

## AVOID VACCINE STIGMATISATION

**T**reating someone differently based on contracting COVID-19 or their vaccination status is discriminatory.

There has been public discourse, especially on social media, that fosters a vaccinated vs unvaccinated divide and encourages offensive behaviour, bullying and exclusion.

It is important to remember that anybody can contract and spread the virus, even those who are vaccinated.

Avoid stigmatising those who have tested positive, those who had to undergo quarantine because they were a primary contact, or those who display covid-19 related symptoms. For instance, a person may cough or have an itchy throat due to allergies.

Not all coughs are covid-19 related.

Spreading false news and unverified information does not help the situation. Be sure to educate your peers on the benefits of vaccination using information that comes from the Ministry of Health, the Office of the Prime Minister or the World Health Organisation.



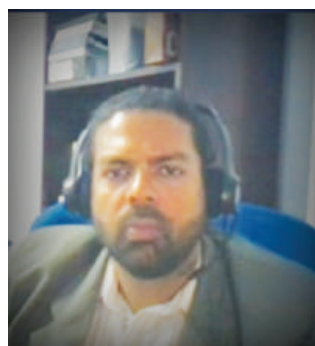
Let us not look for factors that divide us. In the midst of a pandemic, let us instead be each other's keeper and encourage understanding, support and empathy.

## EOC PRESENTS AT HRMATT SEMINAR

**H**aran Ramkaransingh, Director of the Legal Services Unit at the EOC was one of two panellists that led the discussion on vaccine Status and Worker Discrimination at a webinar hosted by the Human Resource Association of Trinidad and Tobago (HRMATT).

The discussion targeted human resource and other professionals to help guide workplace practices, which employers can implement to create and sustain a healthy and safe workplace and respect the rights of employees.

Haran said that, "there is vaccine hesitancy because COVID-19 is still



**HARAN RAMKARANSINGH**  
Director of Legal Services

considered to be a novel virus. Also, we should not look down on someone who has vaccine hesitancy."

Just over 70 participants benefited from the webinar, which was held on Friday 23 July, 2021.

## GET TO KNOW US

### CONCILIATION TO ADJUDICATION

In our last issue of EOC NEWS, we introduced readers to the conciliation stage of the complaints process. We now introduce you to the process that follows. If for some reason, the matter remains unresolved, the complainant has the option to withdraw the matter or request that the matter be referred to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal (the Tribunal) for adjudication. However, before the matter can be referred to the Tribunal, there is a process which must occur.

1. The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) will prepare a report with the details, results and recommendations based on its investigation.
2. A copy of the report will be sent to both parties: the complainant and respondent, and to any other interested party.
3. The Notice of Report will be published on our website, and if funds permit, in a daily newspaper.
4. The report will be made available for inspection by the public. Members of the public and the media can contact the EOC to set up an appointment to view the report.

Members of the public who wish to receive a copy of the report can apply for same under the Freedom of Information Act

# PLAYERS TO FOOTBALL BODIES: I am Human First

National footballers are calling on international football bodies to choose humanity over economics to address racism in sport.

The call was made during a round table discussion hosted by the Equal Opportunity Commission in partnership with the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association. The event entitled Racism in Sports: The Hard Conversation was held on 11 August and provided a platform for footballers to open up about the brutal racist attacks they faced during and after the CONCACAF Gold Cup match versus Mexico in July. Bottles, debris and discriminatory and racist slurs were hurled at the TT players at the end of the match, in which this country drew level with the Mexican team. The game had to be stopped twice.

Panellist and retired national footballer Kenwyn Jones said that "sporting bodies have been placing economics at the top of the ladder and focusing less on the humanity of the sport. Instead, what prevailed was ascribing a different set of standards based on the ranking and the economic return of a country such as Mexico." He added that "current disciplinary actions such as fines are not working. We need harsher measures like expelling a team for one year or two to address perpetrators of racism in sport".

Alvin Jones, who was one of the main targets of the racist attacks said that the encounter affected

him mentally: "the threats were some of the worst and most frightening things I have had to go through. I received death threats and my family members were also threatened. To this day, if I post on social media, I still receive negative messages from Mexican fans and every time I hear a notification, I think that it is a hate-message. It's hard to think about ever playing against Mexico again."

