



Women of Colour in Australian Workplaces

Longitudinal research report

22 October 2024

Authors

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Available at:

<https://womenofcolour.org.au/workplace-report-2024>



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wallumattagal clan of the Darug nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land upon which Women of Colour Australia is situated. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present and extend this respect to all First Nations people.

We acknowledge and honour the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with whom we stand in solidarity. We acknowledge that as settlers on this stolen Aboriginal land, we are beneficiaries of the dispossession, genocide, and ongoing colonial violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We believe that it is our collective responsibility to help dismantle the structural inequities and systemic barriers oppressing the original inhabitants of this land.

We are also painfully aware that this land was taken forcibly, without a Treaty or reparations made.

We have taken a practical step towards honouring sovereignty by paying the rent – and we invite you to do so too.

This land is and always will be Aboriginal land.

Sovereignty was never ceded.



Women of Colour Australia (WoCA) is a grassroots, community-driven, and volunteer-powered non-profit organisation and registered charity established in 2020. Founded by Brenda Gaddi, a migrant from the Philippines, WoCA was born out of the urgent need to address the significant lack of data and representation of Women of Colour (WoC) in Australian workplaces. Guided by a deep commitment to amplify the voices and experiences of Women of Colour, WoCA strives to drive structural change and create a fairer, more just and equitable society for all.

OUR VISION

We envision a society where Women of Colour are valued, respected, and have equal access to opportunities, thriving and making meaningful contributions to their organisations and communities.

OUR PURPOSE

To advocate for, support, and strengthen the lives and experiences of Women of Colour in all places and spaces in Australia, with a particular emphasis on promoting representation and inclusion in the workplace.

OUR VALUES

Our core values guide our actions and decisions, ensuring we stay true to our purpose and remain committed to the communities we serve:

Community Engagement: We foster deep connections and inclusivity, amplifying the voices and experiences of Women of Colour.

Collaboration: We believe in the power of partnerships, building alliances with stakeholders to maximise our impact.

Compassion: We approach our work with empathy and understanding, creating a supportive environment for growth and well-being.

Courage: We challenge systemic barriers and empower Women of Colour to reach their full potential.

Commitment: We hold ourselves accountable, ensuring honesty, transparency, and dedication in serving our community and partners.

Together, our vision, purpose, and values form the foundation of our efforts to create lasting positive change for Women of Colour in Australia.

SUPPORT US

As a registered charity, we rely on you to help amplify the impact of our ground-breaking research, our programs, training and education, and our advocacy work. Please consider donating to us [here](#). All donations over \$2 are tax-deductible.

Can't donate? Volunteer for us or introduce us to your organisation. We deliver custom programs, training and education to help you build a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace for all.

'Women of Colour are talked over, not trusted for their skills, or have White people (especially White women) take the credit for your hard work. Also, opinions are generally dismissed or not wanted to be heard'*

'I feel as though I need to be representative of all Women of Colour in the work that we do, but I also am exhausted by having to play this role and often it not going anywhere anyway'

'It often leaves me feeling as though I need to prove my value at every table I sit at. I have been othered at work (name, hair, ... etc.) and oftentimes ignored'

'Perceptions around intelligence / coherence / literacy due to my accent'

Key Statistics

- ◆ 1,004 Women of Colour across Australia had their say
- ◆ 2 in 3 Women of Colour have experienced discrimination in the workplace (68.4%)
- ◆ This is almost a 10% increase from 2021 (59.6%)
- ◆ Racism is the predominant type of discrimination experience (accounting for 93.8%)- gender equity without intersectionality, is compounding the harm Women of Colour face
- ◆ 2 in 5 Women of Colour do not have or are unsure about the availability of effective mechanisms to report discrimination (40.7%).
- ◆ Only 3 in 10 Women of Colour felt that if they did report discrimination, serious and appropriate action would be taken (29.7%); the vast majority felt any action would be superficial or no action would be taken or that they would face retaliation for doing so.
- ◆ Engagement ≠ retention, revealing structural issues persist in organisations
- ◆ The top 3 reasons for intention to leave their employer are (1) a lack of career progression and opportunities, (2) discrimination, racism and bias, and (3) job insecurity and temporary positions.
- ◆ 2 in 3 of Women of Colour actively navigate multiple identities at work (64.8%), with 1 in 3 reporting feeling exhausted and fatigued (33.2%)
- ◆ The majority of Women of Colour have caring roles (54.4%) highlighting the need for flexible work and supportive policies
- ◆ Almost 3 in 4 (72%) of Women of Colour feel underpaid, with the vast majority asked to do unpaid work (80%) and expected to do more work than others at a similar level (88%). Meanwhile, their contributions are consistently undervalued.
- ◆ 6 in 7 Women of Colour are feel that they are not included in the decision-making process (85%), 4 in 5 are not listened to (81%), 5 in 7 are not given opportunities (70%), 1 in 2 don't feel valued for their lived experiences and skills (55%).

Executive Summary

In 2021, we released our first highly cited and groundbreaking Women of Colour in the Workplace Report. This quantitative survey, and subsequent academic publication, created a foundation to understand the experiences of Women of Colour in Australian workplaces that was evident from our lived and living experiences, but for which no data existed. This report builds on this foundation of evidence, to show how the experiences of Women of Colour are changing over time and to provide community-led solutions to the challenges that persist.

Women of Colour are a highly educated and engaged demographic. In the 'war for talent' organisations that are able to create safe and inclusive cultures where Women of Colour are seen, valued, heard and promoted, will win.

Despite better awareness of legal responsibilities of organisations and institutions, such as Anti-Discrimination and Respect@Work laws, and increasing onus on organisations to provide psychosocial safety at work, our findings show that discrimination against Women of Colour is escalating in organisations. In this report, we point to the limitations of legal protections when Women of Colour are dismissed or heavily penalised for reporting their experiences.

In our deep dive into Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies and initiatives, we find that Women of Colour experience these as largely tokenistic, demonstrating that they are not tailored to be effective for the most marginalised people within organisations. Compounding this, our sharp focus on gender parity and representation, without an intersectional lens, may be leading to more harm. Therefore, this report calls for more intersectional approaches to designing, implementing and measuring initiatives designed to include or support diverse employees and stakeholders.

Our recommendations provide tangible and actionable insights for organisations, HR, leaders and government and policy bodies. These recommendations are from Women of Colour directly and highlight that traditional White models of leadership, management and organisational structures are outdated and need to be rethought and redesigned to be 'fit for purpose' for our diverse society.

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¹All figures presented in this report are from our 2023 - 2024 Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey.

Methodology

Across Australia, 1,004 Women of Colour completed the Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, sharing their lived and living experiences in the workplace through quantitative data combined with rich, qualitative data. The survey itself was co-created with Women of Colour and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to reflect their reality and experiences and to ensure that questions were culturally sensitive and appropriate.

The survey was created and accessed via a link to Qualtrics. Responses were gathered for approximately 6 months across 2023 to 2024, and we recruited participants through outreach to our network, promotion via WoCA's social media channels and a link available on our website. We also asked our WoCA volunteers to share widely within their own networks and through posts on social media.

To maximise accessibility, each question was optional to complete. Thus, the total number of responses to each question may vary accordingly. Beyond demographic data, each question consisted of both closed questions and open text. Statistical and thematic analyses were conducted by WoCA's dedicated research team in mid-2024.

As with our 2021 survey, we received volumes of qualitative data with detailed explanations (and feedback in some cases) in responses to closed questions. This ensured that we were able to accurately interpret and add context to responses. This qualitative data was used to shape this report and inform future survey design.

In conjunction with our groundbreaking 2021 Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, this survey provides longitudinal data to show how experiences are shifting over time. Recognising the evolving legal and sociopolitical landscape, we also added some new questions focused on reporting discrimination and to elicit more specific feedback on a range of DEI initiatives and policies.

Definitions

Women of Colour

'Women of Color is not a biological designation. It is a solidarity definition. A commitment to work in collaboration with other oppressed Women of Color who have been minoritised. It is a term that has a lot of power.' [Loretta Ross](#)²

Women

'Women (trans and cis), all those who experience or have experienced oppression as women, including non-binary and gender non-conforming people and all those who identify as women. Self-definition is at the discretion of the individual.' WIRE³

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)

Diversity

The presence and participation of individuals with varying backgrounds and perspectives, including those who have been traditionally underrepresented such as Women of Colour.

Equity

Equal access to opportunities and fair, just and impartial treatment.

Inclusion

A sense of belonging in an environment where all feel seen, valued, heard, respected and are recognised, rewarded and promoted for their contributions.

'It's not enough to feel seen, valued, heard and respected. We need to be recognised, rewarded and promoted. Too often, this piece of DEI is missing and it exacerbates and entrenches inequality'

Dr Varina Michaels, author of Women of Colour in the Workplace Report 2024

²L. J. Ross, 'The Origin of the Phrase "Women of Color";' video, posted 16 February 2011, by Western States Center, YouTube, 2 min, 59 sec, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82v134mi4lw>

³WIRE, WIRE's Trans and Gender Diverse Inclusion Policy, Wire.Org, accessed 13 October 2024, <https://www.wire.org.au/tgd-policy/>

Women of Colour are highly educated and skilled

Demographics — Education levels

88.8%

Women of Colour in this study

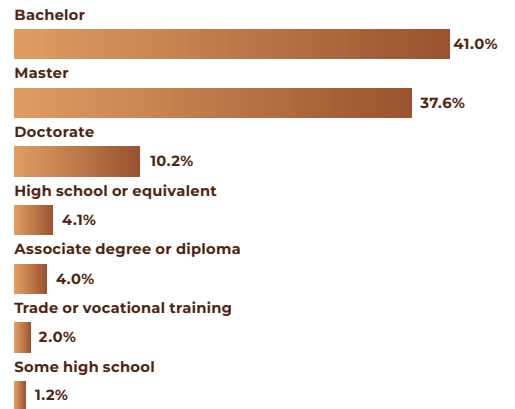
36%

Women in Australia⁵

Hold a bachelor's degree or higher

Figure 1. Highest level of education attained by Women of Colour (right)

The majority (88.8%) of Women of Colour hold a bachelor's degree or higher. 41% have a bachelor's degree, 37.6% have a master's degree and 10.2% have a doctorate. Additionally 8.1% have an additional post-secondary qualification such as a diploma.



Demographics — Majority in large organisations

Figure 3. Industries employing Women of Colour

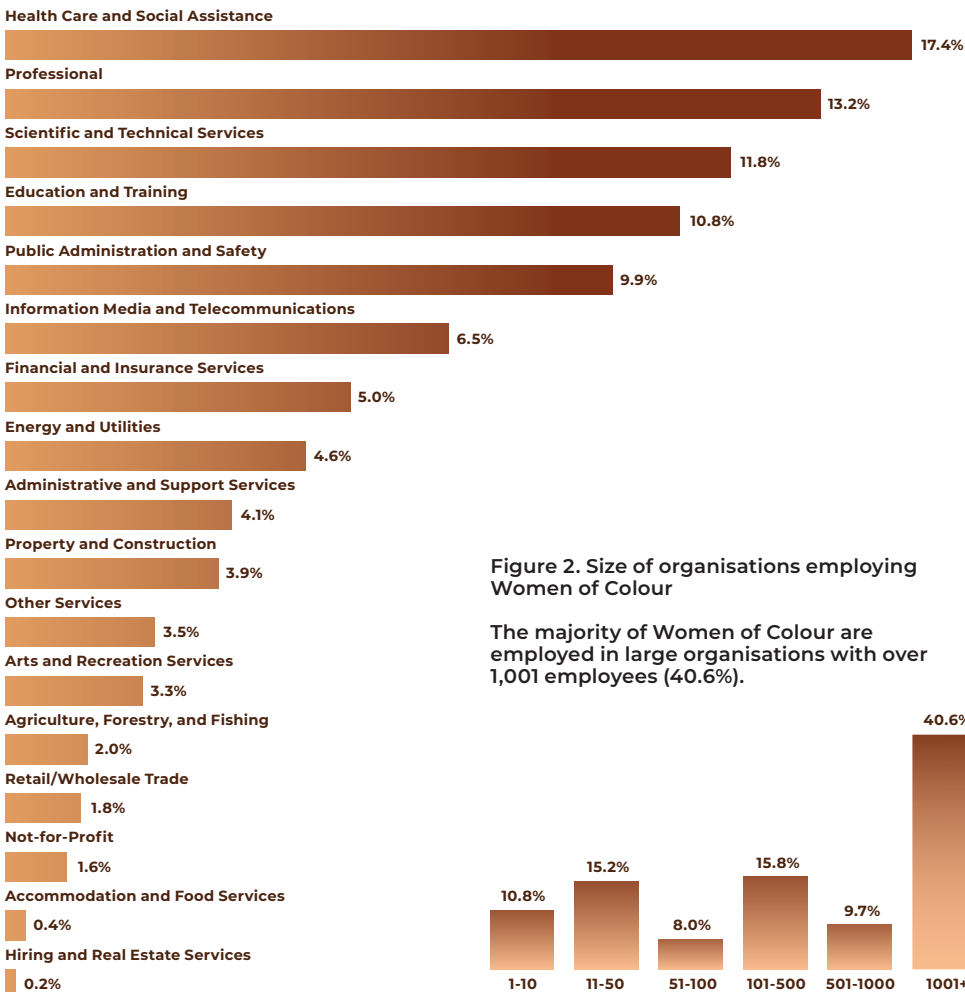
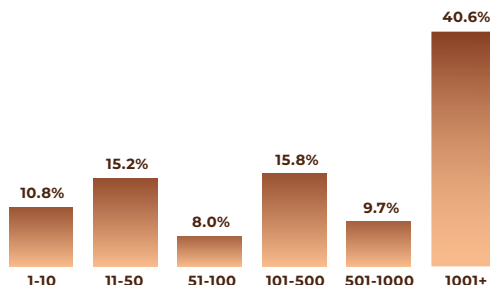


