



Monitoring Barriers to Inclusion

Findings from the pilot

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Introduction

In 2022, FAIR SHARE set out to explore what a more intersectional approach to monitoring could look like within the social impact sector. This effort was driven by the recognition that traditional monitoring practices often fail to capture the complex interplay of multiple forms of marginalisation and the structures that sustain them. Collaboration with civil society actors, alongside a series of roundtable discussions, led to the emergence of [key questions and recommendations](#) to inform monitoring practices rooted in intersectional feminism.

Insights from the exploratory process suggests that intersectional monitoring should:

- Be mindful and aware of potential triggers and additional burdens faced by marginalised individuals, while making multidimensional discrimination, marginalisation, and – above all – the previously identified gaps visible
- Identify and critically challenge existing power structures that enable discrimination and marginalisation
- Identify structural barriers and mechanisms of exclusion
- Use data to spark reflection and drive change
- Explain changes – whether improvements or deteriorations – in the representation, safety and well-being of marginalised individuals in order to inform future strategies and actions
- Support context-specific data collection, recognising that organisations and structural contexts may face very different challenges and forms of marginalisation.

The exploratory process also surfaced important questions that a more intersectional approach to monitoring should address, including but not limited to:

- Which structures maintain existing injustices?
- Which organisational conditions enable stronger representation of marginalised communities?
- What structural factors and barriers hinder or block access to leadership positions for people facing multiple forms of marginalisation?
- What forms of marginalisation and exclusion remain unaccounted for, and how can data collection address these gaps while respecting the needs of affected communities?

Further details on the exploration process can be found [here](#).

Building on these questions and recommendations, a deliberate decision was made to focus the Intersectional Monitoring pilot not on individuals with lived experiences of marginalisation, but rather on the systems, structures and practices that either support or hinder inclusion within organisations.

Through the intersectional Monitoring pilot, we therefore aimed to:

- Test recommendations from the Intersectional Monitoring exploration
- Explore organisations' inclusion practices and systems
- Identify structural barriers to inclusion within the sector
- Shift the burden of change from individuals alone to organisations, and the sector at large
- Foster conversations on the topic of intersectional equity and inclusion.

A key consideration in focusing the pilot on organisational systems and structures rather than individuals was the intention to shift the burden of change away from marginalised individuals alone and towards organisations themselves. This reflects a recognition that the emotional labour of monitoring is often disproportionately borne by those who experience marginalisation. **The pilot therefore aims to encourage organisations to critically examine their own practices rather than placing the responsibility of inclusion on marginalised individuals.**

Overall, the pilot saw the participation of 27 social impact organisations from across the globe, including Belgium, Denmark, Germany, South Africa, the UK, the USA as well as several multinational entities. The pilot generated valuable insights into how organisations approach intersectional inclusion, the systems they have established to foster inclusive environments, and the ways they support individuals with lived experiences of marginalisation. The pilot also surfaced critical reflections on accountability, privilege and the structural gaps that continue to hinder intersectional inclusion.

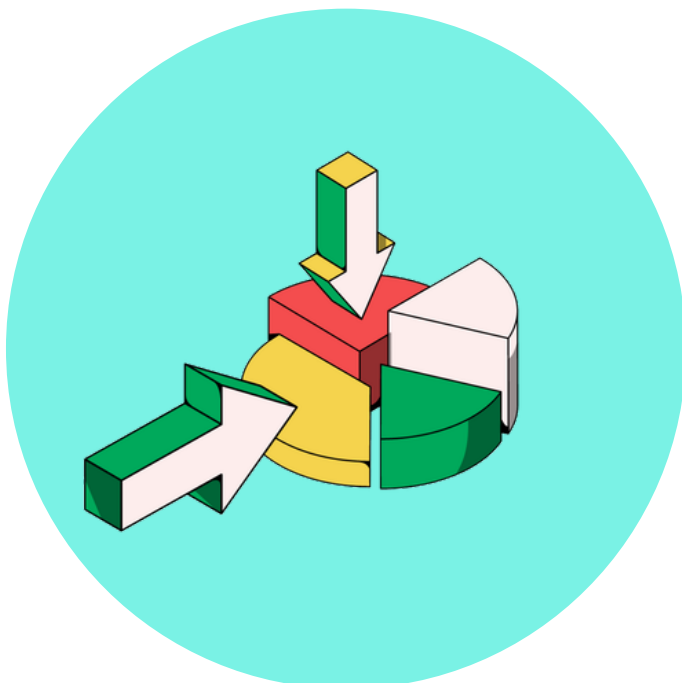


Exploratory process roundtable discussions © Ceren Saner

This pilot aims to encourage organisations to critically examine their own practices rather than placing the responsibility of inclusion on marginalised individuals.

