



# Diversity & Inclusion in Our Unions

An Anti-racist Union

November 2019





The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 13 Component unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 425,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

We recognize the crimes that have been committed and the harm that has been done and dedicate ourselves as a union to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Bert Blundon, President

Jason MacLean, Secretary-Treasurer



## **An Anti-racist Union**

Despite the stories we often tell ourselves, it is undeniable that racism has deep roots in Canadian society. Racist attitudes and cultural norms are present in almost every aspect of our nation's institutions and daily life. The union movement can often reflect systemic racism that is evident in our broader society. However, the union movement can be, and has been, a leader in identifying, condemning, and addressing systemic racism both within Canada and abroad.

Systemic racism is the situation where existing institutions, laws, policies, or practices erect barriers to, or discriminate against, the full participation or equality of racialized peoples. Racism is not always a conscious act or an explicit decision. Although the consequences of systemic racism may be invisible to those not directly targeted, it is a real and harmful force that shapes every aspect of life. Systemic racism pervades work, workplaces, and even our unions.

### **Power unequally distributed**

To understand the complexities of these issues, we begin by looking at the numbers. Although Canada's population is extremely diverse, certain groups—such as non-racialized folks—enjoy disproportionate access to power, wealth and other opportunities. Statistics Canada's 2016 census report found that racialized and Indigenous peoples represented 28% of the total population in Canada, compared to 20% in 2006, with the Indigenous population being the fastest growing in the country.

In 2016, 7,674,580 individuals identified as belonging to the visible minority population as defined by the Employment Equity Act. They represented more than one-fifth (22.3%) of Canada's population. Of this number, 3 in 10 were born in Canada.

The visible minority population has grown steadily since the 1981 Census, when data for the 4 employment equity groups (women, Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities) were first derived. At that time, the 1.1 million people belonging to a visible minority represented 4.7% of the total Canadian population.<sup>1</sup>

Statistics Canada predicts that, if current trends continue, the visible minority population will grow and could represent between 31.2% and 35.9% of the Canadian population by 2036.<sup>2</sup>

There is, of course, a danger in using the term visible minority to talk about racism. Though it's still used by Statistics Canada in 2019, the United Nations warned Canada in 2012 that the term could homogenize the experiences of different ethnic groups. The same danger lies in terms like racialized workers and people of colour. There might be similar trappings of racism that affect all people of colour, but each ethnic group also faces unique prejudices. Additionally, as we're seeing in several cities, like Richmond in British Columbia, and Markham in Ontario, the visible minorities actually constitute the majority of the

population. In major cities like Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver, Statistics Canada predicts that “minority” populations could be the majority as early as 2036.<sup>3</sup> It is therefore important to NUPGE to stay up to date with appropriate terminology, but also to recognize diversity when talking about people of colour.

### **Racism in the workforce**

Although racialized groups comprise a substantial proportion of the Canadian population, our increasingly diverse population is not being reflected in the workforce. Racialized people experience discrimination throughout all aspects of employment and are less likely to be in positions of power, or receive comparable rates of wages and benefits.

Racial discrimination is apparent in the shameful reality that racialized workers do not receive wages or benefits comparable to non-racialized workers. Research shows that racialized peoples earn less than the average worker’s earnings. They are also more likely than non-racialized workers to experience unemployment, precarious employment, or/and poverty.

In 2016, the unemployment rate was 9.2% for racialized workers, compared to 7.3% for non-racialized workers;

unemployment rates are higher for people who identified as Arab or Black.<sup>4</sup>

These inequities are compounded for those at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression. For example,

Racialized women are 48% more likely to be unemployed than non-racialized women.

Racial discrimination occurs in the hiring process as well. A significant component is the barriers many racialized people face when accessing the labour market, or when competing for good jobs and advancement. In addition to explicit discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, implicit biases also exist. For example, research has revealed a tendency for Canadian employers to discriminate against applicants with non- anglophone-sounding names, even if done unintentionally. This is despite the fact that 44% of racialized persons have a post-secondary education, compared to 25% of non- racialized persons.

