

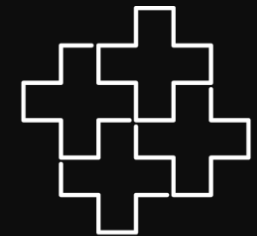
# Racism in aid survey

Please note that this presentation might be upsetting for some and may contain triggers for people who have experienced racism.



THOMSON REUTERS  
FOUNDATION

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Aid Works

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# 1. Introduction

The global anti-racism and Black Lives Matter movements continue to highlight the systemic racism that pervades society.

The power imbalances were previously known and ignored in the aid sector, and often masked by the ways that evaluations and studies were designed and implemented. We (Aid Works) have been complicit in not speaking up about these power imbalances in our evaluations and research. So instead of waiting for a funder to contract us to do the hard work – to speak up – we teamed up with Thomson Reuters Foundation to conduct a rapid survey in August 2020 ([the findings were summarised in an article published in October 2020](#)).

We invited current and recent aid workers, whether they had personally experienced racism or not, to respond to the survey.

The survey aimed to provide evidence on the level of racism that exists, with questions on personal experiences of racism, equal opportunities at work and whether humanitarian groups are doing enough to combat racism.

# 1. Introduction (2)

Through this survey, Thomson Reuters Foundation and Aid Works aimed to provide a platform for aid workers to share their experiences and ultimately, to provide an evidence base for change in the sector.

This report covers the methodology, limitations, and analysis of the data including comments and feedback from the survey participants.

The subject matter and questions asked in this survey may have been triggering for people who have experienced and/or witnessed racism. Participating in the survey would have required a huge amount of emotional labour from many of the respondents. Their honesty and bravery has helped us to gather evidence on racism in the aid sector and it is our sincere hope that this will be a driver for change.

# Methodology

- Thomson Reuters Foundation and Aid Works tried to make the process as inclusive and balanced as possible within the limited timeframe. Limitations are explored on the next page.
- The survey was open to aid workers of all nationalities and ethnicities, working in both head offices and in aid recipient communities, who had and had not experienced racism at work.
- The survey questions were written and edited by a diverse group of people including individuals involved in the anti-racism and Black Lives Matter movements.
- The survey was conducted online in English and communicated through neutral networks rather than specific agencies, for example: aid and development groups on LinkedIn and Facebook; Aid Works' networks; coordination bodies in aid recipient countries; and ReliefWeb. The survey was open for one month. In the analysis, 'n' represents the frequency of responses.
- Some of the main findings were summarised in an [article](#), written by Sonia Elks and published by Thomson Reuters Foundation in October 2020

# Limitations

No survey is perfect. We wanted to get information out quickly to keep momentum going around racism in aid. Limitations include:

- The survey was conducted online and only in English - we acknowledge that this excluded non-English speakers and those without access to computers and/or internet. This impacted on the number of locally-hired staff who could respond. This decision was not taken lightly.
- At 286 respondents, the sample size was relatively small. However, for a rapid, self-funded piece from a small social enterprise, we were impressed with the wide range of locations represented by the respondents.
- Identity is complicated: we recognise that we simplified this for the survey. We focused on the basics – we did not collect information on how race intersects with gender, disabilities, age, sexuality, religion, social mobility, belonging and inclusion.

We're now running more expansive surveys that include intersectionality of characteristics, not only with racism but with identity, discrimination, inclusion, belonging, workplace practices and leadership. We recognise that we have to deal with inclusion and belonging to deal with racism.

## 2. Overview

Half of all respondents reported having experienced racism at work in the past year (2019/20)



