Insights on how to embed race equity when implementing focused deterrence

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March 2025

YOUTH
ENDOWMENT
FUND

Introduction

Race equity should be central to designing and implementing all interventions, especially focused deterrence (FD) programmes. Without careful design, FD programmes can exacerbate racism, disproportionately harming children from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds.[1]

Structural racism: FD programmes often operate within legal frameworks that reinforce systemic inequalities. For instance, joint enterprise legislation has been disproportionately used in cases involving Black individuals, leading to collective punishment based on broad associations.[2] This can unfairly stigmatise and harm entire communities, deepening racial disparities.

Institutional racism: Biased practices in data collection and intelligence within services can lead to Black and minoritised individuals being disproportionately targeted in FD programmes. For example, biases in police data can inaccurately identify communities and individuals as high-risk,[3] reinforcing institutional racism and undermining the programme's effectiveness.

Interpersonal racism: Biases held by any individuals involved in decision-making - whether police officers, social workers or community leaders - can lead to assumptions about which children are considered vulnerable and at risk.[4] This can result in Black and minoritised individuals being disproportionately targeted for FD interventions or referred for deterrence action,[5] reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

Without a focus on race equity, FD programmes may reinforce racial biases and disparities, further entrenching minoritised children and young people into the criminal justice system.

Defining race equity

Race equity can be understood as both an outcome and a process:

- **Outcome:** Ensure that racial identity no longer predicts the outcomes of an individual or group.

- **Process:** Work to address the root causes of race inequities. This includes the elimination of racist policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that create, enable and reinforce disparate outcomes by race.

The systemic and institutional racism experienced by children and young people from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds in the UK leads to significant race inequities, particularly within the criminal justice system.[6] These inequities are evident in the disparities across various aspects of their lives, from education,[7] health[8] and employment[9] to interactions with police.[10]

The production and purpose of this resource

This resource was produced by Laurelle Brown and draws from her expertise in race equity, experience of supporting racially equitable implementation of FD, and understanding of the evidence base. It should be used alongside the YEF's practice guidance on how to deliver FD programmes to keep children and young people safe from involvement in serious violence. The resource focuses on centring and strengthening race equity in FD programme design, planning and delivery. It does not prescribe a one-size-fits-all approach, acknowledging that FD programmes vary across different settings.

YEF is grateful to the report's lead author, Laurelle Brown, for her expertise on matters related to race equity - and to the five focused deterrence pilots - that have informed this report. For clarity, the language used in this report does not in all places align with YEF's style guide.

The language used in this resource

Black and minoritised ethnic groups	The term 'Black and minoritised' is used to describe individuals and groups who face systemic disadvantages due to their race, ethnicity, or identity. It acknowledges that racism and discrimination are not just about being a numerical minority but about the active processes that strip away power, opportunities, and resources from these groups.[11, 12, 13] The term highlights the ongoing impact of these processes, which affect not only Black people but also other groups who experience similar forms of marginalisation.[14, 15]
Race	A social concept used to categorise people based on physical characteristics, such as skin colour, facial features and hair texture, which are often linked to geographic or ancestral origins.
Ethnicity	A cultural identity is defined as a group of people who share common social, historical and ancestral experiences, often linked by language, traditions and customs.
Racism	The belief or ideology that 'races' have distinctive characteristics which give some superiority over others.
Institutional racism	That which, covertly or overtly, resides in the policies, procedures, operations and culture of public or private institutions – reinforcing individual prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn.
Systemic racism	Laws, policies and practices that are embedded throughout society lead to continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race.[16] Systemic racism is evident in the disproportionate rates of stop-and-search targeting Black people.[17]
Anti-Black racism	The specific exclusion and prejudice against people visibly (or perceived to be) of African descent (commonly referred to as 'Black') through a system of beliefs and practices in society.[18, 19]
Cultural humility	The promotion of openness, self-awareness and respectful interactions with people of diverse backgrounds. It recognises power imbalances, aims for mutual respect and supports inclusive environments through ongoing learning.[20]
Oppression	When one social group is unfairly controlled or dominated by another group that holds more power in society. People in the dominant group have privileges and benefits, often at the expense of those in the less powerful group.[21]
Anti-oppressive practice	The challenging of systemic and structural power imbalances, discrimination and inequality. It focuses on promoting social justice by addressing systems of oppression based on factors such as race, gender, class and disability.[22]
Racial disproportionality	In the criminal justice system, this refers to the overrepresentation of marginalised racial or ethnic groups at all stages of the legal process, such as stop and search, arrest, prosecution and sentencing.[23]
Confirmation bias	When people look for or interpret evidence in a way that supports their existing beliefs or expectations rather than being open to new or conflicting information.[24]
Anti-racism	The active effort to identify and remove racism by changing systems, policies, practices and attitudes to redistribute power fairly and equitably.[25]

Summary of actions

Preparation

1 **Embed race equity from the start**

Why? Implementing race equity actions early minimises potential harm to those from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds, ensuring interventions are safer and more effective.

