Refuge
For women and children.
Against domestic violence.

Respect, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy 2022-26

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This new strategy provides details of our key strategic priorities and objectives on equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion (EEDI) during 2022-26, which is supported by an action plan detailing the actions required to achieve our EEDI objectives.

Why Respect, Inclusion and Belonging instead of Equity, Equality and Diversity?

Respect, inclusion, and belonging are fundamental to what we want to achieve at Refuge and are key to this strategy. We want our staff, volunteers, trustees, service users, partners, and all that work with or alongside us to be respected. We want everyone to feel that they belong within Refuge, and we want to create an inclusive environment that celebrates the wonderfully diverse community Refuge continues to become.

> "We want everyone to feel that they belong within Refuge, and we want to create an inclusive environment that celebrates the wonderfully diverse community Refuge continues to become."

Refuge as a feminist organisation is committed to challenging inequality across society. We understand that equality, diversity, and equity are still essential priorities we need to ensure remain at the forefront of our journey. Therefore, whilst this strategy is called Respect, Inclusion and Belonging, we will continue to refer to equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the strategy.

In addition, to support the work we are undertaking in this area, we have renamed our Dignity at Work policy to Respect at Work policy and updated our Equality and Diversity policy to include equity and inclusion as we believe equity needs to be considered alongside equality to creating a fairer world. Equality aims to ensure everyone has the same opportunities and is treated the same way. However, we are aware people may experience disadvantages and discrimination at different stages of their personal or working lives therefore some people will not be starting in the same place. Equity aims to give everyone what they need to be successful. It focuses on 'equality of outcomes'. We believe that both equality and equity are needed alongside diversity and inclusion to create a fairer world.

Key terms explained

The language we use is important. Below is a description of what the key terms used mean to Refuge.

Ally

At Refuge being an ally means that we will use our privilege to support individuals from marginalised groups and fight inequality in society

Authentic

Being your authentic self at work can mean being comfortable sharing aspects of yourself (when appropriate) and being more open about your life experiences

Belonging

This is where everyone can bring their authentic professional selves to work and feel safe and that they belong. This means being yourself and the intersections of your identity and culture etc but doing so professionally and as relevant to your role.

Diversity

Is the representation of various identities, differences, voices and lived experiences

Equality

Ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities and is treated the same way

Equity

The removal of structural barriers that create unfair access or experiences for some people in society

Inclusion

Creation of an environment where everyone is, and feels, valued and respected

Intersectionality

The acknowledgement that everyone has more than one characteristic, therefore they will have their own unique lived experiences

Neurodiversity

Describes the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways

Respect

A way of treating another person with regard and consideration

Foreword

Since 2020 we have been witnesses to global events which have included the murder of George Floyd, leading to an increase in activism around Black Lives Matter, and the Covid pandemic. Both highlighted the inequalities faced by marginalised communities across society and changed the global landscape forever. As a charity, Refuge has had to adapt and make organisational and strategic decisions to embrace this new landscape.

In 2022 we launched our **Strategic Plan for 2022-25**, which continues to ensure all women facing domestic abuse and their children in England can access the services they need and deserve, ensuring they are safe from abuse and empowered to regain control of their lives and futures.

This **Respect, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy** will help to deliver the objectives of the strategic plan by ensuring that:

- we continue to have a diverse team of incredible people who work together to ensure every woman who needs support when facing domestic abuse receives it.

- we have an inclusive culture that celebrates diversity and understands intersectionality.

- everyone is treated with respect and kindness, and staff and volunteers can feel like they belong.

- our workplace is one of allies, where racism and discrimination are challenged through robust policies, procedures, and training.

Our Values

A feminist force for good:

- Never shy away
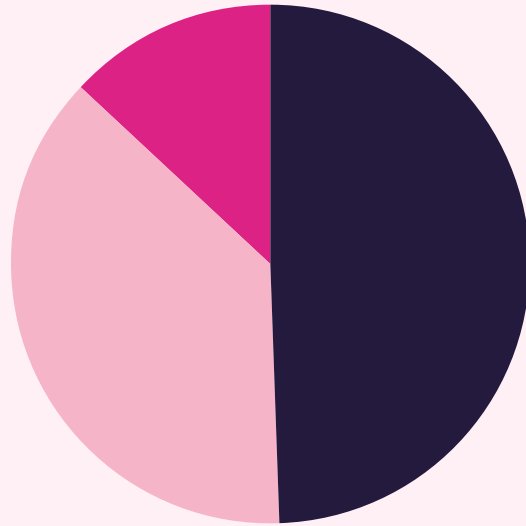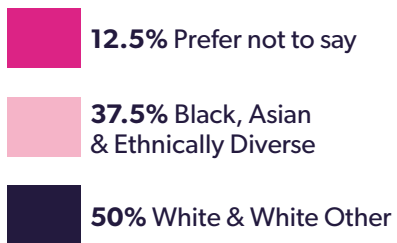- Build it together
- Show we care
- Learn every day