Organisations' approach to intersectionality

A key aspect of monitoring barriers to inclusion through an intersectional feminist lens is examining how different organisations understand and apply the concept of intersectionality in practice. Findings from the pilot indicate that while organisations reported varying levels of familiarity with the concept, a strong majority (85%) were aware of intersectionality and applied it to some extent in their efforts to foster inclusion internally. In practice, this looks like the existence of policies and support mechanisms for staff with marginalised identities, internal monitoring of different identities and experiences of marginalisation where appropriate, inclusive recruitment practices as well as investment in staff learning and development on the topic of inclusion.



Formalising intersectional inclusion

To understand organisations' approaches to inclusion efforts, the pilot distinguished between the presence of an overarching Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) strategy and the existence of specific mechanisms to address anti-discrimination. The findings showed that just over half of organisations (56%) had established a formal DEI strategy, the majority of whom explicitly integrated intersectionality as part of their strategy. However, for an overwhelming proportion of organisations, the existence of anti-discrimination mechanisms was most prevalent (74%) even in cases where no overarching DEI strategy existed.

Organisations that reported having both a DEI strategy and specific anti-discrimination mechanisms accounted for 41% of the sample. These were predominantly more established organisations, typically with more than 50 employees. By contrast, the three organisations that reported having neither a DEI strategy nor formal anti-discrimination mechanisms were all small organisations with fewer than 50 employees. While not representative of all small organisations in the sample, these respondents nevertheless indicated that they were actively in the process of developing internal policies and mechanisms to address these gaps.

Operationalising inclusion

Recognising that marginalisation can take multiple forms and be shaped by specific geographical, cultural and institutional contexts, the pilot deliberately limited its scope to a defined set of fifteen identity and lived-experience metrics to assess who benefits from organisations' integration of intersectionality into their practices. These included: ciswomen, gender-diverse persons, race, ethnicity, disability, body size, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, migration status, age, religion, family status, care responsibilities, employment status (contract vs permanent). Across the sample, ciswomen, race, disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation emerged as the most frequently cited focal points of organisational inclusion efforts.

The pilot also offered organisations the opportunity to report on additional categories beyond those listed. Responses highlighted additional considerations such as **national origin, neurodivergence, veteran status, East German origins, as well as communities affected by climate change.**

Inclusion, for whom?

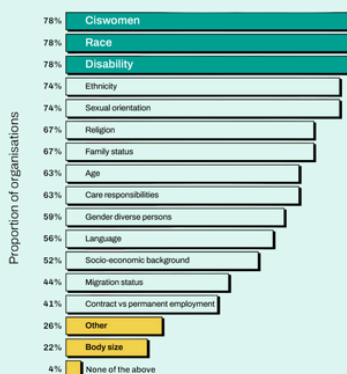


Figure 1. Overview of organisations' inclusion priorities

These responses point to context-specific understanding of marginalisation and demonstrate how intersectional approaches may extend beyond more commonly institutionalised categories.

One organisation reported that none of the listed categories were currently reflected in its inclusion efforts. This may be explained by the organisation's early stage and the absence of formalised DEI or anti-discrimination frameworks at the time of the pilot.

Among participating organisations, the cultivation of an internal culture that is inclusive of marginalised identities and lived experiences is reflected across several organisational domains.

The most commonly cited areas of focus include pay equity, flexible work arrangements and workplace accommodations, harassment & safety, as well as hiring & promotion.



