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The Canadian census of 2006 reports that 16.2% of the Canadian population are members of a visible minority. This represents one in six Canadians. By 2017, Statistics Canada predicts that Canada's visible minority population will number 1 in 5. What implications does this development have for public policy on immigration, integration and diversity? What should policy makers be attending to?

The growing numbers of visible minorities in Canada should encourage more attention to systemic racism. Many people who are visible minorities suffer disadvantages in the labour market even if born in Canada. To understand the causes of this disadvantage, we need to move beyond our traditional emphasis on individual prejudice to examine how social institutions hamper the social mobility of visible minorities. For example, what are the labour market mechanisms that lead to earnings disparities between equally qualified employees from visible minority and European backgrounds?

Policy responses must take account of the heterogeneity of visible minority populations in Canada. Grappling with the diverse experiences of Japanese-Canadians, Filipino-Canadians, Black-Canadians, other visible minorities, and their biracial children will enrich our understanding of exclusion. Equal attention needs to be given to unravelling the impacts of being a newcomer and a visible minority. Growing numbers of people with visible minority status are Canadian-born but we have not distinguished their experiences from those of visible minority immigrants.

Canada's uneven geography of racialisation also warrants attention. Visible minorities are largely absent from Canada's small towns and rural areas where the Bouchard-Taylor commission uncovered palpable discomfort with diversity. Within Canada's largest metropolitan areas, there is also disquieting evidence that poverty is intensifying in neighbourhoods where visible minority newcomers concentrate. Canadian geographies of discrimination require investigation if we are to sustain current immigration levels while maintaining Canada's reputation for successful integration.