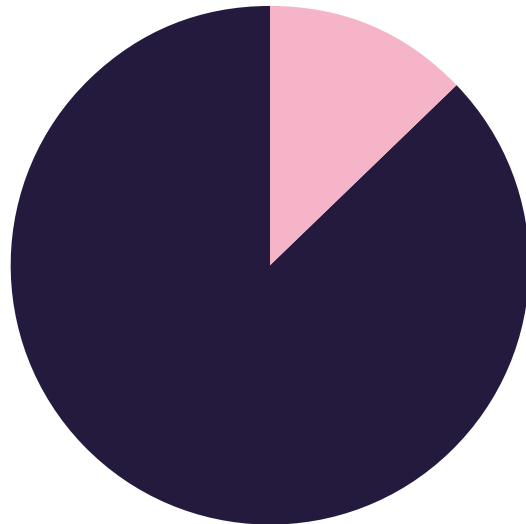*View our values and mission statement on our website* ⋯⟩

Our Board Diversity Stats

(As of December 2022)

Refuge Board: Ethnicity Breakdown

- **12.5%** Prefer not to say
- **37.5%** Black, Asian & Ethnically Diverse
- **50%** White & White Other

Refuge Board: Gender Breakdown

- **87.5%** Woman
- **12.5%** Man
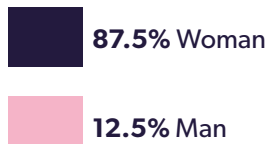
Refuge Board: D/deaf, Disabled, Neurodiversity Breakdown

- **12.5%** Disabled
- **87.5%** Non-Disabled
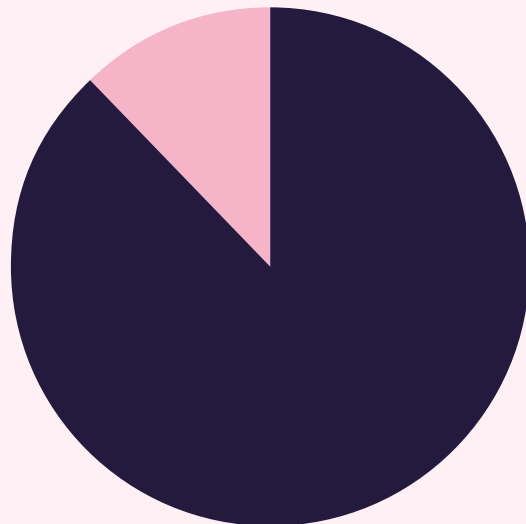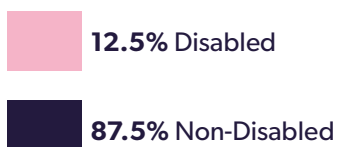
Our Employee Diversity Stats

(As of December 2022)

Refuge Employees: Ethnicity Breakdown

Bar chart showing:
- Black, Asian & Ethnically Diverse: 32.15%
- Unknown: 15.91%
- White & White Other: 50.67%
- Prefer not to say: 1.27%
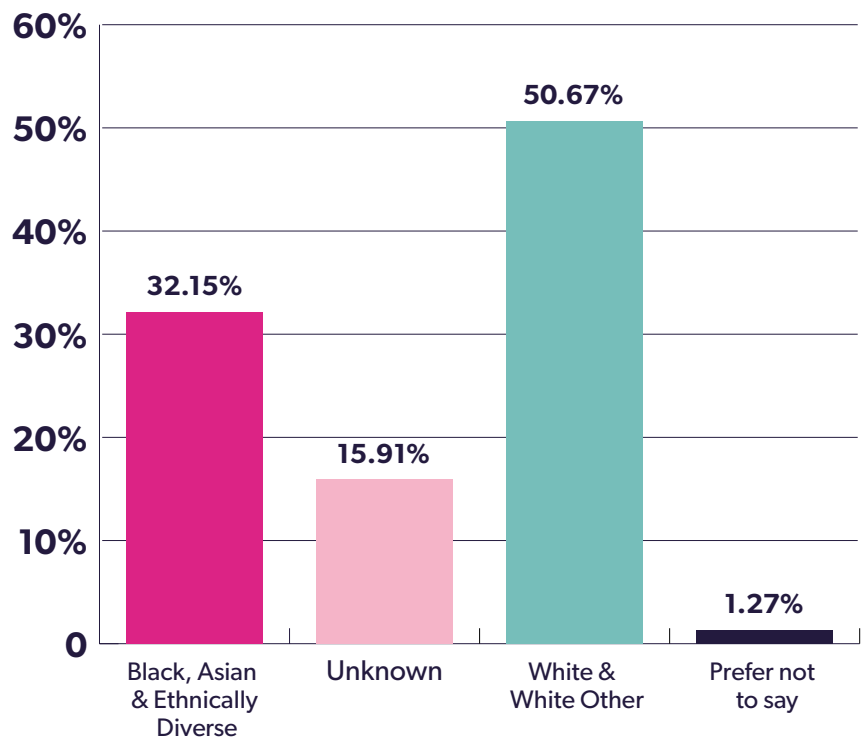
Refuge Employees: D/deaf, Disabled, Neurodiversity Breakdown