### **Microaggressions**

Further, many institutions and workplaces have good policies in place to fight obvious forms of racism, but few have policies to fight racially motivated microaggressions, and many fail to recognize microaggressions at all.<sup>5</sup> This makes it exceedingly difficult for racialized persons to speak up against microaggressions. Racialized workers who report microaggressions often experience gas lighting and are told they’re imagining the problem, or are labelled as angry or difficult to work with by employers who fail to comprehend the situation. The amount of emotional energy expended and the fear of blowback, or job loss,

means many microaggressions go unreported. Statistics Canada does not currently track microaggressions, though independent MP Celina Caesar-Chavannes has spoken openly about microaggressions occurring on Parliament Hill.<sup>6</sup>

### **What can unions do?**

The National Union and its Components are committed to seeing the implementation of legislation and policies that require employers to practice employment equity. This would require that they proactively adopt processes that increase the hiring of people from groups that have been historically oppressed, excluded, or denied equal access to hiring, promotion, and compensation. Representation matters: the composition of Canada's workforces should reflect the diversity that exists in communities across the country.

Furthermore, employment-equity programs do not mean only that peoples from equity-seeking groups have equal and fair access to jobs. Equity means they must also ensure that these individuals enjoy a work environment that includes, values, and supports them.

This goal applies to our unions. Through our Component unions, NUPGE represents tens of thousands of racialized workers in Canada. While all our Components are deeply committed to achieving equality in the workplace and society, there is still much work to do.

Our Components have led Canada's labour movement in bringing an anti-racism perspective into the workplace and our own unions through many significant initiatives and opportunities.

- We offer a wide array of human rights and anti-racism training.
- We have caucuses and working groups comprised of, and directed by, members of equity-seeking groups.
- We promote efforts to foster union participation in various community cultural events and political actions.
- We hold conferences to assist equity-seeking workers in furthering the necessary work against racism.
- We negotiate language about employment equity in our collective agreements.
- We draft and implement anti-harassment policies for both workplaces and for the union.
- We introduced measures to increase the diversity on our provincial Executive Boards.

For many people, the experience of racism—including bullying, harassment, and violence—is a daily occurrence in their workplaces, communities, and even in their unions. More pervasive, and less visible, is the existence of systemic racism in our society. As we have seen, it results in people being discriminated against in the hiring process, or not promoted based on their race, language, cultural differences, or country of origin.

Racism weakens us a union and is destructive to those targeted and to their communities. We are all impeded by racism, and as a union, we must take collective action. Even while politicians, employers, or individual co-workers pretend it does not exist, we must confront, condemn, and work to end racism.

The National Union believes that it is important that we, along with our Components, strongly identify as an anti-racist organization. As a first step, we must, as an organization, acknowledge and address racism wherever we find it.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025b-eng.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-visible-minority-term-statscan/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/jeewan-chanicka/microaggression-privilege-racism-discrimination\\_a\\_23387202/](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/jeewan-chanicka/microaggression-privilege-racism-discrimination_a_23387202/)

<sup>6</sup> [https://globalnews.ca/news/3918707/liberal-mp-microaggressions-parliament-hill/beta/?utm\\_expid=.kz0UD5JkQOC06yMqxGqECg.1&utm\\_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.co.m%2F](https://globalnews.ca/news/3918707/liberal-mp-microaggressions-parliament-hill/beta/?utm_expid=.kz0UD5JkQOC06yMqxGqECg.1&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.co.m%2F)

# nupge

## COMPONENTS



B.C. GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION



CANADIAN UNION OF BREWERY AND GENERAL WORKERS



HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA



HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF SASKATCHEWAN



MANITOBA ASSOCIATION OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS



MANITOBA GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION



NEW BRUNSWICK UNION OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EMPLOYEES



NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR ASSOC. OF PUBLIC & PRIVATE EMPLOYEES



NOVA SCOTIA GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES UNION



ONTARIO PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES UNION / SYNDICAT DES EMPLOYÉS DE LA FONCTION PUBLIQUE DE L'ONTARIO



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND UNION OF PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES



SASKATCHEWAN GOVERNMENT AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services International.