Figure 2. Overview of organisations' inclusion areas of focus

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Interestingly, **no organisation identified Culture, belonging & inclusion as a standalone area of focus for advancing inclusion.** This could be explained by the breadth of this category, which could be understood as an overarching goal rather than a specific area for action. Nonetheless, examples reported under other categories such as “reducing work hours during Ramadan for Muslim employees” suggest that some organisations are engaging in practices that contribute to a broader culture of belonging and inclusion, even when this is not explicitly named as such.

An additional 15% of organisations reported inclusion efforts that fell outside the predefined categories. Examples included practices such as providing childcare during in-person internal meetings, facilitating digital accessibility, and implementing targeted employee engagement and retention initiatives.

Taken together, these responses highlight both the diversity of organisational approaches and the context-specific ways in which inclusion is operationalised.

What emerges

Overall, organisations demonstrate a baseline commitment and some structural mechanisms to advance intersectional inclusion internally. However, the analysis reveals an important gap between stated aspirations and practice. For example, the relatively low emphasis on Staff learning & accountability as well as Accessibility as focus areas of inclusion efforts is significant. Disability specifically was cited as one of the top areas of concerns for inclusion, yet accessibility seem to only be an area of organisation focus for only about half of organisations.



This discrepancy between the groups organisations report prioritising and the specific mechanisms they have in place suggests that commitments to inclusion may not yet be consistently translated into meaningful practices

Representation in inclusion efforts

Representation is an important element of equity, inclusion and justice efforts. However, as highlighted in the [exploration phase](#) of this project, representation data alone can only offer a partial picture. Within the context of this pilot, gauging data collection practices remained an essential step in understanding the extent to which organisations are equipped to identify who their inclusion efforts should be direct towards.

Nearly two third of organisations (63%) reported actively collecting internal data on their staff, with some even extending the practice to interns and volunteers. By contrast, 11% of participating organisations indicated not collecting any internal data on their workforce. These were all small organisations (fewer than 50 employees).

For the remaining 26% of organisations, data collection processes were reported to be under development. These organisations acknowledged the importance of staff data as a foundational element for designing, implementing and monitoring effective inclusion efforts even when complete systems are not yet fully in place.

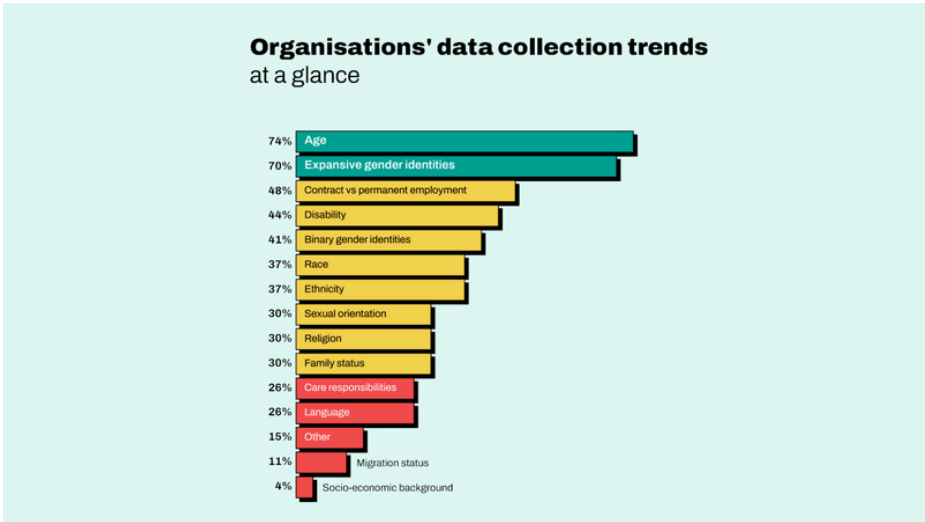


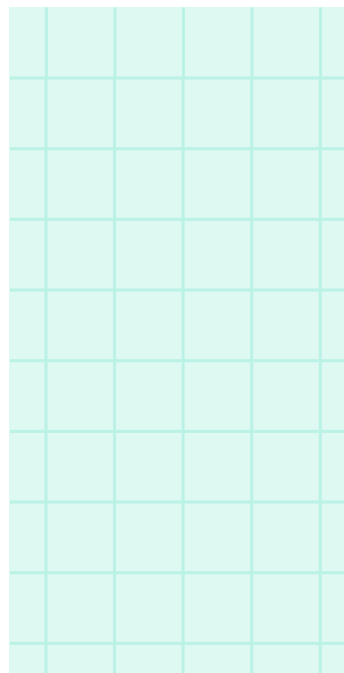
Figure 3. Organisations' data collection areas of focus

