

# EOC warns against workplace racism amid pandemic

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Unison says it has received around 15 complaints from ethnic minority construction workers. File photo: RTHK.



Phyllis Cheung speaks to RTHK's Damon Pang

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has called on employers not to discriminate against their staff based on race or disability, saying it's received complaints from South Asian workers that they've been banned from entering a construction site despite testing negative for Covid-19.

The EOC warned that such selective barring could violate discrimination laws because Chinese workers, as well as those of other ethnicities, were still allowed to work.

"We call on employers to adopt consistent policies to treat all employees equally and avoid discriminating against employees based on their race or disability such as Covid-19," the chair of the EOC, Ricky Chu, said in a statement.

The ethnic minority rights advocacy group, Unison, described the construction site move as unacceptable, saying Hongkongers need to do more to guard against racism.

The group's executive director, Phyllis Cheung, said they received about 15 complaints from construction workers about unequal treatment.

She said is the second case that Unison has come across recently, after a row last month that saw some customers refusing food delivery from ethnic minority workers.

"We feel that the situation has deteriorated, especially discrimination against people of colour...especially after the very first lockdown in the Jordan, Yau Ma Tei area," Cheung told RTHK.

"And the Centre for Health Protection official saying because of their culture and social habits that made the pandemic more widespread among South Asian or ethnic minorities. This is actually not accurate."

Meanwhile, the Construction Industry Council said it was trying to find out what happened, adding that it hopes the sector can treat all workers equally.

The council announced on Wednesday that about 200,000 construction workers in the city will be regularly tested for Covid-19 tests after several major outbreaks were linked to building sites.

It said workers will be required to present a negative test result from the previous two weeks before entering a construction site for work.