Respondents

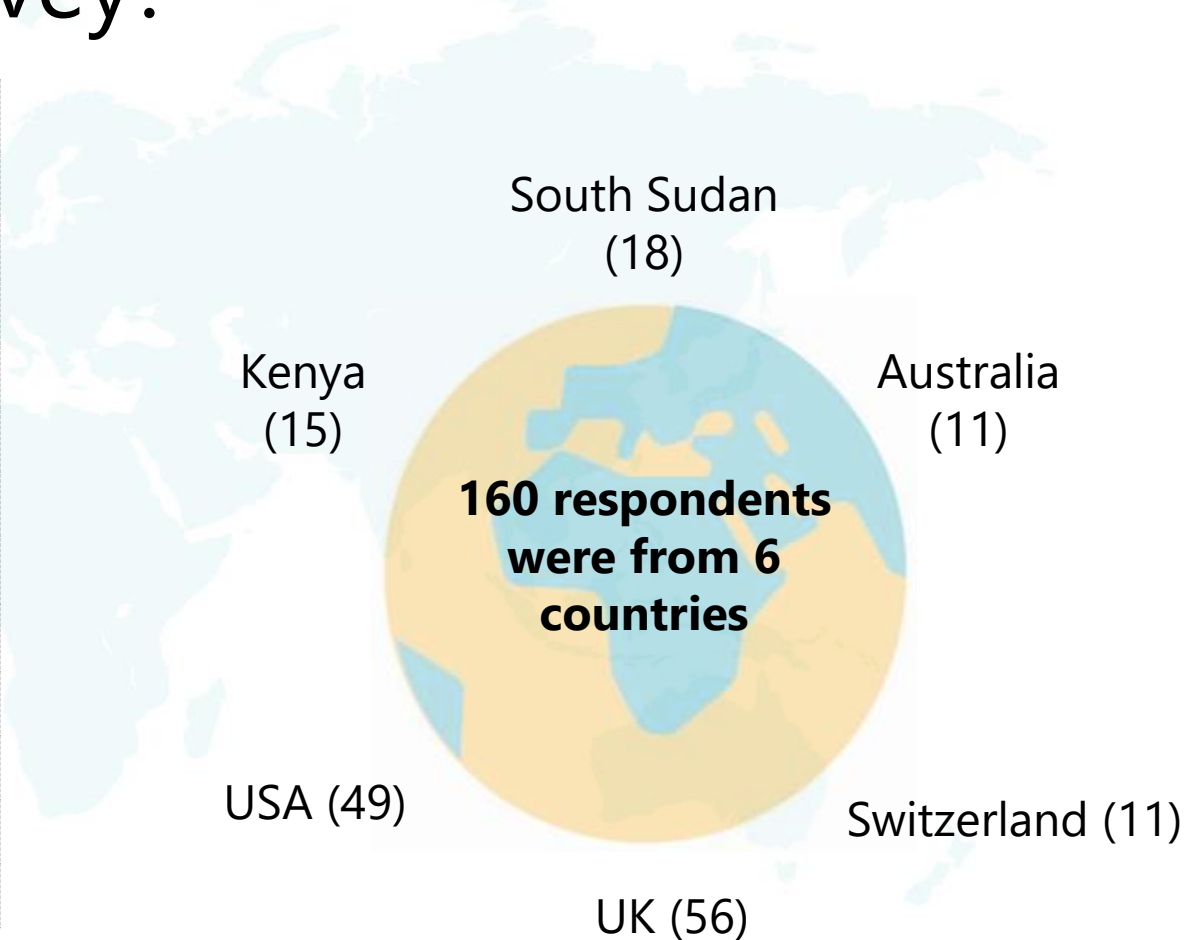
Countries

143

Respondents reported experiencing racism at work in the past year

# Who participated in the survey?

Race/ethnicity	Number of respondents
Black	78
South Asian	22
East Asian	7
Mixed Race	18
Arab	7
Latin American or Hispanic	14
Indigenous or Aboriginal	1
Romany, Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1
Pacific Islander	0
White	107
Other	22
Prefer not to say	11



This was an optional question, so not everyone identified themselves. Some respondents identified with more than one racial/ethnic background. Out of 'other', 9 out of the 22 people could also be considered BIPOC.



# Where did respondents work?

51  
locally hired  
staff

The vast majority of respondents identified as either international staff or working at head quarters/regional offices.

140  
international  
staff

Significantly fewer respondents identified themselves as locally hired staff.

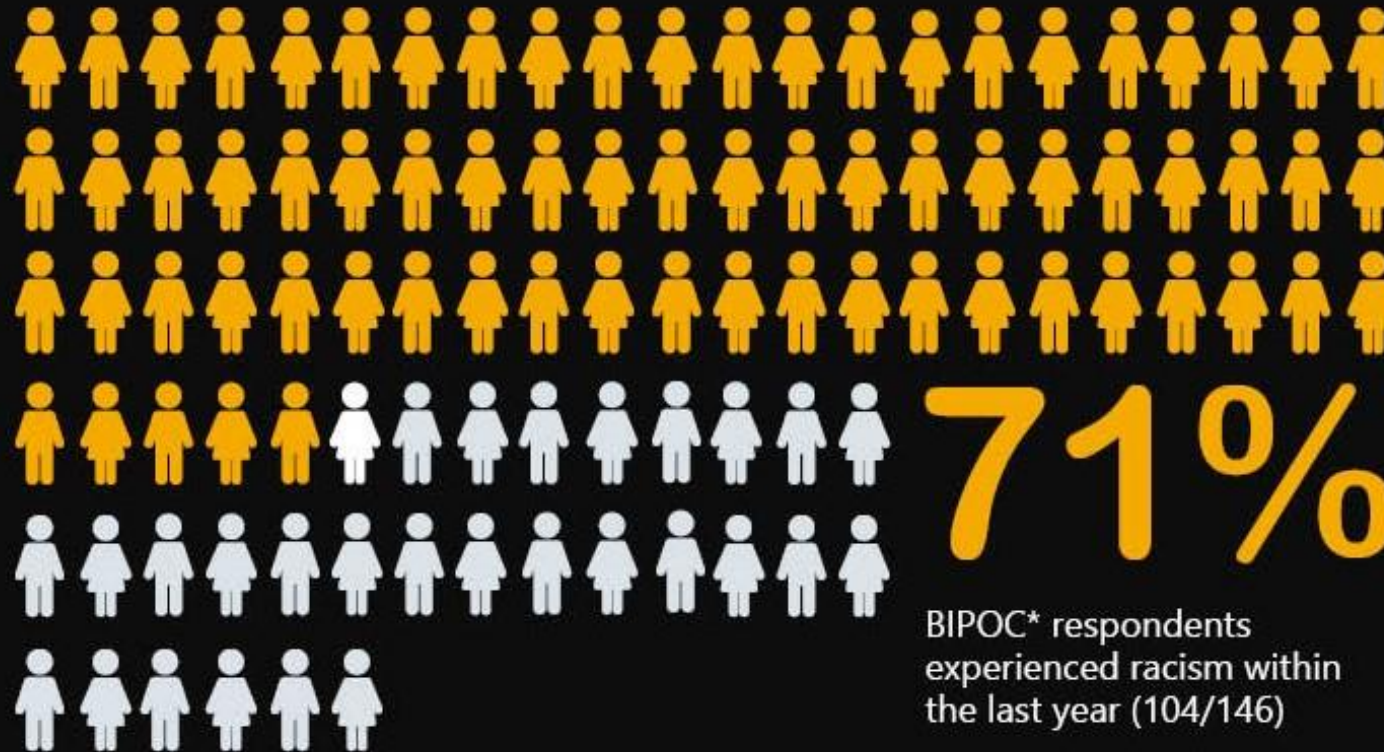
147  
HQ/regional  
hub staff

Some respondents identified as more than one category.

Of those respondents who chose to share their workplace:

Type of employer	Number of respondents
International non-government organisation (INGO)	58
United Nations agency	31
Non-government organisation (NGO)	6
Government agency	5
Donor agency	1
Aid consultancy	1

### 3. Prevalence of racism



We acknowledge we are aggregating people for the purposes of this report. We took 146 persons to be BIPOC from the following racial/ethnic backgrounds: Black, South Asian, East Asian, Mixed Race, Arab, Latin American or Hispanic, Indigenous or Aboriginal, and those that could be identified as BIPOC from 'others'.

The question about racial/ethnic background was optional so it is possible that not all BIPOC respondents have been included in this statistic.