To assess representation data, we again made a deliberate decision to limit the number of categories examined while recognising that intersectional inclusion encompasses a potentially infinite range of marginalised identities and experiences. For the purpose of this pilot, fourteen categories, broadly aligned with those used to analyse organisations' inclusion priorities, were proposed: binary gender identities, expansive gender identities, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, migration status, age, religion, family status, care responsibilities, language and employment status. Organisations were also given the option to report additional categories where relevant. This resulted in the identification of further dimensions of data collection such as **nationality** and **level of education**.

For most organisations (between 70% and 74%), age and expansive gender identities emerged as the most commonly collected metrics in representation data. The next most frequent metrics included employment types and disability status, though these were reported at much lower levels, with less than half of organisations collecting such data.

At the same time, 41% of organisations reported collecting gender data exclusively along binary categories, namely cisgender women and men. A closer look into these organisations reveals no clear pattern in terms of staff size or geographic location, with organisations ranging from 50 to over 1000 employees and operating across different contexts. While the survey did not capture the specific reasons underlying this exclusive focus on binary genders, this finding may be reflective of broader tensions around issues of sensitivity, privacy, legal constraints, or organisational readiness.

Generally, organisations that reported collecting data across a wide range of identities and lived experiences tended to be larger (between 50 and 1000+ employees) institutionally mature organisations, with more formalised DEI infrastructures in place.



What emerges

When comparing organisations' stated inclusion priorities with their data collection practices, a significant discrepancy emerges. For instance, in areas such as disability, race, and sexual orientation, there is a notable gap between the proportion of organisations that report prioritising these groups in their inclusion efforts and those that systematically collect data on them.



This raises a critical question: how can organisations meaningfully advance the inclusion of marginalised individuals if the latter are not reflected in organisations' data collection practices?

Beyond formal data collection on specific forms of marginalisation, many organisations also reported engaging with employees' lived experiences through a range of complementary approaches such as staff surveys, employee resource groups, one-on-one or team meetings, annual reviews, and informal feedback channels.



Figure 4. Lived experience data collection methods

Overall, findings on organisations' representation data patterns point to emerging opportunities for the FAIR SHARE Monitor to further strengthen its intersectional approach. At the same time, insights from the exploratory process underscore that representation is only one piece of the intersectional monitoring puzzle. **Intersectional monitoring should extend beyond who is represented and examine how organisational structures, policies, and practices shape access and participation across intersecting identities.**

Identifying barriers to inclusion

Assessing barriers to inclusion requires examining systemic gaps, power dynamics and institutional conditions that push certain individuals further into the margins while privileging others. To capture these dynamics, the pilot explored organisations' specific practices that may disadvantage employees with marginalised identities.

Over half of participating organisations (56%) acknowledged that their policies and internal practices might indeed disadvantage employees with marginalised identities and lived experiences.

Examples cited included the use of **primary working languages that differ from employees' first languages, education requirements embedded in hiring processes, and limitations on support available to staff with caring responsibilities.**

Respondents also pointed to **country-based salary frameworks** and an over-emphasis on gender equality as a focus of organisational efforts, particularly when this emphasis comes at the expense of addressing other intersecting forms of marginalisation.

With regards to identifying specific barriers to inclusion, a similar proportion of organisations (56%) reported feeling confident in their ability to do so. This confidence is attributed to the existence of robust policies, mechanisms and communication channels to surface and address inclusion-related barriers.

Organisations also pointed to strengthened internal capacity on diversity, equity and inclusion through measures such as appointing DEI leads or establishing dedicated teams or departments.



Figure 5. Organisations' self-assessment

When organisational confidence is cross analysed with the presence of disadvantaging policies or practices, findings show that **26% of organisations express confidence in their ability to identify and address barriers to inclusion despite acknowledging the existence of such disadvantages.**

These organisations recognise the complexity of intersectional inclusion and the potential for blind spots in identifying inclusion barriers, especially in multi-country or multicultural contexts. Nevertheless, they justify their confidence by pointing to the internal structures they have established to examine and challenge expressions of power and privilege.

