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## Coqual's New Research, *Equity and Ethnicity at Work: A Global Exploration*, Reveals DE&I Can't Be One Size Fits All

### Global Study Examines Ethnicity in Brazil, China, India, South Africa & The United Kingdom and Finds Legal Obstacles to Data Collection & Fear of Physical Harm Over Disclosing Ethnicity in India

**NEW YORK, February 8, 2022** — Global business leaders have committed to addressing racial inequities within their institutions. While some progress has been made globally, especially on gender, sexual orientation, and disability, Coqual's new study published today, *Equity and Ethnicity at Work: A Global Exploration*, finds that to be truly inclusive, multinational companies need to consider more than race, and utilize a more nuanced approach to gain a deeper understanding of racial and ethnic marginalization.

Coqual's final study in a three-part series on equity surveyed nearly 4,000 college-educated, employed, full-time professionals in five global markets, to examine the experiences of employees with marginalized backgrounds in Brazil, China, India, South Africa, and the United Kingdom (UK). When it comes to race and ethnicity, much of the work in DE&I has been U.S.-centric, driven by underrepresentation of Black employees. Global DE&I work is complicated because ethnicity isn't always based on race, and cultural and ethnic distinctions vary markedly from country to country.

"Leaders at global organizations are hungry for guidance and eager to take action," said Lanaya Irvin, Coqual CEO. "Our new research underscores the importance of collaborating and acting locally and provides actionable ways companies can identify and understand the unique experiences of marginalized groups to achieve greater equity in the workplace."

DE&I work in the U.S. often treats race and ethnicity as synonymous (or close to it). Coqual finds only 22% of professionals in India say race is part of how they define their ethnicity compared to 60% in South Africa, 43% in China, 39% in the UK, and 28% in Brazil. Where race may be less salient, respondents cited other important factors that define their ethnicity such as: country of birth, language, and religion, among many others.

The study uncovers barriers to collecting data on ethnicity, including legal limitations, social constraints to open dialogue, and employee reluctance and fear. In India, nearly two in five (38%) Muslim professionals surveyed say they fear physical harm if they disclose their ethnicity at work. China-based focus group participants were reluctant to engage in discussions of ethnic discrimination and downplayed the role that ethnicity may play in achieving success. In the UK, professionals we spoke with were reluctant to discuss race and UK survey respondents were among the least likely in the study, second only to China, to say their company should encourage conversation about race and ethnicity.

"Companies are being called on to better support employees of marginalized backgrounds all over the world," said Julia Taylor Kennedy, Coqual Executive Vice President, who led the study. "When it comes to race and ethnicity, the outsider groups vary market-to-market. Our five-step process will guide business leaders to identify them, and to address the inequities they face."

Companies need guidance as they embark on global equity work. Coqual developed the following five-step process, rooted in rigorous methodology, for global DE&I leaders to identify and better understand marginalized ethnicity groups in any market:

1. Acknowledge a cultural starting point
2. Identify marginalized groups

3. Collect qualitative and quantitative data
4. Partner and collaborate
5. Distill and disseminate information

“We are proud to be the lead sponsor for this work that will help organizations better understand the nuanced nature of ethnicity-based marginalization in different global markets,” said Carolanne Minashi, Global Head of Inclusion, HSBC. “To date, much of the analysis and insight has been on the UK and U.S., this global research widens our knowledge. We believe real change is starting to happen, it will take continued effort but collectively we can cultivate a more just world.”

“At Google, we’re always looking for ways to build equity within our workplace,” said Melonie Parker, Chief Diversity Officer at Google. “It’s why we continue to sponsor Coqual’s critical research on DE&I and as a global company, learn from their valuable insights and recommendations.”

To illustrate how ethnicity varies, Coqual applied its five-step process, focusing on two salient groups in each market (recognizing these are not the only marginalized groups worthy of corporate support).

## **BRAZIL**

Brazil has a complex mix of ethnicities and racial identities, as well as deeply entrenched racial disparities. Coqual finds that Black professionals in Brazil are nearly four times as likely as White professionals to say they feel discriminated against at work most of the time. They are also the most likely racial group to say they see ethnic bias at work, and to feel silenced when discussing experiences related to race or ethnicity at work.

When it comes to religion in Brazil, the Roman Catholic tradition dominates cultural life and the workplace. The study finds non-Catholic professionals are more likely than their counterparts to feel misjudged and excluded at work most of the time. Additionally, when it comes to fitting in at work, non-Catholic Christian professionals are more than twice as likely as their Catholic peers to say they fit in less than colleagues, while those without religion are more than three times as likely to say the same.