Steps:

a. Conduct an equality impact assessment.

b. Establish multi-stakeholder governance with diverse representation.

2 **Prioritise inclusive recruitment, retention and team management practices**

Why? Diverse teams that reflect the communities they work with achieve better outcomes and are better able to meet the needs of different communities.

Steps:

a. Review recruitment plans to align with race equity goals and establish inclusive cross-organisational recruitment processes where required.

b. Conduct a learning needs analysis and create a race equity workforce development programme.

Identification and monitoring

3 **Establish a robust process to identify, address and monitor race equity issues**

Why? A data-driven approach for identifying, addressing and monitoring race equity can prevent the reinforcement of racial disparities and enable targeted action to address them.

Steps:

a. Ensure the programme analyst has expertise in race equity, bias and discrimination.

b. Collect high-quality, disaggregated data to enable intersectional analysis and presentation.

c. Ensure ongoing monitoring of race equity by a diverse, multi-agency team.

Implementation

4 **Address racism and strengthen race equity in deterrence and support activities**

Why? Understanding how racism is built into the way police and partner agencies operate enables action to reduce bias and make things fairer for everyone.

Steps:

a. Partner with organisations that can deliver support and have experience and expertise in working with people from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

b. Co-develop services with ethnically diverse young people and community members.

c. Address the risk and impact of racism and intersectional discrimination in deterrence activities.

1. Embed race equity from the start

Why? Implementing race equity actions early minimises risks and potential harm to those from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds, ensuring interventions are safer and more effective.[26]

Steps:

a.   Conduct an Equality Impact Assessment.

b.   Establish multi-stakeholder governance with diverse representation.

1a. Conduct an equality impact assessment

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) helps organisations ensure that their policies, practices and decision-making processes are fair and do not disadvantage any protected groups. This applies to both strategic and operational activities.

Step	Activity	How you might do this
Assess multiple and connected impacts of FD.	Collect a variety of data sources, such as census data, crime statistics, research reports, statutory guidance, inspection frameworks and community feedback, to understand how the programme impacts different groups. In addition to understanding the equality impacts of FD, organisations may also wish to focus on data protection, safeguarding, and ethical and legal impacts. Assess the impact on both protected characteristics (e.g. race, disability, age) and non-protected characteristics (e.g. care experience, socioeconomic status).	Census data can be used to assess the socioeconomic background of potential participants, alongside community feedback, to understand the programme's equality impact on different groups. For example, by focusing on safeguarding impacts, it may become clear that financial-related deterrence actions could disproportionately affect individuals from low-income backgrounds, potentially leading to increased hardship and vulnerability, which in turn may create safeguarding concerns. Additional resources: For an example of a robust robust human rights and EqIA, see the 'Layers of Inequality' summary report assessing the spending cut impact in Coventry.[27] For a general insight into how to conduct an EqIA, see the Impact Assessment Toolkit from Devon Council.[28]
Engage a diverse group of representatives.	Involve a wide range of agency and community representatives, including people with lived experience of violence, to ensure multiple perspectives are considered.[29] This group could be engaged in several ways, such as sharing insights about potential impacts, reviewing the assessment findings and suggesting actions to address harmful impacts.	Set up a community advisory group that includes representatives from different ethnic backgrounds and individuals who have experienced violence or initiate a formal consultation process with community meetings and a survey.