\*Black, Indigenous and People of Colour

# Prevalence of racism

Experienced 3+ racist incidents

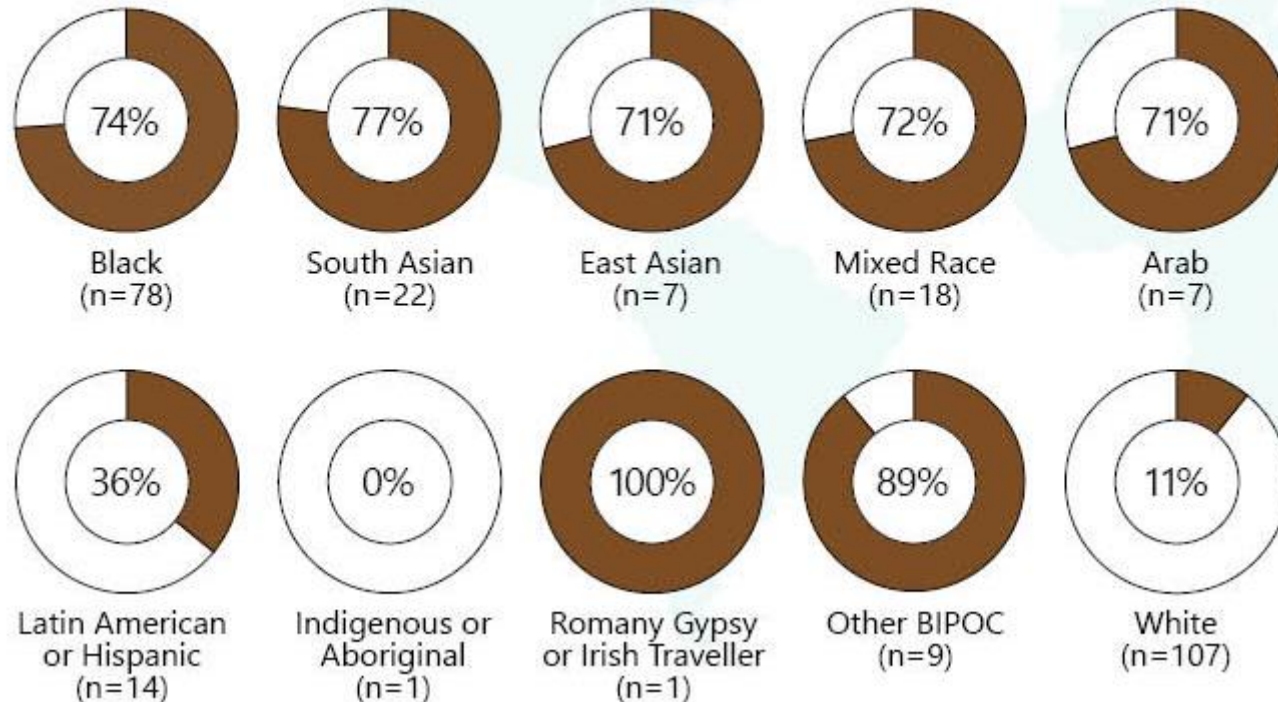


Half of all respondents experienced racism at work in the past year (143/286).

More than two-thirds of these said they had experienced three or more incidents in this time.

# Racism experienced by people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds

Respondents that experienced racism in the past 12 months



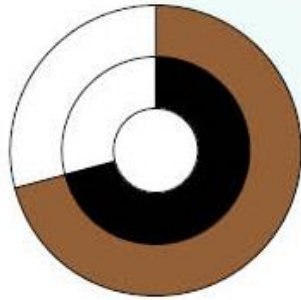
- The total number of respondents is noted with 'n'.
- 11% of white people stated they had suffered racism. Can white people suffer racism in a culture of white supremacy?
- 14% of all respondents described witnessing racism towards BIPOC colleagues (and/or communities served) – this was noted in respondents' extended answers.

The question about racial/ethnic background was optional. Some respondents identified with more than one background (we acknowledge we simplified the categories). 'Other BIPOC' are respondents disaggregated from the 'other' category. We had no respondents from the Pacific Islands.



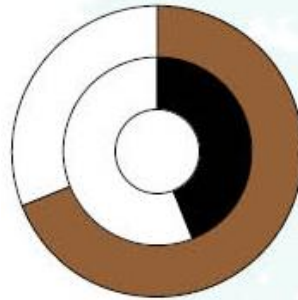
# Prevalence of racism by aid workers with different types of employment contracts/locations

Locally hired staff delivering aid



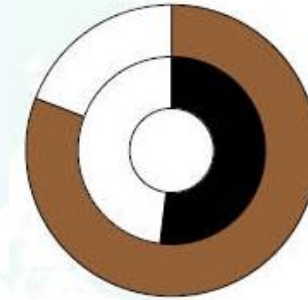
- 71% of all respondents
- 71% of those identifying as BIPOC

Internationally hired staff delivering aid



- 44% of all respondents
- 69% of those identifying as BIPOC

Staff working at HQ/regional hub



- 52% of all respondents
- 81% of those identifying as BIPOC

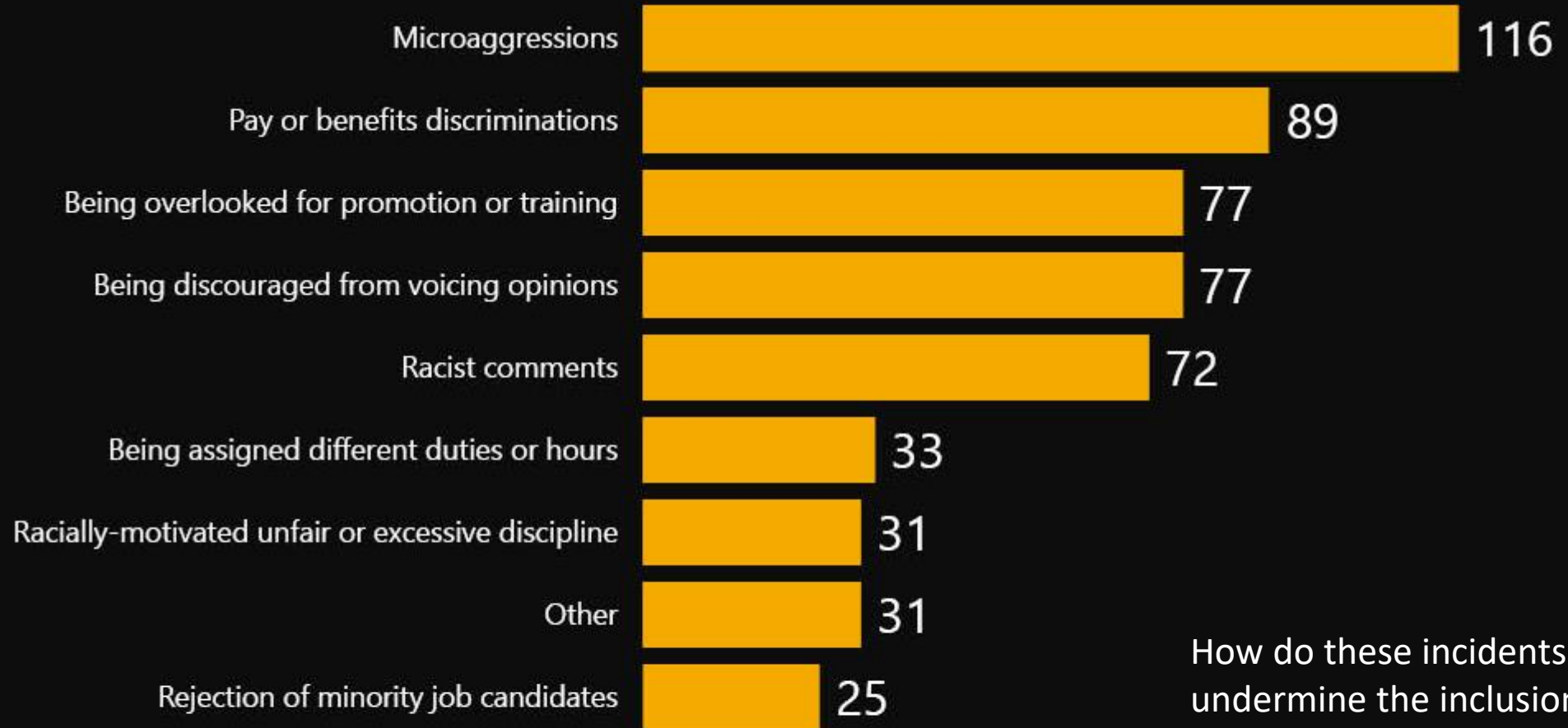
Type of employment contract/location	Sample size for all respondents	Sample size for BIPOC respondents
Locally hired staff	51	41
Internationally hired staff	140	64
HQ/regional hub staff	147	68