This finding reveals an important tension between awareness of potential structural inequities and sustained confidence in organisational capacity to identify exclusion.

Even more striking, an examination of how frequently organisations sought to identify these barriers reveals that **63% conduct internal assessments on an irregular basis or not at all**. This further calls into question the high levels of confidence reported above. Indeed, a cross-analysis of organisational confidence and the frequency of internal assessments shows that only 47% of confident organisations also carry out regular assessments (defined as at least once a year) of inclusion barriers. As a result, it appears that **the majority of organisations expressing confidence in their ability to identify barriers without creating the time and space to intentionally and systematically assess said barriers.**

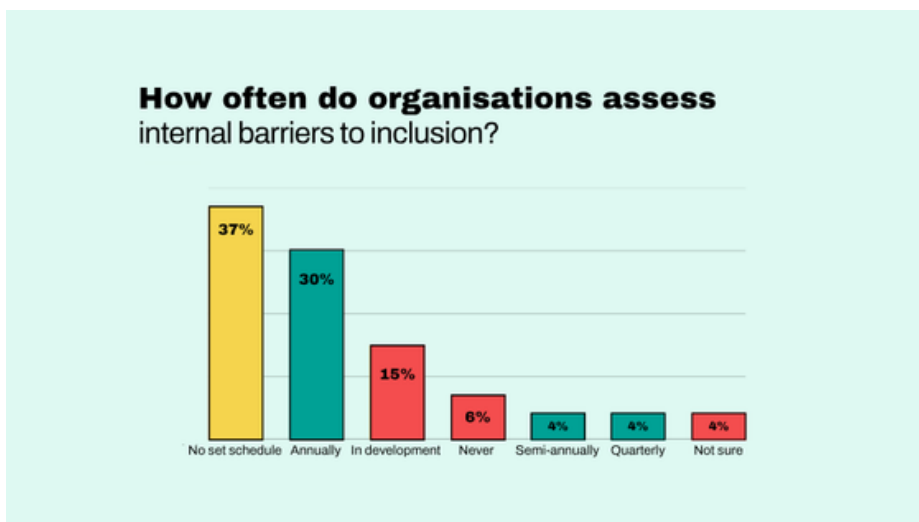


Figure 6. Internal assessment frequency

What emerges

Together, the findings highlight a significant disconnect between organisations' awareness of internal structural inequities, self-reported confidence in their ability to identify and address them, and the extent to which they take concrete action in that direction, particularly through regular internal assessments.



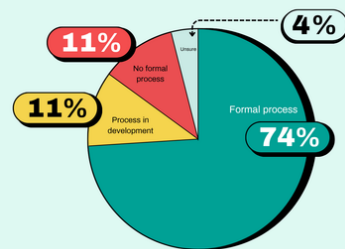
Addressing exclusion

An important element of fostering inclusion is the establishment of mechanisms that enable individuals to safely report instances of discrimination and exclusion when they occur. To explore this, organisations were asked whether they had formal reporting mechanisms in place across six specific areas: hiring & promotion, pay equity, culture, belonging & inclusion, harassment & safety, workplace flexibility & accommodation, and accessibility.

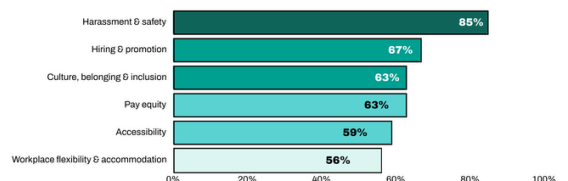
While these do not represent the full range of areas in which discrimination may arise, they were offered as a baseline set of reporting categories for the purpose of this pilot.

Overall, **44% of organisations reported having reporting mechanisms across all six areas.** A closer look into the data shows that mechanisms related to Harassment & Safety are most prevalent, with 85% of organisations indicating that staff can report concerns in this area. The other reporting mechanisms were present in at least half of all organisations surveyed.

How do organisations address exclusion and discrimination?



