

COMBATING EMPLOYMENT DISCRIMINATION IN CONSTRUCTION



EEOC EFFORTS TO BUILD EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Historic federal investments in recent years have increased job opportunities in the construction industry. Because construction jobs can provide good-paying wages and benefits along with potential for career growth, the EEOC is focusing on construction to ensure doors of opportunity are open to all qualified workers.

As part of its [Strategic Enforcement Plan for fiscal years 2024-2028](#), the EEOC is committed to eliminating recruitment and hiring barriers in industries like construction where women and some workers of color are underrepresented. The EEOC is also focused on combating harassment, which is a significant problem in construction. The EEOC has worked to prevent and remedy discrimination and harassment in the construction industry through research, education and outreach, investigating charges of discrimination, and filing lawsuits.

RESEARCH AND RESOURCES

In 2023, EEOC Chair Charlotte A. Burrows issued "[Building For the Future: Advancing Equal Employment in the Construction Industry](#)," a report examining how discrimination and harassment based on race, national origin, and sex operate to exclude women and people of color from the industry and undermine their success on the job. In 2024, the EEOC issued a follow-up document in English and Spanish, "[Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment In the Construction Industry](#)," that recommends key actions industry leaders can take to combat harassment in construction. Previously in 2022, the EEOC held a [hearing](#) to obtain testimony from workers, economists, union representatives, employers, and others about discrimination and harassment in construction.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The agency, including senior leaders, conducted outreach to construction firms, unions, apprenticeship programs, and workers to identify strategies for preventing discrimination and harassment and creating more inclusive workplaces. The EEOC held more than 25 construction-related events in fiscal year 2024 alone, in cities across the country, including:

- Senior leaders have represented the agency at events including the National Taskforce on Tradeswomen's Issues Institute, a White House [roundtable](#) that included government and external stakeholders, and a [REACH Initiative](#) listening session including tradeswomen in Morgantown, West Virginia.
- The EEOC's Las Vegas Local Office discussed equal pay and the underrepresentation of women and people of color in the construction industry with the Southern Nevada Apprentice Workforce Convening & Training Event in partnership with the Nevada Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation; the Southern Nevada Building Trades Women's Committee; and the UBC International Sisters in the Brotherhood.
- The EEOC's Boston Area Office engaged with employers at a construction event hosted by Turner Construction that included HR representatives from various construction companies to provide information and technical assistance.



- Following a presentation at Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT), staff from the Chicago District Office performed outreach by going on-site to answer questions about employment discrimination and assist interested women in construction to file charges of discrimination.

ENFORCEMENT AND LITIGATION

The EEOC continues to use its enforcement tools to hold construction companies accountable when they violate anti-discrimination laws and has recovered millions of dollars for workers. Recent areas of litigation include:



- **Racial Harassment:** In August 2024, [asphalt paving company](#) agreed to pay \$1.25 million and provide comprehensive injunctive relief to settle an EEOC race discrimination lawsuit. According to the lawsuit, the company subjected Black employees to frequent, severe harassment because of their race. Black employees were subjected to degrading and humiliating conditions, such as being forced to relieve themselves outdoors while white workers were taken to indoor restrooms; were often called racial slurs and epithets; and were subjected to physically threatening conduct. The EEOC alleged that company leaders witnessed and received complaints about the racist conduct, but the employer took no action to correct it.
- **Race and National Origin Harassment and Retaliation:** In August 2024, [a plumbing and HVAC contractor](#) agreed to pay \$1.6 million and provide other equitable relief to settle a race and national origin harassment and retaliation lawsuit on behalf of 17 Black and Hispanic employees. The EEOC alleged that the company subjected a class of Black and Hispanic employees to a work environment with open use of racial slurs and derogatory language, display of the Confederate flag, and distribution of humiliating and degrading assignments based on race and national origin. The EEOC also asserted retaliation claims on behalf of two Black employees who were fired because they complained about the discriminatory work environment.
- **Racial Harassment and Retaliation:** In May 2023, [a construction management and general contracting company](#) agreed to pay \$1.2 million to a class of Black former workers and provide other relief to settle a race harassment and retaliation lawsuit. The EEOC alleged that the company subjected Black employees at the jobsite to a racially hostile work environment and retaliated against two employees after they complained about the discrimination. Parts of the jobsite were defaced with racially offensive graffiti, and a noose was displayed in the workplace on Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. According to the EEOC, the company failed to investigate the complaints and instead fired two employees.
- **Refusal to Hire Women:** In March 2023, a court ruled in favor of the EEOC and awarded more than \$2.6 million against [a construction-focused staffing agency](#) that refused to hire women for demolition and laborer positions or assign women to those positions. For example, when one woman called to inquire about job opportunities, a staffing firm employee told her that the company was "only hiring strong men and not women."
- **Sexual Harassment:** In October 2022, [a general construction company](#) agreed to pay \$500,000 and provide significant injunctive relief to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit. The EEOC alleged that male supervisors and coworkers sexually harassed monolingual Spanish-speaking women workers at various construction sites. The women were threatened if they rejected sexual advances and offered better work assignments and hours if they acquiesced.

If you suspect discrimination, [contact the EEOC](#) promptly because there are strict time limits for [filing a charge](#).