The question about racial/ethnic background was optional.

Some respondents identified as having more than one type of employment contract/location – an interesting finding useful for future surveys.

# 4. Types of incidents

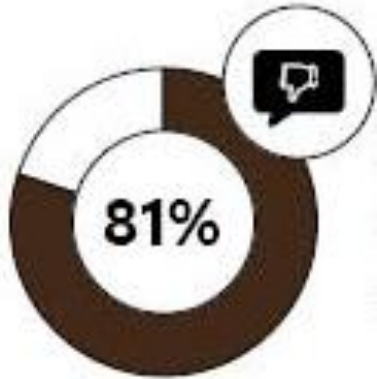
Microaggressions were the most prevalent type of racist incident



How do these incidents undermine the inclusion and belonging we want to create in organisations?

# Types of incidents

Of the respondents who experienced racism



Over 80% suffered **microaggressions**

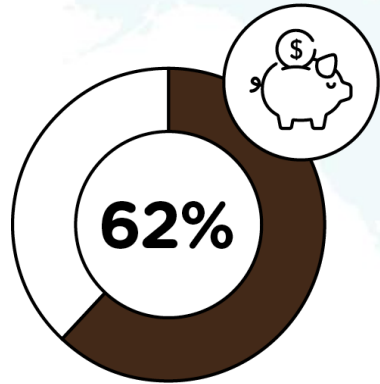
**Microaggressions** is an umbrella term for common verbal or behavioural indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes.

*My previous direct line-manager was a white Australian woman... It was quite notably different how she spoke to me and behaved around me, in comparison to how she behaved around white colleagues... Any comments or ideas shared were always shot down... there were microaggressions and racism, and yet no action was ever taken*

*Microaggressions such as 'I can't understand your accent' ...unfair reprisals... limited social mobility within the organisation re strict recruitment for promotions whereas white (or black but from western countries) members of staff or new recruits were much more lenient or not subject to a transparent recruitment process at all*

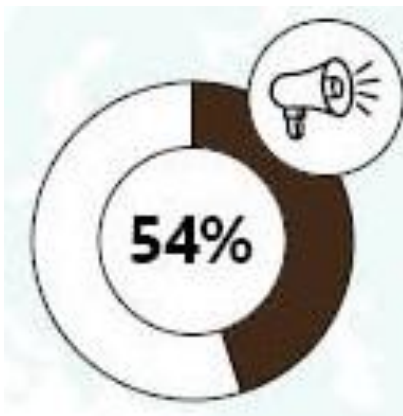
# Types of incidents

Of the respondents who experienced racism



More than half said it involved pay or benefits discrimination.

*...I realised [my] very inexperienced white colleagues were paid up to \$5,000 more than I was, even though I had not just many more years experience but also had more responsibilities*



Over half reported being overlooked for promotion, racist comments, and being discouraged from voicing opinions freely.

*Consistently passed for promotions when I was handling both my job and a line manager's job ... yet the job went to a Caucasian who I had to train*



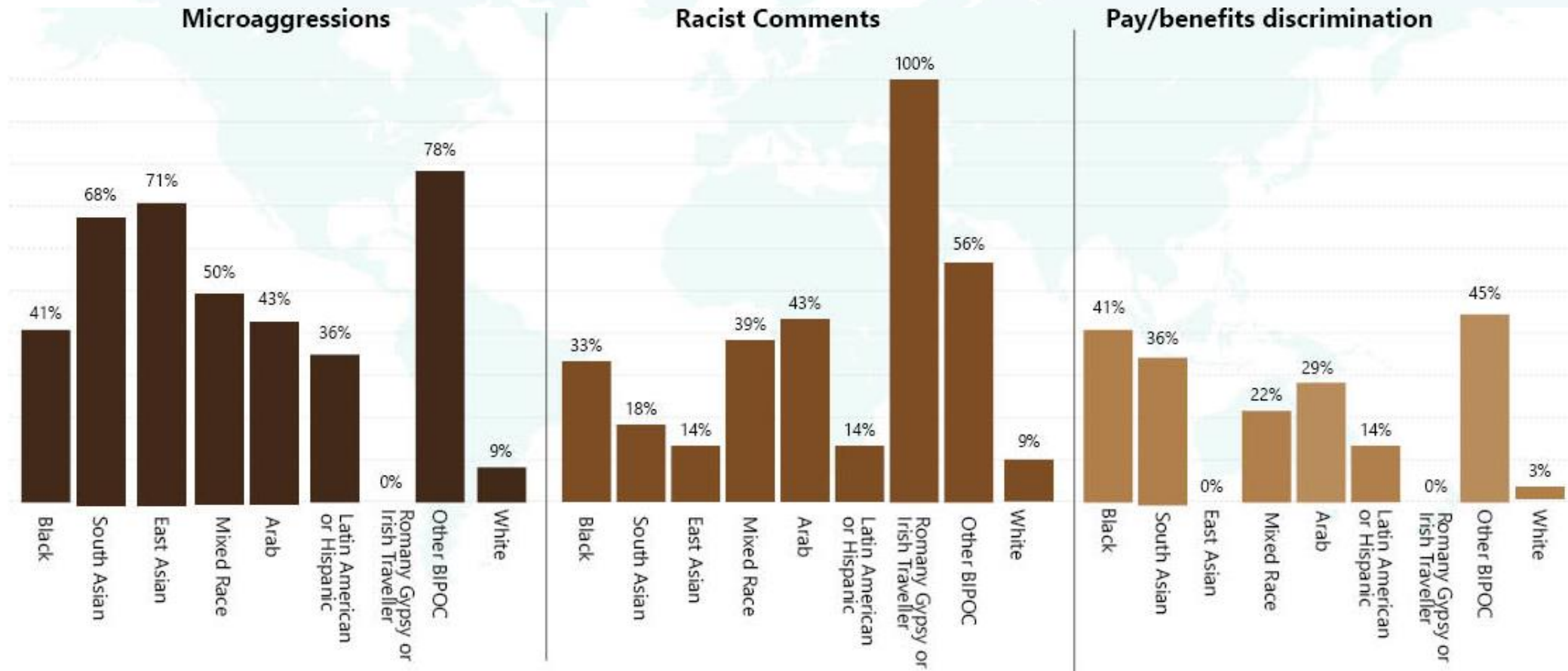
# Racist incidents experienced by aid workers with different types of employment contracts/locations