Step	Activity	How you might do this
Address intersectionality and intersecting identities.	Focus on people with multiple marginalised identities (e.g. Asian young people with disabilities) and understand how overlapping factors, such as race, disability and age, shape their experiences. Recognise how factors such as race, gender, class and ability interact with systemic oppression, creating compounded disadvantages (and advantages) for some individuals.	Consider how an Asian young person with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) may face barriers that are different from those faced by a white young person with SEND, both in terms of social stigma and systemic discrimination. Increasingly, there are examples of local areas recognising such issues and working to reach marginalised groups through specific interventions 'to understand and address their needs in relation to violence and exploitation'.[30]
Develop an action plan to address impacts.	Create an action plan based on the impact assessment findings, outlining clear steps and responsibilities for making improvements and addressing risks.	The action plan should include specific, measurable actions aimed at improving race equity in the programme, ensuring fair treatment and addressing any identified risks or racial disparities.
Pay attention to ethnic differences.	Ensure case recording systems and processes enable the identification of differential impacts, disparities and experiences of discrimination, such as anti-Blackness.[31]	Collect and analyse disaggregated ethnic group data to identify whether any group is disproportionately impacted by the programme (e.g. Black Caribbean/Asian Indian rather than Black/Asian or Black/non-Black).
Review and update the EqIA regularly.	Repeat the impact assessment at least once a year to monitor changes and address emerging risks or disparities. Update the action plan based on new findings, evolving challenges and progress.	Review new research, local plans and data to assess how the intervention has affected different communities over time, ensuring ongoing improvements.

Why assess for multiple impacts: The London Gangs Matrix (2022)

The Metropolitan Police agreed to major changes to the Gangs Matrix after a legal challenge by Liberty on behalf of Awate Suleiman and UNJUST UK. The Matrix was found to violate the right to privacy, and Black young men were disproportionately targeted. The intersection of race and age led to multiple forms of disadvantage, with Black young people facing unfair treatment due to the intersection of racism and gender- and age-based discrimination. This resulted in increased surveillance and a higher risk of over-policing.

1b. Establish multi-stakeholder governance with diverse representation

Design inclusive oversight structures

The governance structure should include representatives from a variety of agencies, professions and communities with a clear focus on addressing race equity. While the exact structure will depend on the context, programmes should ensure consistent community representation and oversight at both the operational and strategic levels. For example, this could be achieved through paid lived experience roles, community representation on strategic boards, community oversight groups or lay members.

The structure should:[32]

- Enable meaningful participation, ensuring community groups can escalate concerns to strategic leaders and receive feedback.

- Represent the local community's ethnic diversity, reflecting the population it works with rather than the national population or the diversity of professionals within statutory organisations.

- Fairly remunerate and support community members' contributions to ensure their involvement is impactful and sustainable.

Clarify decision-making and escalation points

Identify who makes key decisions and ensure that oversight and escalation procedures are clear to all parties engaged in the programme. Establish an accountable structure for addressing race equity issues at all levels, including escalation to a strategic multi-agency group when needed.

2. Prioritise inclusive recruitment, retention and team management practices

Why? Diverse teams that reflect the communities they work with achieve better outcomes[33] and are better able to meet the needs of different cultures. By prioritising inclusive management practices, organisations can identify and address inequitable dynamics, creating fair, supportive and effective environments for all staff.

Steps:

a. Review recruitment plans to align with race equity goals and establish inclusive cross-organisational recruitment processes where required.

b. Conduct a learning needs analysis and create a race equity workforce development programme.

2a. Review recruitment plans to align with race equity goals and establish inclusive cross-organisational recruitment processes where required

Assess recruitment needs and align processes with race equity goals

Review the programme's recruitment activities (e.g. writing job descriptions, advertising vacancies), identify key job roles to be recruited (e.g. data analyst) and determine which partners are best positioned to recruit or employ specific roles (e.g. police). Consider how agency-specific practices may influence race equity. For example, it may be determined that analysts should be recruited and employed by the police rather than the council or a charity partner to overcome barriers to data access and transparency.[34]

Engage community members in recruitment processes

Actively involve community members, especially those with lived experience of violence and support services, in the recruitment process. This could include co-creating job specifications and interview processes and participating in interview panels. This inclusion helps ensure that recruitment practices add credibility among community members and balance the process so that it is not dominated by institutions.[35] Ensure community member involvement is properly planned, with adequate preparation and support factored in and budgeted for.

2b. Conduct a learning needs analysis and create a race equity workforce development programme

Undertake a learning and development needs analysis

Establish the race equity skill set and educational needs across the multi-stakeholder, multi-agency programme, including statutory and voluntary community sector partners, before delivering activities. Collect data from various sources, such as training programme feedback and attendance, staff feedback, staff performance data, national reports, and good practice and impact assessment plans, to identify areas of need.[36]

Design a holistic, evidence-informed workforce development programme or learning journey

Using the findings from the needs analysis, develop a tailored workforce development programme that includes system, group and individual learning opportunities, such as supervision[37] and peer review,[38] that extend beyond training activities. Identify foundational topics, such as intersectionality, structural racism and anti-racism. Provide ongoing access to resources and practical learning to systemically embed race equity.