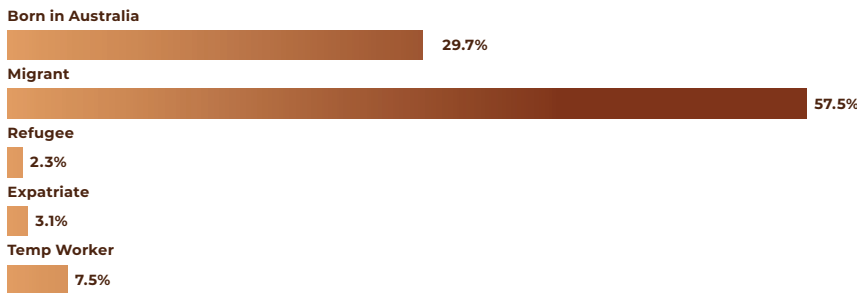
Figure 2. Size of organisations employing Women of Colour

The majority of Women of Colour are employed in large organisations with over 1,001 employees (40.6%).



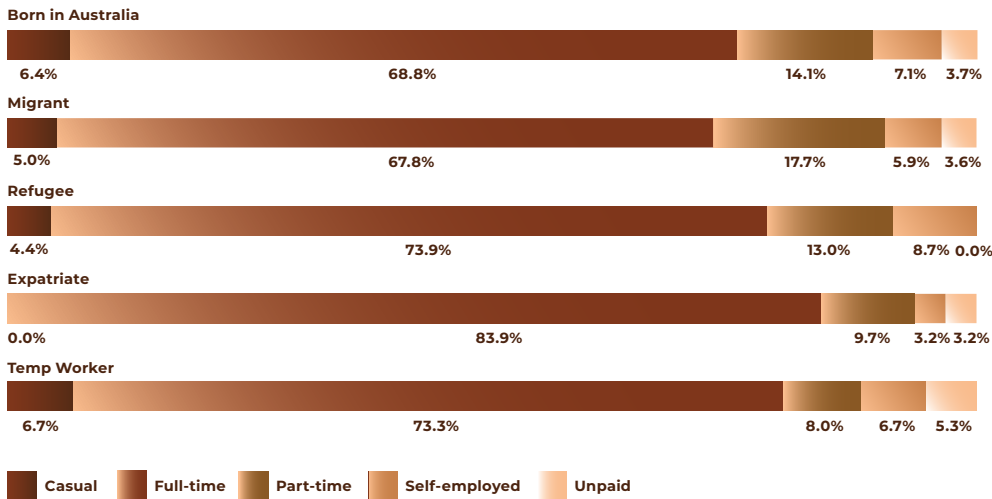
Demographics — Employment types for origin and visa status

Figure 4. Origin and visa types of Women of Colour.



Among respondents who provided information about their origin or visa status, migrants represent 57.5% of the total, while those born in Australia account for 29.7%.

Figure 5. Employment type by origin and visa distribution of Women of Colour



Among the three types of permanent residents in Australia – those born in Australia, migrants and refugees – refugees make up the highest proportion of full-time workers (73.9%) and the highest rate of self-employment (8.7%). Migrants, conversely, make up the highest proportion of part-time workers (17.7%).

Regarding work visa holders, 83.9% of expatriates are employed full-time, while 26.7% of those with temporary work visas work in casual, part-time or even unpaid positions.

Demographics — Age, location and residency

The majority of Women of Colour in this study are aged between 25 and 54, with 39.6% aged 35 to 44, 29.1% aged 24 to 34 and 20.2% aged 45 to 54. The proportion of 35 to 44 year olds has increased since the last report.

Geographically, most Women of Colour in this study reside in Victoria (42%) and New South Wales (34.5%), with a smaller proportion living in Queensland (9.5%) and Western Australia (6.2%).

Regarding residency duration, 64.4% of respondents have lived in Australia for less than 20 years.

Figure 5. Age distribution of Women of Colour.

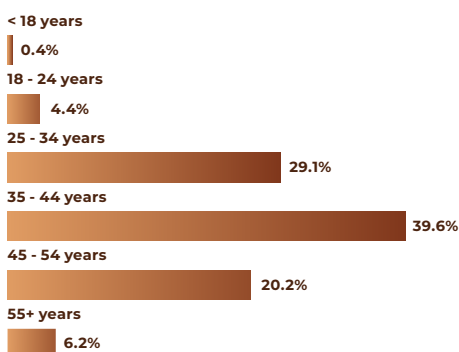


Figure 6. Geographic distribution across states of Women of Colour.

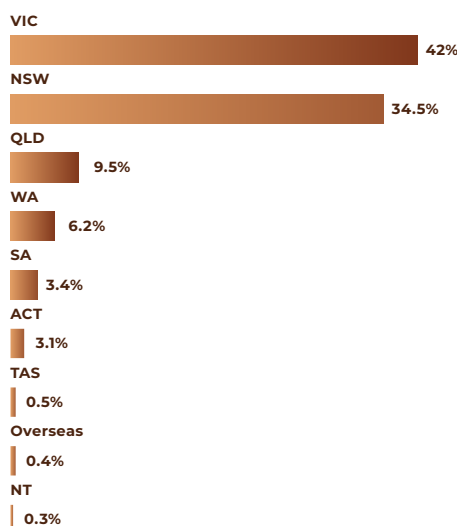
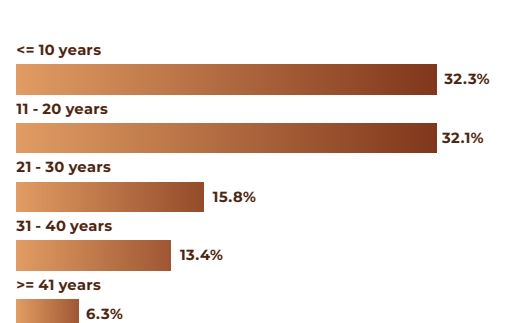


Figure 7. Duration of residence in Australia among Women of Colour.



PART I — Research Findings

1.1 Who are ‘Women of Colour’? An intersectional lens

Our 2023-2024 survey revealed that Women of Colour in Australia are incredibly diverse, coming from 73 different countries of origin and identifying as 140 ethnic and cultural identities. Although over two-thirds (68.5%) of Women of Colour were born overseas, more than one-third (34%) identified primarily as Australian, highlighting that being ‘Australian’ comes in many forms.

In this research, we are proud to have 5.1% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation. We acknowledge that the original inhabitants of this land continue to face marginalisation and ongoing colonial violence, and we are honoured that they have chosen to participate in our research and identify with our community. As WoCA founder and executive director Brenda Gaddi has often declared in her presentations, at WoCA ‘we remain steadfast in our dedication to dismantling systemic barriers and fighting oppression faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We firmly believe that Women of Colour cannot have justice, without First Nations justice.’⁶ Over one-sixth of Women of Colour identify as LGBTQIA+ (16.3%), including non-binary people, demonstrating the inclusiveness of our community and the importance of moving beyond biological designations in the workplace.

The majority of Women of Colour have caring responsibilities (54.4%), with intergenerational caring responsibilities represented heavily. Caring responsibilities extend beyond children, with one in eight (12.9%) caring for parents, relatives or a friend. Almost one-tenth of Women of Colour have multiple caring responsibilities (9.7%), which is an important consideration when designing inclusive workplaces and policy.

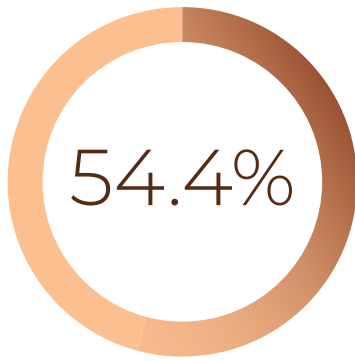
An intersectional lens allows us to see the vibrant diversity of Women of Colour. Although they come from different backgrounds and identities, we continue to see similar stories emerge from our research, which show Women of Colour face ongoing interpersonal and systemic barriers, marginalisation and discrimination in the workplace. Women of Colour bring a wealth of experience, education and diverse perspectives to organisations but being homogenised in the category of ‘women’ overlooks the cultural and racial disparities that persist. In some cases, we can see that the movement to improve gender disparities, without an intersectional lens, advantages some and further marginalises Women of Colour. The need for a more nuanced approach has never been more important and this report provides recommendations, supported by evidence, for how this could be achieved.

The movement to improve gender disparities, without an intersectional lens, advantages some and further marginalises Women of Colour

⁶Most recently in Brenda Gaddi’s welcome speech on 26 August 2024, at the Women of Colour Executive Leadership Program Launch Event at Wesley Place Business Hub, Melbourne, Australia.

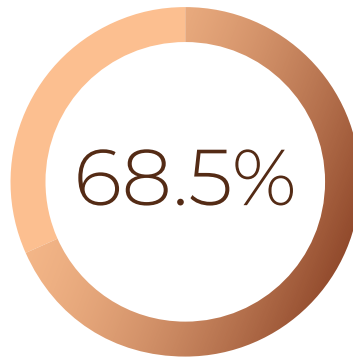
Women of Colour are incredibly diverse

Figure 8. Women of Colour with caring responsibilities.



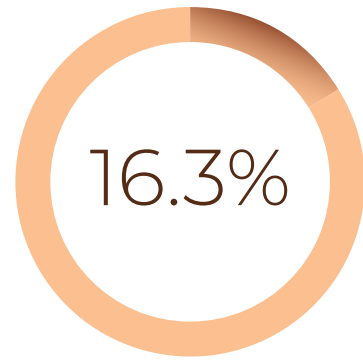
have caring responsibilities

Figure 9. Women of Colour who were born overseas.



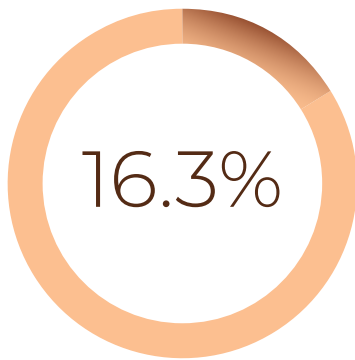
were born overseas

Figure 10. Women of Colour who identify as LGBTIQ+.



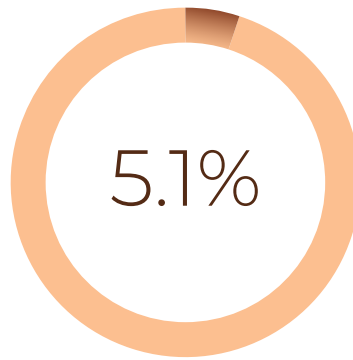
are LGBTIQ+ including non-binary

Figure 11. Women of Colour living with a disability.



are living with a disability

Figure 12. Women of Colour who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.



are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples

'Unconscious bias wise I think definitely, people have always underestimated my abilities, especially White women or I'm spoken down to by everything and it's a lot of energy to overcome this, particularly in the sector I work in construction but even in govt in this area.'