Type of employment contract/location	Sample size
Locally hired staff	51
Internationally hired staff	140
HQ/regional hub staff	147

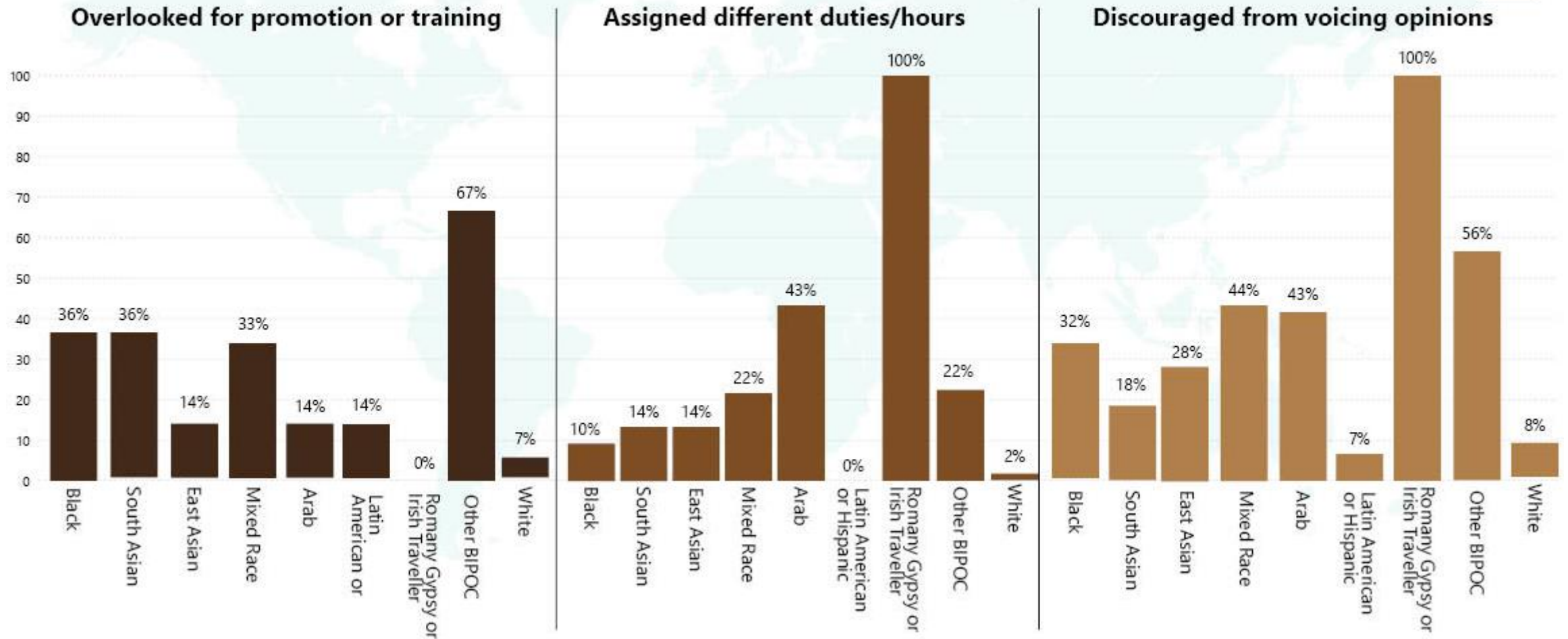
- Pay or benefits discrimination was highest for locally hired staff
- Microaggressions were highest for internationally hired staff and those in HQ/regional hubs

# Types of racism experienced by different racial/ethnic backgrounds



Race/ethnicity	n
Black	78
South Asian	22
East Asian	7
Mixed Race	18
Arab	7
Latin American or Hispanic	14
Romany, Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1
Other BIPOC	9
White	107

# Types of racism experienced by different racial/ethnic backgrounds



# Other types of racist incidents

Respondent's gave details of the following incidents in their extended answers:

Incident	Number of respondents
Bullying and/or name-calling	7
Spoken to in a patronising way	7
Stereotyping	3
Gaslighting	2
Working in dangerous conditions with a lack of security provision (compared to international staff)	2
Racist 'jokes'	1

*Internationals, especially white western ones have all sorts of stereotypes about the different South Sudanese ethnic groups. I regularly heard them say awful/inappropriate things*