Bar chart showing:
- Non Disabled: 30.25%
- Prefer not to say: 1.18%
- D/deaf, disabled neurodiverse breakdown of employees: 10.00%
- Unknown: 58.57%
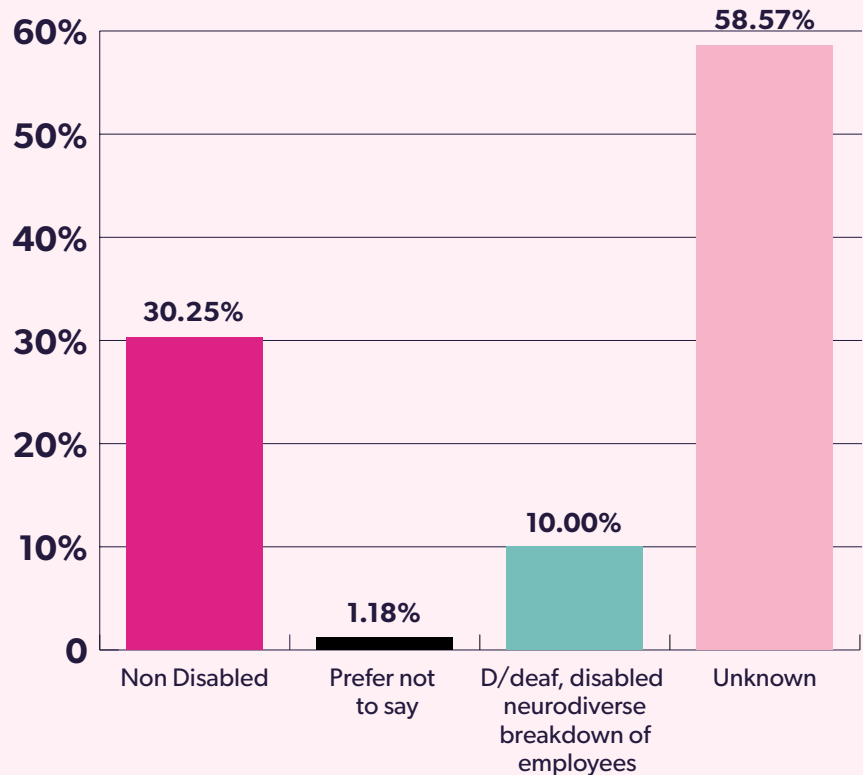
Refuge Employees: Gender Breakdown