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

1.2 Discrimination is on the rise



Figure 13. Workplace discrimination and microaggressions experienced by Women of Colour: 2023 vs 2021 comparison.



Women of Colour are experiencing higher levels of discrimination. Organisations, particularly large organisations where the majority of Women of Colour in this study currently work, have established or are establishing stronger DEI policies, initiatives and growing emphasis on transparent reporting than ever before.⁸ Yet, the experience of Women of Colour has gone backwards.

Since 2021, Women of Colour have experienced a significant increase in discrimination (8.8% increase) in the workplace (68.4% in 2024 vs 59.6% in 2021). This is highly alarming and simply unacceptable. Against the backdrop of a perceived backlash against DEI in the US, we might believe that this could correlate to a reduction in DEI activities or commitment. However, research does not support this trend.⁹ In 2024, 57% of C-Suite executives reported that their organisation had expanded their DEI activities over the previous year,¹⁰ with 36% reporting that their efforts were holding steady and only 6% reporting a decrease in commitment or activity. Further, research in the US found that the majority (56%) of employees believed that DEI in the workplace is ‘a good thing’ and 28% saw it as neutral, with only 16% viewing it negatively.¹¹

WoCA’s last Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey in 2021 was conducted in the context of increased sociocultural tensions due to COVID-19, such as the significant increase in discrimination against Asian Australians (see WoCA’s academic work on the experiences of Women of Colour during COVID-19 here). While the sociocultural and legal context in Australia has largely been strengthened during this period, a simultaneous increase in discrimination indicates that organisations and government policies are not focusing on the right areas. Therefore, a deeper dive is needed to understand these trends.

⁷Australian Bureau of Statistics. Experience of Discrimination: Valuing Diversity, Belonging and Culture (ABS 2024), [Experience of discrimination | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/Australian-Bureau-of-Statistics)
⁸See, for example, Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), A Roadmap to Closing the Gender Pay Gap: WGEA Legislative Reforms (WGEA, 2023), https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/March_2023-WGEA_REFORMS-A_Roadmap_to_Closing_the_Gender_Pay_Gap.pdf
⁹Lily Zheng (@lilyzheng308), ‘I recently took an interview with a journalist writing about #diversity, #equity, and #inclusion — and successfully convinced them not to run the story. The journalist approached me with a simple request: comment on a new anti-DEI trend allegedly sweeping the corporate world. The only problem? No such trend existed’, LinkedIn, 3 September 2024, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/lilyzheng308_diversity-equity-inclusion-activity-7236777048952725504-YhEe?
¹⁰R. Minkin, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Workplace (Pew Research Center, 2023), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/05/17/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-in-the-workplace/>
¹¹Littler, Inclusion, Equity and Diversity C-Suite Survey Report (Littler, 2024), https://www.littler.com/files/2024_littler_csuite_survey_report.pdf

1.3 A lack of intersectional feminism is amplifying the problem

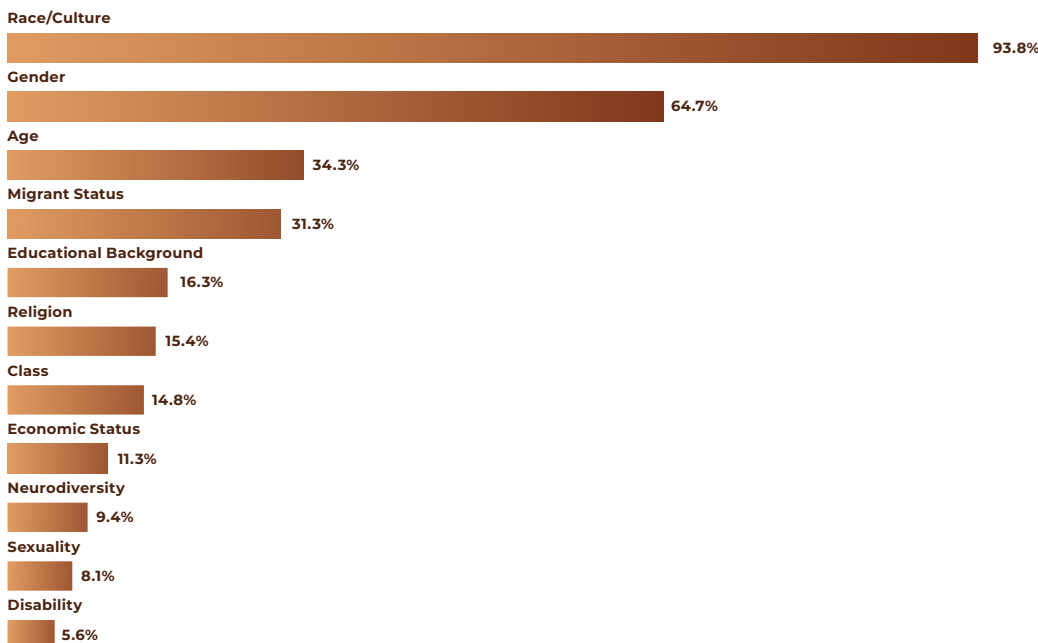
It's time for antiracism and intersectional feminism. For Women of Colour, racial and cultural discrimination overwhelmingly surpasses the rates of gender-based discrimination in the workplace. Among the top four factors related to respondents' perceived workplace discrimination, 93.8% of all respondents highlighted that race and culture is the most significant factor. Gender is also a prominent factor, accounting for 64.7% of reported discrimination. Age and migrant status are other notable categories, with 34.3% and 31.3% respectively.

Many policies, initiatives and legal protections are aimed at addressing gender (e.g. Workplace Gender Equality Agency's requirement for organisations with more than 100 employees to report on their gender pay gap), while largely ignoring racial and cultural discrimination. For example, the limited number of organisations that even collect data on race and culture is deeply problematic.

We need intersectional feminism.

A focus on gender is important, but significant research has shown that the biggest beneficiaries of affirmative action and DEI-focused initiatives are White women. When we fail to adopt an intersectional lens, Women of Colour are further marginalised. They are not the dominant group when it comes to gender (White women are) and they are not the dominant group when it comes to culture and race (Men of Colour are). While each of these groups faces specific challenges in the workplace, Women of Colour continue to fall between the cracks.

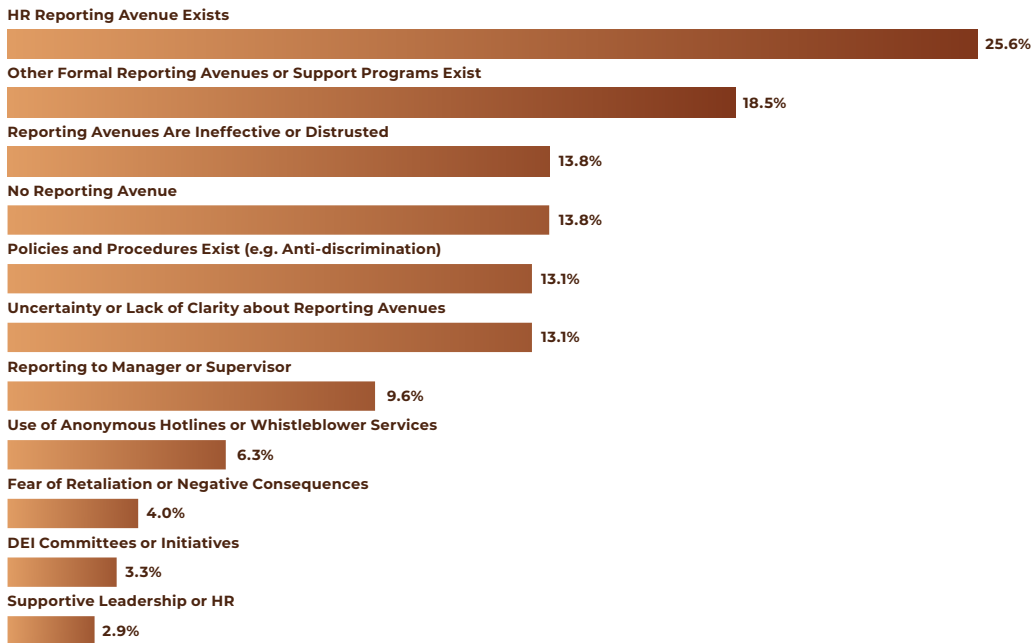
Figure 14. Factors related to discrimination experienced by Women of Colour.



1.4 Silent suffering: The hidden toll of reporting discrimination and harassment

Despite high levels of reported discrimination in the workplace and existing legal requirements to provide a workplace that is free from discrimination and the psychosocial safety of employees, Women of Colour have limited avenues to report these instances. Only 25.6% of Women of Colour report having access to HR reporting avenues, 18.5% mention other formal reporting avenues or support programs, 13.1% refer to policies and procedures addressing discrimination in place, and 6.3% report the availability of anonymous hotlines or whistleblower services. It is important to note that many respondents who reported having access to any reporting avenues identified more than one avenue or resource available to them, suggesting that there are fewer Women of Colour have access to any means of reporting than the sum of these percentages might initially indicate. This is reflected by the findings that 13.8% report avenues being ineffective or distrusted and the same number (13.8%) of Women of Colour have no reporting avenue at all. 13.1% Women of Colour report being uncertain or unclear about the avenues for reporting racism or sexism with another.

Figure 15. Avenues for Women of Colour to report racism or sexism in the workplace.

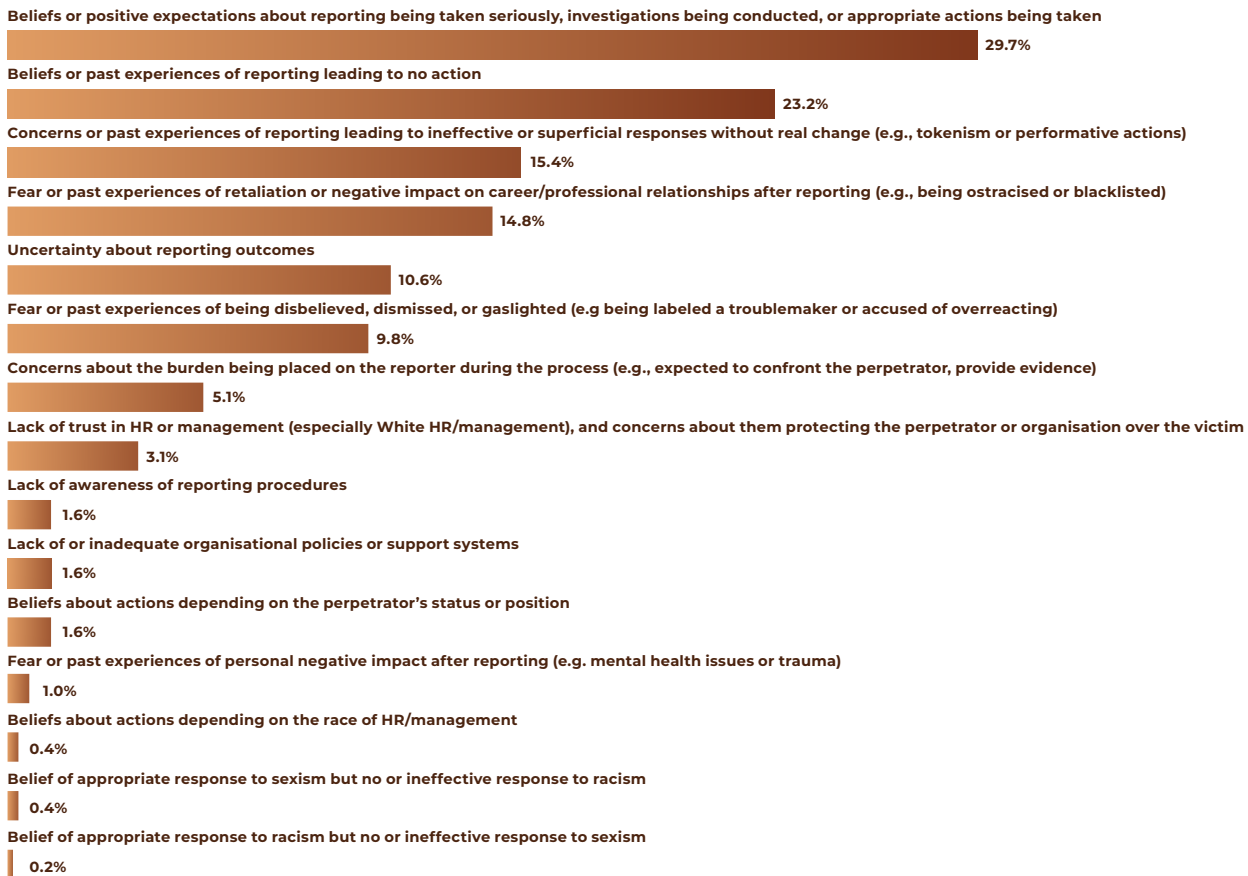


More concerning is what Women of Colour believe would be the outcome of reporting discrimination, as almost 1 in 4 Women of Colour indicated that if they reported discrimination in their workplace, no action would be taken (23.2%), with an additional 1 in 6 believing that only superficial or tokenistic action would be taken without any real change (15.4%). A similar number had a fear of retaliation or negative consequences for reporting (14.8%). Only 29.7% felt serious investigations would be conducted and appropriate action would be taken.

