

CUPE SAFE UNION SPACES WORKING GROUP

REPORT TO CONVENTION 2021



Members of the Working Group

- Sherry Hillier, GVP (NS, NL, NB, PEI)
- Nan McFadgen, RVP NS
- Carole Neill, VPR SCFP QC
- Yolanda McClean, DVP Racialized Workers
- Candace Rennick, RVP ON (Co-Chair)
- Judy Henley, GVP (SK, MB) (Co-Chair)
- Lee-Ann Kalen, GVP (BC, AB, Territories)
- Karen Ranalletta, RVP BC and YK
- Barb Nederpel, RVP BC and YK
- Debra Merrier, DVP Indigenous Workers (Co-Chair)

Staff Support:

- Anne Healy, EA to National Secretary-Treasurer
- Annick Desjardins, EA to National President
- Archana Rampure, Director, Staff Support to the Working Group

History

- Working Group created by NEB Motion in 2021 “to ensure CUPE has in place all the necessary tools, policies, practices and processes to create safe union spaces for all members and at all levels of the union.”
- This was a direct response to a number of recent incidents or allegations of sexual violence and harassment that were reported in the media or raised internally.
- We began with an acknowledgement that sexual violence, gender-based harassment and violence as well as other forms of harassment occur inside CUPE.
- We also acknowledge that systemic discrimination against members from equity-seeking groups also exists within CUPE and that this is linked to harassing behaviours that members experience.
- As per our mandate, we will continue to report back to the NEB with our recommendations but welcome this opportunity to address Convention.

Context for our work

- As the Working Group, we created a work plan that included a study of the depth and breadth of the harassment and discrimination faced by members in union spaces and to offer solutions.
- We engaged a consulting firm – Dennery Resources – to assist us with this task as we wanted expert external guidance: they have undertaken a broad survey of our members, have conducted focus groups and a document review of our practices and policies around education, reporting and complaint processes.
- This presentation is a summary of our findings and a roadmap for the work we all need to do over the next two years.

Survey – process and context

- 4553 CUPE members filled out a comprehensive online survey.
- Survey was on their experiences of harassment and discrimination in union spaces.
- We also asked members to weigh in on a variety of possible solutions.
- Survey was voluntary and distributed as widely as possible – we sent it to all local leaders with request to distribute directly to members; staff were also asked to ensure distribution and participation.
- Information was gathered by consultants to ensure that participant confidentiality was respected.
- Raw data has been shared with CUPE after all identifying information had been removed by the consultants.