Refuge Employees: Gender Breakdown

	Women	Men
	96.82%	3.18%

- Women: 96.82%
- Men: 3.18%

Refuge Employees: Age Breakdown

Refuge Employees: Age Breakdown

- Under 25: 10.65%
- 25–34: 36.06%
- 35–44: 24.87%
- 45–54: 17.47%
- 55–64: 10.15%
- 65+: 0.80%
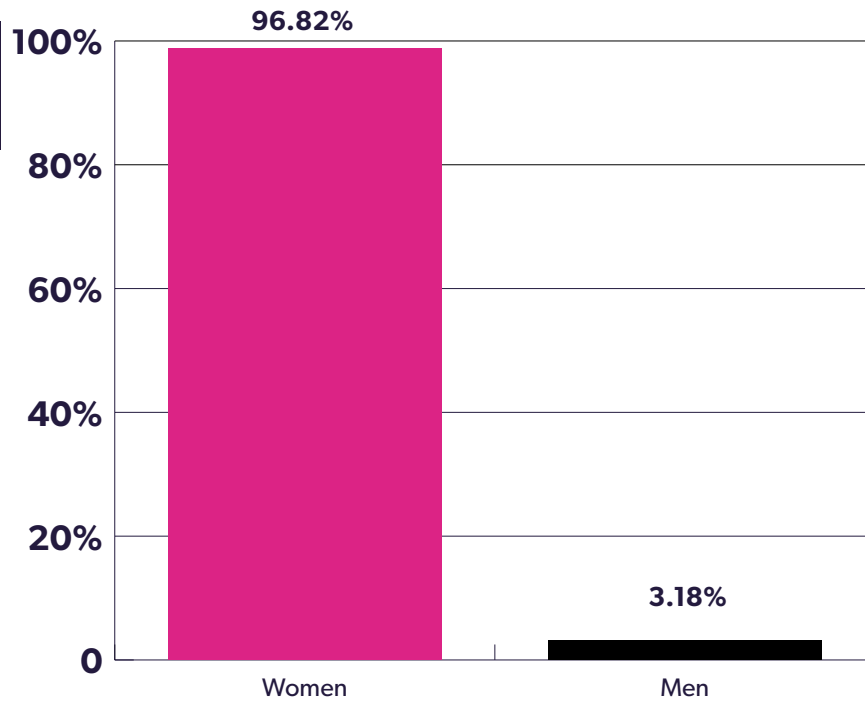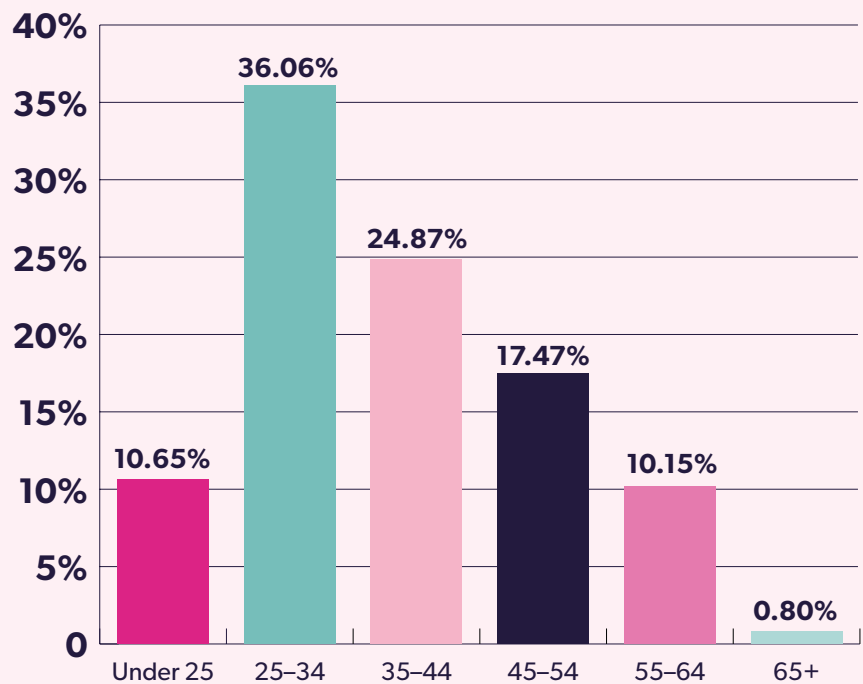
Where are we coming from?

As a charity we are committed to a world where domestic abuse and violence against women and girls is not tolerated, and where women and children can live in safety. We are committed to promoting equality by creating better experiences for women and girls because we understand that for some survivors', experiences of abuse intersect with experiences of racism, homophobia, ableism, and other forms of oppression including class and social-economic disadvantage, and immigration status, making escape from abuse even more complex. Furthermore, we are committed to providing a safe and inclusive work environment for our staff and volunteers.

Therefore, in response to the changing global landscape (in 2020) we paused, reflected, and decided to look inwards as an organisation. Through the support of an external EDI consultant, we undertook a significant piece of work which included listening to our staff and asking key questions about the communities we serve and the services we provide.

From this reflection we found that whilst we were making great strides forward in tackling inequalities faced by women and girls within society, we still had further work to undertake to challenge discrimination and racism within society. Furthermore, as a charity we have a duty to our staff, volunteers, and trustees to ensure that we provide a safe and inclusive environment for our diverse team.

