individual and systemic inequalities.

# How can we all do better?



## By respecting preferences and honouring experiences

In conversations about heritage and ethnicity, the most vital principle to acknowledge is that the ultimate authority on a person's identity and experiences belongs to that individual. Above all, commit to respecting the other person's preferences and honouring their lived experiences. Be prepared to understand and empathize around the challenges that exist for ethnic minorities, do not discount their perspective.

## By acknowledging bias, privilege and context

Be intentionally aware of your privilege and your biases. Acknowledge how your appearance, social class, upbringing, or affiliations might place you in a privileged position. Also, be mindful of the social and historical context in which you operate. Approach the conversation acknowledging your position as a member of the majority or the minority. Keep in mind that there may be a history of certain groups being underrepresented or mistreated in your educational or geographic context.

## By owning our learning

As you discuss complex notions about heritage and ethnicity, be open to learning something new. Be careful, however, not to rely on the

other person to teach you everything about their heritage and/or culture. Engage people on their terms, and do not expect them to accept the burden of automatically educating you about unfamiliar topics.

## By avoiding assumptions

Avoid making assumptions about a particular ethnic group based on limited or biased samples. While it is excellent to research different cultures and backgrounds, be careful to ensure that your sources of information are credible.

## By rejecting colour blindness

To build relationships, it can be powerful to connect over similarities. However, do not neglect to celebrate your differences! Refuse to be colour blind. Instead, be colour brave! Take time to appreciate the uniqueness and individuality of everyone you encounter.

## By getting comfortable with discomfort

Because concepts of heritage, culture, race, ethnicity and identity are complex and deeply personal, they often bring feelings of discomfort. Many of us enjoy talking about the latest movies we saw over the weekend, music, activities, and events in our communities. Yet, racial issues such are avoided at all costs. We should not avoid these conversations because they make us uncomfortable.

# How can we all act at work?



**Start with your personal analysis** and ask yourself how good you're at engaging with people from different ethnic backgrounds

**Educate yourself** on issues relating to ethnic minorities, **ask your team members and/or colleagues to do so.**

Dare to engage in **bold conversations** on the topic of ethnic minorities.

**Set ground rules for these conversations**, e.g. get comfortable being uncomfortable, don't interrupt, ensure confidentiality.

**Influence others** by making the conversation about ethnic minorities a continuous dialogue.

**Identify talents** within the organisation and **support them** to address the barriers they face at work.

**Create mentoring and/or reverse mentoring relationships** to help build new skills and perspectives.

**Sponsor talents from ethnic minorities**, become their advocate, give them visibility, stretch assignments and projects to accelerate their careers.



**Actively support and sponsor Employee/ Business Resource Groups and their initiatives.**

**Diversify and expand your networks; seek out untapped talents** and provide opportunities.

**Ask for diverse slates of candidates** for hiring and promotion.

Actively **invite a range of perspectives and voices on all your teams.**

**Notice what people are experiencing and ask how their experience differs from yours.**

**Call out racist behaviour, discrimination, challenge conscious and unconscious ethnic bias.**

**Fight against any other forms of disrespectful behaviours**, even when they affect "majority groups"

**Be a role model** by being accountable for fostering ethnic minorities' representation at all levels of the organization.

**Consider volunteering in the community** to support local underprivileged populations.

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