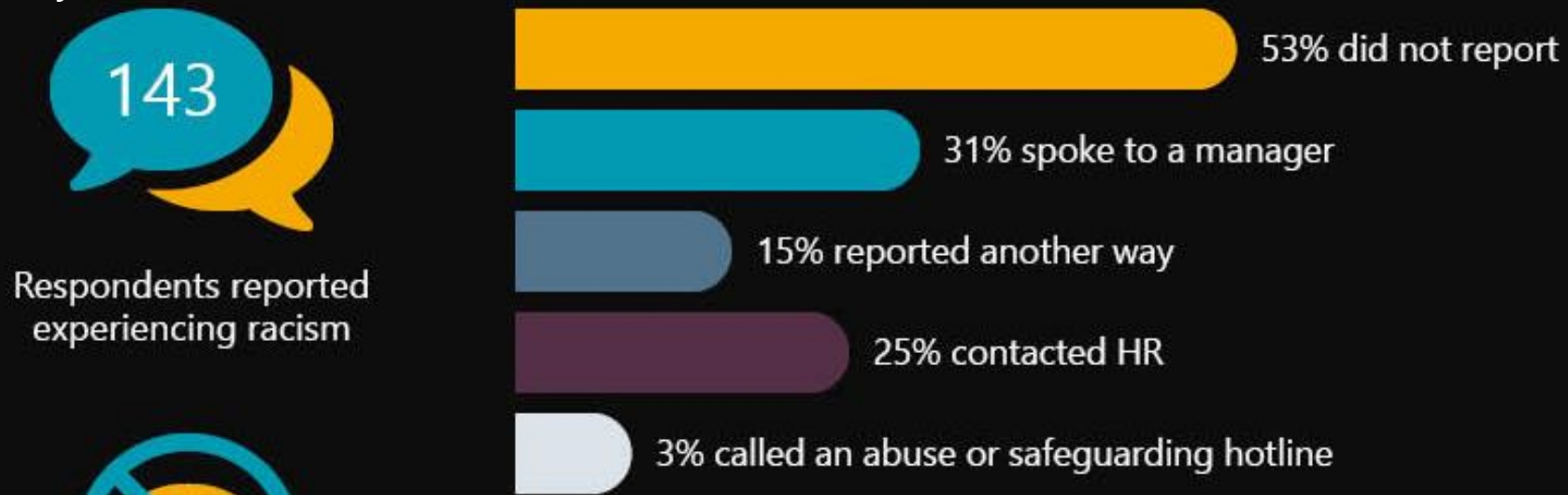
*I received several comments about being Muslim and all the jokes about not eating pork. I have also received comments from CDs informing that if there's an evacuation I'll be last to leave because priority will be given to European and other Western people*




# 5. Rate of reporting racist incidents

Less than half of respondents reported the racism they experienced to their organisation.

The respondents who *did* report were most likely to go to their manager, and often reported in more than one way.



Half of them did not report it

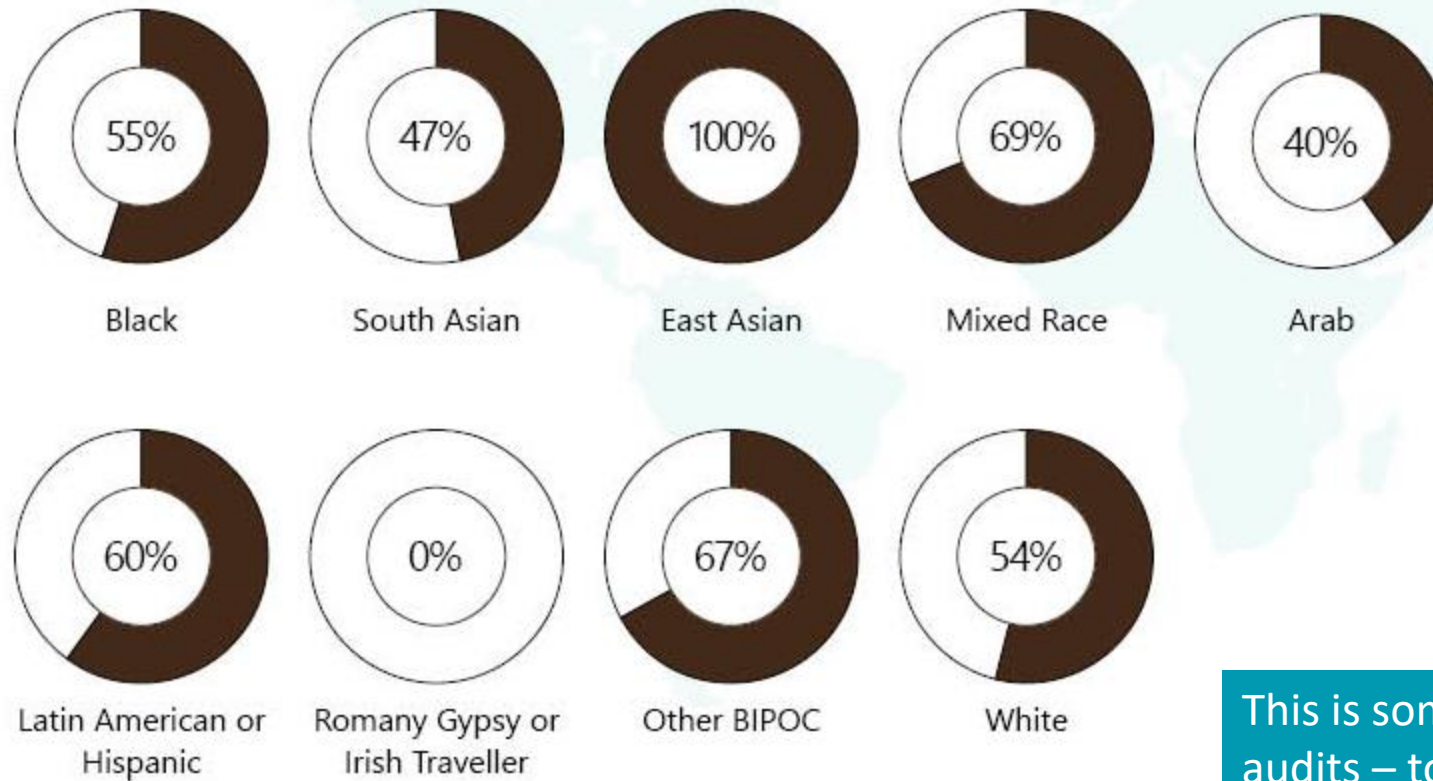


Among the 66 people who did choose to blow the whistle, almost three quarters said they were unhappy with how it was dealt with. Only one person was happy with the response.

1 respondent did not give an answer.

# Reporting of racist incidents by racial/ethnic background

Percentage of respondents who **did not** report the racism they experienced:

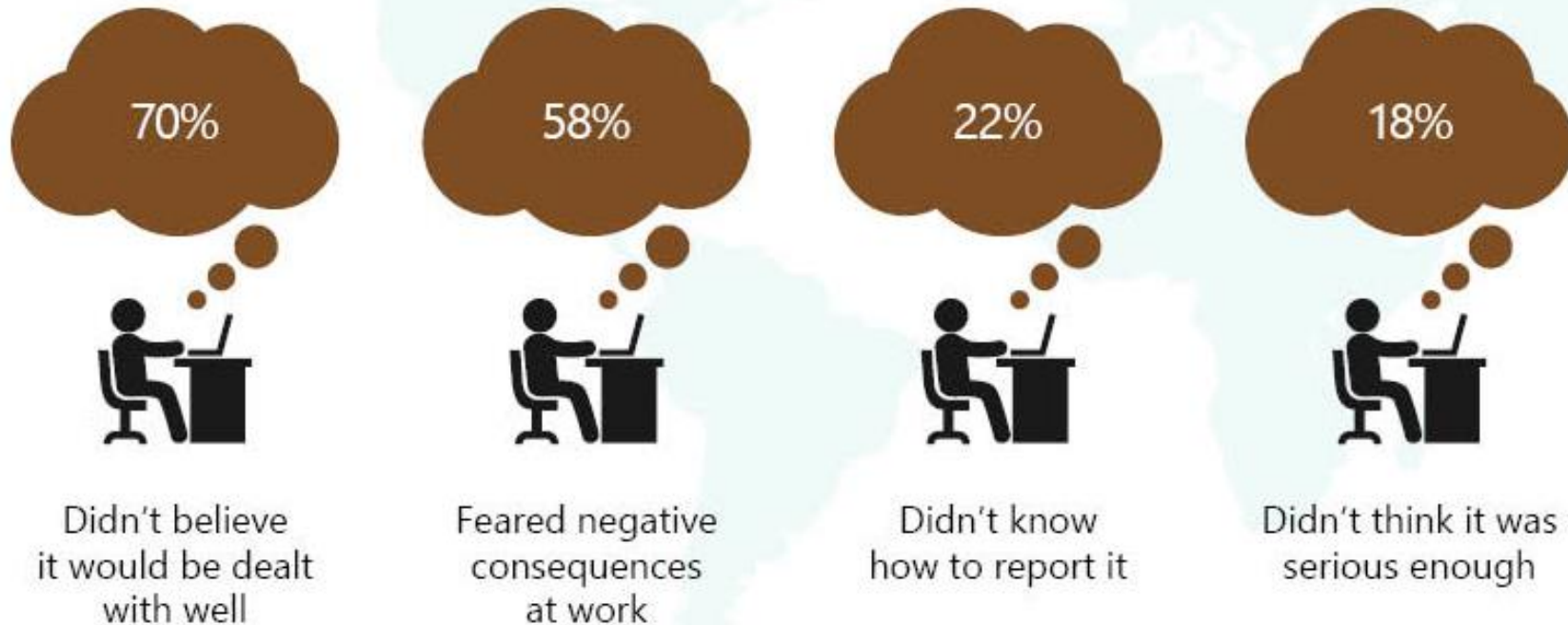


Race/ethnicity	Number of respondents who experienced racism
Black	58
South Asian	17
East Asian	5
Mixed Race	13
Arab	5
Latin American or Hispanic	5
Romany, Gypsy or Irish Traveller	1
Other BIPOC	9
White	13

This is something we discuss in our workshops and audits – to bring to agencies’ attention the hidden nature of incidents.

# Why did respondents not report racism?

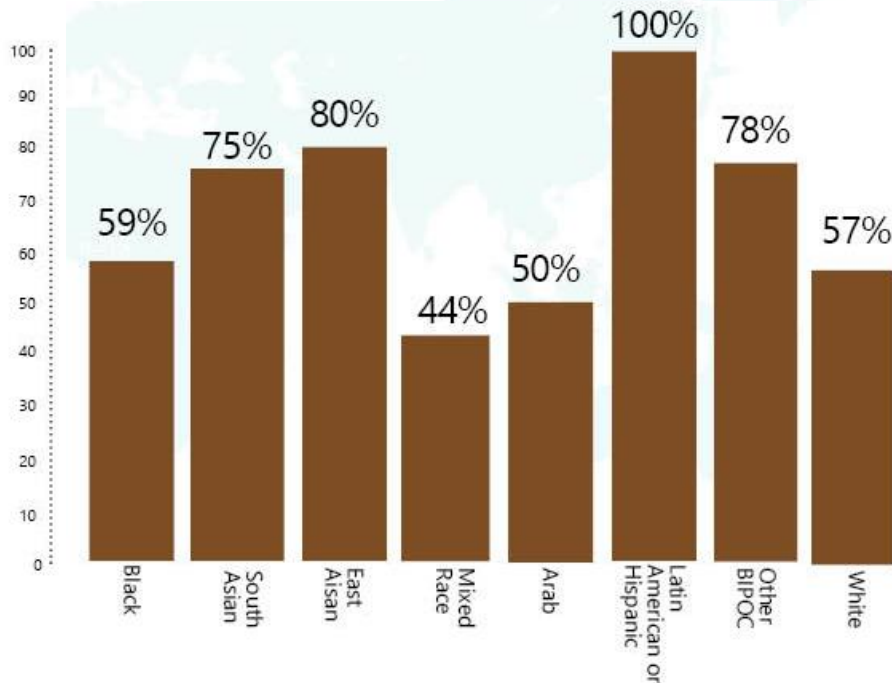
Of the 76 respondents who experienced racism but **did not** report it:



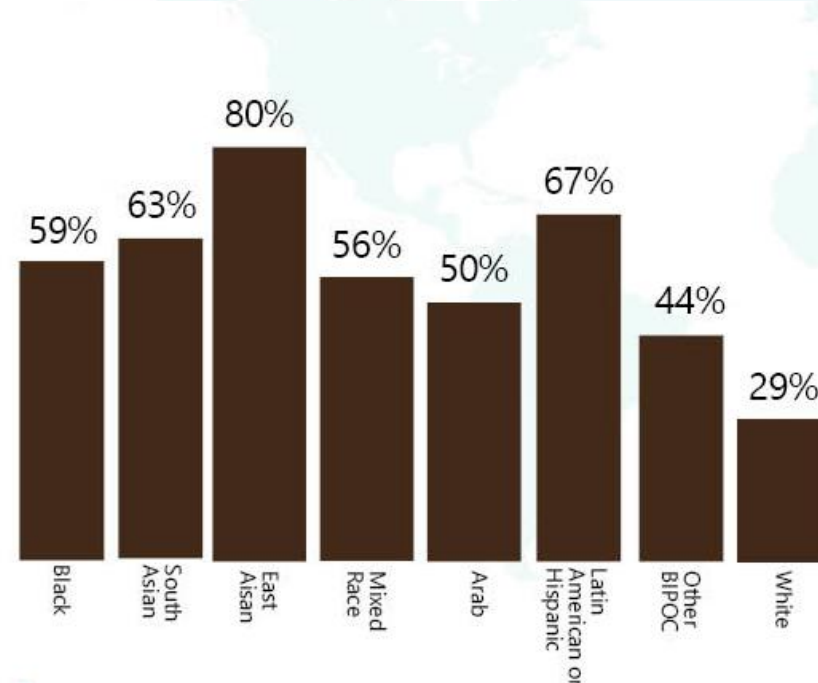
*I never reported [racism] anywhere, nor will I, because I cannot afford to be identified as the person that was playing the "race card" or have those incidents define me more than my work*

# The two most common reasons why people did not report racism

**Didn't believe it would be dealt with well**



**Feared negative consequences at work**



Race/ethnicity	Number of respondents who experienced racism and <b>did not</b> report it
Black	32
South Asian	8
East Asian	5
Mixed Race	9
Arab	2
Latin American or Hispanic	3
Other BIPOC	9
White	7



# How did type of employment contract/location affect how people reported racism?

Percentage of respondents that **did not** report the racism they experienced in the past year:



More than half of respondents in all three groups did not report racism.