> **… we understand that for some survivors', experiences of abuse intersect with experiences of racism, homophobia, ableism, and other forms of oppression including class and social-economic disadvantage, and immigration status."**

We found that in order to ensure that equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion are central to our core principles and are reflected in our service provision, workforce, volunteers, trustees and in the way in which we work, we would need to undertake the following:

Ensure that our focus was on improving our accountability, diversity, and inclusivity within the organisation.

Ensure that all staff have a basic understanding of equity, equality, diversity, unconscious bias, microaggressions through training.

Provide a safe space for marginalised groups to share lived experiences.

Continue to grow a diverse workforce that is reflective of the communities we serve.

Discover ways in which we could reduce structural inequalities and barriers within the organisation and in society.

Understand the many forms of discrimination and challenge them.

Provide staff with a safe space to disclose incidents or experiences of discrimination.

Review our policies to ensure they are fair, transparent, and supportive of people from marginalised communities.

Recruit a person who would be dedicated to EDI, to ensure that we remain committed and accountable and have the capacity to fulfil our EDI commitments.

Create an EDI strategy and action plan and report on progress to our staff and Board.

What have we achieved so far?

From the review in 2020 we achieved the following:

☑ Developed an interim Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statement of Intent and Action Plan for 2021-22

☑ Established an EDI Champion role at senior leadership level and recruited an EDI Advisor

☑ Through a staff led approach established seven equality network groups (ENGs) to provide staff with a supportive and safe environment to share lived experiences and ensure staff from marginalised communities contribute to holding us accountable for our commitment to EDI.

These groups are:

- Allies
- Anti-Racism
- Disability and Neurodiversity Matters
- Families
- LGBTQI+ Shine
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Women's

☑ Established an EDI Steering Group which consists of senior management representatives from each directorate and the Chairs of the ENGs.

☑ Introduced mandatory EDI training which provided an understanding of the different forms of bias, microaggressions and their impacts and the meaning of privilege.

☑ Established our commitment to the Violence Against Women and Girls Anti-Racism Charter.

☑ Committed to the Disability Confident scheme to signal our commitment to being a more inclusive employer.

☑ Developed our staff forum and introduced a confidential whistleblowing line to provide staff with safe and confidential space to raise concerns.

☑ Started a review of employment policies to ensure fairness, transparency, and greater support for staff.

☑ Committed to carrying out an employee engagement survey to provide staff with another means of being listened to and heard.

☑ Updated our EDI policies, changing them to be reflective of the journey we are undertaking.

Where are we going?

We are committed to respecting and treating everyone fairly, eliminating discrimination and actively promoting inclusion and belonging. We understand that it is our attitudes when we are at work every day – our choices, behaviours and interactions with each other, service users and partners that ensures we are inclusive. How we show respect, humility, and empathy towards each other will determine if we are truly inclusive. We are proud of the work we have undertaken so far to improve equality, diversity, and inclusion. However, we are aware we are on an ongoing journey and still have some way to go.

Team data

Whilst we consider our employees to be diverse with 32% of our staff team identifying as Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse in comparison to 12% of workers in the UK and 34% in London *(Health.org.uk, 2019).* Only 10% of our staff identify as being D/deaf, disabled or neurodivergent. However, 1 in 5 of the working-age population are classed as disabled according to GOV.UK *(The employment of disabled people 2021).* As part of our commitment, we will continue to review and report our employee diversity data to allow us to understand the make-up of our team and ensure that any initiatives we undertake consider this data. Furthermore, we will encourage employees to update their information to enable us to provide more accurate reporting on all diversity data and ensure that we are able to report in the future on the diversity of our volunteers and trustees.

32%
of our employees identify as Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse

10%
of our employees identify as being D/deaf, disabled or neurodivergent

Retention and recruitment

We are aware that we still have work to do to attract and retain staff. Furthermore, we need to ensure that we have an awareness of the inequalities within society that may affect individuals from marginalised communities, which include but are not limited to:

⋯➤ By age of 26 disabled people are four times more likely to be out of work compared to non-disabled people *(Papworth Trust, 2018).*

⋯➤ 79% of disabled people interviewed believe that barriers related to their impairments had impacted on their career *(Attitude is Everything 2021).*

⋯➤ 51% had withdrawn from a job application process due to accessibility related reasons *(Attitude is Everything 2021).*

⋯➤ Black and ethnically diverse people are much less likely to be employed in senior or highly paid positions *(EW Group)*; with management being predominately White, 25-40 years of age.