'Existing avenues have lost staff trust due to lack of structural and systemic changes.'

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

Figure 16. Outcomes of reporting racism or sexism in the workplace, anticipated by Women of Colour.



This report provides substantiation for the low numbers of reporting not being a good indicator of discrimination within organisations. Discrimination does exist. The problem is that there is a lack of awareness and safety in reporting experiences of discrimination. Further, a lack of culturally appropriate and sensitive trauma-informed approaches to reporting and training for individuals who receive reports can further traumatise individuals that do report or can run the risk of genuine reports not being believed:

'The racism and microaggressions I have experienced at work have been so insidious and intangible, that to explain this to a White HR manager to investigate feels literally impossible. I don't think I could have really formally reported any of these incidents and have had them result in any favourable outcome.'

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

1.5 Who is protected?

The following quotations are from Women of Colour who responded to the question from WoCA's 2024 Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey: If you were to report racism or sexism in your workplace, what do you believe would be the result?

'Nothing unless you made it public. But publicly addressing racism just puts a target on your back for being a trouble maker.'

'They will get around it, somehow shape or form they would be able to prove that they have always been promoting migrant employment and hide the ugly treatment that is given to the workers. They trick you to believe that they support migrants, Women of Colour but the way employees are mistreated and then sugar coated with a little bit of bonus (bribe to keep their mouth shut) is demeaning.'

'Patronised; 'shushed' or have it explained that it was a joke or they didn't mean it; I got it wrong; I am being too sensitive.'

'If it is a client, we would be told it is not their intention and to just brush it off whereas if it was either another colleague or other health professional. We are just told it's not that serious.'

'I think my complaint would be minimised and I'd be told I was too sensitive/politically correct. I would be told I'm expecting too much from them.'

'I'd be let go. Happened before in [an]other organisation. And I see it here each time. Mental health impact is great too as the investigation process is a gaslighting attempt at cover up.'

'That would be even further detrimental result, not helping at all. I also witnessed that the Male of Colour reported something (not knowing details of the report though) and he had to resign at the end.'

'I have done this in the past [at] a previous company. I was pressured to report the ongoing harassment by my team and senior management, with their support as witnesses. I was fired without reason before my probation period ended (6 months). I was told after an internal investigation that they found no evidence of sexism or racism.'

'I would be forced to resign as my life would be made miserable at my workplace.'

'It's most recently been acted on by management but their behaviour didn't change. People double down ..or 'I'm sure they didn't mean it.' Which is unconscious bias and white women supporting each other first and always.'

1.6 Engagement ≠ Retention

Highly engaged employees are 21%¹² more profitable

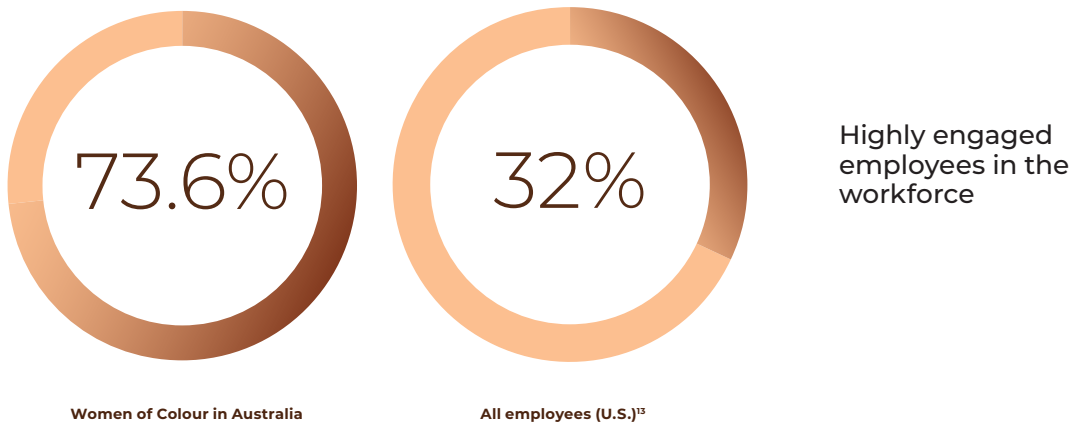
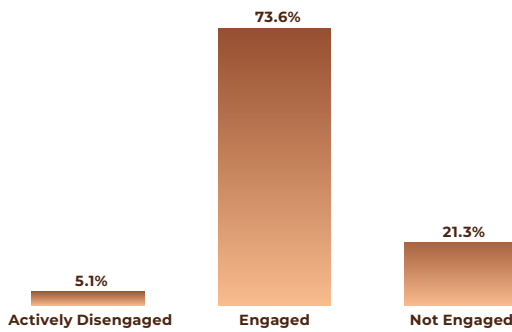


Figure 17. Women of Colour's engagement at work

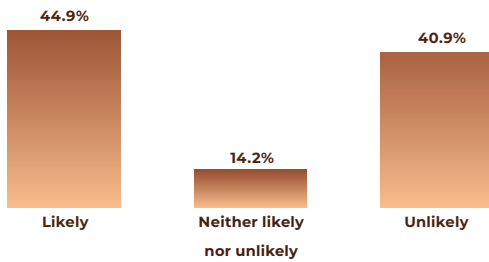


Engagement is a commonly used metric within organisations to measure employees' enthusiasm and energy at work. Surprisingly, this research highlights that engagement is not a useful metric for Women of Colour's overall satisfaction with their leader, organisational culture or DEI policies. This research revealed very high levels of engagement at work (73.6%), while simultaneously showing that significant numbers (44.9%) of Women of Colour are likely to leave their workplace in the next 12 months. Engagement also defies the levels of discrimination being experienced.

¹²Harter, J., Employee Engagement on the Rise in the U.S., (Gallup, 2018). [Employee Engagement on the Rise in the U.S. \(gallup.com\)](https://www.gallup.com)

¹³Harter, J., U.S. Employee Engagement Inches Up Slightly After 11-Year Low, (Gallup, 2024). [U.S. Employee Engagement Inches Up Slightly After 11-Year Low \(gallup.com\)](https://www.gallup.com)

Figure 18. Women of Colour's intention to leave their current workplace in the next 12 months.



With 44.9% of Women of Colour intending to leave their employer in the next 12 months, and another 14.2% of respondents unsure whether they will stay with their current employer, most Women of Colour are not having their needs met at work. Overall, Women of Colour are engaged and enjoy their work (73.6%), while 21.3% are not engaged, and a smaller fraction, 5.1%, identify as actively disengaged. In the face of very high levels of engagement at work, this dissatisfaction is not with the work itself. Rather, dissatisfaction stems from the lack of a safe and inclusive organisational culture and not feeling valued by their manager. Importantly, the reasons to leave their employer have not shifted significantly from our 2021 report. Employers need to do more.

In addition, we question the metrics being used within organisations to measure organisational culture and workplace satisfaction. Employee engagement has limited correlation with satisfaction with the organisational culture or their leader, or predicts an employee's intention to leave. Nevertheless, metrics like this persist. Decolonising workplace research and using diverse populations to formulate and test terminology is important in achieving higher levels of accuracy and building better strategies to understand and enhance the experiences of a range of employees and other stakeholders – not just the dominant group.

So why should organisations care about engagement?

Organisations with highly engaged employees have “substantially better customer engagement, higher productivity, better retention, fewer accidents, and 21% higher profitability. Engaged workers also report better health outcomes”¹⁴. Organisations need to be doing more to improve the levels of safety and inclusiveness for Women of Colour, and at an individual level provide higher quality feedback, more opportunities and better job security and career progression. Those that do will retain these highly educated, skilled and engaged source of talent.

¹⁴Harter, J. Employee Engagement on the Rise in the U.S., (Gallup, 2018). [Employee Engagement on the Rise in the U.S. \(gallup.com\)](https://www.gallup.com)

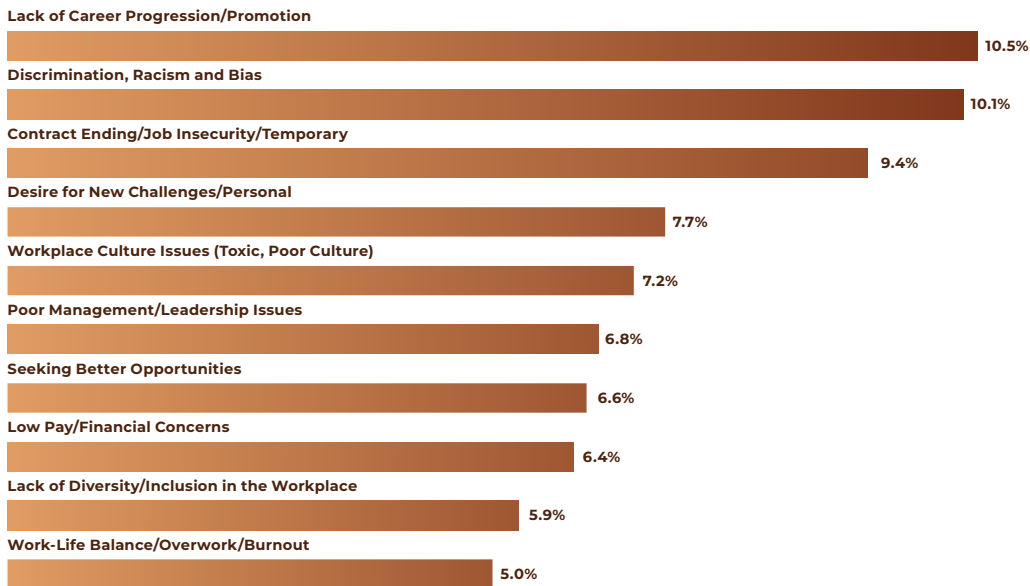
The top three reasons for Women of Colour to leave their organisation are:

1. Career progression and opportunities (10.5%)
2. Discrimination, racism and bias (10.1%)
3. Job insecurity and temporary positions (9.4%)

These results have not significantly shifted from 2021.

Other factors mentioned include a desire for personal and career growth (7.7%) and workplace culture issues (6.8%). This highlights the lack of inclusion and safety in Australian workplaces, which are legally required to provide psychosocial safety¹⁵.

Figure 19. Reasons why Women of Colour are considering leaving their organisation.



¹⁵Safe Work Australia, Psychosocial Hazards (SWA, 2024), <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/mental-health/psychosocial-hazards>.

1.7 Belonging and navigating multiple identities

1.7.1 Covering and code switching

Women of Colour often have to navigate multiple identities in the workplace. Covering refers to the act of downplaying or hiding a stigmatised identity to blend into the mainstream¹⁶, while code switching refers to making choices on which identity or role becomes more prominent based on contextual cues. Over two-thirds (64.8%) of Women of Colour actively navigate multiple identities at work.

The impacts of being forced to cover and code-switch have been well documented, as it generates an additional cognitive, emotional and social load. This, in turn, can have negative effects on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and therefore reduces the resources that employees have to do their job. Inclusion and belonging at work are strategies that specifically remove the need for employees and other stakeholders to cover or code-switch at work. This research shows that Women of Colour are still experiencing pressures to conform to the dominant group and are not able to bring their whole, authentic self to work.

'I feel like I can't bring my full self to work, all my identities, as a queer, second-gen immigrant, WOC [Women of Colour] from a Muslim background. I feel like I'm too much when I'm holding the organisation to account and calling out discrimination or voicing how we need to be more inclusive. It makes me feel lonely and it puts a target on my back if I am not the model minority – if I am not quiet about my identities.'

