

Mediating religious intolerance in corporate workplaces

The legal and strategic role of faith-oriented employee resource groups in Fortune 500 and FTSE 100 companies

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Abstract

This article argues that faith-oriented Employee Resource Groups function as effective intermediate mechanisms for mediating religious intolerance in corporate workplaces. Drawing on United States and United Kingdom legal frameworks and corporate case studies, it finds that Employee Resource Groups enhance compliance with anti-discrimination laws, reduce workplace conflict, and promote religious literacy. The analysis shows that these groups translate formal legal duties into practical organizational strategies, contributing to inclusive corporate cultures. The article concludes that faith-oriented Employee Resource Groups play a critical role in operationalizing freedom of religion or belief beyond legal minimums.

Keywords

Religious diversity, employee resource groups, faith-oriented ERGs, workplace discrimination, Title VII, Equality Act 2010, diversity and inclusion, religious accommodation.

1. Introduction

Religion and belief are re-emerging as important facets of workplace diversity, prompting both challenges and opportunities for employers in increasingly multireligious societies. Conflicts over religious expression and accommodation

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at work have been rising, as evidenced by a steady increase in religion-based discrimination claims in recent decades (Ghumman et al. 2013:441). In both the United States and the United Kingdom, robust legal frameworks prohibit religious discrimination and mandate that employers must maintain an outwardly tolerant environment. Yet formal compliance with the law may not suffice to address subtle forms of exclusion or to proactively foster understanding among employees of different faiths or none. This gap between legal obligations and lived workplace experience has led companies to turn to internal mechanisms to bridge the divide.

These workplace dynamics cannot be understood in isolation from broader societal trends. Globally, religious identity is becoming more salient rather than less so, with religious populations growing in both absolute and relative terms, while incidents of religious discrimination, social hostility, and violence have increased in many regions. Religious intolerance experienced in workplaces often reflects – and reinforces – patterns of exclusion and marginalization already present in the wider society. For many individuals, employment is one of the primary public spheres in which religious identity is negotiated. When religious exclusion occurs at work, it can compound existing social vulnerability, economic precarity, and psychological harm associated with religious discrimination more broadly.

Intermediate actors within organizations – notably faith-oriented Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or Business Resource Groups (BRGs) – have emerged as key mediators of religious diversity and potential intolerance. These groups are voluntary associations of employees, officially recognized and often sponsored by the company, organized around shared religious identities or interfaith interests. They operate at the intersection of organizational policy, corporate culture, and individual rights, translating broad principles of nondiscrimination into concrete practices on the ground. In doing so, faith-oriented ERGs or BRGs help companies navigate tensions before they escalate into formal complaints, acting as a form of “soft governance” or internal advocacy that complements formal human resource and compliance structures.

Beyond mitigating conflict or facilitating compliance, faith-oriented ERGs actively contribute to the construction of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) within corporate environments. As articulated in the U.K. report *Building Freedom of Religion or Belief Through Faith-and-Belief Friendly Workplaces: A Call to Action* (Religious Freedom & Business Foundation 2023), religious freedom in employment is not realized solely through formal legal protections but through everyday organizational practices that normalize belief, enable expression, and cultivate mutual respect. Faith-friendly workplaces thus operate as sites where FoRB is materially enacted rather than merely protected. By institutionalizing

dialogue, accommodation, and religious literacy, faith-oriented ERGs transform abstract rights into lived experiences, embedding FoRB within corporate culture and extending its influence beyond the workplace into surrounding communities. In this sense, ERGs do not merely respond to religious freedom norms – they help build and sustain them.

The policy-focused discussion in this paper integrates insights from prior research and reports on FoRB in the workplace, situating the role of ERGs in the context of intermediate actors that stand between individuals and institutions. By analyzing both legal frameworks and on-the-ground corporate examples, we aim to show how employee-driven initiatives can mediate religious intolerance in ways that law alone cannot – ultimately contributing to workplaces that are not only compliant with the law but also genuinely inclusive and respectful of religious diversity.

2. Legal frameworks for religious equality in the workplace

Effective mediation of religious intolerance in corporate settings must begin with an understanding of the legal duties that companies face regarding religion in the workplace. Both the U.S. and the U.K. have statutory regimes that prohibit religious discrimination and harassment at work, although the scope and mechanisms of these laws differ. This section outlines key features of U.S. and U.K. law – in particular, Title VII and the Equality Act 2010 – and examines how these laws frame employers’ duties to accommodate religious needs and maintain a workplace free from religious bias. These legal frameworks create the compliance baseline upon which many companies build further voluntary initiatives, such as ERGs, to address religious diversity more comprehensively.