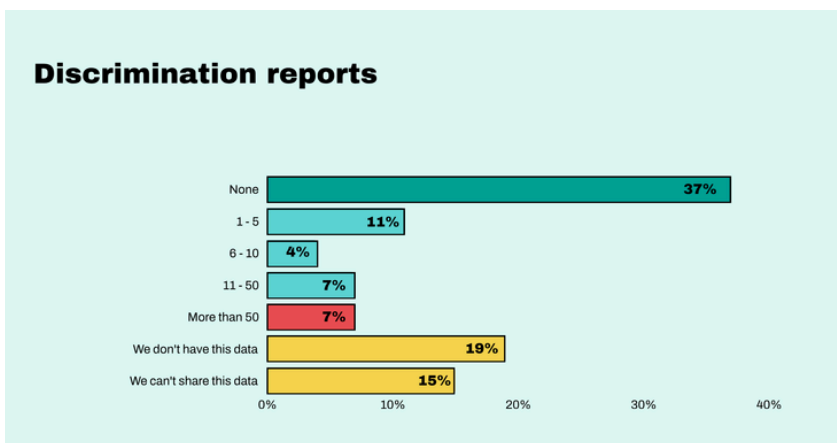
Exclusion reporting areas



However, it is worth noting that 11% of organisations reported having no formal report mechanisms whatsoever. These organisations vary both in size and scope of work. Despite the absence of formal reporting processes, they nonetheless expressed a commitment to taking seriously any grievances raised informally by employees. However, **this lack of formal reporting mechanisms places additional burden on employees to navigate power dynamics and advocate for themselves, which could disproportionately affect employees living at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalisation.**

That said, an analysis of organisations with formal reporting mechanisms shows that that 29% reported receiving at least one complaint related to discrimination or exclusion in the twelve months preceding the pilot. **Individuals affected by these reported cases of discrimination included employees with disabilities, people from marginalised racial or ethnic groups, women, staff with care responsibilities, individuals with migration backgrounds, and staff on temporary contracts.**

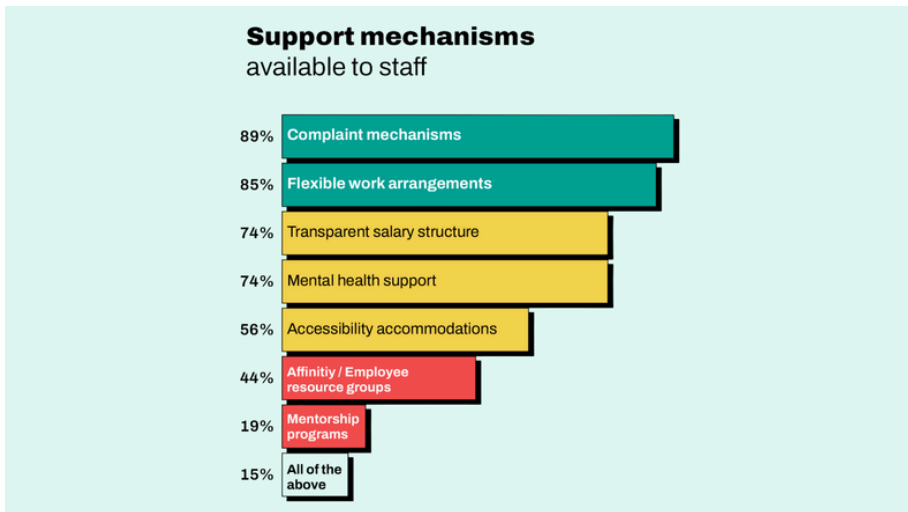
19% of organisations reported having no formal data on discrimination complaints despite having reporting mechanisms in place (with one exception). Moreover, 15% indicated that while they do collect this data, they are unable to share it externally. Combined, organisations that either lack data on discrimination or are unable to share it account for 34% of the pilot sample.



Finally, 7% of organisations reported receiving more than 50 discrimination complaints. These were all large organisations, employing over 1000 staff and having comprehensive reporting mechanisms in place across multiple areas. No details were provided regarding the nature of these complaints.