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

1.7.2 Identity strain and load

In an effort to understand the implications of managing diverse identities in the workplace, participants were prompted to share their perspectives on the identity strain and additional load associated with navigating multiple identities. Their feedback underscored a range of repercussions, with 33.2% reporting feelings of exhaustion and fatigue, and 10.4% noting adverse effects on their mental wellbeing, further emphasising the compounding challenges posed by intersectional identities:

'It is exhausting, trying to be both authentic in order to build rapport and relationships, whilst maintaining a "professional" demeanour and image.'

'It's extremely tiring and, after 20 years of it, unsettling. I feel like a refugee in my own mind and body.'

'Stressful remembering what game I am playing at any point to fit in.'

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

¹⁶K. Yoshino, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* (Random House, 2006).

Figure 20. Distinct identities for Women of Colour in the workplace.

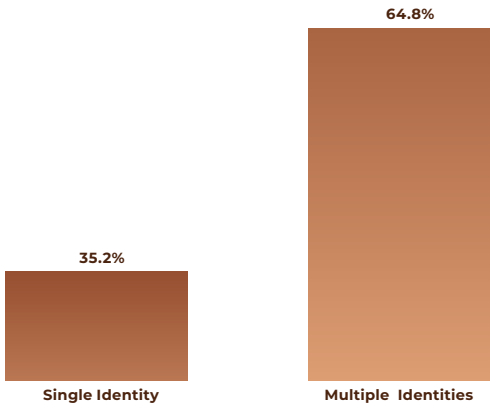


Figure 21. Top 10 effects of navigating multiple identities for Women of Colour in the workplace.

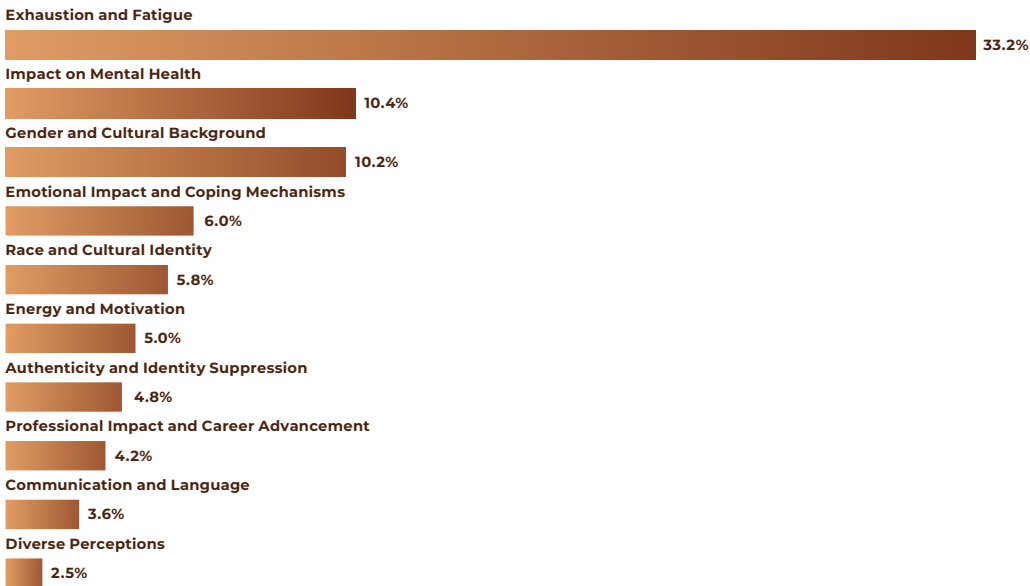
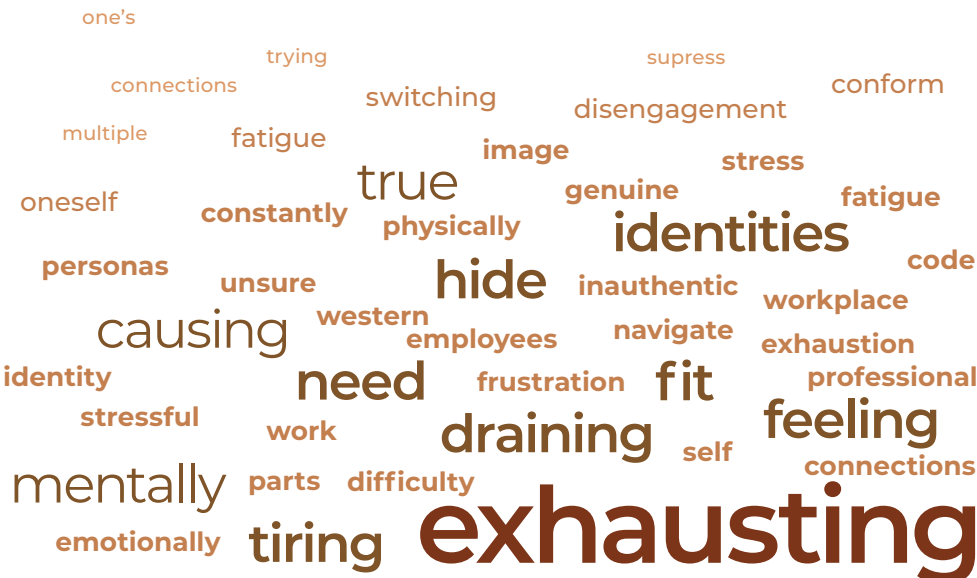


Figure 22. Visual representation of the experience of being a Woman of Colour at work.



1.7.3 Multiple identities as an untapped resource

Having the ability to code-switch can also be an advantage in the workplace. For example, individuals with multiple cultural backgrounds may be able to act as ‘cultural bridges’ that effectively communicate to different groups and bridge differences, while bringing unique and innovative perspectives to the workplace. This was particularly prevalent in those that work in community engagement or DEI roles, or where bilingualism or fresh perspectives were an important part of their role:

‘Recently I have found that there is more of a focus on having WoC in roles that relate to our own communities. In that sense, my cultural identity has allowed me access and legitimacy in these spaces.’

‘I moved into the international development sector and worked in the country of my parents’ birth. There I was able to use my background to more effectively build rapport with my colleagues based on shared cultural knowledges and experiences. This was still challenging to navigate however, as there were other cultural gaps and missed assumptions due to my upbringing in Australia – but on balance it worked in my favour to be seen as a relatable Woman of Colour.’

‘My ability to navigate identities and cross cultures, which I’ve gained through hard experience surviving in overwhelmingly monolingual and monocultural Aussie schools and social groups, has helped me as a translator and interpreter. It also helps me work with writers and academics from diverse backgrounds because I know (and they know I know) how hard it is to be dismissed as a ‘non-native’ English-speaking academic or student... I know the vocabulary and grammatical structures to use without having to simplify difficult concepts.’

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

Research also demonstrates that individuals who have navigated multiple identities and make choices on which aspects of their identities are appropriate for a given context are more adaptable, self-aware and aware of contextual factors that others may never notice.¹⁷ For example:

‘Occasionally I have the element of surprise. Because they think when speaking with me that I’m White. Then when we meet and they see that I’m not I have a few minutes to watch their reaction and learn more about them while they are off balance.’

‘I think it helps me with cross cultural communication and understanding more that everyone comes from various cultural identities and that shapes the way they work.’

‘I can be a chameleon/ethnically ambiguous, able to code switch into any situation.’

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

Workplaces are failing to acknowledge the benefits of navigating multiple identities and to provide respectful, inclusive and safe cultures to reduce the load associated with having to cover or being forced to switch.

¹⁷V. Paisley and M. Tayar, ‘Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Expatriates – an Intersectionality Perspective,’ *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 27, no. 6 (2016): 1–15.

1.8 Nowhere to hide: Double-edged sword of being identifiably 'other' at work

For most Women of Colour (83.7%), their cultural identity is easily identifiable due to physical appearance or other dimensions such as a perceived accent; only 16.3% indicated that their cultural identities are not easily identifiable. With high levels of racial and cultural discrimination and a lack of cultural safety in the workplace, most of those who had an easily identifiable cultural background (69.4%) viewed it as a barrier in the workplace, with one-third (30.6%) viewing their identity visibility positively.

Among those Women of Colour that were not easily identifiable as a Woman of Colour, the majority (55.6%) did not perceive it as an advantage for their career. This indicates that structural barriers exist for most Women of Colour, with their identity acting as a barrier to their career and full participation in the workplace.

Those with ambiguous cultural and ethnic backgrounds cited challenges such as having to 'prove' their identity, discrimination based on their name and accent, and being exposed to racial comments:

'I find that I am placed in a position where I have to prove my blackness. After this I am treated very differently by colleagues.'

'Not at the current workplace, but applying for different workplaces, I believe my name has been used to discriminate against me.'

'People ... might have self-censored if I was readily identifiable as Asian rather than making racist comments in the workplace.'

'People hear my accent and make assumptions.'

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

Workplace harm can take different forms for Women of Colour that aren't visibly 'othered'. It is a double-edged sword that can open doors into unsafe spaces and force these individuals into covering:

'Privilege due to passing for white - "one of the good ones" for racists.'

'In my current consulting role, I feel that my name and outward appearance immediately cull the racists, so that's a positive! They don't approach me for work, and I don't have to deal with dickheads.'

'Only at the start as a junior [my identity was an advantage]. My "diversity" was seen as a nice to have and a check box - I wasn't (yet) a threat so this helped [me] to get ahead (as long as I code switched).'

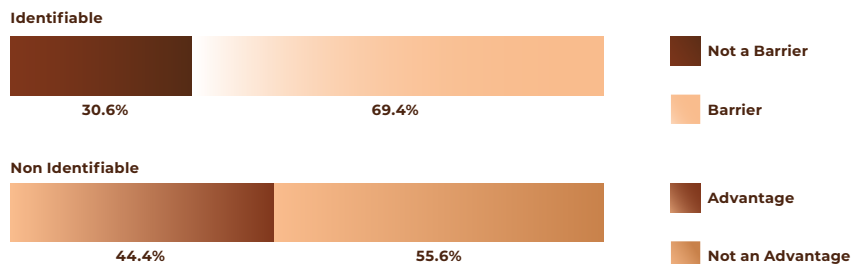
'Not being easily culturally defined gives me flexibility in fitting in to multiple groups - although even then I'm not welcome in the boys clubs.'

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

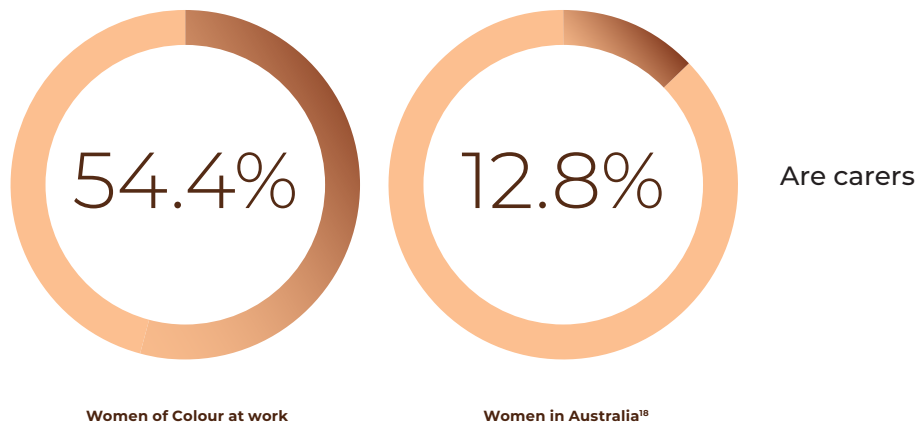
Figure 23. Visibility of the cultural identities of Women of Colour



Figure 24. Perception of cultural identities of Women of Colour as a barrier and/or advantage



1.9 Acknowledging the role of carers



The majority (54.4%) of Women of Colour have caring roles, with 31.7% caring for children, 12.9% caring for parents, other relatives or friends, and 9.7% with multiple caring responsibilities. Carers are most likely to be juggling full-time employment alongside their caring responsibilities (69.1%), with smaller numbers working part-time (15.5%), being self-employed (6.3%), and in casual work (5.4%) or unpaid positions (3.7%). Overall, the number of Women of Colour who identify as carers dropped almost 15% (from 69%) in 2021, potentially due to COVID-19 lockdowns occurring at that time.

Again, Women of Colour carry an additional cognitive and emotional load by taking on primary caring roles and balancing this with work responsibilities. Despite lower numbers overall, three-quarters (74.3%) of Women of Colour in part-time roles have caring responsibilities. Policies and initiatives such as flexible work arrangements have been shown to benefit people with caring roles and allow them to meaningfully contribute to organisational life¹⁹. These policies disproportionately affect Women of Colour but apply to a broad intersection of the population, including men with caring responsibilities:

'As a parent, there has been enough work life balance given to me. This is one advantage I am grateful for.'