Dr. Krystal-Jane Verasammy, Commissioner at EOC and a Counselling Psychologist said "what Alvin Jones described were triggers and it shows that this was a traumatic experience. There are differing responses to these experiences based on personality traits and our footballing bodies should provide mental health support to players."

The players on the panel acknowledged that while there are campaigns and access to a three-step protocol to deal with racism and discrimination in the game, it is evident that a greater humanitarian approach is required to combat this issue and its devastating impact on an individual's mental health. Only one of the three steps were implemented at the T&T vs Mexico match. The steps are:

1. Stop the match
2. Suspend the match
3. Abandon the match.

The panellists agreed that the solution will not come overnight and there must be mechanisms in place to prepare upcoming sports men and women for this type of negative behaviour and resulting mental



**Marvin Phillips** Goalkeeper  
Senior Men's National Football Team

**Alvin Jones** Footballer  
Senior Men's National Football Team

**Kenwyn Jones**  
Retired National Footballer

**Naomie Guerra** Footballer  
Senior Women's National Football Team

**Dr. Krystal-Jane Verasammy** Commissioner  
Equal Opportunity Commission

Host: **Caston Cupid**

## TTOC TO SPEAK ON RACISM IN SPORT

It is official! The Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee (TTOC) has accepted the Pass the Ball Challenge. The TTOC will be collaborating with the EOC to discuss racism in sports, before passing to more sporting bodies to do the same. Congratulations to the TTOC for continuing this critical and relevant conversation.



# EOC CALLS FOR ADOPTION OF **LGBTI+** WORKPLACE POLICY

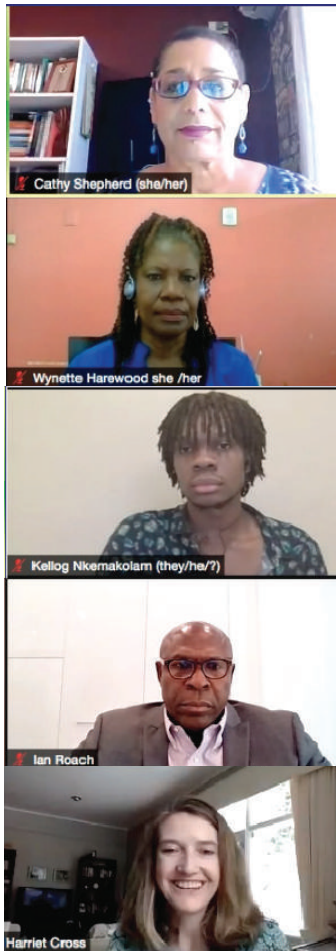
Until the Equal Opportunity Act (the Act) is amended to include sexual orientation as a status ground, the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) is committed to partnering with allies of the LGBTI+ community to support its members and amplify their voices.

CAISO Sex and Gender partnered with the EOC and the British High Commission, Port of Spain to launch the Model LGBTI+ Workplace Policy for Trinidad and Tobago. The policy document seeks to encourage and accommodate diversity in the workplace for the LGBTI+ community.

At the launch, EOC Chairman Ian Roach called on employers to adopt the policy to promote inclusivity in the workplace. "As part of our public education efforts, we speak about the responsibilities of employers to create and foster a culture of inclusivity by developing and implementing appropriate policies. I am hopeful that employers will see the benefit of this inclusive policy and implement it within their workplace."

Commenting on the partnership, Chairman Roach said, "the EOC is elated to have partnered with CAISO and the British High Commission, Port of Spain to make this Model LGBTI+ Workplace Policy for T&T a reality, notwithstanding the many challenges faced and the personal sacrifices of so many devoted to the cause, like my classmate and CAISO founder, Colin Robinson, who unfortunately passed away recently. This launch today bears testimony that his work was not at all in vain. Gone but his legacy of work will not be forgotten." He also thanked Cheryl-Ann Peters, Legal Officer I at the EOC, who was instrumental in providing a legal and human-rights review of the policy document. CAISO Director, Omar Mohammed

said, "the purpose of the policy is to address and reduce the prejudice faced by LGBTI+ employees and applicants. It reminds employers that it is critical to provide a safe and inclusive work environment, including providing training for employees to educate and empower them to report discrimination."



Dr Angelique Nixon of CAISO supported his view saying, "we (CAISO) can offer LGBTI+ sensitivity trainings, which are very important to help this policy move forward and we encourage management, especially in your workplaces, to be leaders. However, we need that political will and voices to stand up - it can't only be LGBTI+ people to speak out for justice and for safety."

