

# Employment Equity: A WORKPLACE THAT REFLECTS THE COMMUNITY



**Many of our workplaces do not reflect the diversity of the communities we live in. Groups that are traditionally underrepresented include women, workers of colour, Aboriginal workers, workers with disabilities, and LGBTTI workers. These workers also tend to be concentrated in lower paid, insecure and more hazardous jobs.**

CUPE's recent membership survey shows that women and racialized CUPE members are more likely to be precariously employed. It also shows that the percentage of racialized or Aboriginal CUPE members is less than the national average. Fifteen per cent of our members are racialized, less than the national average of 19 per cent, and 3.4 per cent are Aboriginal, less than the national average of 4.3 per cent.

Employers have a responsibility to ensure that workplaces are inclusive and free from discrimination. However, inequalities often exist as a result of years of hiring practices that have excluded certain groups, usually unintentionally. For example, an employer may require unnecessary educational qualifications for certain jobs which act as a barrier for people who have difficulty accessing higher education.

It's important to ensure that our workplaces are open to everyone in our communities, including groups that have historically been marginalized in the labour market.

The goal of employment equity is to change representation in the workplace to better reflect the community. Through employment equity programs, designated group members not only get fair access to jobs, they also have a work environment that encourages them to stay and

advance within their workplaces. Special measures such as training and career development opportunities for all designated group members, and accommodations for persons with disabilities, are important. These measures do not mean that people would be placed in positions for which they are not qualified, nor would performance expectations be different.

CUPE has a proud history of fighting for equality and justice. We know our union will grow stronger the more we represent the diversity of our communities.

Many CUPE locals have bargained employment equity programs with their employers to ensure barrier-free, inclusive workplaces. CUPE has also made significant gains in promoting employment equity for Aboriginal workers through the Representative Workforce Strategy, a comprehensive employment and training initiative to improve the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers in the health care and other sectors in Saskatchewan.

We can also lobby federal and provincial governments for employment equity legislation that requires employers to implement employment equity. The goal of a good employment equity law is to eliminate discriminatory barriers in employment systems, and to ensure appropriate representation for designated groups throughout the workplace.

The Federal Employment Equity Act and the Federal Contractors Program have been in place at the federal level since 1986. Federal contractors, covering more than 1,000 employers, had to comply with the Act to obtain government contracts. But the Harper Conservative government has made some significant changes to that legislation, reducing the number of employers covered under the Act and reducing the requirements of the program.

In 1995, the Ontario Conservative government eliminated the only provincial employment equity legislation in Canada. There is now no provincial legislation in place to support employment equity goals.

We need to act to ensure that our workplaces are free from discrimination and reflect the diversity of our communities. Employment equity ensures fairness and human rights in employment, and it builds the diversity of our union. We have the power to bargain employment equity and lobby governments for change.

## WHAT CAN THE UNION DO?

- Negotiate employment equity language and enforce it.
- Reach out to marginalized group members to ensure our union is representative of the community we live in.
- Bargain and enforce no discrimination/ no harassment language in our collective agreements.
- Mandate human rights training for local officers.
- Ensure the employer complies with applicable human rights legislation and employment equity programs.
- Lobby for employment equity legislation.

## EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE MEASURES THAT EMPLOYERS AND LOCALS CAN IMPLEMENT

- Provide funding for training and apprenticeship positions.
- Select a member of a marginalized group when qualifications and seniority are relatively equal in a job competition.
- Target outreach to marginalized group communities.
- Provide sensitivity courses related to marginalized groups.
- Establish bridging positions to enable marginalized group members to gain the qualifications and experience needed to advance.
- Implement work-family balance policies such as child care or elder care.
- Implement flexible work programs like job shares.
- Implement mentoring programs.
- Implement anti-harassment programs and policies.
- Implement accommodation measures.
- Recognize that there is more than one way of doing things.

For more information and resources on employment equity, please contact [equality@cupe.ca](mailto:equality@cupe.ca)

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