WoCA, Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey, 2024

¹⁸Australian Bureau of Statistics. Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Finding (ABS 2022), [Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022)

¹⁹LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Co., Women in the Workplace 2024: The 10th Anniversary Report (LeanIn.Org, 2024), <https://leanin.org/women-in-the-workplace>

Figure 25. Primary caring responsibilities of Women of Colour

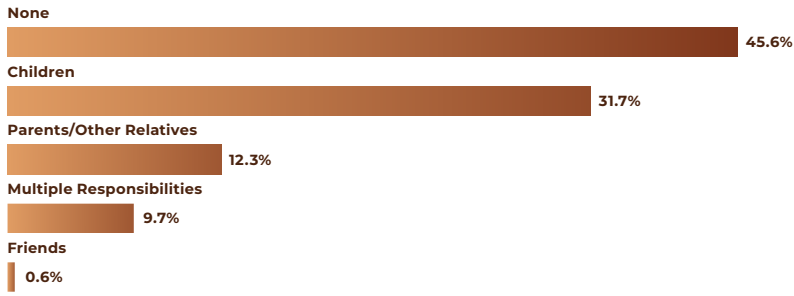


Figure 26. Employment status of Women of Colour

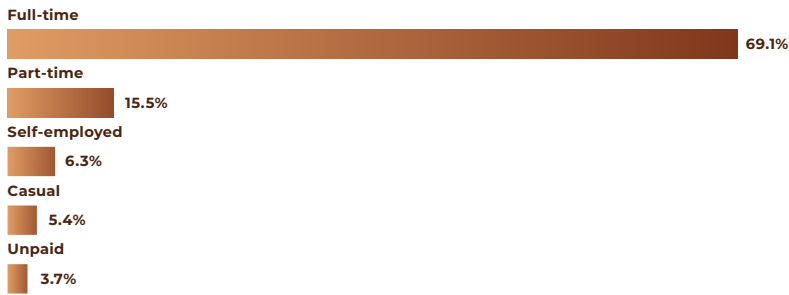
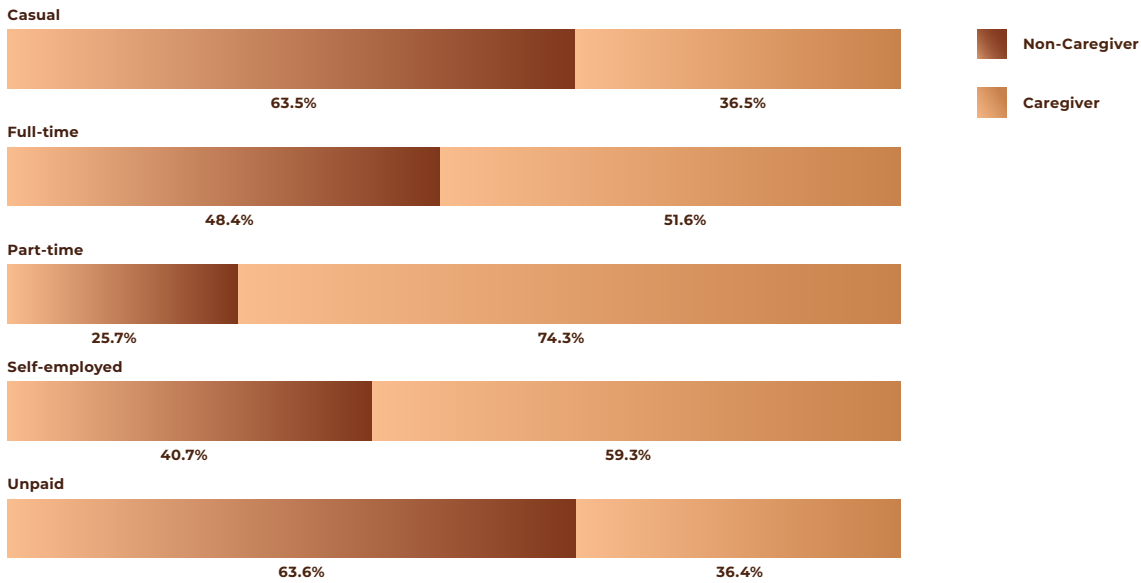


Figure 27. Employment status of Women of Colour who are caregivers compared to non-caregivers



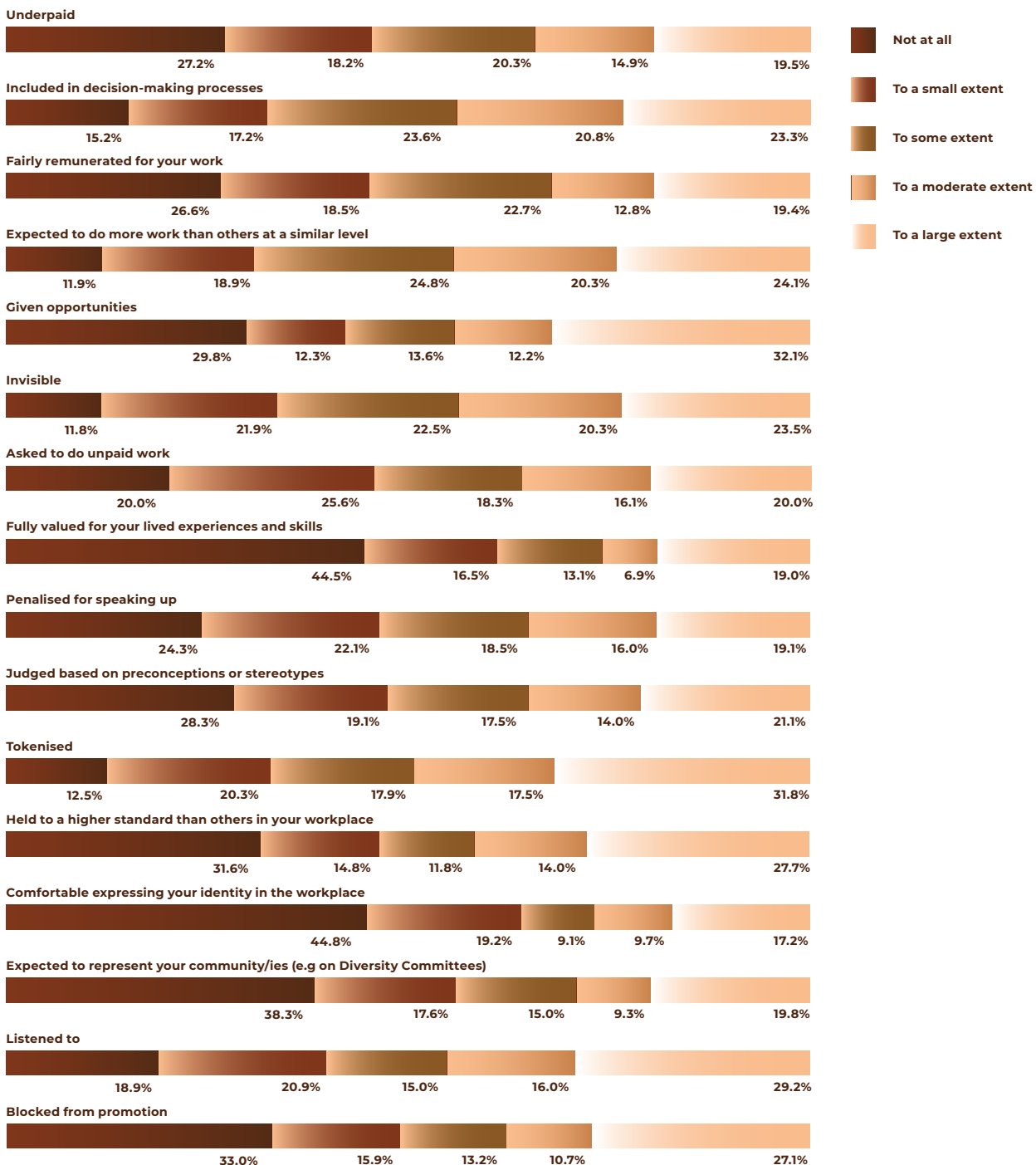
1.10 Asked to do more, not recognised, not promoted

Women of Colour in the workplace overwhelmingly feel undervalued, excluded and held back from reaching their potential and having a successful career. Almost three-quarters (72%) of Women of Colour feel underpaid, with the vast majority asked to do unpaid work (80%) and expected to do more work than others at a similar level (88%). Meanwhile, their contributions are consistently undervalued. Women of Colour feel that they are not included in the decision-making process (85%), not listened to (81%), not given opportunities (70%), and not valued for their lived experiences and skills (55%).

Many employers are adding a cultural load to Women of Colour, which is not recognised or rewarded. In many cases, they are consistently in a double-bind, where they are expected to represent their community (62%) while simultaneously being judged on stereotypes (72%) and penalised for speaking up (76%). As a result, over two-thirds (67%) have been actively blocked from promotion.

The psychological contract between Women of Colour and their workplaces is broken - but we now have a better understanding of how to repair this to get the most out of these highly educated, skilled and engaged workers. Organisations and leaders that recognise, value, reward and promote Women of Colour will get the benefit of their talent, adaptability, lived experiences and diverse perspectives, as well as the dedication of employees who are already going above and beyond their roles to contribute to the organisation. Organisations must stop asking Women of Colour to do work for free and start providing opportunities for them to contribute and then recognise those contributions. The rewards in doing so are clear: organisations can repair the psychological contract to attract better talent, lower rates of turnover, and foster productivity and innovation, to name a few.

Figure 28. Women of Colour's experience of inclusion and equity at work



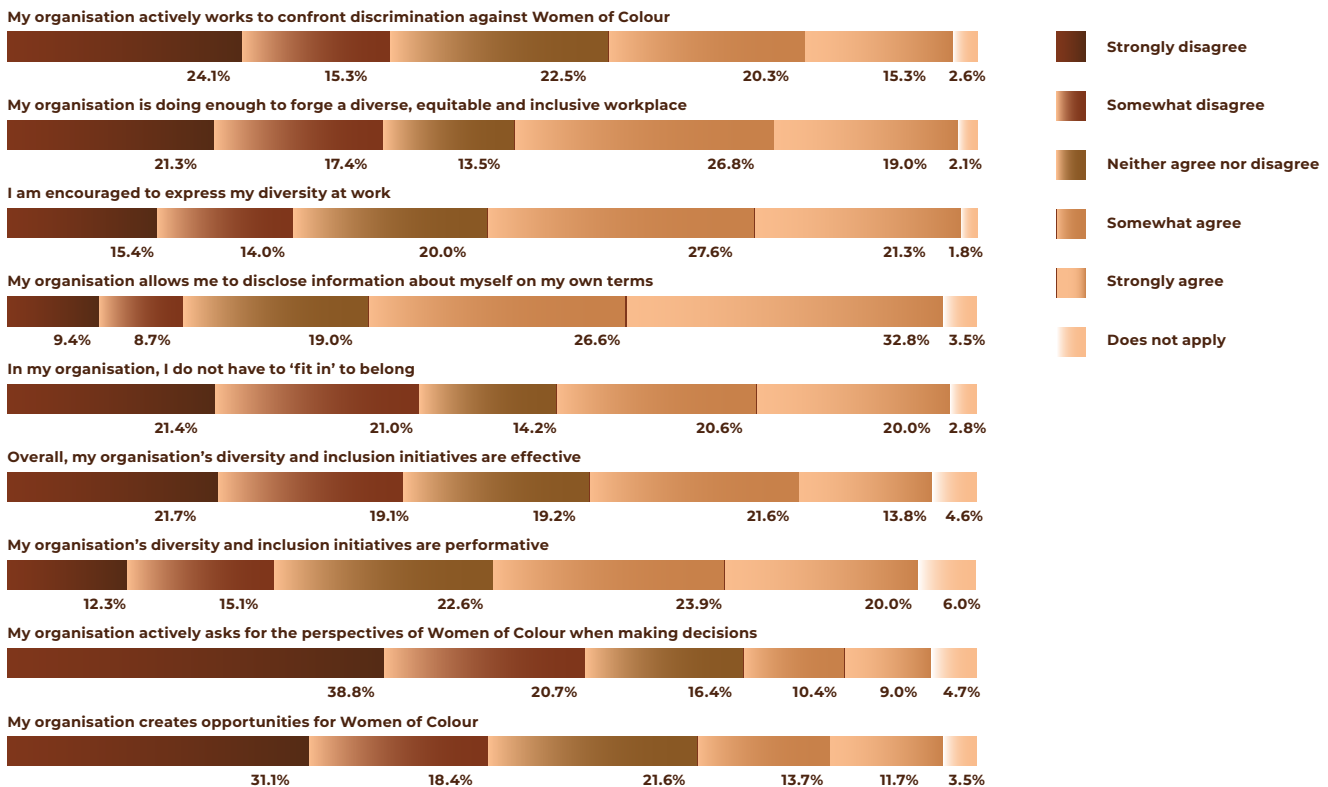
1.11 Is it genuine? DEI in the workplace

Overall, Women of Colour are split regarding whether organisations are doing enough to create diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces. In some areas, organisations were doing well. For example, Women of Colour indicated that they were encouraged to express their diversity at work (48.9%) and could disclose information about themselves on their own terms (59.4%).