Her Excellency Harriet Cross, British High Commissioner to Trinidad and Tobago said, "this Model LGBTI+ Workplace Policy for Trinidad and Tobago has been long anticipated and the timing of this launch is excellent as it falls within Pride Month. We have made great strides toward breaking down barriers which prevent equality and freedom, but there is still a huge amount of work to be done, not just in the Caribbean, but in the United Kingdom and the wider world".

The Model Policy was launched virtually on Wednesday 30th June 2021.

## Discrimination Costs

There is also a business argument for inclusivity according to Liam Rezende of Open for Business, a coalition of leading global companies dedicated to LGBTI+ inclusion. The organisation conducted research and prepared a report detailing that LGBTI+ inclusion fuels better business outcomes. Companies that are diverse and inclusive are better able to compete for talented employees, have higher rates of retention of motivated employees and benefit from the large, growing, global spending power of LGBTI+ consumers.

The report entitled, The Economic Case For LGBT+ Inclusion In The Caribbean, estimates that LGBTI+ exclusion in the English-speaking Caribbean costs between USD 1.5 billion and USD 4.2 billion per year which is between 2.1% and up to 5.7% of the regional GDP. The report focuses on diminished human capital and labour output, health disparities, experiences of violence, and constraints on tourism in 12 Caribbean nations, including Trinidad and Tobago.

# HUMAN TRAFFICKING:

## Is the term a cloak of misrepresentation?

When you think of the term 'human trafficking', what are the first set of images that appear? What if you were told that many victims of human trafficking are really migrants who are indentured labourers facing brutalities, coercions, and exploitation quite similar to the indentureship system? What would be your reaction? Would you speak out against the injustices that migrants face? Would you lobby to protect their rights?

We often think of human trafficking as something that happens in other parts of the world but it is prevalent in the region and right here in Trinidad and Tobago. It begs the question, how in the twenty-first century do we continue to sympathise with trafficked victims but not migrants hoodwinked into forced labour, when in most cases, they are one and the same?

InterClub of Trinidad and Tobago and supported by the Equal Opportunity Commission.

Professor Kempadu brilliantly presented on the history of trafficking in the Caribbean and asked the participants to look at trafficking beyond the sex trade and the lens of the morality of women. She said that not much has changed on the face of human trafficking. From the earliest history of human trafficking to now, there is no true definition that captures all the nuances, legislative agendas have not changed much, language has not evolved around it and the issue is pegged/ marketed as a woman's ethics issue. The idea of human trafficking has been pushed as a sexist and racist narrative and it still impacts the way we view it today. However, it is critical to face the glaring truth that forced migration and

Dr. Alissa Trotz agreed with Professor Kempadu on the language of trafficking and how it obscures, rather than clarify. She also shared stories of trafficked families across the Caribbean who were separated because they did not speak the language of the country they were trafficked to and there was no support for the victims. Dr. Trotz lamented that many governments, individuals and groups claim to be in solidarity with victims but in actuality, the affected migrant communities who have escaped their captures are discriminated against and have no rights within those said countries. She reminded the "students" at the Teach-In that many of the victims are easy targets because they are fleeing political and economic crisis in their country.

Dr Trotz is a Professor of Caribbean Studies at New College and the Director of Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto. She is also affiliate faculty at the Dame Nita Barrow Institute of Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados.

The banner features logos for UWI St. Augustine Campus, IGDS (Institute for Gender and Development Studies), The Interclub of Trinidad & Tobago, and EOC (Equal Opportunity Commission). The text on the banner reads: "RETHINKING TRAFFICKING: GETTING TO THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM" and "JULY 28 2021 10AM-12 NOON".

According to Kamala Kempadoo, Professor of Social Science at York University, Canada, the term trafficking and the language associated with it hides or misrepresents the exploitative experiences of migrants: This is the source of the problem.

The Professor was speaking at a Teach-In webinar, **Re-Thinking Trafficking: Getting to the Source of the Problem**. The webinar was hosted by the Institute for Gender and Development Studies, the

oppressive domestic labour have been swapped with the word 'trafficking'.