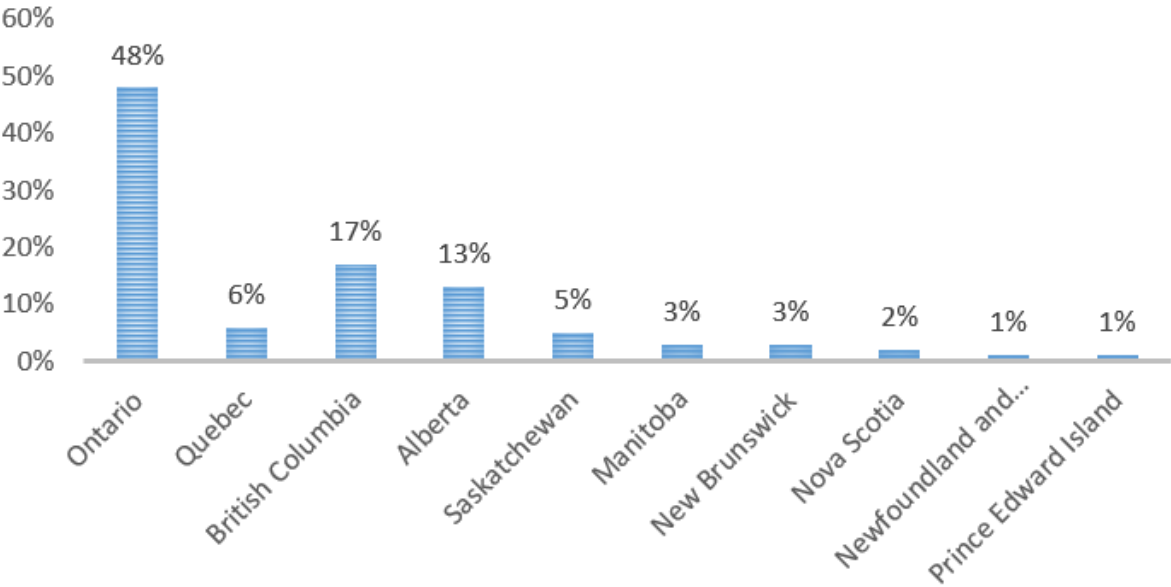
Survey Top line results

- 64% of survey responses were from people who had attended in-person union activities within the last 36 months (i.e., in the 18 months before the pandemic halted many in-person interactions).
- 30% of survey participants reported experiences of gender-based harassment and other forms of harassment.
- 20% of survey participants also reported having experienced discrimination.
- Unsurprisingly, participants who identified as non-binary reported higher levels of harassment than participants who identified as men or women.
- Similarly, participants who were not white reported higher levels of discrimination.

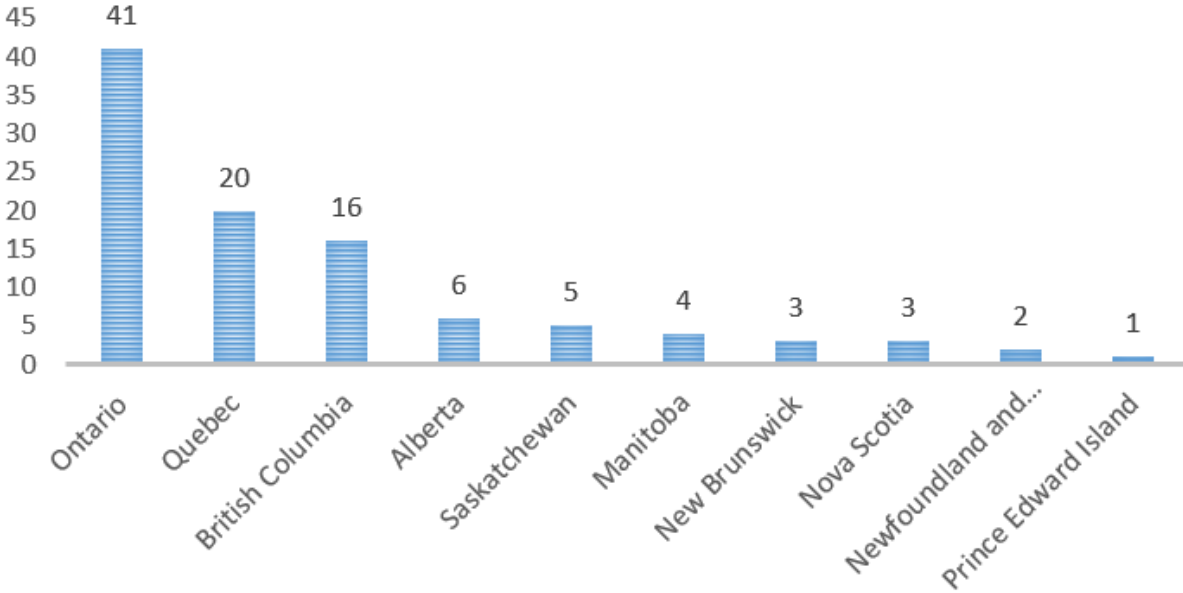
Demographics of survey participants

Comparison to CUPE members (2019 survey)