2.1. United States: Title VII and the duty of reasonable accommodation

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964² is the principal legal safeguard against workplace religious discrimination in the U.S., prohibiting employers (with 15 or more employees) from discriminating based on religion in hiring, termination, and workplace conditions. Crucially, Title VII also imposes an affirmative duty on employers to provide reasonable accommodations for employees’ sincerely held religious beliefs and practices, unless such accommodations impose an “undue hardship”³ on business operations (USC 1964).

2 Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. 42 U.S.C. §2000e-2. Available at: <https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/title-vii-civil-rights-act-1964>.

3 “Enforcement Guidance on Reasonable Accommodation and Undue Hardship under the ADA.” Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yc4uxn9n>.

For decades, courts interpreted “undue hardship” leniently in favor of employers, following the Supreme Court’s *TWA v. Hardison* (1977)⁴ standard, which allowed denial of accommodations for more than a *de minimis* cost. However, *Groff v. DeJoy* (2023)⁵ reversed this trend, ruling that employers must now demonstrate a substantial burden on their operations to lawfully deny a religious accommodation. This raised standard strengthens protections for religious observances such as Sabbath-keeping, prayer breaks, or religious attire (U.S. Supreme Court 2023).

Beyond accommodation, Title VII also prohibits religious harassment, including coercive proselytizing and hostile work environments where offensive or isolating behavior based on religion becomes pervasive. Employers can be held liable if they fail to prevent or address such conduct, including mocking religious attire or spreading stereotypes (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC] 2021). Title VII thus requires both reactive and preventive measures.

To support compliance, the EEOC advises implementing clear anti-discrimination policies that explicitly include religion, providing training on religious inclusion, and creating complaint mechanisms (EEOC 2021; Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service [Acas] 2024). Many companies go beyond legal minimums to foster inclusivity and reduce legal risks. In this proactive context, faith-oriented ERGs have emerged as key partners. They assist employers by identifying accommodation needs, educating staff, and de-escalating issues – effectively acting as internal agents of both legal compliance and cultural transformation.

2.2. United Kingdom: Equality Act 2010 and indirect discrimination

In the U.K., the Equality Act 2010⁶ serves as the foundational legal protection for religious rights in the workplace. “Religion or belief” (see section 10 of the Act) is one of nine protected characteristics, and the Act applies broadly across employment contexts (Equality Act 2010; Acas 2024). It prohibits four types of conduct: direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimization based on religion or belief.

Direct discrimination refers to unfavorable treatment explicitly related to religion or belief, such as refusing to hire a Muslim applicant. This is rarely justifiable outside narrowly defined roles (Hill 2017:124). Indirect discrimination involves seemingly neutral policies (e.g., bans on head coverings) that disproportionately disadvantage religious groups. Under section 19 of the Act, employers must justify such policies as proportionate means to achieve legitimate aims. This effectively

4 *TWA v. Hardison*, 432 U.S. 63 (1977). Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep432063/>.

5 *Groff v. DeJoy*, 600 U.S. 447 (2023). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/54c7bdje>.

6 Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>.

creates a duty similar to religious accommodation, even though that term is not formally used in U.K. law (Relaño Pastor 2018:66; Hill 2017:134).

Harassment is also prohibited, defined as unwanted conduct related to religion or belief that causes a degrading or hostile environment (Equality Act section 26). This includes jokes, bullying, or offensive displays, and protections extend to non-religious and philosophical beliefs such as humanism and veganism (Shoosmiths 2022).

Employers are expected to balance competing beliefs and foster a respectful, tolerant environment. The guidance provided by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) on the duty to ensure public-sector equality and on best practices promotes this proactive stance (EHRC 2019). Although financial penalties in U.K. tribunals are capped (unlike in the U.S.), reputational and regulatory consequences are substantial (Relaño Pastor 2018:63).

Increasingly, British employers voluntarily exceed legal requirements by incorporating religion into diversity agendas. Initiatives include celebrating religious festivals, offering flexible holidays, and creating multifaith prayer spaces. In this context, faith-oriented employee groups have become vital actors in facilitating inclusion and resolving tensions where religious practices meet business needs, embodying accommodation as a cultural value and not merely a legal formality (Hill 2017:24; Relaño Pastor 2018:59).

