

International Women's Day 2026

Supporting & Advancing Ethnic Minority Women in Marcomms

Insights from Women in PR & People Like Us

Date
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This report brings together lived experiences from ethnic minority women working across PR, communications, marketing and the wider creative industries.

Produced by **Women in PR** and **People Like Us**, the research explores the barriers women face in their careers, the support that has helped them progress, and the practical changes organisations can make to build more equitable workplaces.

Published alongside International Women's Day 2026, the findings align with the theme Give to Gain, which encourages empowering women through generous, collaborative and intentional action.

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Overview

The communications industry prides itself on creativity, insight and the ability to connect with diverse audiences. Yet many professionals from underrepresented backgrounds continue to face barriers that affect how they enter the industry, how they progress, and how comfortable they feel being themselves at work.

To better understand these experiences, **Women in PR** and **People Like Us** conducted research with ethnic minority women working across PR, communications, marketing and the wider creative industries.

The aim was simple: listen to lived experience and turn those insights into practical action.

The research highlights both the challenges many women continue to encounter and the support structures that have helped them succeed. It also identifies areas where organisations can take meaningful steps to create more inclusive environments.

Published alongside International Women's Day 2026, this report contributes to a wider industry conversation about equity, inclusion and opportunity.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to understand the lived experiences of ethnic minority women working across the communications and creative industries.

While progress has been made in conversations around diversity, many professionals still encounter barriers that affect confidence, career progression and workplace inclusion.

The study aimed to:

- **Capture the real experiences of ethnic minority women working in PR, communications, marketing and related industries**
- **Identify structural and cultural barriers affecting career progression**
- **Highlight the types of support that have helped individuals succeed**
- **Explore what changes could improve equity and inclusion across the industry**
- **Provide practical recommendations that organisations can adopt immediately**

At its core, this research seeks to **move beyond discussion and towards action.**

Methodology

This report combines qualitative insights with quantitative industry data to build a fuller picture of the experiences of ethnic minority women working in marcomms.

01 Qualitative Research

In-depth interviews were conducted with professionals working across communications, marketing and the wider creative industries.

Participants were invited to discuss:

- Career barriers they had experienced
- Support structures that had helped them progress
- What changes would have improved their early career experience

These interviews provide rich personal insight into the day-to-day realities of navigating the industry.

02 Quantitative Research

A wider industry survey was conducted to validate themes emerging from the qualitative interviews and measure how widespread certain experiences are across the sector.

Together, these approaches provide both personal perspective and broader industry context.

Key Findings

Several consistent themes emerged from the research. While individual experiences vary, many participants described similar challenges across different organisations and career stages.

The most common themes included:

Hidden Workplace Barriers

Structural policies and workplace practices sometimes unintentionally disadvantage ethnic minority women.

Unwritten Workplace Norms

First-generation professionals often encounter unspoken cultural expectations that can create additional hurdles.

The Mental Load of Representation

Many participants described feeling pressure to represent entire communities or speak on behalf of others.

London-Centric Industry Networks

Networking opportunities and career visibility often remain concentrated in London, limiting access for professionals working in other regions.

The Importance of Supportive Leadership

Managers and sponsors who actively advocate for diverse talent can significantly influence career progression.

Inclusive Teams Improve Confidence & Collaboration

Participants reported feeling more comfortable contributing ideas when working within genuinely diverse teams.

These findings highlight both the challenges individuals face and the opportunities organisations have to improve workplace culture.

Hidden Barriers in the Workplace

Many participants described structural barriers that affected their career experiences.

Some challenges related to workplace policies and systems that were not designed with diverse experiences in mind.

For example, several interviewees highlighted **religious inclusion barriers**, particularly around taking time off for non-Christian religious observances. Requests for leave were sometimes framed as personal favours rather than supported through equitable policies.

Others described being assigned to campaigns involving **distressing or racialised subject matter** without proactive welfare checks or clear opportunities to opt out.

Participants also highlighted the impact of **limited early-career guidance**, particularly when entering the industry without existing professional networks or mentors.

These experiences can create additional pressures that affect both confidence and long-term career progression.

Navigating Unwritten Workplace Norms

For many participants, the most difficult barriers were not formal policies but the unwritten cultural expectations that shape workplace environments.

First-generation office professionals in particular described feeling unsure about the informal “rules” of workplace culture. These included expectations around communication style, networking behaviour and office etiquette. Without clear guidance or mentoring, these norms can become hidden barriers.

One interviewee explained:

“Agencies say they value different opinions, but the moment you show any difference, it’s like they start quietly deciding you don’t fit in.”

Others described feeling pressure to adjust aspects of their behaviour or identity to align with perceived workplace expectations.

“I’ve learned how to code-switch and hide parts of myself to get through the process, but it shouldn’t be a requirement just to survive the workplace.”

Clear onboarding, mentoring and transparent workplace expectations can help reduce these hidden barriers.

The Invisible Labour of Representation

Many participants described carrying an additional emotional burden at work.

This often involved being expected to represent or speak on behalf of entire communities during discussions about race, diversity or social issues.

One interviewee reflected:

“ In meetings about diversity or race, I’d suddenly be treated as the spokesperson for all Black women. Black people aren’t a monolith, but that’s how it can feel when you’re the only one in the room. ”

Others described situations where they felt responsible for highlighting problematic language or potential reputational risks linked to cultural issues.

