



Canadian
human rights
commission

Commission
canadienne des
droits de la personne

Update on the Canadian Human Rights Commission's anti-racism efforts

A focused look at systemic changes in complaints and hiring

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Introduction

As Canada's National Human Rights Institution, the Canadian Human Rights Commission has long acknowledged that systemic anti-Black racism is real in Canada. No organization is immune, and it is up to all of us to uncover and reject all forms of racism and discrimination whenever they arise.

While we believe that the [anti-racism work](#) we have done over the past number of years has put us on the right path, it is incumbent on the Commission to lead by example by acknowledging and working to dismantle systemic racism within the organization and in Canada.

In June 2021, the [Anti-Racism Action Plan](#) laid out a series of actions with regard to our role as an employer, a service provider and regulator, and as human rights advocates. In the last 4 years, we have pursued every single action identified in the plan, with 86% of completeness. The remaining activities are ongoing as we do the work to embed anti-racism into our governance structures and the ways in which we measure and report on results.

Much of the criticism the Commission has received over the past few years has centered on allegations of high dismissal and low referral rates for race-based complaints. The Commission welcomed this criticism as valuable feedback and has taken steps to carefully address the issues. This has resulted in systems changes and introducing accountability measures to ensure race-based complaints are treated in a just manner and produce proportionate rates of dismissals and referrals.

This update focuses specifically on the progress we made in these two areas by embedding changes into the way we work. The report also provides an update on diversity within the Commission; the Commission's policy work related to anti-racism and the independent review of the Commission's compliance with the Paris Principles as conducted by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). The Commission welcomes the establishment of a Second United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent. The pillar of Justice serves an important anchor and focal point under which the Commission will seek to promote equality and non-discrimination, improve access to justice, and to address anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination in Canadian society.

As an employer, the Commission is committed to developing a culture of inclusion providing our employees with a psychologically safe, healthy and respectful environment.

The Commission will do what is necessary to ensure that everyone in Canada can trust it to conduct its work with integrity and accountability.

Transforming the handling of race-based complaints

Operational and organizational transformation

Changes to our complaints process, based on expert recommendations about understanding the way in which systemic racism manifests in society and how to use evidence to assess referrals, are making a meaningful difference.

Key changes include:

- We have implemented an **accountability framework** for the complaints process to ensure that the necessary checks and balances are in place to avoid a situation where any one individual is able to influence the outcome of a complaint.
- We have ensured that our **complaints staff are a diverse group of individuals**, including many who bring with them the lived experience of identifying as Black or racialized.
- Our **learning and training matrix** is now in place. It ensures employees receive training about unconscious bias, inclusion, anti-Black racism, Islamophobia, anti-oppression, and how to take a trauma-informed approach.
- We have adopted a structured **system of monitoring for race-based complaints** which allows us to review relevant statistics on a monthly basis to ensure that any departures from what we would expect to see are quickly identified.
- We launched a **disaggregated demographic data initiative** to better understand the users of the Commission's complaint process and identify possible areas to improve service delivery.

Dismissal rates

The percentage of race-based complaints being dismissed has decreased significantly. It has also been consistently lower than the overall dismissal rate since 2021.

In 2018, the dismissal rate for race-based complaints was disproportionately higher at 26% versus the dismissal rate for all complaints which was 22%.

As the changes we had made became embedded in our processes and governance structures, positive change was apparent in the data. In 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, the dismissal rates for race-based complaints remained lower at 7%, 9%, 12%, and 13% respectively compared to all complaints in the same period, which were 10%, 13%, 16%, and 18% respectively.

Referral to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal

Prior to 2020, the Commission referred between 6% and 10% of complaints (including race-based complaints) to the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT).

The proportion of race-based complaints being referred to the CHRT has increased and has been consistently higher than the overall rate since 2020.

Since 2020, the referral rate for race-based complaints has been 38% in 2020, 18% in 2021, 21% in 2022, 27% in 2023, and 23% in 2024, compared to all complaints in the same period, which were 26%, 19%, 16%, 15%, and 12% in these respective years.

The referral rate can vary from year to year depending on a variety of factors. For example, it was much higher in both 2020 and 2023 — when large groupings of similar complaints were submitted at the same time — almost 100 such complaints in 2020 and more than 50 in 2023.

Average time for processing complaints

Through increasing claims resolved via alternative dispute resolution and the modernization of our complaint process, the Commission continues to work hard to move complaints through our system as efficiently as possible.

In the period between 2020 and 2023, the average time to process a complaint was reduced by almost half:

- 2020: 27 months (all complaints)
- 2023: 15 months (all complaints) and 14 months (race-based complaints)

The average time to process complaints includes everything from the initial contact date to the final decision. It may include, for example, preliminary assessment, investigation, and mediation. At each step of the process, there may be periods of back-and-forth between the Commission and the parties, where we normally wait for documentation to be completed or submitted before a file can be put before a Commissioner for decision.