3. Faith-oriented ERGs as intermediate actors in corporations

Robust laws provide a necessary foundation for religious equality, but the day-to-day reality of inclusion often depends on intermediate structures within organizations. ERGs, sometimes called Business Resource Groups when emphasizing their alignment with business objectives, have become key players in fostering inclusive environments for various identity groups (such as those related to gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ status, veteran status, or disability). ERGs are voluntary, employee-led associations that are officially sanctioned by the employer and centered around shared characteristics or life experiences. Their core purposes typically include building community and support for members of the affinity group, advising the company on related diversity issues, and contributing to business goals (e.g., through recruitment, marketing insights, or professional development) (Religious Freedom & Business Foundadtion [RFBF] 2020). When applied to religion, faith-oriented ERGs (also sometimes termed multifaith or interfaith networks) create a formal channel for employees to bring their faith identity into workplace discussions and initiatives. Although such groups were once rare, they have been growing as companies recognize that religious diversity merits attention alongside other diversity dimensions (Grim 2020).

According to the RFBF (2020), faith-oriented ERGs are “company-sponsored, employee-led affinity and allyship organizations” that embed religious inclusion into corporate structures. These groups not only foster a sense of belonging for their members but also provide business value by bringing diverse perspectives and increasing employee engagement. Notably, research indicates that companies that include faith as part of their diversity strategy tend to perform better on inclusion metrics across the board (Grim 2020; RFBF 2020). In other words, paying attention to religious inclusion can have a halo effect, strengthening overall workplace culture and retention. Faith-oriented ERGs often position themselves as bridges – between employees and management, among employees of different faiths internally, and between the company and external faith-based communities or stakeholders. In doing so, they exemplify the role of intermediate actors mediating between individual needs and institutional policies.

Until recently, explicitly religious ERGs were relatively uncommon in the corporate world, especially in secular industries. A seminal analysis in 2020 found that among hundreds of ERGs in Fortune 100 companies, only about 5 percent were faith-oriented (38 out of 775 ERGs surveyed), compared to far larger numbers of ERGs devoted to race/ethnicity or gender (RFBF 2020). Moreover, a majority of Fortune 100 company diversity websites at that time did not mention religion or faith as part of inclusion efforts. This marginalization of religion in corporate diversity programs has been attributed to several factors: a historical reluctance to mix religion and work due to fear of conflict, concerns about appearing to favor one religion over others or violating secular norms, and a general corporate culture that viewed religion as a private matter outside the scope of diversity initiatives (Grim 2020). However, this picture is changing rapidly. RFBF’s Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Index (REDI), first published in 2020, signaled a potential tipping point toward more faith-friendly corporate environments. By 2022, more than 85 percent of Fortune 500 companies explicitly included religion in their diversity statements or initiatives – more than double the number in 2015. By 2024, RFBF reported that roughly 12 percent of Fortune 500 companies had established faith-oriented ERGs (Grim 2025), and this trend is continuing as executives recognize the business and ethical case for religious inclusion. Major firms in technology, finance, and other sectors have begun publicly affirming the importance of faith as part of employee identity, often inspired by pioneers in this space (RFBF 2025a).

Notably, the expansion of faith-oriented ERGs has continued in parts of the private sector despite broader political and regulatory backlash against diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the United States. However, this trend should be interpreted cautiously. Recent federal actions to dismantle DEI

programs have not exempted religious inclusion; in some cases, faith-based employee groups and related initiatives have also been suspended or eliminated as part of broader institutional rollbacks. Accordingly, while corporate data suggest continued investment in religious inclusion, this persistence does not necessarily reflect a distinct or protected trajectory, but rather variation across sectors and organizational contexts.

Internationally, the trend extends beyond the U.S. In the U.K., faith and belief networks have grown within top companies, albeit about a decade behind the U.S. trajectory. In 2018, very few FTSE 100 companies had any faith-oriented employee group, but by 2024, around 12 percent had formal faith or belief networks, and by 2025 that share had more than doubled to 26 percent (RFBF 2025a). Nearly all FTSE 100 firms now at least mention religion or belief in their diversity policies or reports, whereas previously many did not. This growth occurred despite some general pushback against diversity initiatives in the mid-2020s, suggesting that religious inclusion gained recognition on its own merits (ReadLion 2025; RFBF 2025c). In 2025, the U.K. Minister for Trade publicly praised faith-friendly workplaces and recognized the top 20 faith-and-belief-friendly companies, noting that enabling employees to bring their faith to work can yield “bottom-line competitive advantages” through improved team performance, retention, and talent attraction (as reported in RFBF 2025a). Such government endorsement further legitimizes faith-oriented ERGs as mainstream, valuable components of corporate inclusion strategy (Faith at Work UK 2025).