While these contributions are often valuable to organisations, the responsibility should not fall solely on individuals from marginalised backgrounds.

Sharing this responsibility through allyship and inclusive workplace practices can reduce this invisible labour.

Access Beyond London-Centric Networks

Networking plays a significant role in career progression within the communications industry.

However, many participants described feeling that opportunities remain heavily concentrated in London.

For professionals working in other regions, networking events, industry groups and informal opportunities can feel harder to access due to travel time, cost and visibility.

One participant explained:

“

Support networks like 10,000 Black Interns were a godsend. They're the reason I got into the industry at all. But outside those schemes, so many opportunities still come down to who already knows who.

”

Expanding events, mentoring programmes and industry networks beyond London could help improve access and inclusion across the sector.

The Power of Authentic Team Diversity

While participants highlighted challenges, many also described positive experiences working within genuinely inclusive teams.

When organisations actively prioritise diversity and inclusion, it can significantly improve workplace culture and confidence.

Participants reported that diverse teams often felt more curious, collaborative and open to different perspectives.

Supportive leadership was also identified as a critical factor.

One participant explained:

“

When I had a manager who really advocated for me, she poured confidence into me and opened doors I'd never have pushed for myself.

”

When leaders actively sponsor diverse talent and champion inclusion, the impact can be transformative for individuals and organisations alike.

What Support Has Worked

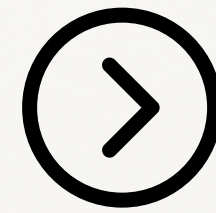
Participants identified several forms of support that had a positive impact on their careers.

These included:



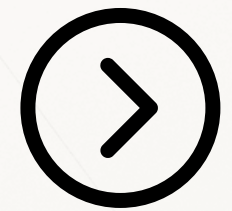
Diverse & Inclusive Teams

Working alongside colleagues from varied backgrounds created environments where people felt more comfortable contributing ideas.



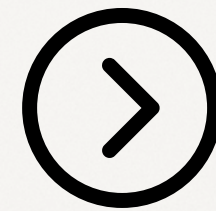
Career Mobility & Varied Roles

Opportunities to work across different areas such as social media, digital PR and community management helped build confidence and broaden skill sets.



Regional Industry Events

Hosting networking opportunities outside London improved accessibility and visibility for professionals working in other cities.



Clarity of Role Purpose

Understanding how communications work contributes to wider organisational goals helped individuals feel more confident and effective in their roles.

These experiences demonstrate how relatively practical changes can significantly improve career development.

What Support Is Still Needed

Participants also identified areas where additional support could improve industry experiences.

The most frequently mentioned suggestions included:

Formal Mentoring & Early Career Guidance

Structured mentorship programmes can help individuals navigate the industry and build confidence

Equitable Policies for Religious Observance

Flexible leave policies that recognise diverse religious practices would improve inclusion.

Clear Safeguards when Assigning Sensitive Work

Managers proactively checking employee wellbeing before assigning difficult subject matter.

Onboarding that Explains Workplace Norms

Practical guidance that helps new professionals understand workplace expectations.

Shared Responsibility for Diversity Discussions

Creating environments where everyone contributes to inclusive conversations, rather than relying on minority voices.

More Regional Industry Opportunities

Expanding networking events and professional communities outside London.

These experiences demonstrate how relatively practical changes can significantly improve career development.

A Pledge to Support and Advance Ethnic Minority Women in Marcomms

Improving equity and inclusion across the communications industry does not require organisations to solve every challenge at once.

Meaningful change often begins with small, intentional actions.

Women in PR and **People Like Us** invite organisations to commit to one to three actions from the following pledge.

The Pledge:

1. Champion transparency in pay and progression

Publish salary bands and clear promotion criteria to build trust and fairness.

2. Create psychologically safe workplaces

Ensure employees can raise concerns about pay, progression or workplace culture without fear of repercussions.

3. Build genuinely diverse teams

Prioritise inclusive recruitment and team structures so ethnic minority women are not isolated within organisations.

4. Strengthen mentorship

Provide access to mentors and senior sponsors who actively advocate for career progression.

5. Commit to active sponsorship

Leaders lend their networks & influence to advocate for ethnic minority women. Say their name in decision-making spaces.

6. Embed reverse mentoring

Create formal reverse mentoring connections where leaders benefit from colleagues' perspectives as strategic expertise, not informal D&I labour.

7. Invest in supportive line management

Train managers to recognise bias and support fair career development.

8. Increase visible diverse leadership

Commit to developing and promoting ethnically diverse leaders.

9. Protect employees in external-facing work

Ensure employees feel supported when navigating difficult client or stakeholder dynamics.

10. Value diverse perspectives

Recognise that lived experience strengthens communications and helps organisations connect with wider audiences.

Next Steps

The findings in this report mark the beginning of an ongoing conversation.

Women in PR and **People Like Us** will continue working with industry partners to raise awareness of these insights and encourage organisations to take practical action.

Organisations are encouraged to:

- **Read and share this report**
- **Commit to the industry pledge**
- **Participate in industry conversations about inclusion and equity**

Collective action will help create workplaces where **everyone can thrive**.



Acknowledgements

Women in PR and **People Like Us** would like to thank the professionals who generously shared their experiences and insights for this research.

Their openness and honesty have helped highlight both the challenges and opportunities facing the communications industry today.

We also thank our industry partners, supporters and community members who continue to contribute to building a more inclusive future for the marcomms profession.