REGION OF WORK

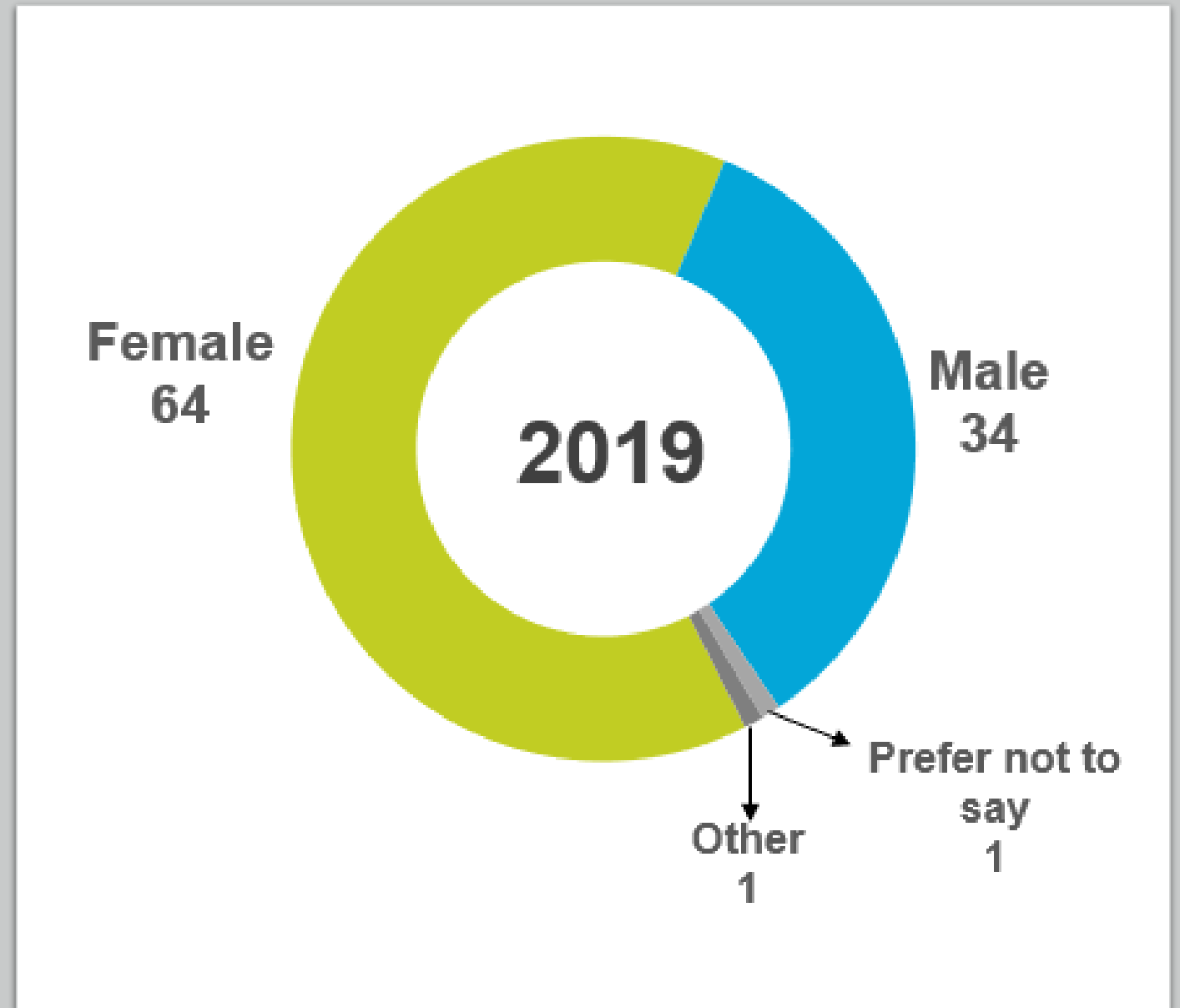


MEMBERS BY PROVINCE



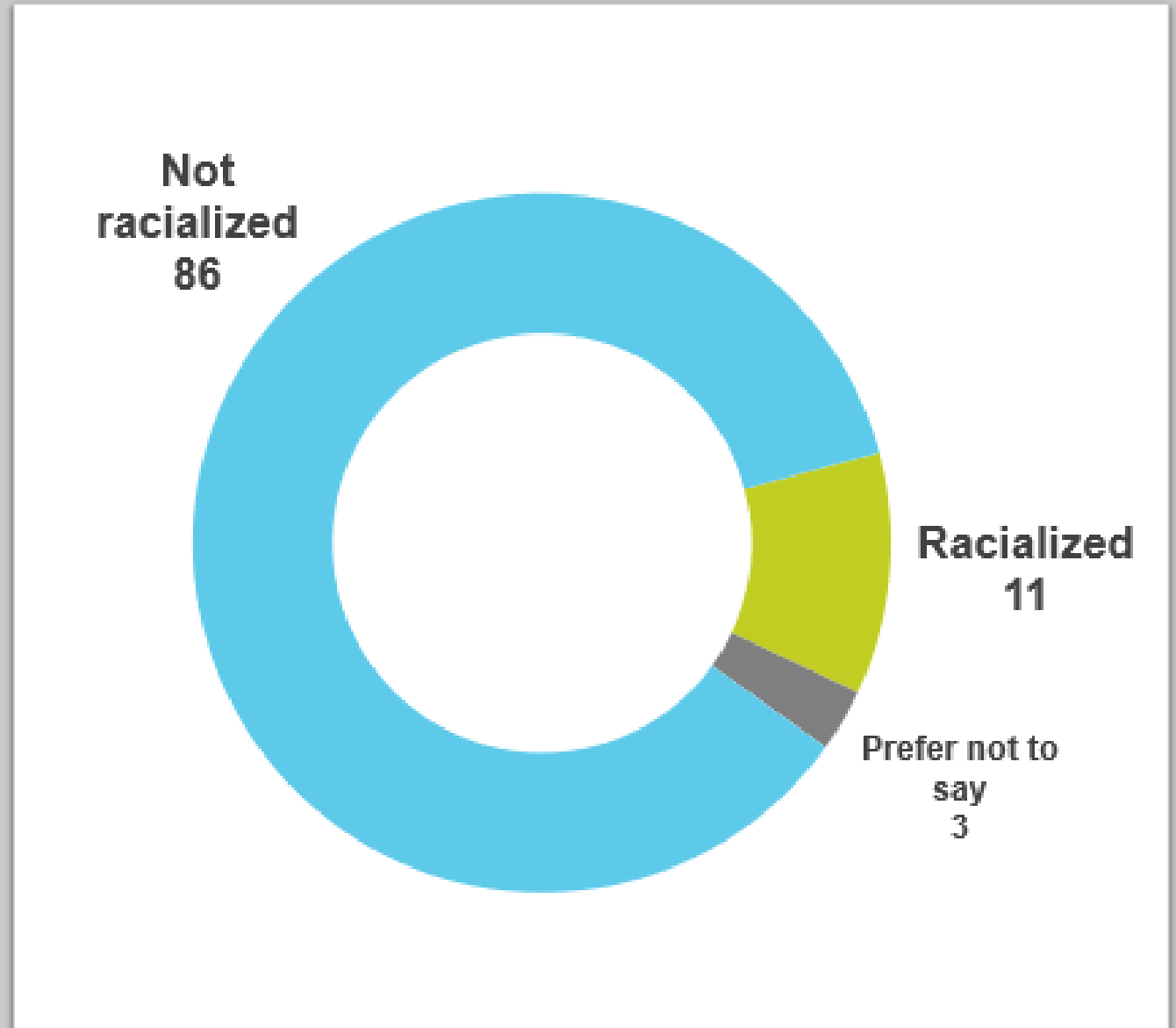
Gender distribution of participants

- Of the 4553 participants who completed the survey, 69% identified as female.
- Our most recent data shows that 64% of CUPE's members identify as female.



Participation by Race

- Of the 4553 participants who completed the survey, 69% also identified as white.
- Our most recent data shows that 86% of CUPE's members identify as not racialized.
- This suggests that a larger percentage of the racialized members of CUPE participated in the survey, suggesting that higher rates of harassment and discrimination are experienced by these members.



Survey – on reporting and results

- Participants expressed widespread hesitancy and fear about possible repercussions about reporting experiences of harassment and/or discrimination.
- Still, 48% reported incidents of harassment and 40% reported discrimination within CUPE.
- Many more shared their experiences within their own circles.
- Only 39% of the members who reported felt either somewhat or greatly respected during the reporting process.
- And 59% of those who reported felt either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the outcomes of their reporting.

Focus groups - context

- In contrast to the broad survey, which was promoted to local leaders by email and social media, and which drew 4553 responses, a small group of members voluntarily signed up for focus groups with consultants and staff on this topic.
- 11 focus groups with 57 participants took place in Oct 2021; with 6 of them being open to members of equity seeking groups only while 5 were open to all CUPE members.