Why are companies turning to faith-oriented ERGs? Both qualitative and quantitative evidence points to multiple roles these groups play for organizations. Key functions of faith-based ERGs include the following:

3.1. Support and retention of talent

For employees who strongly identify with a faith or belief, the existence of an ERG signals that the company values that aspect of their identity. This can boost morale, loyalty, and retention. For instance, a Salesforce executive observed that young professionals “expect that you can have your faith and have it be seen in the workplace,” and some job candidates inquire about faith networks when choosing an employer (RFBF 2019b). There are documented cases of talented employees switching companies specifically because they felt unwelcome in their religious practice at a previous job and sought a more faith-friendly culture. A well-known example is an engineer who left a firm where he felt he “wasn’t allowed to pray” and joined Salesforce upon learning it had a vibrant faith ERG; he later said this dramatically improved his sense of belonging (RFBF 2019b). By making religiously observant employees feel included rather than alienated,

ERGs help reduce turnover and make the company more attractive to a diverse talent pool.

3.2. Facilitating religious accommodations and policy input

ERGs provide a structured forum for identifying common religious accommodation needs (such as prayer times, dietary requirements, and holiday observances) and for bringing those needs to management's attention collaboratively. Rather than requiring each request to be handled individually or reactively, the ERG can voice concerns collectively and suggest proactive solutions. Many faith ERGs work closely with human resources or diversity offices to establish facilities and practices that benefit religious employees, such as dedicated prayer or meditation rooms, flexible scheduling for holy days, or ensuring vegetarian, halal, or kosher options at company events. These initiatives help the company comply with non-discrimination laws (fulfilling the spirit of Title VII's accommodation duty or the Equality Act's indirect discrimination rules) in a preemptive way. Instead of waiting for a conflict or complaint, the ERG helps companies craft policies and toolkits (for example, interfaith calendars or manager guides) so that the workplace environment naturally accommodates religious diversity (Acas 2024). This not only prevents problems but also integrates accommodation into the company's standard operating procedures, making it part of the culture.

3.3. Education and religious literacy

A critical function of faith-oriented ERGs is to promote religious literacy – understanding of different religions and beliefs – among the broader employee population. Ignorance or misconceptions about a faith can breed prejudice, discomfort, or unintentional offense. ERGs tackle this threat by organizing educational events: lunch-and-learn sessions, interfaith dialogues, panel discussions, and cultural celebrations (Diwali, Eid, Passover, Easter, Vaisakhi, and more) that are open to all employees (RFBF 2019b). These events put a human face on religious traditions and allow colleagues to learn in an atmosphere of respect and curiosity rather than suspicion. Over time, as religious literacy increases, a company's culture shifts toward one where religious differences are normalized and bigotry (anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, etc.) is clearly outside the norm. In turn, this education reduces the likelihood of harassment or conflict (Ghumman et al. 2013).

3.4. Mediation of conflicts and prevention of harassment

When religiously charged conflicts or incidents do arise at work, faith ERGs can act as informal mediators or advisors to management. Members of an ERG, by

virtue of their cultural competency and trust within the community, can help address issues in a sensitive way. For example, if an employee feels they have been harassed or ridiculed because of their beliefs, they might approach the ERG for support. ERG leaders can then, with the employee's consent, raise the concern to human resources or leadership in a constructive manner, helping to resolve the situation before it escalates. Likewise, if tensions emerge between different faith groups among employees, an interfaith ERG can facilitate dialogue and mutual understanding (Texas Instruments 2019). The very presence of a faith-oriented network sends a message that the company is committed to a respectful culture, and that employees themselves are empowered to be stewards of that culture. This not only reduces the incidence of harassment but also provides an early-warning system, in which problems can be solved internally through conversation rather than through legal grievances.

3.5. *Advocacy for inclusive policy development*

On a structural level, faith-oriented ERGs can influence corporate policies to be more inclusive of religion or belief. Many companies, sometimes prompted by their ERGs, have updated their official diversity and inclusion statements to explicitly mention religion or belief as a valued aspect of diversity (where previously it might have been omitted). ERGs might advocate for adding clear religious accommodation guidelines to employee handbooks or for including religious holidays in the corporate holiday calendar or flexible holiday policies. Some have pushed to ensure that diversity training covers religious bias just as it covers racial or gender bias. The impact can extend to corporate governance structures: for example, a few firms have created Interfaith Councils or designated executive sponsors for religious inclusion as a result of ERG recommendations, thereby institutionalizing attention to religious diversity at high levels.

