



CUPE BC racial justice glossary

This glossary provides an overview of commonly used terms relating to the fight for racial and social justice in Canada and around the world. This glossary was developed with the assistance of the CUPE BC Racialized Workers Committee.

Allyship

Being an ally is about taking action against an oppressive system to advance the interests of marginalized groups. It's about striving to understand other people's experiences. It's about supporting one another in times of need. It's about setting a positive example for others. And most importantly, it's about creating a more inclusive and caring environment where everyone is valued, no matter who they are or how they look.

Anti-racism

The active process of identifying and challenging racism, by changing systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes, to redistribute power in an equitable manner.

Biases

Cognitive 'shortcuts' used by our brain to process information about others easier and faster. This includes beliefs, traits and behaviours assigned to specific groups based on one or a few characteristics, such as gender, age or nationality. This oversimplification often results in the stereotyping of a particular group, and can easily turn into discrimination. Biases can be conscious or unconscious.

BIPOC

Black, Indigenous, and/or Person of Colour. Also sometimes written as IBPOC.

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Colonization

The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically.

Colonialism

Domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation: the practice of extending and maintaining a nation's political and economic control over another people or area. It occurs when one nation subjugates another, conquering its population and exploiting it, often while forcing its own language and cultural values upon its people. By 1914, a large majority of the world's nations had been colonized by Europeans at some point. The concept of colonialism is closely linked to that of imperialism, which is the policy or ethos of using power and influence to control another nation or people that underlies colonialism.

Colourism / Discrimination on the grounds of colour

Using White skin colour as the standard, colourism is the allocation of privilege and favour to lighter skin colours and disadvantage to darker skin colours. Colourism operates both within and across racial and ethnic groups.

Cultural appreciation

Honouring and respecting another culture and its practices as a way to gain knowledge and understanding. Cultural appreciation can promote broadened perspectives and cross-cultural connections and exchanges.

Cultural appropriation [also sometimes referred to as "Cultural Misappropriation"]

Theft of cultural elements for one's own use, commodification, or profit — including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. — often without understanding, acknowledgement, or respect for its value in the original culture. This results from the assumption of a dominant culture's right to take other cultural elements.

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Decolonization

The decolonization efforts of the United Nations derive from the principle of “equal rights and self-determination of peoples” as stipulated in Article 1 (2) of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as from three specific chapters in the Charter which are devoted to the interests of dependent peoples. The Charter established, in its Chapter XI (“Declaration regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories”, Articles 73 and 74), the principles that continue to guide the decolonization efforts of the United Nations.

Discrimination

Discrimination is “any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on a person’s race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, age, language, social origin or other similar shared characteristic or trait”. Discrimination is considered prohibited conduct and “may be an isolated event affecting one person or a group of persons similarly situated or may manifest itself through harassment or abuse of authority”.

Diversity

A workforce that is diverse from a variety of perspectives (including equitable geographical distribution and gender balance, as well as cultural, generational and multilingual perspectives and the perspectives of persons with disabilities), and this diversity should be embraced in decision-making to strengthen the performance of the organizations.

Equal opportunity

Equality in employment regardless of colour, sex, religion, SOGIESC and so forth; non-discriminatory practices in hiring employees. Internationally agreed definition (ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), Art. 1)

Any distinction, exclusion or preference made on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, which has the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.

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Equity

The process of being fair to all individuals and groups, by addressing present and historical inequality in order to work towards equality in outcomes. Equity may involve the use of temporary special measures to compensate for the historical and systemic bias and discrimination faced by marginalized groups. Systems, institutions, policies and programming may be described as equitable or inequitable depending on their approach to addressing inequality. Generally speaking, equity is a means to the goal of equality.

Ethnicity

A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as a shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical base.

Exoticise

To regard or represent as foreign or exotic, especially in a stereotypic or superficial way. One specific form of exoticism is what postcolonial theorist Edward Said termed 'orientalism': the exaggeration of difference, the presumption of Western superiority, and the application of clichéd analytical models for perceiving [...] the peoples of Asia, North Africa and the Middle East.

Implicit bias

Implicit bias refers to a tacit, indirect or embedded preference or inclination, sometimes unconscious, that is developed through beliefs, values, culture, background, education, societal norms, stereotypes or personal experiences. This bias can prefer or distinguish individuals or groups because of their race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, class, religious beliefs, age, able-bodiedness, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, and other such traits.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a dynamic state of feeling, belonging and operating in which diversity is valued and managed to create a fair, results-based institution. An inclusive workplace culture and environment fosters equitable opportunities to resources and opportunities for all staff and personnel. It also enables staff and personnel to feel that diversity is valued and managed to create a fair workplace where they feel safe, motivated and respected.

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Intersectionality

The ways in which race, class, gender, and other aspects of our identity overlap and interact, informing how people simultaneously experience oppression and privilege in their daily lives. Intersectionality promotes the idea that aspects of our identity do not work in a silo.

