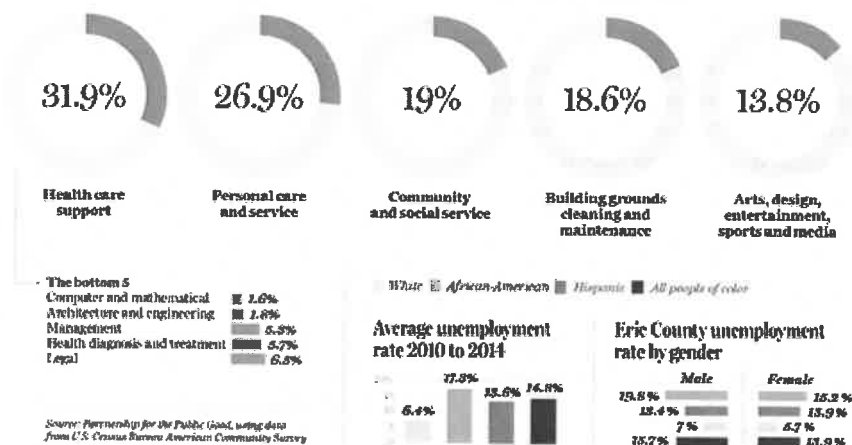


Business

Erie County's racial employment divide

"The scope of the problem is very dramatic ... a tale of two cities," according to the Partnership for the Public Good, as the disparity in jobs and wages for blacks and Hispanics is wider in the county than nationwide.

Percentage of African-Americans in selected occupations: The top 5



Graphic shows minority hiring and racial divide in Erie County

Minority job, wage picture bleak

New study by Partnership for the Public Good finds that poverty stems from high unemployment rates, low pay for African-Americans, Hispanics

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African-American and Hispanic workers in Erie County are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as white workers and earn more than 25 percent less than white workers in the same industries, a new study has found.

The study, released Tuesday by the Partnership for the Public Good, found that the higher unemployment rates among minority workers and the lower wages they receive are prime causes of poverty among African-American and Hispanic workers, who fill a disproportionately large number of low-paying service occupations while holding relatively few jobs in higher-paying careers such as law, management, business and finance.

While lower wages and higher unemployment rates among black and Hispanic workers are a national trend, the study found that the disparity between white and minority workers is more pronounced in Erie County. "The scope of the problem is very dramatic," said Lou Jean Fleron, co-director of the Partnership. "We've said for a number of years here that we're a tale of two cities."

The study, based on census data from 2010 to 2014, found that the county job market for white workers is vastly different than it is for blacks and Hispanics:

- The unemployment rate for black and Hispanic workers from 2010 to 2014 has been more than double the jobless rate for white workers in Erie County. While the unemployment rate for white workers averaged 6.4 percent over the five-year period, jobless levels averaged 17.3 percent for black workers and 13.6 percent for Hispanics during that same period.
- Joblessness is a particular problem for young black workers. The unemployment rate for black workers between the ages of 20 and 24 averaged 20.5 percent from 2011 to 2013, more than double the 8.2 percent

jobless rate for white workers in the same age group.

- Minority workers filled jobs that were concentrated in the generally lower-paying portions of the service sector. Black and Hispanic workers filled nearly 32 percent of all health care support jobs and nearly 27 percent of all personal care and service jobs in Erie County. Minority workers also held roughly 19 percent of all jobs in the community and social services fields, as well as in building grounds cleaning and maintenance work.

- At the same time, minority workers held less than 2 percent of all jobs in computer and mathematical fields, along with architecture and engineering positions. They held fewer than 7 percent of all production, legal, management and health diagnosis and treatment jobs.

- On average, black workers earn 71 cents for every \$1 earned by white workers, while Hispanics earn 73 cents for every \$1 that whites earn.

While job growth in the Buffalo Niagara region accelerated to its fastest pace in 25 years during 2015, pushing the unemployment rate below 5 percent late last year for the first time since 2007, leaders in the minority communities have complained that too few good-paying jobs – especially those receiving state subsidies through the state's Buffalo Billion economic-development initiative – have been flowing to minority workers.

That prompted rallies by community groups – outside the SolarCity solar panel factory being built in South Buffalo and the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus – to urge more minority hiring at those major projects. Minorities have accounted for slightly more than 17 percent of the hours worked on the SolarCity construction project through November, said Kevin C. Schuler, a spokesman for LPCiminelli, the project's Buffalo-based contractor. Women have worked just under 6 percent of all hours on the project.

The Partnership is recommending that companies receiving public subsidies be required to have minority hiring targets, with special focus on neighborhoods with the highest poverty rates.

Sam Magavern, co-director of the Partnership, said that goal is "on the same page" as a proposal by Assemblyman Sean M. Ryan, D-Buffalo, to create what essentially would be a Buffalo-focused employment agency to connect city residents with job opportunities.

Ryan's proposal would create a state-run employment clearinghouse to build a pool of potential applicants for job openings, establishing a database that companies could access to identify city residents looking for work and learn about their experience, education and other qualifications.

Companies receiving tax breaks and other public subsidies for projects within the City of Buffalo would be required to participate in Ryan's proposed Hiring and Investing in Real Employment center.

"It seems like a fair thing to ask of a company receiving tax breaks of public assistance," Magavern said.

The chances of minority job candidates getting hired also are often hurt when employers use credit histories to screen applicants and consider an applicant's criminal record as part of the evaluation process. State law bans employers from using a criminal record in hiring decisions unless it has a direct relation to the job.

Logistics also are a hurdle for minority applicants, who frequently are precluded from seeking jobs in the suburbs because they are not accessible by public transportation, Magavern said.

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