Faith-oriented ERGs do not operate in isolation; they often network across companies as well. In the U.S., faith ERG leaders from different corporations have formed informal coalitions (such as the annual Faith@Work ERG Conference convened by RFBF) to share best practices and collectively encourage more businesses to adopt faith-friendly policies (RFBF 2020). In the U.K., a cross-company initiative called Faith at Work UK has emerged with support from the Prime Minister's office, bringing together leaders of various corporate faith networks to discuss strategies for workplace inclusion (International Institute for Religious Freedom [IIRF] 2025). This kind of cross-organizational advocacy underscores that ERGs can have influence beyond their own company; they are helping to set broader norms in industry and encouraging peer organizations to follow suit in creating faith-friendly workplaces.

3.6. External engagement and community relations

Faith-oriented ERGs often extend their impact beyond the company's walls by engaging with external communities, clients, and civil society. Many such ERGs organize volunteer service projects or charitable initiatives that align with their members' values – for example, interfaith service days, fundraisers for disaster relief, or partnerships with faith-based charities. These activities enhance the company's community profile and demonstrate that the company supports employees' whole selves, including their altruistic or service motivations rooted in faith.

Furthermore, ERGs can offer insights into diverse customer bases. In dealings with regulators and civil society, companies that visibly support religious inclusion may also earn goodwill. In the U.S., having active faith ERGs could be cited as evidence of a company's good-faith efforts in an EEOC investigation, potentially heading off claims by showing a culture of accommodation. In the U.K., companies have engaged with bodies including the UK Equalities Office or interfaith NGOs to share their approaches, thus aligning with broader social goals of cohesion and FoRB. In short, faith ERGs often symbolize the company's commitment to religious freedom and inclusion, both internally and externally. They help the company avoid cultural missteps in global operations and position the firm as a positive actor in societal efforts to promote pluralism.

Faith-oriented ERGs have moved to the forefront as intermediate actors translating lofty legal and ethical principles into everyday practice. They stand between individual employees and corporate management, converting personal religious needs into organizational language (policy proposals, business cases) and conveying corporate values of inclusion back down to individuals in a relatable way. They also act as bridges between the company and the outside world, channeling the company's commitment to religious freedom into community engagement and market insight. By fulfilling these roles, faith-oriented ERGs help mediate instances of intolerance or ignorance – either by preventing them through proactive education and inclusive policies or by addressing them through support and intervention when they occur.

Seen through the lens of freedom of religion or belief, faith-oriented ERGs operate as a preventive institutional infrastructure, reducing the likelihood that ignorance, stereotyping, or unmanaged conflict will escalate into exclusionary practices that mirror – and potentially reinforce – forms of religious persecution observable in wider society.

4. Case studies: Faith-oriented ERGs in practice

Case studies from Salesforce, Texas Instruments, and HSBC reveal how faith-oriented ERGs mediate religious diversity, enhance inclusion, and align with legal and strategic objectives in both U.S. and U.K. corporations.

4.1. *Salesforce (U.S.): Building belonging through Faithforce*

Salesforce launched its interfaith ERG, Faithforce, in 2017 to create a space for employees to express their religious identities without stigma (RFBF 2019b). Faithforce emphasized inclusion from the outset: it barred proselytizing, welcomed secular allies, and focused on interfaith and intersectional collaboration. Notably, Faithforce partnered with the company's LGBTQ+ group to address tensions and build empathy between groups, exemplifying how faith and other identities can coexist constructively in diversity programming.

Faithforce received visible executive support, which bolstered credibility and participation. It hosted interfaith events, educated employees on major religious observances, and helped normalize dialogue about religion at work. Practical outcomes included increased cultural literacy and better accommodations, such as adjusting team schedules for Ramadan fasting, which improved employee morale and loyalty. Faithforce also played a compliance role, helping Salesforce proactively align with Title VII by offering early issue resolution and fostering a respectful culture. Its success inspired similar initiatives at Google, Facebook, and other tech companies (Grim 2025).