Among the remaining 37% of participating organisations, no formal report of discrimination or exclusion were filed in the twelve months preceding the survey. However, it is important to note that the absence of formal complaints does not signal the absence of discrimination itself. As raised by these organisations themselves, employees may be reluctant to navigate the procedural and emotional hurdles associated with filling a formal report, especially for cases perceived as minor. **The emotional labour involved in documenting and potentially reliving experiences of exclusion could therefore be a significant deterrent to formal reporting.**

To foster staff's sense of inclusion and belonging and to mitigate the impact of marginalisation, organisations reported a wide range of support systems . These supports include mentorship programmes, affinity or employee resource groups, flexible work arrangements, mental health support, accessibility accommodations, transparent salary structures, and complaints mechanisms.



Flexible work arrangements and complaint mechanisms were the most common, with 85% and 89% of organisations, respectively, indicating having these internally. It is also noteworthy that a significant portion of organisations (74%) reported offering some form of mental health support to their staff, although the survey did not explore the specific nature of this support. Given trauma-sensitivity as a core principle of intersectional monitoring, this finding is significant. It suggests that

some organisations may already have foundational support structures that can be leveraged to advance internal intersectional monitoring practices, particularly with regards to trauma-sensitivity for individuals with marginalised identities.

Affinity and employee resource groups and mentorship programs emerged as the least common support mechanisms among organisations, highlighting an opportunity for action for organisations to leverage, especially if staff with experiences of marginalisation express needs in these areas. Lastly, 15% of organisations stood out as offering all seven support mechanisms to their employees. These were exclusively large, internationally operating organisations, with staff size ranging from 100 to 1000+ employees, indicating robust internal structures that enable a comprehensive range of support to staff.

Beyond proactive support mechanisms available to staff, 74% organisations also shared having formal redress mechanisms to respond to incidences of discrimination or exclusion. While these mechanisms vary across organisations, they commonly include corrective actions outlined in employee codes of conduct and reinforced through whistleblower policies. Such corrective measures are supported by safeguarding procedures and structured investigations, alongside opportunities for appeal. In several cases, organisations also reported appointing designated support persons, leadership representatives or working groups to accompany affected employees throughout the process.

For the remaining 26% of participating organisations, formal redress mechanisms are either in development or inexistent, due to limited internal resources or organisational capacity, particularly among organisations with fewer than 50 employees.

What emerges

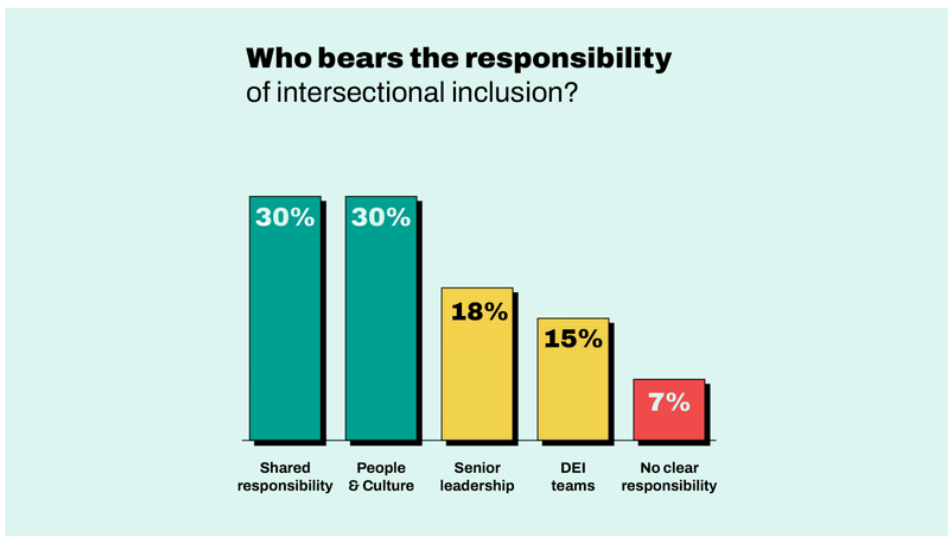


Overall, the findings point to a few gaps in organisational support structures relative to the scope of inclusion priorities. Smaller organisations in particular appear to face significant structural and capacity constraints, making them less likely to have the systems required to identify, let alone effectively address incidences of exclusion in ways that are responsive to employees' needs and wellbeing.



