

Core functions of the EOC

AS WE start the new year, we remind members of the public about the mandate and core functions of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) so that they can access the full range of benefits that the EOC offers. It is prudent to ensure that members of the public understand and appreciate that the EOC does not just receive complaints, but we are empowered and positioned to be the leading public advocate on equality and discrimination.

In addition to the functions that we will list further in the column, the EOC offers free services such as inclusivity training for organisations, appearances on webinars and panels as subject matter experts, publication of guidelines, working with stakeholders on projects to amplify calls for equality and be a part of movements that meaningfully and positively impact individuals, communities, society and the nation.

The EOC was established by the Equal Opportunity Act 2000 and we were established for the purpose of exercising the jurisdiction conferred upon it by the act. Our mandate is to work towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality and good relations between people of different statuses.

The Equal Opportunity Act



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seeks to protect people against discrimination as it relates to four categories: employment, education, the provision of goods and services and the provision of accommodation. Under the act, people are entitled to equality and fair treatment, despite their status. The seven status grounds covered by the act are race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, origin including geographical origin, disability and sex.

27. (1) The functions of the commission are:

(a) to work towards the elimination of discrimination;

(b) to promote equality of opportunity and good relations

between people of different status generally;

(c) to keep under review the working of this act and any relevant law and, when so required by the minister, or otherwise thinks it necessary, draw up and submit to the minister proposals for amending them;

(d) to receive, investigate and, as far as possible, conciliate allegations of discrimination;

(e) to develop, conduct and foster research and educational programmes and other programmes for the purpose of eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity and good relations

between people of different status;

(f) to prepare and to publish appropriate guidelines for the avoidance of discrimination;

(g) to do any other thing conducive or incidental to the carrying out of its functions.

The act also covers victimisation and offensive behaviour.

A person who believes that they have been subjected to discrimination in any of the above areas may lodge a complaint with the EOC. The EOC investigates every complaint lodged at its office. Services at the EOC are free of charge up until the stage of conciliation. Bear in mind that the EOC is not a court of law that makes determinations or gives interpretations under the act.

If the matter is unresolved, the complaint can be referred to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal (EOT).

The EOT, which is an independent body separate and distinct from the EOC, is a superior court of record and its mandate is to hear and adjudicate on matters referred to it by the EOC.

The EOT has the power to make orders, declarations and awards of compensation as it determines to be appropriate.

For more information, please visit www.equalopportunity.gov.tt or follow our Facebook page @EOCTT