4.2. *Texas Instruments (U.S.): A long-term interfaith model*

Texas Instruments (TI) pioneered faith-based ERGs around 2000, integrating them into its broader diversity network alongside other identity groups (RFBF 2019a). Its religious ERGs – Christian, Jewish, and Muslim – are supported equally with other groups, and the company even offers volunteer chaplaincy.

TI's ERGs were grounded in business strategy, promoting collaboration, innovation, and community engagement. The company fostered interfaith cooperation by encouraging joint activities among the ERGs, including visits to houses of worship and events with guest speakers. This approach built trust, reduced prejudice, and created a workplace culture that strongly discourages religious intolerance.

From a legal perspective, TI's ERGs helped address accommodation requests informally and proactively, reducing the risk of formal complaints. Faith inclusion was viewed as a strength, not a liability. TI's long-standing success made it a model for others and earned it top scores on workplace inclusion indices, including tying for second place on RFBF's REDI Index in 2020 (RFBF 2020).

4.3. *HSBC and the U.K. landscape: Faith as cultural competence*

In the U.K., HSBC's Global Faith Network exemplifies the growing inclusion of religion in corporate diversity agendas. The network, which brings together employees of various faiths and none, has been credited with influencing

business operations in religiously diverse markets (RFBF 2025b). Events like Diwali and Eid celebrations, often attended by clients and senior leadership, help build trust and brand loyalty.

Beyond cultural outreach, HSBC's faith network contributes to internal policy adjustments, including accommodations for prayer, holidays, and religious dress. This aligns with the Equality Act 2010's indirect discrimination framework. Other U.K. companies, including KPMG and Network Rail, have developed similar networks that advise on policies and foster religious literacy.

U.K.-based efforts often emphasize cohesion and mutual respect rather than individual rights, reflecting the Equality Act's public-sector duty to foster good relations. Cross-industry initiatives like Faith at Work UK are helping to reduce workplace stigma around religion, with government support enhancing legitimacy (Faith at Work UK 2025).

These case studies illustrate how faith ERGs are evolving from niche support groups into central players in diversity strategy. Whether helping preempt legal conflicts, improving workplace morale, or contributing to market insights, these groups function as powerful intermediaries between corporate structures and employees' religious needs.

5. Comparative analysis: U.S. and U.K. contexts

Faith-oriented ERGs are gaining prominence in both the U.S. and U.K. as essential components of workplace diversity strategies. Despite differing legal frameworks and cultural traditions, companies in both countries increasingly recognize that supporting religious identity at work enhances inclusion, employee satisfaction, and business performance.

5.1. Commonalities

In both jurisdictions, ERGs emerged in response to rising religious diversity and employee demand for inclusive spaces. They help improve morale, reduce bias, and offer strategic insights for engaging diverse markets (Grim 2020; ReadLion 2025). These groups educate colleagues, advise on policy, and serve as informal mechanisms for preventing religious discrimination. Allyship and intersectionality are central themes; successful ERGs actively collaborate with other identity-based groups (e.g., LGBTQ+, women, mental health), emphasizing that religious inclusion complements rather than competes with other forms of diversity.

The growth of ERGs typically follows a "bottom-up meets top-down" dynamic, showing that grassroots employee initiatives gain traction when supported by executive leadership. Public recognition programs, such as the RFBF's REDI Index

in the U.S. and public awards in the U.K., also create external incentives for companies to adopt faith-friendly practices (Grim 2025; RFBF 2025a).

5.2. *Key differences*

Several differences arise from the respective legal and cultural environments:

- 1) Legal drivers: In the U.S., Title VII's duty to accommodate religious practices has been a primary motivator for ERG development. U.K. companies, operating under the Equality Act 2010 without a specific accommodation duty, have typically adopted faith networks as part of broader diversity commitments or in response to generational workforce expectations (RFBF 2025a; Grim 2025).
- 2) Religious expression: U.S. workplaces are generally more accepting of overt religious expression, reflecting strong constitutional free-exercise protections. ERGs may include prayer sessions and visible religious symbols. In contrast, U.K. workplaces have historically leaned in a more secular direction, requiring ERGs to frame activities more cautiously, focusing on education and mutual respect (Hill 2017; Faith at Work UK 2025). However, openness in the U.K. is increasing as societal diversity grows.
- 3) Scope of belief inclusion: U.K. law protects philosophical beliefs alongside religious ones. As a result, U.K. ERGs often adopt "faith and belief" language and include secular worldviews like humanism or ethical veganism. U.S. ERGs may welcome secular members but typically focus on religious traditions.
- 4) Government involvement: U.S. government engagement is largely regulatory (e.g., EEOC guidance), whereas U.K. officials have at times proactively promoted faith inclusion as part of social cohesion efforts under the public-sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010: section 149). Public commendation in the U.K. can further incentivize companies to embrace ERGs.
- 5) Scale and structure: U.S.-based multinationals often have large, formalized ERGs with global coordination. U.K. networks may be smaller or less institutionalized, especially in regionally focused companies, though this is changing as best practices proliferate.