⋯➤ Within the UK, 76% of White people were employed compared to 67% Black, Asian or ethnically diverse people' *(ONS 2021).*

Therefore, we will actively review our recruitment processes to ensure they are inclusive. Furthermore, we will consider how we retain and develop our staff, and if we need to undertake initiatives to tackle any inequalities within our organisation or because of societal barriers and structural inequality and discrimination.

79%

of disabled people interviewed believe that barriers related to their impairments had impacted on their career

(Attitude is Everything 2021).

"
We will consider how we retain and develop our staff, and if we need to undertake initiatives to tackle any inequalities within our organisation."

Championing inclusion and fighting racism and discrimination

We are committed to being an anti-racist organisation and amplifying voices from marginalised communities. We are aware from the *Broken Ladders report by the Fawcett Society and Runnymede Trust (2022)* that institutional racism is a common occurrence with 75% of respondents having experienced racism at work. Furthermore, 28% of respondents reported that a manager had blocked their progression at work, and 42% reported being passed over for promotion. Therefore, we will support our leaders, managers, and staff to understand racism and the impact it can have. We will review our employee lifecycle with a focus on eliminating bias and offering initiatives including mentoring and sponsoring. We will continue to listen to Black, Asian, and ethnically diverse staff to ensure that we are doing everything we can to ensure they feel safe and can trust all of us to be allies.

75%
of respondents had experienced racism at work.
Broken Ladders Report (2022)

"We will review our employee lifecycle with a focus on eliminating bias and offering initiatives including mentoring and sponsoring."

We are committed to challenging discrimination faced by staff from marginalised communities within our workforce and beyond. We understand from research that staff who are D/deaf, disabled or neurodivergent may have concerns disclosing their identity for fear of being treated differently and this may indicate why only 10% of our staff team identify as disabled: *'48% of disabled people have worried about sharing information about their impairment or condition with their employer' (Papworth Trust 2018)*.

Only 31% of our staff provided information on their sexual orientation. According to *Stonewall (2018),* more than a third of individuals from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex (LGBTQI+) community had hidden their identity at work for fear of discrimination.

Therefore, we will work with EEDI specialists and membership bodies to signal we are a safe space and provide additional support to our staff from the LGBTQI+ community and staff who are D/deaf, disabled, and neurodiverse.

Findings from our current EEDI training have identified a need for further EEDI training focused on providing an awareness of racism, discrimination, understanding intersectionality, tackling microaggressions, unconscious bias, greater awareness of privilege, and the challenges faced by individuals from marginalised communities.

Therefore, we will commit to providing training that will lead to greater inclusion and a sense of belonging, encouraging staff to be their authentic selves. We will enrol our managers on inclusive leadership training because as leaders they are role models. Their behaviours will be mimicked by others, and these behaviours are vital to creating an inclusive team culture. By learning together, we will provide a psychologically safe environment in which everyone is encouraged to take responsibility for equity, equality, diversity, and inclusion by becoming allies. Only by taking this active stance can we challenge the inequalities within society.

We will review the impact of racism and discrimination on staff mental health and wellbeing to understand if we need to provide additional wellbeing support for individuals from marginalised groups as psychological well-being at work has been identified as one of the most important factors in employees' decisions to stay or to go *(mckinsey.com)*.

We will invest in the development of policies, procedures, and training to ensure our interactions are respectful of each other and we will celebrate diversity and intersectionality, by increasing awareness of key inclusion dates and offering opportunities for us to all learn together.

Finally, we will ask our staff, volunteers, and service users to hold us accountable to do better. We will provide opportunities to feedback via surveys and consultations. We will continue to provide safe and confidential spaces for individuals to whistle-blow or share their lived experiences via our equality network groups. Our EDI Steering Group will remain fundamental in ensuring that this strategy and accompanying action plan are active documents of change.

"
We will commit to providing training that will lead to greater inclusion and a sense of belonging, encouraging staff to be their authentic selves."

Societal impacts on service users

As a feminist organisation striving for inclusivity and equality, we recognise that gender inequality is endured differently by women and girls from marginalised communities. We believe that gender inequality is both a root cause, and consequence of, domestic abuse (an issue which disproportionately impacts women) and other forms of male violence against women and girls. Refuge stands against the patriarchal and misogynistic social structures that perpetuate gender inequality. Furthermore, we strive to have awareness and understanding of the additional challenges because of discrimination and inequalities within society including but not limited to:

- In the year ending March 2019, disabled women were more than twice as likely to have experienced domestic abuse (17.3%) than non-disabled women (7.0%). *(ons.gov.uk)*

- Research shows low referral rates for disabled people into domestic abuse services *(Safelives.org.uk)*

