

# Civil Rights, Affirmative Action and EEO: What do they mean and how do they relate?

*Anti-discrimination legislation, policies and practices*

## Civil Rights

A civil right is an enforceable right or privilege. The first Civil Rights Act, passed in 1866 protected people against discrimination on the basis of race and national origin. Subsequent civil rights acts, like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Act of 1991, further prohibit segregation and discrimination in selection, employment and the public sector.

Civil Rights are also used synonymously with the various legislation passed in the 1950s and 60s as related to anti-discrimination. EEO encompasses each piece of legislation related to equal opportunity laws. Additionally, Affirmative Action was born out of the Civil Rights era as a way to further protect racial and gender equality.

Affirmative Action is a phrase referring to laws and social policies intended to alleviate the types of discrimination that limit opportunities of people who have been the traditional victims of discrimination.

More specifically, it refers to both voluntary and mandatory efforts undertaken by federal, state and local governments, private employers and schools to promote equal opportunity. Employers who have government contracts or subcontracts of \$50,000 or more and involving at least 50 employees are required to have written Affirmative Action plans.

## Affirmative Action

Affirmative Action goes further than EEO by requiring employers to take steps to achieve a balanced representation of workers.

## EEO

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) is best described as a policy of nondiscrimination, in compliance with legislation, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, prohibiting all forms of discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, or national origin. It specifically outlaws discrimination in employment in all public and private sector organizations with 15 or more employees, as well as labor organizations and employment agencies.