Despite their divergent starting points, the U.S. and U.K. are converging toward a shared understanding of the value of faith-oriented ERGs. Whether framed around "reasonable accommodation" or "fostering good relations," these groups advance the realization of freedom of religion or belief in everyday workplace practice. Moving forward, mutual learning is likely: U.S. firms may adopt broader belief-inclusion models from the U.K., while U.K. firms may implement proactive accommodation tools pioneered in the U.S. In both settings, the core function of these ERGs remains the same: empowering employees to bring their whole selves to work and promoting inclusive, respectful organizational cultures (RFBF 2025a, Faith at Work UK 2025).

6. Strategic impacts of faith-oriented ERGs

Best-practice research indicates that faith-oriented ERGs are most effective – and least controversial – when guided by clear principles. These include (1) strict non-proselytization norms; (2) voluntary participation and allyship; (3) respect for internal diversity within religious traditions; (4) collaboration with human resource and legal teams to ensure that reasonable accommodations are consistent with operational needs; and (5) interfaith or multifaith engagement that avoids syncretism while fostering mutual respect. When such guardrails are in place, ERGs can advance religious inclusion without privileging particular beliefs or generating internal conflict.

Faith-oriented ERGs contribute significantly to mitigating religious intolerance in the workplace. Their impact can be analyzed across three interconnected strategic areas: promoting religious literacy, preventing harassment and discrimination, and fostering a rights-based organizational culture.

6.1. Advancing religious literacy

One of the core benefits of faith-based ERGs is the enhancement of religious literacy, which refers to an informed understanding of diverse religious and nonreligious belief systems. This knowledge reduces prejudice, as it humanizes unfamiliar practices and helps dismantle stereotypes. ERGs provide peer-led education through events and dialogues that are often more impactful than conventional training. Such initiatives cultivate a workplace where religious differences are normalized and respected.

Furthermore, literacy initiatives have external benefits. Salesforce reports high participation in Equality Groups, including faith-based ones, which enhances employees' ability to engage respectfully with clients and communities in global markets (Salesforce 2019; Grim 2025). Increased awareness reduces microaggressions and supports a culturally competent workforce (RFBF 2025b).

6.2. Preventing harassment and discrimination

Faith-based ERGs help combat religious harassment by legitimizing religious inclusion within company culture and providing informal support networks. Their visibility signals organizational commitment, encouraging employees to report incidents without fear. ERG leaders often serve as initial points of contact, helping to address issues before they evolve into formal complaints (RFBF 2020). They also contribute to policy development by incorporating religious inclusion in training and compliance efforts, ensuring that religion is not overlooked in diversity strategies.

ERGs can mediate conflicts when religious expression appears to clash with company DEI initiatives. The Salesforce collaboration between Faithforce and Outforce (ERG focused on LGBTQ+ employees and allies) illustrates how proactive dialogue can defuse potential factionalism (RFBF 2019b). By offering informal spaces for discussion, ERGs facilitate respectful negotiation of sensitive issues and reduce polarization. Additionally, regular celebration of diverse religious holidays creates a culture of inclusion that discourages discriminatory behavior and supports visibility of religious minorities.

6.3. Promoting a rights-based culture

Faith-oriented ERGs embed the principle of FoRB within corporate values, transforming compliance into genuine commitment. Rather than treating accommodations as legal obligations, companies with active ERGs increasingly frame inclusion as a matter of human dignity. Internal messaging like “bring your whole self to work – faith and all” mirrors human rights language (e.g., Universal Declaration on Human Rights Article 18) and promotes alignment with values-based frameworks (Accenture 2020; Petri 2025:30).

Some ERGs connect their work to global benchmarks such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals or civil society initiatives such as the Corporate Pledge on Religious Diversity and Inclusion (RFBF 2020). These commitments elevate internal practices and position corporations as public advocates against religious intolerance. In response to antisemitic or anti-Muslim incidents, for instance, companies with faith ERGs have publicly condemned hate, citing internal interfaith efforts as evidence of their integrity in this regard (Grim 2025; RFBF 2025b).