Mediations in race-based complaints

As part of its complaints-handling process, the Commission mediates a large percentage of cases, including race-based complaints, some with the potential for systemic remedies that will impact the lives of many. Given the complaints process at the Commission is legislated as confidential, not all outcomes are made public. In some instances, the parties agree to share settlements publicly.

Recent examples:

In 2023, the Commission assisted the parties in reaching a [settlement](#) in a complaint involving the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), aimed at addressing and preventing systemic discrimination at the RCMP Training Academy.

The Commission also participated in the [settlement](#) of a complaint filed by a Black woman who worked for the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service as an Intelligence Officer. The complaint was referred by the Commission to the Tribunal and was settled prior to a hearing.

Strategic litigation

When a discrimination case goes before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal or Canada's courts, the Commission often participates and represents the public interest. It means our team of litigators are there to advocate for the rights of all the people in Canada who, while not parties to that specific complaint, still stand to have their rights impacted by its outcome.

Cases go before the Tribunal when our independent Commissioners apply the legal test and make a decision to refer them. They do so with careful consideration of the evidence before them and the applicable law, as well as with a view to the potential the case may have for far-reaching, systemic impacts on the lives of many people in Canada.

The Tribunal is an entirely separate organization from the Commission and works similarly to a court — with full hearings, testimony and evidence, which are by default public. Only the Tribunal can decide whether discrimination has taken place. When the Commission objects to a ruling by the Tribunal, we can choose to participate in the judicial review process and litigate the case before the Federal Court, and sometimes even the Federal Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada.

Throughout this entire process, the job of the Commission's litigators is to represent the rights of people in Canada and bring to light any systemic human rights issues that are at stake in the case. The Commission does this so that the individuals, many of whom have no legal representative, do not have to do this on their own.

Over the course of 2024, the Commission continued to use strategic litigation, also known as impact litigation, to advance anti-racism jurisprudence and legal precedents in race-based discrimination cases.

Over the past year, race-based complaints represented an average of **58%** of our Tribunal caseload. Of the complaints we referred to the Tribunal in 2024, we participated in **83%** of the race-based cases. This includes making legal arguments and presenting evidence in many of the cases, as well as participating in mediation and case management.

Engagement

Over the past year, the Commission has engaged with key communities and organizations as part of our commitment to addressing issues of discrimination, fostering inclusion, and ensuring equitable treatment for everyone in Canada.

Engagements with Black communities both within and outside the federal government has resulted in a marked improvement in our relationship as with these communities demonstrated by a willingness to engage further, offer feedback and host the Commission in presenting its mandate under the Canadian Human Rights Act to their respective audiences. By fostering dialogue with diverse groups, the Commission continues to strengthen its efforts in promoting an inclusive and equitable society for all.

Given the documented rise in Islamophobia and antisemitism and hate-motivated incidents targeting Muslim and Jewish communities, engagement with these representative groups were prioritized to offer timely information on how the Commission's role and mandate could help respond to these issues. Through engagement and dialogue, the Commission developed a better understanding of the challenges of Islamophobia and antisemitism in both federal workplaces and in communities at large.

In 2024–2025, the Commission was invited to speak about its human rights complaints mandate at a variety of events and meetings. The Commission took these as opportunities to also listen to and learn from diverse groups and representatives. Some highlights include:

- Participation in the International Symposium on Muslims in Canada: Citizenship, Multiculturalism and Discrimination
- Meeting with Muslim Federal Employees Network
- Meeting with Jewish Public Servants Network
- Meeting with Government of Canada's Anti-Racism Ambassadors Network
- Meeting with Dr. Rachel Zellars on her report "Study on the Black Executive Community in the Federal Public Service"
- Presentation to the Black Executives Network
- Meeting with the Federal Black Employee Caucus
- Meeting with the Federation for Black Canadians (key distributor of federal funding to support Black Canadian Communities)
- Participation in the 4th National Black Canadians Summit

Increasing and sustaining diversity in our workforce at all levels

The Commission is made up of a diverse group of people, many of whom have lived experience of the kinds of discrimination that the CHRA exists to combat. And the Commission is committed to continuing to increase that diversity at all levels.

In 2023, the Commission completed its Employment Equity Action Plan for 2023-2026 based on the results of the Employment Equity Audit and Employment Systems Review, as well as consultations with our consultation committee made up of Indigenous, Black and other racialized employees yes and with the unions.

The Commission also continues to leverage the staffing options available to us in a strategic way to ensure greater diversity at all levels of the organization. This includes the use of both advertised and non-advertised processes, and the tailoring of those processes to meet our diversity and equity objectives.