## **CHINA**

In China, Han Chinese have long been the dominant ethnic group. Coqual finds more than half (53%) of Han Chinese respondents say strong professional networks are important for success compared to their non-Han Chinese peers (28%). More than two in five Han Chinese respondents say fitting in is a requirement to advance compared to their non-Han Chinese peers. Additionally, non-Han Chinese professionals are more than twice as likely as their Han Chinese peers to say they feel excluded at work most of the time, but the Han Chinese respondents are more than twice as likely to say they change how they speak at work to fit in compared to their non-Han Chinese colleagues.

*Hukou*, China’s national household registration system, also creates a divide between the rural (agriculture) vs. urban (nonagricultural) citizens, with designation based on place of birth and parental status. Coqual’s data suggests rural *hukou* holders are less likely to feel they fit in at work and may minimize the importance of networks in career development compared to urban *hukou* holders.

## **INDIA**

In India, striking disparities exist based on caste, particularly for those outside of the traditional caste system: Dalit, (formerly known as “untouchable”), and Adivasi (indigenous) groups. The study finds Dalit and Adivasi professionals are more likely than those from traditional castes to be negatively impacted at work, with more than half saying they feel invisible and alienated at work most of the time.

Compared to Hindu professionals in India, Muslim professionals are much more likely to experience negative emotions at work, with more than half feeling excluded (54%) and nearly half feeling alienated (47%) and misjudged (45%) most of the time.

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

Race and heritage, often signified by native language, differentiate the experience of inclusion and equity at work in South Africa. The study finds that nearly half (45%) of Coloured professionals (people of mixed race) say they face more obstacles

to career advancement than their peers and, 36% of them say their colleagues have assumed they are at a lower job level than they currently are. Coqual also finds that members of South Africa's Venda linguistic group often face exclusion at work. They are more likely than professionals of other linguistic heritage to say they face greater penalties or harsher evaluations.

## **UK**

In the UK, race and religion stood out in the data. Coqual finds that Black, Asian, and Muslim professionals have significantly different experiences with workplace culture and career advancement compared to White and Christian respondents. At work, Coqual finds nearly half (47%) of Black professionals surveyed say that race affects the way people see or treat them, compared to their Asian (23%) and White colleagues (7%). Many professionals feel pressure to change aspects of their appearance and social life to fit in better with colleagues. Nearly one-third of Black professionals surveyed say that they change how they spend their free time to fit in with colleagues at work, and when it comes to appearance, more than one-third change their style of dress to fit in.

When it comes to religion, workplace norms in the UK are often more accommodating for Christian and nonreligious groups. Muslim respondents (31%) are more likely to say they receive less feedback compared to their Christian (15%) peers and those with no religion (9%). Additionally, one in four Muslim respondents feel misjudged at work most of the time.

While barriers to equity and opportunity and stark regional differences often exist for many groups, Coqual offers a roadmap for companies to tailor their global DE&I strategies to create inclusive, equitable workplaces for all.

**Methodology:** The research consists of a survey; focus groups, Insights In-Depth sessions (a proprietary web-based tool used to conduct voice-facilitated virtual focus groups), and one-on-one interviews with more than 100 professionals, experts, and practitioners in Brazil, China, India, South Africa, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (U.S.). The survey was conducted online in August 2021 among 3,753 respondents (735 in Brazil, 817 in China, 790 in India, 707 in South Africa, and 704 in the UK), over the age of 21, currently employed full time in professional occupations, with at least a bachelor's degree. Data was weighted by gender and, where available, race, using available benchmarks for each market. The base used for statistical testing was the effective base. The survey was conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago under the auspices of Coqual, a nonprofit research organization. NORC was responsible for the data collection, while Coqual conducted the analysis. In the charts, percentages may not always add up to 100 because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses from respondents.

**Lead Sponsor, HSBC; Research Sponsors:** Ernst & Young Global Limited (EY); Google; Intel Corporation; Johnson & Johnson; and S&P Global

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**About Coqual:** Coqual (formerly Center for Talent Innovation) is a global, nonprofit think tank dedicated to helping leaders design diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces where every person belongs. Founded in 2004, Coqual provides in-depth research, thought leadership, and data-driven, actionable solutions for companies to address bias and barriers to inclusion for underrepresented populations in the workplace. Coqual's cutting-edge research and Advisory Services focus on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, veteran status and LGBTQ identities, and others—as well as the intersections among these groups. For more information, visit [www.coqual.org](http://www.coqual.org).