According to statista.com, the latest data shows that women are more than twice as likely to be trafficked than men. Equal opportunity for trafficked victims is difficult due to cultural perceptions that propagate stigmatisation and casual attitudes towards women who are trafficked. However, in many instances, victims are either deceived with the promise of a better life, kidnapped or coerced into some type of labour, then silenced into compliance.

Some of the solutions discussed at the Teach-In include meaningful collaboration and steps between Government, NGO and civil society support; support for victims to come forward; trafficked children or someone who observes abuse of children being equipped to report the injustice; access to health and a family life; education for children; and viewing trafficked victims as survivors or crime and not part of a problem.

# DONT DISCRIMINATE WHEN HIRING

Not many are aware, but it is possible for employers to discriminate even at the stage of hiring.

According to section (8) (a) of the Equal Opportunity Act (the Act), an employer or a prospective employer shall not discriminate against a person in the arrangements he/she makes for the purpose of determining who should be offered employment.

This means that job hunters are eligible to apply for and obtain jobs despite their status. The seven status grounds covered under the Act are sex, race, ethnicity, disability, religion, marital status and origin, inclusive of geographic origin.

Haran Ramkaransingh, Director of Legal Services at the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) shared this little-known fact at a virtual public education session with employees at Guardian Media Limited. Haran shared a print advertisement that read, **NOW HIRING MANUAL LABOURERS. ONLY MALE APPLICANTS WOULD BE CONSIDERED.**

He said “advertisements should be as neutral as possible and focus on the requirements of the job. The advertisement is contrary to the Act, unless the employer could demonstrate that the job requirements fall within one of the exceptions identified in section 11 of the Act”.

Data at the EOC shows that over the last five years, the most lodged complaints were under the category of employment.

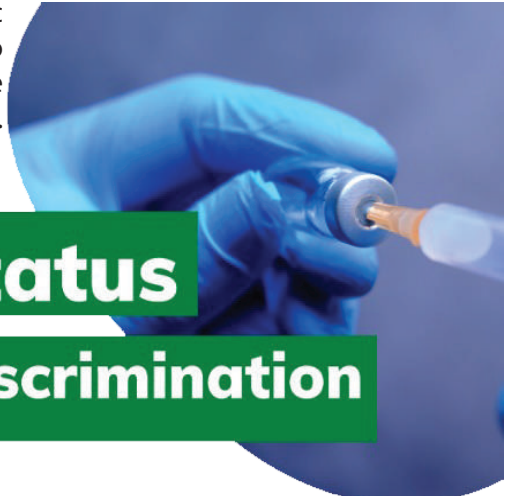
The Commission continues to facilitate

public education sessions with public and private sector organisations to curb discrimination in the work place and promote inclusivity.

## Vaccine Status Workplace Discrimination

Human resource professional at Guardian Media, Kalvyn Seepersad said, “Guardian intends to ensure that our leadership and management team are knowledgeable and aware of the best practice approaches and legal dynamics of this critical area”. He added, “this session would help to equip our teams to better identify discrimination practices in employment and by extension reduce legal incidents.”

The informative virtual education session took place on Wednesday 7th July with twenty (20) staff members from the Guardian Media Limited. To request a virtual session, send an email: [communications@eoc.gov.tt](mailto:communications@eoc.gov.tt).



# KUDOS TO NEWLY RELAUNCHED

## SOCIAL EVENTS Committee

The EOC Social Events Committee has officially been re-launched.