Staff Diversity

The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) [annual figures](#) currently available show a steady increase in the proportion of Commission staff who self-identify as racialized and who also grant permission to have their data published:

- 2018: **16.1%** of self-identifying Commission staff identify as racialized
- 2019: **17.9%** of self-identifying Commission staff identify as racialized
- 2020: **20.6%** of self-identifying Commission staff identify as racialized
- 2021: **20.6%** of self-identifying Commission staff identify as racialized
- 2022: **22.9%** of self-identifying Commission staff identify as racialized
- 2023: **25.2%** of self-identifying Commission staff identify as racialized

As of March 31, 2024, 76.8% of the Commission employees have filled out the voluntary employment equity form and have given the Commission permission to use that information for reporting purposes. As such, actual representation may be higher than what we were able to report.

The 2025 federal election delayed the release of the 2024 TBS public service employment equity data. For the purpose of this report, we have included the Commission's internal employment equity data. This data will be updated when the TBS data is available.

Trends in representation:

Of the 270 employees who gave the Commission permission to use their information for reporting purposes:

- 28.6% self-identify as Indigenous, Black or racialized:
 - 8.9% self-identify as Black
 - 4.6% self-identify as Latin
 - 4.3% self-identify as South Asian/East Indian
 - 3.5% self-identify as mixed origin
 - 2.3% self-identify as Non-White, West Asian, North African, Arab
 - 2.3% did not self-identify in any category
- 18.5% self-identified as a person with a disability
- 73% self-identified as women

Note: The data provided for employees who self-identify as Indigenous, Black or racialized is limited to that the categories where sufficient data is available to be disclosed.

Initiatives to support and grow our diverse workforce

The Commission participates in the Treasury Board's [Mosaic Leadership Development program](#), to provide a meaningful, experimental assignment to employees of intersectional identity in an executive position that focuses on the employee's areas of growth.

The Commission has launched its own Mentorship Plus Program to increase representation of equity-deserving groups in leadership positions.

The Commission has launched a Sponsorship Pilot Program for Black, Indigenous and racialized employees.

The Commission has updated its guidelines on official language training to prioritize second language training for Black, Indigenous and racialized employees who are seeking career growth and for whom lack of second language ability is a barrier to career advancement.

The Commission has implemented new Mandatory Learning and Training Guidelines through the Canada School of Public Service, to ensure existing and new staff, including Governor-in-Council appointees, gain a deeper understanding of anti-racism, anti-ableism, anti-discrimination, inclusion and allyship.

The Commission now also offers employees confidential support and benefits from anonymized feedback through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ombuds for Small Departments and Agencies. This provides a safe and independent avenue for employees to express timely and honest feedback.

Advocating for anti-racism change in the public interest

The Commission continues to advocate for positive change towards diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism in the public interest, in accordance with its promotion mandate under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

The Commission continues to highlight issues relative to racial inequality in Canada in all of its interactions with the United Nations system, including in all periodic reviews of Canada by the Treaty Bodies, and in its interactions with Special Procedures mandate holders.

Most recently, in September 2024, when Canada was being reviewed by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against women, the Commission raised concerns about the over-representation of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized women in precarious and low-income employment. The Commission also highlighted the historical and ongoing anti-Black racism that has reinforced barriers to employment experienced by Black public servants and other workers in the federal employment sector in the context of the modernization of the Employment Equity Act.

The Commission also continues to provide advice to Parliamentarians and policy-makers emphasizing the need for laws, policies and programs to be responsive to the needs of Indigenous, Black and racialized people in Canada.

In November 2024, the Commission appeared before the Parliamentary Subcommittee on International Human Rights as part of their [Study on the Implementation of Canada's Universal Periodic Review](#). During this appearance, we called for the ratification of the Optional Protocol on the Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT), highlighting the over-representation of both Indigenous and Black individuals in federal prisons and in other places of deprivation of liberty.

Decision in independent review

In the Fall of 2024, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Organizations (GANHRI) completed a special review of the Commission's A-status compliance with the Paris Principles. The review was initiated by GANHRI at the request of civil society, who raised concerns about the Commission's compliance with the Paris Principles.

Through its [decision](#), GANHRI concluded that it is satisfied with the Commission's progress and its ability to operate effectively. In upholding our A status, the Sub-Committee has encouraged us to continue to “tackle systemic human rights violations, including addressing systemic racial discrimination within the CHRC and in the discharge of its mandate.”

While we welcome this decision as independent validation that the progress the Commission has made has put us on the right path, we remain deeply committed to working towards meaningful and measurable anti-racist change. We will continue to use our independent standing before UN bodies to raise human rights issues in Canada, including specifically highlighting the issue of anti-Black racism.