Identify and address inequitable dynamics within teams

Team members from diverse professional backgrounds bring different values, norms and operational styles, making it crucial to foster a supportive and inclusive team environment as new teams are formed. If unaddressed, mistrust due to cultural differences can lead to negative emotional environments that adversely impact team performance.[39]

To foster a supportive and inclusive team environment:

- Plan and schedule regular team-building activities and create safe spaces for open dialogue. Consider using debriefing[40] and reflective conversation[41] tools to surface feelings and address power imbalances and biases, especially in the initial stages of team formation. See also Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1998)[42] and Nayak's Intersectional Model of Reflection (2022)[43] for examples of how to approach and deliver reflective conversations and activities.

- Facilitate structured conversations on race equity with skilled facilitators to address potential defensiveness from white staff[44] and to promote racial identity awareness, honest reflection and discussion.[45]

- Agree on key values and practices, such as communication styles, to ensure consistency and unity.

- Regularly review decision-making processes to ensure equitable participation and influence, creating a more inclusive and cohesive team culture.

Ensure access to a robust therapeutic support offer

Team members working on FD may experience multiple forms of stress[46] and trauma, including vicarious trauma, hearing about or witnessing others' distress, and racial trauma stemming from personal or systemic experiences of discrimination. This added layer of stress can further impact team dynamics, decision-making and overall well-being.

Offer diverse therapeutic support to staff involved in direct work with young people, ensuring facilitators are skilled in the relationship between racialised groups' mental health and the multifaceted issues (e.g. cultural, historical and economic) surrounding race.[47]

3. Establish a robust process to identify, address and monitor race equity issues

Why? A data-driven approach for identifying, addressing and monitoring race equity issues can prevent the reinforcement of existing racial disparities and enable targeted action to address them.

Steps:

a. Ensure the programme analyst has expertise in race equity, bias and discrimination.

b. In data reporting, identify and describe the systemic and structural factors that contribute to violence.

c. Collect high-quality, disaggregated data that enables intersectional analysis and presentation.

d. Ensure ongoing monitoring of race equity by a diverse, multi-agency team.

3a. Ensure the programme analyst has expertise in race equity, bias and discrimination

The analyst should filter and analyse data across various project stages (e.g. impact assessment, participant selection and deterrence decision-making), ensuring that race equity considerations are consistently integrated and progress towards race equity goals is tracked effectively throughout the programme.[48]

In data reporting, the analyst should identify and describe the systemic and structural factors that contribute to violence. The analyst should use clear and honest language to describe key issues such as disproportionality, confirmation bias, institutional racism and prejudice to ensure that these challenges are accurately represented.

3b. Collect high-quality, disaggregated data that enables intersectional analysis and presentation

Recognise that comprehensive, disaggregated police data are often limited but strive to collect the best possible data on children and young people, as well as data on structural factors, such as poverty. Work towards gathering multi-agency data from sources such as the police, children's social care and the voluntary sector, alongside community and personal insights, to create a more complete understanding of how different factors intersect and impact individuals and how they contribute to violence and broader inequalities.[49] For example, teams might look at how poverty, race and a lack of access to resources can combine to impact violence in a specific community.
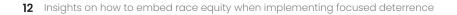
Regularly review how data is collected and presented to ensure all relevant insights are captured.

3c. Ensure ongoing monitoring of race equity by a diverse, multi-agency team

Establish a multi-agency team to consistently monitor race equity goals to support transparency, ensure programme accountability for strategic and operational race equity goals, and highlight areas for continuous improvement to align with community needs.

Establish reporting and escalation protocols for addressing racial disproportionality.

Identify baseline data and set clear thresholds for racial disproportionality and disparities. Establish a reporting approach to highlight any breaches of these thresholds. Use reporting and escalation protocols to address these breaches across the entire programme, from referral and support interventions to deterrence actions.

4. Develop support services that strengthen race equity

Why? Understanding how racism is built into the way police and partner agencies operate enables action to reduce bias and make things fairer for everyone.[50]

Steps:

    a.   Partner with organisations that can deliver support and have experience and expertise in working with people from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

    b.   Co-develop services with ethnically diverse young people and community members.

4a. Partner with organisations that can deliver support and have experience and expertise in working with people from Black and minoritised ethnic backgrounds

Identify and select organisations that have a proven commitment to supporting Black and minoritised ethnic communities. Formalise partnerships with clear agreements on roles, shared goals and joint activities, such as training or workshops on anti-racism.