- The focus groups were organized to allow members to disclose as much as they were comfortable disclosing but also provided them opportunities to discuss solutions and best practices.
- The confidentiality of participants is protected.
- During and immediately after the session, participants were offered support from the CUPE Ombudsperson program.

Focus groups – findings

- Similar to survey respondents, participants felt that harassment and discrimination were prevalent within CUPE.
- Members felt that those who acted in harassing or violent or discriminatory ways were not held accountable and did not face any consequences for their actions.
- Participants felt that CUPE's organizational culture accepted behaviour that oppressed them.
- Members felt that others within CUPE who witnessed such behaviour were silent bystanders.
- CUPE members in the focus groups felt that those who challenge harassment, violence, or discrimination are targeted for speaking out.
- This is a terrible reflection on how vulnerable and victimized members see CUPE.

Take-aways for the Working Group

Working with the consultants and assigned staff over the last few months, the Safe Spaces Working Group has been able to synthesize a number of relevant takeaways:

- CUPE has very good workshops and educational materials on harassment and discrimination but we must acknowledge the difficulty of handling member on member complaints.
- Moreover, training on anti-harassment and discrimination for members, leaders at all levels and staff cannot be one-offs.
- Such training also needs to teach people about trauma and how people who have experienced trauma can react, how memory works and what kinds of support victims of violence may need.