- Black and ethnically diverse survivors may not report abuse to the police for a range of reasons, including concerns about the impact or stigma on their wider family or community, language difficulties and feeling distrustful of the police because of past negative experiences *(Thiara & Roy, 2012 via Women's Aid)*

- Women and girls with insecure immigration status and no resource to public funds (NRPF) face additional barriers *(jcwi.org.uk)*

- One in seven LGBT people (14 per cent) avoid seeking healthcare for fear of discrimination from staff and half of LGBT people (52 per cent) experienced depression in the last year *(Stonewall 2018)*

Research shows low referral rates for disabled people into domestic abuse services

> " We believe that gender inequality is both a root cause, and consequence of, domestic abuse (an issue which disproportionately impacts women)…"

Therefore, we will focus on improving the services we provide by:

- continuing to make survivor voices central to our work
- increasing our awareness of societal inequalities and the impact of racism and discrimination
- remaining committed to the *VAWG Anti-Racism Charter*
- reviewing our services with an EEDI lens
- providing further ongoing EEDI training to our staff
- continuing to provide culturally specific services
- working collaboratively with partner organisations and 'by and for' organisations to support all women

We are actively reviewing our services to make sure that they are inclusive for all women. We know that marginalised women face additional barriers to accessing support, particularly safe accommodation, and we are committed to ensuring that all women can access the services and support they need.

Currently all our community based and non-accommodation services are fully accessible to trans women, and our accommodation services are predominantly single-sex. We will continue to provide single-sex accommodation but, as the largest provider of refuge accommodation in the UK, we are working with and learning from specialist providers to understand how to ensure trans women have increased access to refuge accommodation.

Finally, as a charity, we are committed to making meaningful long-term change that provides positive impact for our staff, volunteers, service users and the communities and partners we work with. We understand the importance of collaboration and will ensure that our partnerships, especially with 'by and for' organisations are an opportunity for us to learn and to give back. We will consider deeply how we can address any inequalities across our services and strengthen our partnerships with our local communities.

We will aim to always learn, develop and be better allies to ensure that we take an active role in challenging discrimination and racism in society. And we will encourage our existing and future partners, funders, contractors, and external organisations (we work closely with) to support our values and take an active role in supporting our journey. Everyone we work with; partners and supporters, are instrumental in ensuring that we place respect, inclusion and belonging at the heart of all our activities.

"We are actively reviewing our services to make sure that they are inclusive for all women."

"Everyone we work with … are instrumental in ensuring that we place respect, inclusion and belonging at the heart of all our activities."

Our EEDI Vision

A community of kind and empathetic people who bond around shared values, feel respected, and have a voice in decisions that affect them.

Our EEDI Mission

We aim to create an equitable culture that attracts, retains, and develops staff to empower them to create a safe and inclusive environment to support women and girls in transforming their lives.

Our EEDI Strategic Priorities

Our priorities for this strategy will support the vision and mission and ensure that we have key milestones along our journey.

Through these priorities we will ensure that we are bold and take decisive action to address, and challenge racism and discrimination faced by our staff, volunteers, and service users, and acknowledge the impact of discrimination on individuals' mental health. We will aim to challenge inequalities within society and services to ensure that we do better. We will aim to develop and build on our inclusive culture with a greater understanding of intersectionality which we will encourage our funders, supporters, and contractors to embrace. Finally, we will support and learn from our partners and communities to ensure that we provide and promote good practice across the sector.

Our vision, mission and strategic priorities

1 **Maximize opportunities to attract, develop, support, and retain diverse representation** across the organisation – staff, volunteers, and Board members.

By 2026 we will have:

⟶ Taken action to increase the diversity and retention of staff, volunteers, and Board members.

⟶ Formed partnerships and commitments that signpost the organisation as a safe and inclusive workplace for individuals who are D/deaf and/or disabled and/or neurodivergent, are from the LGBTQI+ community and/or are Black, Asian, or ethnically diverse and/or from a marginalized community.

2 **Develop and embed an inclusive culture within the organisation** to ensure all staff and volunteers have a work environment in which they feel safe and can be their authentic selves.

By 2026 we will have:

⟶ Educated all staff to understand equity, intersectionality, and the importance of being an ally through adopting a 'Respect Charter'.

⟶ Taken a stance against racism and discrimination towards our staff and beyond the workforce.

⟶ Developed our leaders through training to provide an inclusive environment for all staff that ensures everyone has equal access to opportunity to grow and develop within the organisation and/or wider sector.