Who's responsible for intersectional inclusion?

Embedding and ensuring intersectional equity and inclusion within an organisation is a complex undertaking that requires commitment and coordination across multiple levels. While responsibility for fostering a culture of equity and inclusion should rightfully be shared across the organisation, clear mandates and roles remain essential for accountability and effective progress tracking. Findings from this pilot indicate that for 30% of organisations, primary responsibility for equity and inclusion sits within People & Culture departments. In another 30% of organisations, responsibility is distributed across a combination of leadership, People & Culture, staff and designated DEI focal points. In another 18% of organisations, responsibility is distributed across a combination of leadership, People & Culture, staff and designated DEI focal points. In another 15% of organisations, responsibility is distributed across a combination of leadership, People & Culture, staff and designated DEI focal points. In another 7% of organisations, responsibility is distributed across a combination of leadership, People & Culture, staff and designated DEI focal points.



Diving deeper into individual staff responsibility, particularly among those who experience greater privilege due to their positionalities, reveals a striking pattern: across organisations, **staff with privilege are no more actively engaged in inclusion efforts than those who themselves experience marginalisation.** The findings suggest that rather than adopting targeted approaches, organisations tend to implement generalised inclusion strategies, often rooted in a reluctance to directly engage those who experience greater privilege than their peers.

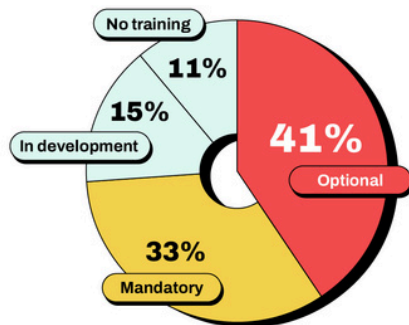
Overall, 81% of organisations reported embedding intersectional equity, justice and inclusion goals in their strategic planning to some degree. When it comes to tracking progress towards these goals, Staff Feedback emerged as the most widely used mechanism, cited by 81% of organisations. This was followed by Regular reporting to leadership, used by 70% of organisations. 37% of organisations relied on external audits, while 48% reported Public Transparency measures such as the FAIR SHARE Monitor or Accountable Now as accountability tools.



In light of organisations stated goals towards equity, inclusion and justice, the pilot examined how organisations strengthen staff capacity on topics of inclusion and intersectionality. **For many organisations, training on these topics is not systematic: 41% offer it on an optional basis, while 11% do not provide any training at all.**

When considered alongside earlier findings, particularly that many organisations do not actively engage staff in positions of privilege, this raises important questions about who is more likely to leverage these learning opportunities and who ultimately bears responsibility for driving transformational change within organisations.

Organisations' approach
to intersectionality and inclusion training



What emerges

Power and privilege are central to discussions on intersectional inclusion. A key question emerging from this pilot is how organisations can more effectively engage staff in positions of privilege in actively contributing to inclusive cultures and structures.



Current approaches seem to prioritise minimising discomfort, often relying on generalised approach to education and training on questions of intersectionality and inclusion. However, such approaches can inadvertently shift the responsibility for advancing inclusion onto those who already experience marginalisation.

Building truly inclusive organisations requires constructively engaging with discomfort. This could look like creating spaces where individuals in positions of privilege are both encouraged and expected to reflect on their positionality and to actively contribute to inclusion efforts. Without such a shift, efforts toward intersectional equity and inclusion risk remaining unbalanced, with the responsibility for change continuing to fall disproportionately on those most affected by exclusion.

Key Takeaways

Existing Organisational Structures

- Overarching diversity, equity and inclusion strategies
- Monitoring of limited forms of marginalisations
- Emerging internal processes for identifying barriers to inclusion
- Support mechanisms to address exclusion
- Emerging responsibility and accountability frameworks linked to inclusion goals

Underlying Gaps

- Structural misalignment between:
 - Stated inclusion priorities vs internal monitoring and support practices
 - Perceived capability in identifying barriers vs systemic and accountability processes
- Need for intentional engagement with questions of privilege within inclusion efforts

Acknowledgements

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Finally, we would like to acknowledge all those who contributed to the earlier exploration on intersectional monitoring, whose foundational work made this pilot possible.