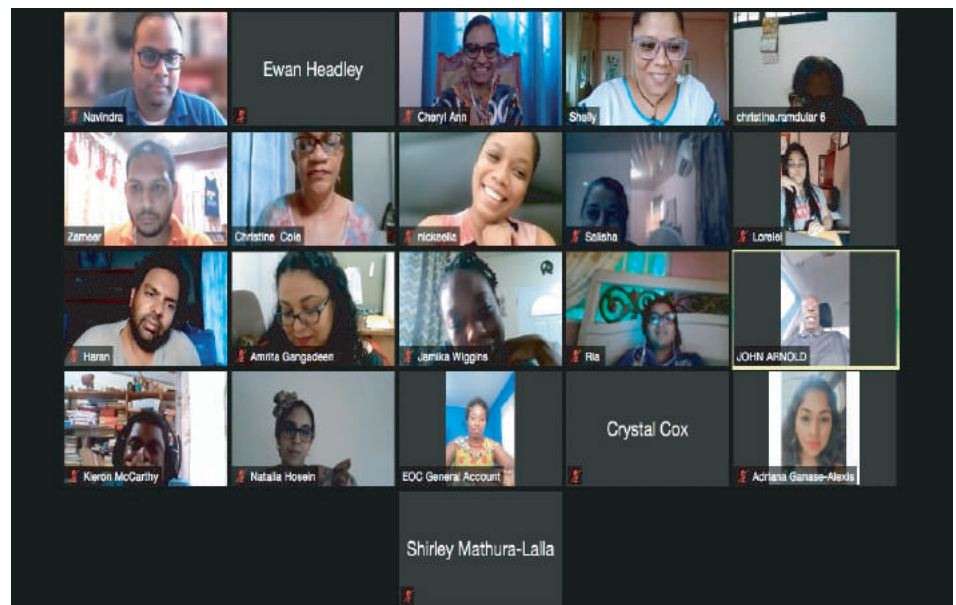
EOC staff loosened up at the re-launch, which was held in the form of a games afternoon. It was also the first virtual staff event, since the start of the pandemic. On Friday 30th July, almost all EOC staff eagerly participated in fun-filled team building activities.

As the participants sang to the tunes of hands of a lady friend or tried to remember their high school history and geography classes, they had the opportunity to showcase their individual talent and skills while working together as a team.

Through all the fun, laughter, and enthusiasm for scoring points, everyone agreed that it was a great idea to spend quality time with their colleagues in a lighter setting.

One staff member shared, "It was relaxing, and refreshing. We hadn't had something like this in a while and I am looking forward to more initiatives like this." A new member of the organisation keenly noted, "due to the covid-19 staff events have been halted, so I was really happy about this event. It was enjoyable! I liked the questions, energy and environment."

Mission Statement: The Social Events Committee commits to being the driving force that fosters camaraderie through team building activities that would develop departmental and individual growth geared towards the well-being of staff and the organization as a whole.



# LINK WITH US ON LINKEDIN

The Equal Opportunity Commission of Trinidad and Tobago is on LinkedIn! Here are three reasons to head over to the page and hit the "connect button":

- 1- Free services- The EOC offers a range of services free of charge for organizations and individuals. See how you, your employer or your company can benefit from these services.
- 2- Be part of the change- The EOC is committed to partnering with organisations and individuals to eliminate discrimination and promote inclusivity and equality. Contact us to see how we can work with you.
- 3- Education is key- To raise awareness on equality and inclusivity, collective action is needed to sustain and promote efforts



# TITL Welcomes EOC Training

Employees at the Tobago Information Technology Limited (TITL) are now better equipped to prevent or manage discriminatory matters and create a more inclusive workplace.

'Discrimination and the EOC, the EOC's Covid-19 Guidance for Employers and Sexual Harassment' were the focus of the virtual training session.



**Ms. Cheryl Ann Peters**  
Legal Officer

Staff was well informed by Ms. Cheryl Ann Peters, Legal Officer at the EOC. She recommended that employers develop and enforce an equal

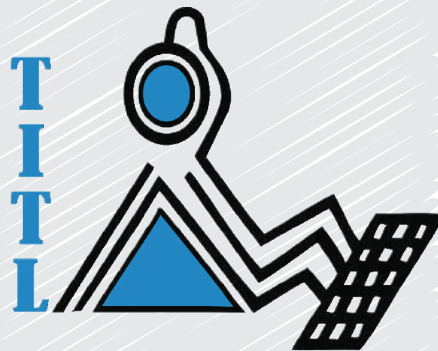
opportunity policy, a code of conduct, a bullying and harassment policy, written guidance for managers on harassment and discrimination and an internal complaints procedure among others. These documents will ensure that staff members understand what is acceptable, as well as their rights and responsibilities.

Responding to the session, Melessia Douglas, HR Manager at TITL said, "the information received will help the organisation tighten internal controls (HR policies) and reduce potential legal matters."

She revealed, "our HR Policy is currently under review, and we are definitely going to use the information garnered from this session especially in the areas of sexual harassment and COVID-19 guidelines".

The session held on Thursday 29th July, is part of the Commission's continued commitment to host virtual educational sessions with private and public sector organisations. These sessions are free of charge.

To request a virtual session Send an email to: [communications@eoc.gov.tt](mailto:communications@eoc.gov.tt)



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