> **"**
> **By 2026 we will have … formed partnerships and commitments that signpost the organisation as a safe and inclusive workplace."**

Centring service users and survivors at the heart of their services to ensure that their voices are listened to and heard, and ensuring we provide an inclusive and supportive service for all.

By 2026 we will have:

⤑ Ensured that as many refuges and community-based services as possible are accessible to D/deaf and/or disabled and/or neurodivergent service users or where possible, they are signposted to 'by and for' organisations to ensure that we can support as many individuals as we can.

⤑ Given more prominence and listening better to survivors to ensure our services are inclusive, and that they can hold us accountable if we do not provide the best possible service we can.

⤑ Provided survivors with services that consider their intersectionality, individual needs, and cultural backgrounds.

4 **Embed EEDI beyond the workforce – through procurement, funding, and influence**, ensure more of our partner organisations, suppliers, and funders have inclusion as a core value.

By 2026 we will have:

⤑ Published a pledge that ensures all external parties that work with us have a clear understanding of our values and commitment towards equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion and are aligned to these.

5 **Developed existing partnerships with 'by and for' organisations** and create new partnerships to ensure support in the VAWG sector is diverse and inclusive.

By 2026 we will have:

⤑ Continued to work with other Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) organisations to improve equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion across the sector.

⤑ Collaborated with partners and 'by and for' organisations on policies and procedures to promote good practice in the sector.

> **"By 2026 we will have … provided survivors with services that consider their intersectionality, individual needs, and cultural backgrounds."**

Strategy Principles

To achieve the priorities for this strategy, we will:

✓ Create a safe and inclusive working environment for all

✓ Ensure representation across all levels of the organisation

✓ Create a sense of belonging and include equity in all that we do

✓ Treat each other with respect, kindness, and empathy

✓ Challenge racism and discrimination and acknowledge our privileges and bias

✓ Communicate in an inclusive way which enables the full and equal participation of staff, volunteers, and service users from marginalized communities

✓ Commit to learning about and celebrating difference

✓ Commit to and invest in programmes that are focused on improving the experience and wellbeing of staff and service users from marginalised groups

✓ Ensure everyone sees equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion as their responsibility

✓ Deliver interventions that are data driven, evidence based, and outcomes focused

✓ Lead by example through senior leadership driving change in behaviours, processes, systems, and approaches to enable diversity and embed inclusive practises across the workforce and beyond

✓ Ensure that an EEDI lens is built into everything we do to ensure decisions are fair, transparent and deliver inclusive and impactful results

✓ Develop a learning culture and approach where diversity and inclusion principles, knowledge and skills are integral

✓ Provide needs-based training to staff to enable them in their work to support people with diverse needs

✓ Ensure managers are trained as inclusive leaders to empower them to create positive change

✓ Provide equal opportunities to all staff based on their individual needs and aspirations

✓ Commit to being reflective in our approach and ways of working including learning and unlearning behaviours aimed at collectively creating the EEDI culture that we want to see at Refuge

How will we measure success?

We will embed a relevant EEDI objective in each department's outcomes and business plans and cascade this through our staff performance management framework

Ensure that each directorate provides regular feedback on progress against this area of work

Analyse the participation in EEDI related training

Analyse the data on the number of candidates from marginalised groups applying for external and internal roles, promotions, secondments, and the number of whom are successful

Continue to collate, monitor, and report on the diversity data of staff, our Board, and volunteers

Reports from the Equality Network Groups and EDI Steering Group on the progress of our goals

Responses from our people via engagement surveys

Responses from service users' surveys and consultations

Annual reviews from accredited EEDI bodies on our commitments to EEDI

Accountability

This strategy and supporting action plan were shaped by our team. They are owned by the Board and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) who will review them annually. SLT, supported by the EDI Steering Group and the Senior Management Team, reporting to the Board, are responsible for monitoring progress, identifying yearly success criteria, and for agreeing significant changes or additions to the plan. Both the strategy and action plan are 'living documents' with aspirational aims.

They are documents that are aimed at providing us with guidance and steps on how we wish to develop our EEDI journey at Refuge. Some of the actions will need to be tested to see if they are the right actions for us. Some actions may evolve, change, or develop over the years, which will allow us to reflect and adapt based on the learning we accomplish over the life of the strategy. This approach will allow us to respond to the needs of our staff, volunteers, and service users.

Refuge

**For women and children.
Against domestic violence.**

Thank you

We would like to thank our trustees, staff, volunteers, service users, partners, contractors, and funders for supporting our commitment to becoming a more inclusive charity.

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