

# INTERSECTIONALITY, NGOS AND GOVERNMENT MINISTERS: WHO HAS WHICH MINISTER'S EAR?



Ashlee Christoffersen and Orly Siow

**A new open access article published in the academic journal *West European Politics* reveals striking intersectional inequalities in who gets access to government ministers.**

Government ministers have a unique ability to further the interests of marginalised groups through their control of policy priorities and legislative agendas. In the current context, it's more important than ever that equality organisations be able to access ministers. However, some equality organisations are granted this access much more often than others. This briefing summarises what we found about unequal access to ministers and outlines some of the potential uses of the findings for equalities organisations.

## About the Research

The article analyses over 78,000 meetings between UK government ministers and external organisations from 2012-2021, focusing specifically on 660 meetings held with 293 equalities organisations.

The analysis uses data that was collated and published by Transparency International with the aim of monitoring lobbying of government (available at [openaccess.transparency.org.uk](https://openaccess.transparency.org.uk)). The time period includes five parliamentary terms.

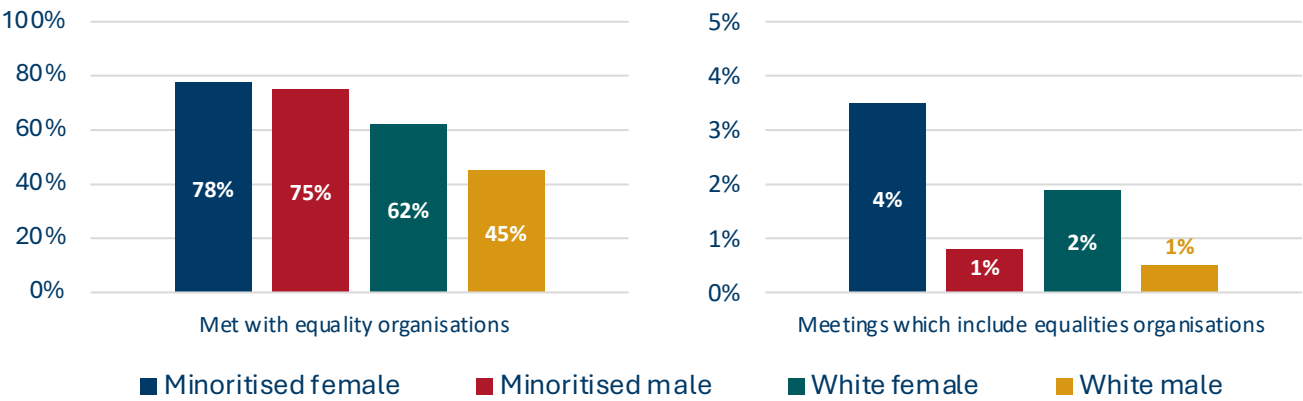
## We asked two questions:

- What is the relationship between ministers' race and gender on the extent to which they engage with equalities organisations?
- What is the relationship between ministers' race and gender on which equalities organisations they engage with (women's, racial justice, intersectional)?

## Key Findings

- White male ministers (who are the vast majority of ministers) engage least with equalities organisations, and racially minoritised women (few and far between among ministers) engage most, even when controlling for other possible explanations. In other words, privileged white male ministers who are the least knowledgeable about the experiences and interests of marginalised groups, are also the least likely to engage with organisations that could help them represent these constituencies.
- Women's organisations enjoy far greater access than organisations focused on race, or those led by and for intersectionally marginalised groups.

**Figure 1: Likelihood of meeting with equalities organisation by minister race and gender**



**How often do government ministers meet with equalities organisations?**

Not very often. Of the nearly eighty thousand meetings that government ministers held between 2012 and 2021, just 0.8% (n = 660) included at least one racial and/or gender equality organisation.

**How many ministers meet with equalities organisations?**

Only half. In total, 50.6% of the 324 ministers in post over the time period met with racial and/or gender equality organisations at least once during their term.

**Which ministers meet with equalities organisations?**

Mostly racially minoritised women and men. 77.8% of minoritised women ministers, 75% of minoritised male ministers, 62.2% of white women ministers, and just 45% of white male ministers met with racial and/or gender equality organisations at least once during their term.

Meetings hosted by minoritised women are seven times as likely to include an equalities organisation compared to meetings hosted by white men (3.5% versus .5%).

White female ministers are least likely to meet with racial justice organizations (even less likely than white men).

**Which equalities organisations get to meet with ministers?**

Mostly women’s organisations. Of the 660 meetings ministers held with equalities organisations, 55.5% (N = 366) included organisations focused on gender only, 32% (N = 211) included organisations focused on race only, and just 10% (N = 66) included at least one intersectional organisation (as defined by who the organization is led by and for, as well as its mission statement, e.g. Black women’s organisations).

Organisations focusing solely or primarily on gender equality have substantially greater access to ministers than organisations focused solely or primarily on race, and over five times as much access as organisations led by and for racially minoritised women.

Intersectionally marginalised groups face exceptional levels of exclusion from opportunities to access and try to influence government ministers.

Missing from the picture are those thousands of equalities organisations who were not granted access to meet with any government ministers from 2012 to 2021.

Table 2: Meetings with equalities organisations by minister identity and type of organisation

	Minister identity				
	Minoritized female	Minoritized male	White female	White male	All ministers
Women's organisations	27.9	40.0	68.5	48.4	55.5
Racial justice organisations	44.2	48.9	21.0	39.0	32.0
Intersectional organisations	18.6	22.2	8.8	7.9	10.0
Other	15	13.8	14.2	12.0	15.2

Implications for equality organisations

The findings underscore the uniquely important role of intersectional organisations, and the need for:

- funders to resource intersectional organisations for parliamentary engagement
- ministers and other equalities organisations to make efforts to include intersectional organisations in meetings

The findings also may help organisations who want to meet with government ministers, in where to direct ministerial meeting requests. Racially minoritised women and men are more likely to meet with racial justice and intersectional organisations.

Women’s organisations may wish to make greater space at tables by making efforts to actively include racial justice and intersectional organisations in meetings with ministers.

Implications for ministers

Make active efforts to meet with a wider range of equalities organisations, especially intersectional organisations, in a wider range of meetings.

Publicly report on meetings to increase transparency and accountability.

[We reflect on implications further in this blog post](#)

Feedback

The authors welcome feedback from equalities organisations and will shortly be undertaking research (interviews and workshops) with organisations to explore these dynamics in more detail.

Get in touch

Ashlee: [ashlee.christoffersen@ed.ac.uk](mailto:ashlee.christoffersen@ed.ac.uk)  
Orly: [orly.siow@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:orly.siow@ncl.ac.uk)