In other areas, organisations were missing the mark. The majority of Women of Colour (59.5%) felt that the perspectives of Women of Colour in the workplace were not actively sought; many felt that they had to fit in to belong (42.4%); and about half felt that organisations did not create opportunities for Women of Colour (49.5%).

Many Women of Colour (43.9%) felt that their workplace’s DEI initiatives were performative, indicating that the existence of policies and initiatives was insufficient. Organisations that are able to demonstrate genuine consultation and commitment to DEI are more likely to be perceived as good places to work. An intersectional lens is critical to ensuring that policies and initiatives cater to the diverse needs of their employees and stakeholders.

Figure 29. Women of Colour’s experience of their organisation’s DEI policies and practices.



PART II — RECOMMENDATIONS

This research conclusively demonstrates that Australia is in its infancy when it comes to building workplaces where Women of Colour can feel seen, heard, valued and, most importantly, are recognised and promoted for their contributions. Respectful, safe and inclusive workplaces are essential for organisations to meet their statutory obligations to provide psychosocial safety in the workplace, according to Safe Work Legislation. Organisations are also failing to prevent rampant discrimination, as required by anti-discrimination and Respect@Work laws. Fortunately, there are clear steps and recommendations that can shift our workplaces in the right direction. In this section, we outline recommendations for government and policy bodies, organisations and leaders.

All the recommendations outlined in this section are directly from participant responses to WoCA's Women of Colour in the Workplace Survey 2023-2024. WoCA is a leading expert in this field and provides services and consultation to government and organisations. As an organisation, WoCA is dedicated to amplifying the voices of our community and providing recommendations that are from Women of Colour, for Women of Colour. Thus, each of the recommendations are anchored in first-hand research and we present direct quotations and statistics on what Women of Colour want.

2.1 What Women of Colour want: Recommendations for organisations

Mental health and psychosocial safety are the most pressing concerns for Women of Colour in their workplaces. When asked what they do not have access to and wish that they did, almost two-thirds of Women of Colour indicated a desire for connections to mental health resources that offer targeted support for Women of Colour (62.2%) and a psychological safety audit of their team (60.0%). It is not enough to have mental health resources available or to talk the talk about psychological safety. Organisations need to actively connect their employees to culturally sensitive and trauma-informed supports. Psychological safety through an intersectional lens is essential for creating a workplace that addresses the nuanced needs and experiences of employees, recognising that individuals from diverse backgrounds experience hazards in different ways. In doing so, we can create a workplace where everyone feels safe, valued and empowered.

2.1.1 Psychosocial and mental health support

Adding even more evidence for organisations to invest in psychosocial safety, the most effective workplace initiative, according to Women of Colour, was their organisation's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) with 56.1% indicating it was very effective or effective. The need for additional support is clear, given the high levels of discrimination and additional cultural, emotional and cognitive load that Women of Colour experience. Organisations developing policies and initiatives to support their employees should dedicate more resources to external, confidential, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed psychosocial supports to ensure the effectiveness of these tools and to combat the one-quarter (23.9%) of staff that felt that their EAP was tokenistic.

2.1.2 DEI and anti-racism

Again, we have evidence to support that Women of Colour often experience their DEI strategy as tokenistic (44.7%). There is demand for greater accountability and transparency in the diversity in workplaces and ensuring that leadership represents the communities more closely. This is reflected in the responses for setting targets for increased ethnic and cultural diversity of staff and senior leadership (51.1% say their workplace doesn't offer this and they wish they did) and publishing this data (50.4%). This was followed by having a clear anti-racism action plan to tackle racism in the organisation (49.1%).

2.1.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement

The next most effective workplace initiative was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consultation (35.8%) and development of Reconciliation Action Plans (30.6%), indicating progress on genuine engagement with Australia's First Nations people.

Figure 30. How Women of Colour experience key workplace initiatives.

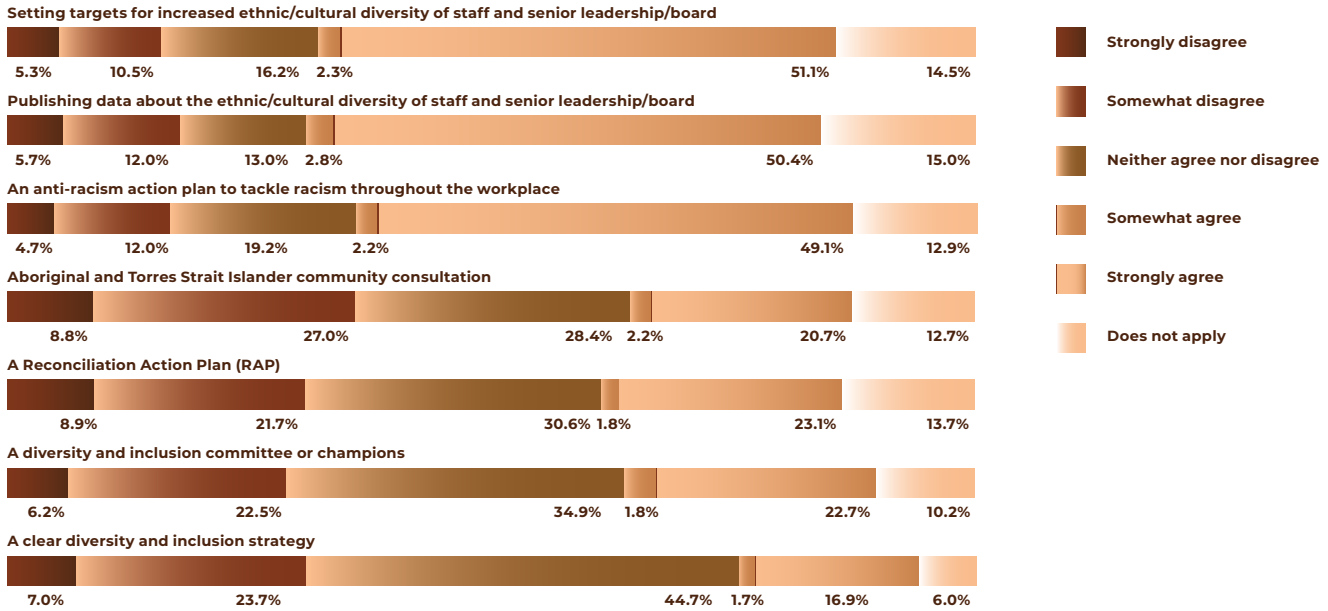


Figure 31. How Women of Colour experience mental health initiatives at work.

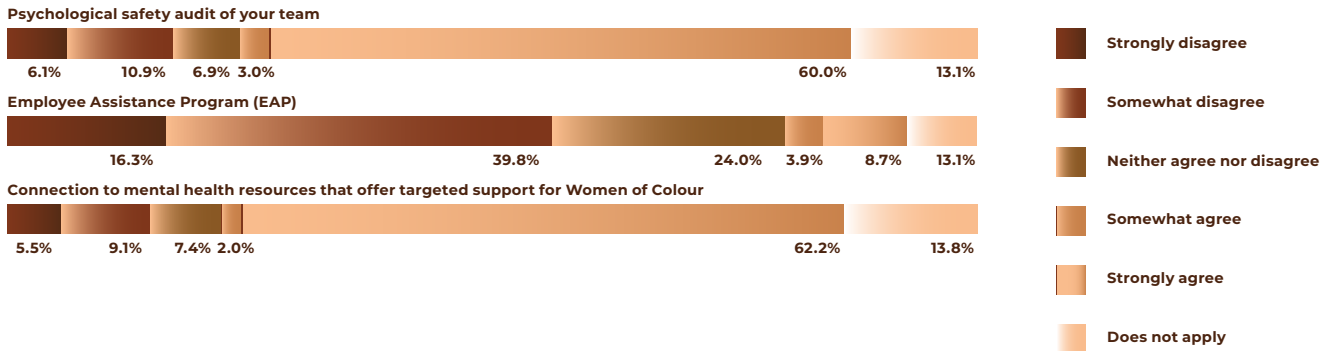
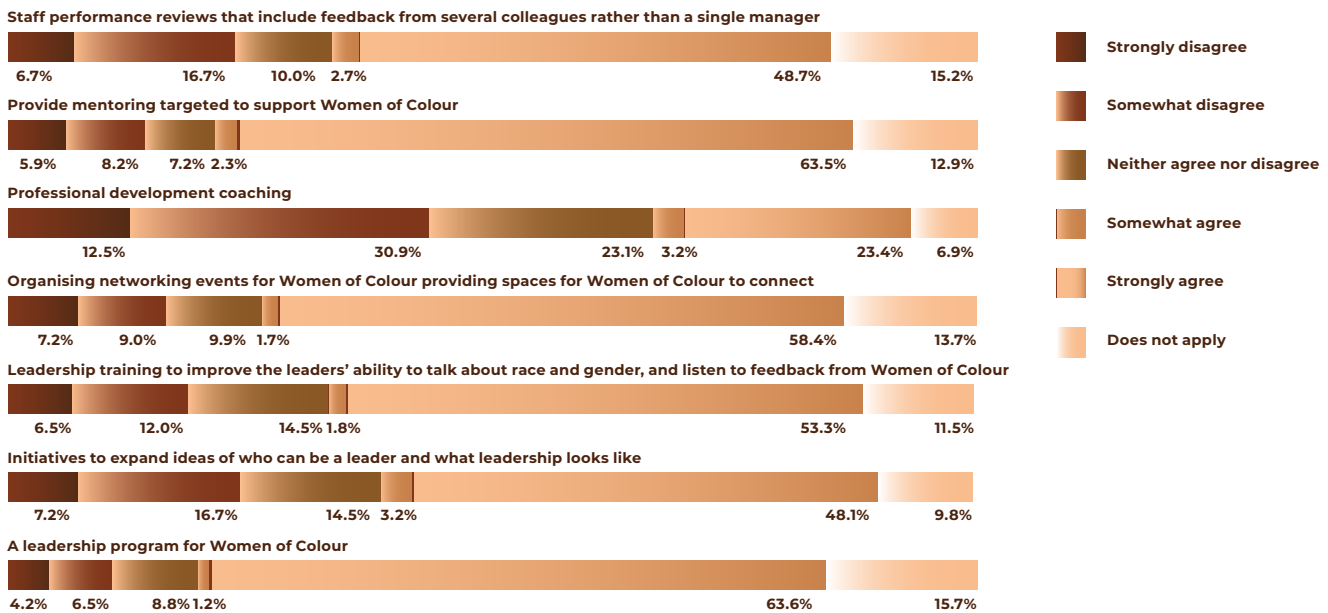


Figure 32. How Women of Colour experience professional development and their leaders.



2.2 What Women of Colour want: The myth of meritocracy in the HR life cycle

Bias is baked into the system. To create systems that are more equitable and fair, we need to recognise and remove these biases. This research supports that bias exists in each step of the HR lifecycle and Women of Colour are acutely aware of this.