Selecting partners

While there are no universally agreed standards for defining good experience and understanding in anti-racism work and cultural humility, applying key principles from these frameworks can help assess potential partner organisations. Key considerations include:

- Does the organisation **demonstrate diversity** within its structure across all levels?

- What efforts has the organisation made to **understand** how racism is embedded within it?

- What **actions** has it taken to address policies, processes and systems that may perpetuate inequality?

- How does it **recognise** the interconnectedness of identities, both internally and in its work with others?

- Does it have a track record of **challenging dominant narratives** that downplay or ignore the impact of racism?

- How does it **centre the voices and perspectives** of racially minoritised groups in anti-racist initiatives?

- Can it show a commitment to ongoing **learning** about diverse groups and how this has influenced its work?

- Can independent feedback be obtained from minoritised or marginalised groups to **verify** its performance?

This list was developed from key principles in the Critical Race Theory,[51] Anti-Racism[52] and Cultural Humility[53] frameworks.

4b. Co-develop services with ethnically diverse young people and community members

Engage ethnically diverse young people and representative community members (or third-party providers),[54] particularly those with lived experience of violence, to co-design services. It is important to address barriers to programme access (e.g. lack of cultural understanding by service providers), ensure the services are culturally informed and relevant, and address the unique needs of these groups, especially those from backgrounds disproportionately affected by violence.

5. Address the risk and impact of racism and intersectional discrimination in deterrence activities

Why? Deterrence activities can have a profound impact on the well-being, opportunities and future outcomes of affected individuals.[55] It is crucial to address discrimination in decision-making to prevent reinforcing existing inequalities and ensure that children and young people do not face unfair or disproportionate consequences.

Steps:

a. Co-develop a systematic approach aimed at minimising race inequities in decisions and outcomes.

5a. Co-develop a systematic approach aimed at minimising race inequities in decisions and outcomes

Approach	Description	Goal
Clear process, roles and responsibilities	Develop and publish processes with defined roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders in deterrence decision-making. Ensure these roles include accountability for addressing racism in outcomes.	Increase transparency and accountability to reduce the likelihood of bias influencing key decisions or of bias influencing decisions without being detected.
Collaborative decision making	**Young people and community members** Involve community members, young people and advocates from Black and minoritised ethnic groups in decision-making related to deterrence activities. Use participatory frameworks that allow co-design and implementation,[56] such as the widely used Lundy Model (2007)[57] for youth participation. **Police, community and support services** Develop multi-agency decision-making processes to ensure individual deterrence reviews and decisions include diverse perspectives from at least two individuals. The goal should be to achieve desistance by preventing reoffending with a tailored, individual response[58] rather than by punishing individuals or keeping them in the programme longer than necessary.	Increase trust and community ownership of deterrence measures to make outcomes more inclusive and legitimate.

Approach	Description	Goal
Consideration of contextual and structural factors	Incorporate the analysis of contextual and structural factors, such as socioeconomic status, available community resources (e.g. individual support services) and agency history (e.g. the impact of previous agency involvement with an individual or community), into deterrence-related decisions. Apply an intersectional lens to understand how different factors, such as race, gender and socioeconomic background, will affect individuals or groups. For example, instead of removing financial support for an activity, consider alternative measures to take deterrence action, such as implementing a curfew, without exacerbating existing disadvantages.	Have deterrence measures that address broader systemic issues to reduce harm and avoid exacerbating existing disadvantages.
Robust oversight and scrutiny	Consider setting up an oversight group with representatives from Black and minoritised ethnic communities, community organisations and experts in race equity. This group should have the power to review, change or stop deterrence activities if racial bias or discrimination is found. It should also be independently reviewed regularly and have a clear process for resolving disagreements.	Have ongoing oversight to identify and address racism in deterrence activities.

Case Study: Leicestershire's FD programme (Phoenix Programme) community oversight group

The Community Oversight Group (COG) is a formally recognised group within the local Violence Reduction Network, providing community representation in governance. It includes members from communities most affected by violence.

The COG has been essential, ensuring diverse community essential for representation and oversight. After a year, the group was refreshed based on feedback from the first cohort, oversight of the programme which highlighted the need for clearer communication and understanding of data use, particularly race equity and disproportionality, and structured involvement in decision-making processes, such as co-producing campaigns and providing input into strategic assessments. This led to the development of a more structured governance framework for the second cohort, with clear terms of reference, defined roles and training to improve inclusivity and effectiveness.

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