Institutional racism

Institutional racism refers to policies, procedures and practices of institutions that produce patterns of inequitable outcomes for staff and personnel based on their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

Internalized racism

The situation that occurs when an oppressed racial group supports the supremacy of the dominating group by maintaining or participating in the attitudes, behaviours, social structures, and ideologies that underpin the dominating group's power.

Interpersonal racism

Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals. It takes place when personal beliefs are manifest in interactions with others, such as public expressions and acts of prejudice, exclusion and bias on the basis of race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

Islamophobia

The use of essentializations and misperceptions of Islam to stigmatize Muslim individuals and communities. [...] Perpetuating discrimination, hostility and violence towards Muslim individuals and communities, the phenomenon undercuts the ability of affected Muslims to be Muslim and violates their freedom of religion or belief and myriad other human rights.

Marginalized groups

Communities that experience discrimination and/or exclusion (social, political and/or economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social and/or cultural dimensions.

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Microaggression

Microaggression is a conscious or unconscious, verbal or non-verbal interaction that expresses a prejudiced attitude towards an individual or group, for example, based on race, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, class, religious beliefs, age, able-bodiedness, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics, and other such traits. It can be interpreted as non-physical aggression.

Power

Involves the ability, skill or capacity to make decisions and take action; physical force or strength. The exercise of power is an important aspect of relationships. The more power a person has, the more choices are available to that person. People who have less power have fewer choices and are therefore more vulnerable to abuse. When women's movements, feminist groups and development organizations help people acquire 'power' individually and collectively, they do not necessarily understand power in its traditional sense of domination or 'power over.' Instead, they have agreed that there are several kinds of power involved in the empowerment process. These four dimensions are called: power over, power to, power with and power from within.

Person of colour

A collective term used to describe any person who is not considered 'white'.

Privilege

A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group in a given culture. We are often not aware of our privilege, and we can simultaneously hold forms of privilege while experiencing forms of oppression. In conversations about racism and other forms of discrimination (and our actions), it is always important to be aware of one's privilege and ensure that we speak and act with this in mind.

Race

A social construct that divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly colour), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups.

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Racism

Racism includes attitudes, practices and beliefs rooted in ideas or theories of superiority, as a complex of factors, which produce discrimination and exclusion. Racism can take many forms, including stereotyping, harassment, negative comments or hate crimes. It can also be deeply rooted in culture, education, values and beliefs which may affect workplace culture and behaviours.

Reparation

Reparations initiatives seek to address the harms caused by widespread or systematic human rights violations. They can take the form of compensating for the losses suffered, which helps overcome some of the consequences of abuse. They can also be future-oriented, providing rehabilitation and a better life to victims, and help to change the underlying causes of abuse. Reparations publicly affirm that victims are rights-holders entitled to redress.

Segregation

The social, physical, political, and economic separation of diverse groups of people, based on racial or ethnic groups. This particularly refers to ideological and structural barriers to civil liberties, equal opportunity, and participation by minorities within the larger society.

Stereotype

A generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by members of a particular social group or the roles that are or should be performed by members of that group. Stereotypes can easily lead to discrimination.

Systemic racism [also sometimes referred to as Structural Racism or Institutional Racism]

The institutions and structures that have entrenched policies and practices that disadvantage people of colour and ultimately yield disparities in terms of education, employment, wealth, housing, healthcare, criminal justice, and more.

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Tokenism

The practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of diversity. Essentially, it gives the appearance of equality without achieving it, and can give a false sense of achievement.

White fragility

Discomfort, clumsiness, anger, and defensiveness that white people display when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice. White fragility holds systemic racism in place.

UNDPAD

[United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent](#)

UNDRIP

[United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

White privilege

Refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are white. Generally white people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.

White supremacy

A form of racism centered on the belief that White people are superior to those of other racial backgrounds and that White people should politically, economically, and socially dominate non-Whites. While often associated with White supremacist groups, it also describes a political ideology and systemic oppression that perpetuates and maintains social, political, historical, and economic White domination.

Xenophobia

Attitudes, prejudices and behaviours that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity. This may be explicit and obvious, such as discrimination against recent migrants or refugees. It may also be less directly tied to a recent migration history and may target members of different communities who have lived alongside each other for generations. The Durban Declaration of 2001 acknowledges that xenophobia, in its different manifestations, is one of the main contemporary sources and forms of discrimination and conflict.

SOURCES:

- UNICEF *Glossary of terms related to DEI*
- World Bank *End Racism Flipbook Vocabulary*
- United Nations and Decolonization *Internationally agreed language (inter alia A/RES/1654(XVI))*
- UN Strategic Action Plan on Antiracism *Internationally agreed language (inter alia, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination)*
- Report of the International Civil Service Commission for the year 2018 (A/73/30)
Internationally agreed language (inter alia, Declaration of Principles of International Cultural Co-operation)
- UN Strategic Action Plan on Antiracism *(edited)*