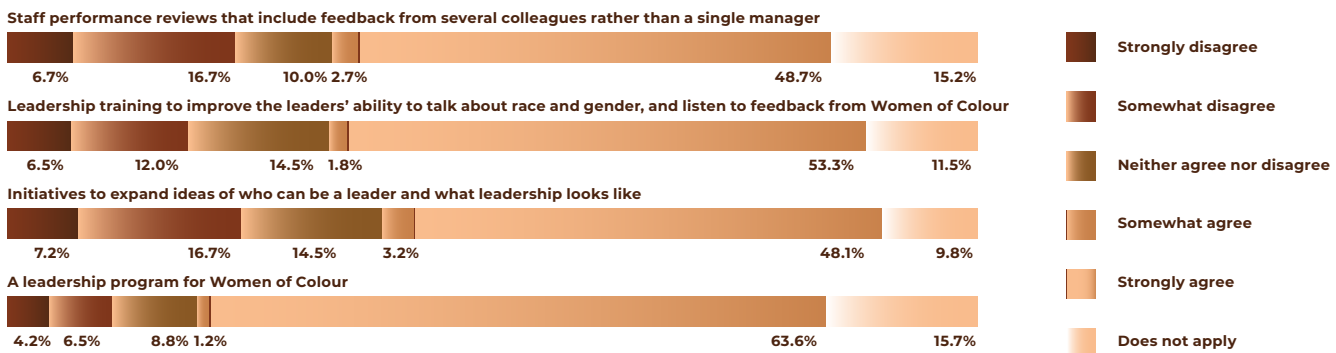
To support this, we asked Women of Colour what worked, what didn't work and what they wanted to see more of. The majority (57.9%) of Women of Colour want to see de-identified CVs so that managers do not know the ethnicity, culture or gender of applicants. The most effective initiatives were online job interviews to make it easier for those with varying needs and personal commitments (61.7%), and including salaries on job advertisements, so everyone is offered the same salary for the skill and experience required (44.8%). These small tweaks to the recruitment and interview process, can make a lasting difference and help level the playing field.

Of all the initiatives that we asked about, the most detrimental initiative was the perception of a clear and unbiased promotion process and career path (6.7%). The myth of meritocracy and the broken ladder associated with the careers of Women of Colour has been well documented in the UK²⁰, Canada²¹, US²² and Australia²³. Insistence that organisations are fair and unbiased hampers candid conversations about how bias is built into the system and perpetuates harm, particularly for Women of Colour and people from marginalised backgrounds. HR needs to reduce bias across both hiring, promotions, and provide flexible working options and external reporting for discrimination and harassment.

Figure 33. Perspectives of Women of Colour on recruitment and career progression.



Figure 34: Perspectives of Women of Colour on professional development and training.



²⁰M. Gyimah, Z. Azad, S. Begum, A. Kapoor, L. Ville, A. Henderson, and M. Dey, Broken Ladders: The Myth of Meritocracy for Women of Colour in the Workplace (Fawcett Society & Runnymede Trust, 2022), <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/broken-ladders>.

²¹Fix the Broken Rung, Why Is It So Difficult for Racialized Immigrant Women to Get Promoted into Management? (Fix the Broken Rung, 2023), <https://www.fixthebrokenrung.com/research>.

²²LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Co., Women in the Workplace 2024.

²³Women of Colour Australia, Workplace Survey Report 2021 (WoCA, 2021), <https://womenofcolour.org.au/workplace-survey-report-2021/>.

2.3 What Women of Colour want: Effective leadership

Alongside structural changes, organisations can provide tailored initiatives to support the careers of Women of Colour. Programs that are designed, delivered and tailored to the living experience of Women of Colour have been shown to have profound impacts on their personal and professional development and support career growth.

2.3.1 Professional development

63.6% wish their organisation offered a Women of Colour leadership program, while 63.5% wanted targeted mentoring for Women of Colour, and 58.4% want more networking, especially with other Women of Colour. Creating spaces of connection and a community of support for Women of Colour, is one essential step in creating support networks where individuals can share their experiences and co-create solutions without having to cover or code-switch or worry about how to present themselves and their stories.

Professional development coaching plays a meaningful role in the development of Women of Colour's careers, with 43.4% rating this as effective or very effective and 23.4% wishing their organisation offered coaching. Interestingly, almost one quarter (23.1%) of Women of Colour found that their professional development coaching was tokenistic, highlighting the importance of offering coaches who understand the living experiences of Women of Colour and the unique barriers that they may need to overcome to succeed. Too many leadership development initiatives have historically been developed and delivered by members of the majority, for whom the workplace is very different and who may unintentionally invalidate Women of Colour's experiences.

2.3.2 Leadership training

There are also several recommendations for leaders. The majority of Women of Colour wished that their workplace would have leadership training to improve leaders' abilities to talk about race and gender, and listen to feedback from Women of Colour. Given that Women of Colour continue to face high levels of discrimination and are excluded and unheard, this is not surprising. Talking about these issues, rather than trying to minimise or gloss over them, is an important leadership capability. Further, almost half of Women of Colour (48.1%) wanted initiatives to expand the ideas of who can be a leader and what leadership looks like. This indicates a lack of representation of diverse leaders continues to hamper the inclusion of diverse people at all levels.

2.3.3 Feedback and development

Almost half of Women of Colour (48.7%) wished their staff performance reviews included feedback from multiple sources rather than a single line manager. Women of Colour are less likely to receive good quality feedback, particularly from a leader that is a member of the majority due to conscious or unconscious bias and fear of the feedback being received poorly²⁴. Feedback is essential for career advancement as it is necessary for professional development and growth.

²⁴D. Davis, Black Women Are Less Likely to Get Quality Feedback at Work. That Impacts Their Earnings and Leadership Opportunities Over Time, Forbes, 15 June 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/darreonnadavis/2022/06/15/black-women-are-less-likely-to-get-quality-feedback-at-work-that-impacts-their-earnings-and-leadership-opportunities-over-time/>.

2.4 Recommendations for government and policy bodies

2.4.1 An intersectional lens is crucial

Intersectionality needs to be at the core of any policy development. Single-axis policies are useful but tend to prioritise the most dominant groups in society. Women of Colour should be more widely consulted in the development of policies and initiatives. As a community, Women of Colour are incredibly intersectional, with representation from 140 ethnic or cultural backgrounds; two-thirds (68.5%) born overseas; 5.1% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation; 16.3% identifying as LGBTIQ+, including non-binary people; and 54.4% with caring responsibilities. As this research demonstrates, many of the policies that currently exist overlook the experiences of Women of Colour and their perspectives in understanding and creating solutions.

2.4.2 The need for training and career development designed for Women of Colour

The demand for Women of Colour Leadership Development training programs is clear. The Office for Women in Victoria funded the Women of Colour Executive Leadership Program Pilot in 2023, which had the astounding impact of 66% of participants achieving a promotion at work within 6 months of program completion. WoCA is currently validating its 2024 program and extending this offering for the Australian Public Service to help them achieve their strategy of 24% CALD representation of Executive Leaders to reflect the broader community. Further training and development is needed, not just for Women of Colour but also for policymakers and leaders, to ensure that bias is being removed from structures and to increase awareness of how to create safe, respectful and inclusive spaces in the workplace and beyond.

2.4.3 Meaningful community consultation

An intersectional lens facilitates more nuanced policies and initiatives to be developed, in direct consultation with the community and community-based organisations. Too often, the dominant organisations that spend large budgets in marketing and networking are heard, while those doing great work on the front lines are overlooked. Meaningful, safe and respectful engagement is not just for your employees. It needs to extend to all key stakeholders, particularly the communities that you serve. Training on meaningful community consultation, transformational ethical storytelling (TEST) and research via Co-Creation is needed to ensure that efforts to engage communities do not have unintended consequences or perpetuate harm.

2.4.4 Safety needs to be strengthened

This research highlights that workplaces are still unsafe for most Women of Colour. Despite legal frameworks covering anti-discrimination and Respect@Work, and the more recent strengthening of psychosocial safety guidelines, discrimination continues to grow. While these frameworks are useful, strengthening legal protections could prevent further harm. For example, WoCA's National Alliance on Women of Colour's Safety and Work (NAWoCS) recently campaigned for Safe Work legislation to mandate that large organisations create gendered violence prevention plans, recognising that diverse leadership representation is essential for the primary prevention of gendered violence.

2.4.5 Women of Colour as carers

Finally, Women of Colour are disproportionately affected by caring. Importantly, many Women of Colour have intergenerational or multiple caring responsibilities, which is an important consideration when designing inclusive workplaces and policy.

2.5 Implementing change: Next steps

Partnering with Women of Colour Australia

WoCA can support your organisation in improving visibility, representation and inclusion for Women of Colour in the workplace in a number of ways, as outlined below.

2.5.1 Leadership, mentorship and sponsorship programs

Our tailored programs are designed, developed and delivered by Women of Colour, for Women of Colour, cultivating a supportive environment that nurtures growth, bolsters confidence, and enhances professional development.

2.5.2 Workshops, training and education

Our dynamic and culturally safe workshops and training sessions equip participants with the vital skills and knowledge necessary to drive sustainable change. By exploring key topics such as identity, cultural competence and authentic communication, we enable individuals to contribute positively to a culture of belonging and allyship within your organisation. Our expert facilitators offer practical strategies and tools that promote the professional growth of Women of Colour and foster a more diverse and welcoming work environment for everyone.

2.5.3 Advisory and assessing where your organisation is at and where you want to be

Our team at WoCA partners with your organisation to analyse existing policies, processes and practices, identifying opportunities to foster a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Together, we clarify your vision for increased visibility, representation and inclusion of Women of Colour at all levels. This assessment informs the development of a tailored strategy, featuring actionable steps and measurable targets, to achieve your diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

Notes on language

The term 'Women of Colour'

Women of Colour is a term derived from the community itself. It was produced as a political act in 1977 in the US by Women of Colour for Women of Colour, and its use is a representation of power and support across diverse intersections of women that cuts across cultural and ethnic categories. It is a solidarity definition that brings women from non-White backgrounds together and gives them a platform to be heard.

Other terms exist and are used in different contexts in Australia. Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women was introduced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to replace Non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB)²⁵ and refers to individuals raised in families where a language other than English was spoken, and whose cultural values and upbringing differed from those of English-speaking society. The main criticism of CALD is that it is too broad and encompasses many people from White backgrounds who may speak a different language or dialect. As an administrative label, it also does not resonate with individuals who find the term confusing, outdated and convoluted.

Culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) is a term introduced by another large organisation, the Diversity Council of Australia, to recognise the racial component of discrimination faced by many Australians. Similarly, as a label ascribed to groups and individuals, rather than a label that comes from the community, many find the term implies a deficit lens as people and communities want to see themselves as empowered in the face of adversity rather than identifying themselves as 'marginalised'.²⁶

As an organisation that represents Women of Colour across Australia, we believe that it is up to our community to label ourselves in a way that empowers, uplifts and solidifies our commitment to one another and change. It is for this reason that we capitalise 'Women of Colour' and call for other organisations to do the same. Thus WoCA continues to advocate for the term 'Women of Colour', which simultaneously recognises the diversity ('colour'), intersectional living experiences and incredible power of our community.

Capitalising 'White'

To pursue grammatical justice and racial equity, WoCA has decided to capitalise 'White' throughout this report in reference to race and systems of oppression (i.e. Whiteness). In the tradition of historically marginalised activists reclaiming the narrative, capitalising 'White' is a linguistic tool to stop normalising 'white' as the default. This is highlighted in Karen Yin's work on conscious language.²⁷ As K. Mack and J. Palfrey from the MacArthur Foundation state, 'choosing to not capitalize White while capitalizing other racial and ethnic identifiers would implicitly affirm Whiteness as the standard and norm. Keeping White lowercase ignores the way Whiteness functions in institutions and communities.'²⁸

²⁵J. Bahr, 'CALD: Why Some Say This Label Is Failing Australians,' SBS News, 29 April 2023, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/hopelessly-inadequate-why-some-say-this-label-is-failing-australians/i0beOywsd>.

²⁶This was highlighted at the 2023 Women of Colour Leadership and Allyship Conference when the Diversity Council Australia presented and then polled the audience, who were primarily Women of Colour, how they identified. They overwhelmingly saw themselves as Women of Colour over other terms offered such as CARM and CALD.

²⁷K. Yin, 'Capitalizing for Equality: When Black and White Are Used as Racial Terms,' Conscious Style Guide, 2017, <https://consciousstyleguide.com/capitalizing-for-equality/>.

²⁸K. Mack and J. Palfrey, Capitalizing Black and White: Grammatical Justice and Equity (MacArthur Foundation, 2020), <https://www.macfound.org/press/perspectives/capitalizing-black-and-white-grammatical-justice-and-equity>.

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Can't donate? Volunteer for us or introduce us to your organisation. We deliver custom programs, training and education to help you build a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace for all.

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