ERGs also balance rights within diverse workplaces. This avoids “zero-sum” conflicts and instead fosters collaborative solutions that respect all parties’ rights.

Moreover, ERGs contribute to the broader human rights ecosystem by holding their organizations accountable and promoting FoRB in external engagement. As companies align with frameworks like the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, ERGs serve as internal stewards of those commitments (UN Global Compact 2020; Petri 2025). In encouraging corporate participation in interfaith forums or partnerships with NGOs, they extend their influence beyond the workplace into public life.

Beyond normative and legal considerations, religious exclusion in the workplace carries measurable economic costs. Employee disengagement and turnover linked to workplace discrimination impose billions of dollars annually in lost productivity, recruitment, and training expenses in the U.S. Voluntary turnover among employees who experience identity-based exclusion is significantly higher than organizational averages, while inclusive practices correlate with

improved retention and engagement. Faith-oriented ERGs contribute to reduced attrition and increased employee commitment by signaling dignity, belonging, and institutional trust.

7. Conclusion

Religious intolerance in the workplace lies at the intersection of law, corporate culture, and individual rights. Faith-oriented ERGs in Fortune 500 and FTSE 100 companies serve as essential intermediaries in addressing that challenge. These groups do more than respond to legal requirements; they proactively foster environments where religious diversity is recognized, accommodated, and celebrated.

Importantly, the impact of faith-oriented ERGs is not confined to corporate boundaries. By normalizing religious literacy, respectful dialogue, and accommodation within influential economic institutions, these groups contribute to shaping broader social norms. Employees carry workplace practices and attitudes into families, religious communities, and civic life. When large employers model principled engagement around issues of religious difference, they indirectly counter social polarization and reduce the conditions that enable religious persecution. In this sense, faith-oriented ERGs function as micro-level laboratories of pluralism whose cumulative effects extend into society at large.

As religious affiliation continues to grow globally, workplaces are increasingly becoming frontline arenas for negotiating religious differences, making the development of effective, rights-respecting institutional responses ever more urgent.

In the U.S., ERGs assist employers in complying with Title VII by promoting early dialogue and preventing discrimination through accommodation (Relaño Pastor 2018:59). In the U.K., faith networks support implementation of the Equality Act 2010 by highlighting how seemingly neutral policies may disproportionately affect religious employees, as well as by promoting equitable adjustments (Hill 2017:134). Across both contexts, ERGs move organizations from a minimal legal compliance posture to a robust culture of respect and inclusion.

Despite differences in legal frameworks, both countries reflect a convergence: modern employees value authenticity and expect workplaces to include faith identity within broader diversity efforts. The rapid growth of faith ERGs in the U.K. (117 percent in one year) and the increasing number of U.S. companies scoring highly in religious inclusion indices signal a paradigm shift: religion is becoming a legitimate and managed aspect of workplace diversity (Mercer 2020; Grim 2025).

However, challenges remain. ERGs must navigate tensions between religious inclusion and other identities, ensure broad participation beyond voluntary members, and secure institutional backing. Companies should also consider

evaluating the impact of faith inclusion on employee well-being, innovation, and retention to reinforce the business case.

From a legal and human rights perspective, the rise of faith-based ERGs underscores how intermediate structures can supplement the law's limitations. Law can mandate non-discrimination but cannot foster mutual understanding; that task falls to organizational actors. ERGs embody the principle that protecting FoRB is a shared responsibility, implemented not only by courts but by everyday workplace practices.

In sum, faith-oriented ERGs have emerged as key mediators of religious inclusion. They translate legal protections into lived experience, transforming potential conflicts into opportunities for engagement and solidarity. As corporations become more diverse, these groups will be vital in shaping environments where freedom of religion is not only protected but respected and celebrated. ERGs build bridges in increasingly divided societies, starting with in the workplace.

The durability of faith-oriented ERGs across divergent political and regulatory environments further underscores their role in institutionalizing FoRB within corporate governance. Even where broader diversity initiatives face retrenchment, faith-based ERGs have persisted as pragmatic, employee-anchored mechanisms that translate legal norms into organizational practice. Their continued growth confirms that religious freedom at work is increasingly understood not as a peripheral concern but as a core component of lawful, ethical, and sustainable business culture (Grim 2025; RFBF 2025c).

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