Type of employment contract/location	Number of respondents
Locally hired staff	51
Internationally hired staff	140
HQ/regional hub staff	147

# Respondents who report racism are unhappy with the outcomes

Of those who did make a formal complaint, about three-quarters were unhappy with how it was handled. 20% said they were partially satisfied, and the remainder were unsure. **Just one person was happy with the response to their complaint.**

*I reported all of it to CD and senior management. She never faced investigation*

*When subjected to verbal abuse by a partner executive director during a phone conversation, reported abuse to white male HR chief and senior management... Did not receive any formal apology ... He remains executive director of partner organisation to-date*

*When I have raised issues with bullying, I was left unsupported, had responsibilities removed until claims were further corroborated a few years later by a white colleague*

# 6. Equal opportunities

Almost 9 out of 10 (247/286)



of those surveyed said people of colour and local workers in countries where aid is being delivered were not given the same opportunities as international staff.

The top three areas of inequality were noted as:



PAY OR  
BENEFITS



CAREER  
PROGRESSION



FREEDOM TO  
VOICE OPINIONS

# Equal opportunities

## Pay or benefits

*I am a white female aid worker... I have been assigned as a team leader with a team of national experts, some of whom are way more qualified than me. And their daily fee is not even half of mine*

## Career progression

*[E]very day I witness white colleagues being given the benefit of the doubt that they will "grow into" a role they are being promoted into, while colleagues of colour are told about all the different ways they need to develop themselves to one day be considered for promotion*

# Is enough being done?



**82%**

235 people said humanitarian organisations are not doing enough to combat institutional or staff racism



# Comments from respondents

*[I]t's no longer possible to pretend we don't know better*

*The system is unequivocally Eurocentric*

*Unconscious bias training alone doesn't work. It needs to be couple[d] with policies, systems and structures that support issues to be addressed*

# What more should be done?

52 respondents said that there should be more representation of local people within organisations, particularly at management level

*It is ridiculous that we see fresh out of college graduates, showing up first time in field after a brief stint pen pushing at HQ to manage national staff with several years of experience*

26 people argued that the same job should pay the same salary and have the same opportunities for international and local/national employees and/or that organisations should fully disclose salaries of all workers

*Have one pay scale for expats and local staff*

17 respondents said that aid agencies should increase learning and development opportunities for local/national staff

*More and more should be done to open learning opportunities at all level for local staff*

# What more should be done? (2)

15 people said that there should be more robust and transparent complaints procedures for reporting racism

13 aid workers said that the knowledge/ expertise that informs aid work should be driven by local people and/or local staff (rather than relying heavily on international aid workers who have limited experience in that context)

13 people said that there should be more awareness/ training

*Repeated accusations and reports [should be] thoroughly investigated within the organisation*

*Preference should be always [be] given to local staff and / or people who speak the local language fluently, understand local culture and who have local know how*

*Make training on racism mandatory*



# 7. Discussion points

- Racism exists in the aid sector: the vast majority of BIPOC respondents reported experiencing racism in the last year, with more than two-thirds experiencing three or more incidents. White people also acknowledge witnessing racism. There is a clear imbalance in power and privilege, highlighted by data and the respondents' comments.
- Microaggressions, inequities in pay, promotions and training, being discouraged from voicing opinions and allowing racist comments - all erode inclusion and belonging in teams and organisations. This is a cultural issue to be dealt with across all parts of an organisation, not just in countries being supported or head offices alone.
- The low rate of reporting racist incidents indicates a lack of confidence in any systems in place, and that managers are not equipped to support individuals experiencing racism.
- The vast majority of respondents - of all racial/ethnic backgrounds - agree that more needs to be done. At the moment the responsibility all too often is on the person experiencing racism to do something about it.

# Seven ways forward – support the workforce and workplace

**We need to support the workforce and the workplace - not just the work.** This is a collective responsibility and don't assume that someone else is driving change.

- 1. Explore your organisation's status, via a wide-ranging audit** – this survey has been an informative exercise across the sector. For an organisation, link this survey to assessing the diversity, inclusion and belonging in your organisation (not just your diversity). Within such a survey, be conscious of the bias we create in formulating patterns. Share the results with all your staff and publicly – be brave.
- 2. Have safe approaches for learning and sharing information within your organisations** – use workshops, focus groups, and specific safe spaces for BIPOC staff. Unconscious bias training is not enough by itself. Ensure you are truly supporting your BIPOC team members – listen to their needs. It's essential to link such workshops with internal plans for learning and actions.
- 3. Provide support to managers** – alongside the need for commitment from senior management, greater support to middle-managers is needed, to enable them to identify and resolve problems, and improve relations (we have found coaching support a very powerful tool for managers).

# Seven ways forward – support the workforce and workplace (2)

- 4. Create champions for change** – across your organisation, from the CEO to frontline workers. This will look different for each organisation. It could include reverse mentoring schemes, career progression pathways for locally-hired staff, and shift power (not problems) away from the white-centric system we work within. Do not tolerate white supremacist behaviour anymore.
- 5. Work on your systems and policies** – review, update and improve your policies and systems – including your recruitment, pay, benefits, complaints and career progression processes. Don't wait for an incident to happen. If you wait, racism could end up creating huge individual trauma and costing the organisation large sums of money.
- 6. Provide accessible, neutral and meaningful support to those experiencing racism** – to increase confidence in fair processes and support those experiencing racism to take action in a safe way.
- 7. Work through your own white privilege** – by taking responsibility for your continuous education, and intentionally changing your habits and behaviour. Listen to your BIPOC team members but don't rely on them for your education.

What are you going to do today, to drive  
change?

# Thank you

Thank you to the respondents for bravely sharing their experiences.

This is triggering for people who have experienced and/or witnessed racism.

We hope that your honesty and bravery will drive change in the aid sector.

For a chat about what this may mean for you or your organisation – email us [confidential@aidworks.org.uk](mailto:confidential@aidworks.org.uk)

If you are an empathetic change maker who cares about social justice and making the world more equitable - come join The Innovation community <https://community.theinnovation.org.uk/>