The CUPE Ombuds Program

- The Ombudsperson Program has great intentions, principles and values but we need to work on how to ensure that these are sustained in practice.
- We need to consider whether the current model of the Ombudsperson program is best suited for CUPE and about how to expand it beyond CUPE National events.
- Members do not have a full understanding of the Ombudsperson program – what it does and what it does not and there is confusion about who the Ombuds people are and how it is different at National events from other CUPE events (organized by Divisions, for instance).

On our Complaints processes

We need to think through our approaches to complaints and investigations -- adversarial processes like Trials may be necessary for certain reasons but may not be the best ways of addressing harassment and discrimination complaints.

- It is clear from both the survey and the focus groups that members do not have a full or clear understanding of the different complaints processes CUPE has in place.
- We need to better communicate the options members have so that they can choose the best process for their complaint.
- Drawing from Indigenous cultures, we can consider how “Restorative Justice” principles can be used to supplement and complement our existing complaints processes.

Transparency and Accountability

Overall, CUPE needs address toxic masculinity within the organization: macho behaviour that is intimidating, threatening or excludes or endangers some members are far too often encouraged or rewarded as a sign of strength and leadership with the union.

- We need to be transparent about the extent of these issues in CUPE.
- Members and staff need to see that there are consequences within CUPE for gender-based violence and harassment and for discrimination.
- There is a need to regularly report on our complaints processes and the resolutions to harassment, discrimination and violence cases – while assuring the confidentiality of complaints (where that is appropriate).

The Contexts for Union Spaces

- We need to define “union spaces” broadly.
- Union spaces also include staff – in any discussion about creating safe union spaces we need to acknowledge the important role of staff. Often they are the only “CUPE” contact for members outside of their own local. And the vast majority of staff are former members who sometimes alternate roles as members, leaders and staff.
- Members encounter “CUPE” in many spaces – at the local level, at District Councils and Provincial Divisions or Service Components and, of course, at the National level (at conventions and conferences but also in CUPE Regional and Area offices and during the bargaining process). We have to address safety in all these spaces.
- They participate in online and real spaces – meetings, conferences, conventions educations and training, as well as in informal groups on social media.

Next steps: we all have a role to play here

- It is obvious that there is a deeply rooted culture that allows harassment and discrimination to flourish in the organization.
- In the first place, it is absolutely vital for us to have an open and welcoming – and SAFE – culture for all because the union needs all of its members to be engaged in our work.
- We have to build a culture of accountability: members need to see that everyone involved in the union is held to account for their actions and for their inaction.
- Moreover, as a union, and as a social justice organization that believes in the inherent equality of all, we have moral and ethical obligations to stop harassment and discrimination.
- Our work has just begun – what you have seen and heard so far is a “state of the union” – not a roadmap for the future.

Creating a Roadmap for the Future

- The women members of the NEB that will be in place for 2021-2023 will continue to work together to find best practices for eliminating gender-based harassment and violence as well as other forms of harassment and discrimination.
- We will continue to identify solutions: where possible, we will work through the NEB and CUPE staff to ensure that operational changes are made where these do not require constitutional change.
- For matters that require Convention approval, we will bring forward resolutions and constitutional amendments as necessary for the 2023 National Convention.
- We will also ensure broad reporting out to the members, through NEB reports and directly from the Working Group, as well as Division conventions and wherever possible, at other CUPE conferences and gatherings over 2022 and 2023 so that the widest swathe of our members can be engaged and invested in this critical project of culture change.
- But this work is not just the work of the women of the NEB – ensuring our safety and ability to participate fully is the responsibility of the Officers, the NEB, Divisional and local leaders and staff – and of all members.

Comments

- We thank those of you who responded to the survey and those of whom participated in the focus groups.
- Those were the first steps of our process, not the last.
- So the members of the Working Group are now happy to take comments from Delegates.
- Please note, however, that this is not a Q & A session but rather an opportunity for you to share your thoughts with us.

Into 2022

- Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us: we appreciate what we have heard today. And we are committed to keeping this dialogue going beyond Convention.
- We want to leave you with an invitation to participate in the next stage of our work: you can contact us at safesecuritaire@cupe.ca or safesecuritaire@scfp.ca with your suggestions.
- We also invite you to mark your calendars for ***Jan 19th or Jan 29th*** when the Working Group will be hosting Listening Sessions.