Race and ethnicity style guide

When talking about race and ethnicity, language matters. Language can shape systems and influence biases – it can challenge or reinforce them. These sections are based upon conversations with and guidance produced by other expert organisations.

There is no consensus on the 'right' terminology to use, and we recognise that all terms have their limitations. We will continue to discuss, review and revise our guidance.

It is also an opportunity to remind colleagues about the need for language to be supported by images which challenge bias and discrimination and are inclusive – our own *image library* is a great source of realistic, representative images.

Race and ethnicity

Race, Ethnicity and Nationality

'Race' is an umbrella term used to describe aspects of a person's identity that is generally linked to their own or their ancestor's homeland. Race covers nationality (for example, British), national origin (for example, English), skin colour and ethnicity or 'ethnic origin'.

It's important to remember that 'race', as we understand it, is socially constructed, and not a scientific classification. Race was invented as a way to define physical differences between people and has historically been used as a tool of oppression. Ethnic origin is defined by a shared history/ancestry, language, or distinctive shared culture. Ethnicity can be seen as a more positive identity than one forged from the shared negative experiences of racism.

Nationality is determined by what is on your passport (e.g. British) and national origin is the country you are from (e.g. English).

Talking about race and ethnicity

We follow the below principles when talking about race and ethnicity:

1. Wherever possible, be specific
Different ethnic groups have distinct identities, experiences and challenges. Where possible, we use specific language to describe the group we are talking about – for example Black or Asian. This is particularly true for data that's broken down and includes different groups, such as Bangladeshi or Black African households. Phrases such as 'people from a Black Caribbean background' and 'Black people' are acceptable.

2. Where it isn't possible to be specific, we avoid the term 'BAME'
Disaggregated data is often not available, or sample sizes are not sufficiently large for us to analyse by individual ethnic group. When dealing with limited data, we will always state the limitations of such data and analysis.

'BAME' has been found to be an unhelpful term, which masks disparities between different ethnic groups and emphasises some ethnic groups over others. We therefore avoid this term, or 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic', in line with the government's guidance on *talking about ethnicity*.

Our terminology will always be guided by context. When we can't use specific terms, we will use:

- **People from minoritised ethnic backgrounds** or minoritised ethnic groups/ communities/ households (particularly when talking about ethnicity data- for more detailed terminology, see below)
- **People from racially minoritised backgrounds** or racially minoritised groups/ communities/ households (particularly when talking about racism and systemic barriers faced)
- **People from racially marginalised backgrounds** or racially marginalised groups/ communities/ households (particularly when talking about people's representation, voice, power and opportunities)
- **People experiencing racial inequality** or groups/ communities experiencing racial inequality (particularly when talking about inequality and we need more accessible language)

The term 'minoritised' recognises that individuals have been minoritised through social processes of power and domination, rather than just existing in distinct statistical minorities. It also better reflects the fact that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK are majorities in the global population.

The term ‘marginalised’ recognises that individuals have been pushed to the edges of society and given less power, voice, or opportunity. It means they are excluded or treated as less important, often because of social, economic, cultural, or political system.

We should aim to consistently use the same terminology throughout any written output, to ensure clarity for the reader. If different terminology is used, we should reference and explain this (either in the text, footnotes or in a glossary).

Describing more specific groupings

Sometimes we will need to be more specific in our terminology, when reporting on specific data points or analysis (for example, analysis of census data).

- When reporting data that denotes all ethnicities other than White British, we will use ‘minoritised ethnic groups’ or ‘people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds’.
- When reporting data that compares with the White group as a whole (including White minority ethnic groups) we use ‘minoritised ethnic groups (excluding White minorities)’ or ‘people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds (excluding White minorities).

We may need to adjust language to ensure it is more accessible (for example in a press release) and this can be reviewed on a case by case basis to ensure the right balance of accessibility and accuracy.

We do not use ‘ethnic minorities’. This term has negative connotations, and it’s felt that by not having the word ‘ethnic’ first, ‘minority ethnic’ better reflects the fact that everyone has an ethnicity including White British people.

We do not use ‘non-White’, since this privileges White people and defines people from minority ethnic backgrounds in relation to a majority group.

3. Only refer to people’s ethnicity (or race) if it is relevant to the context in which you are writing.

If you are writing about an individual, only refer to people’s ethnicity or race if it is relevant to refer to the ethnicity or race of an individual – for example, in research that is specifically exploring the experiences of people from different minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

It is good practice to ask the person how they would like to be described before writing about them. Respect how the person (or group) describes their identity.

Capitalisation

We capitalise all ethnic groups, including Black and White.

Alternative definitions

Language is ever-evolving and there's no single piece of terminology that fits all purposes or that is used universally. We will therefore keep reviewing terms as they change.

We recognise different organisations will have different approaches and that people may have very individual perspectives on how best to describe their own identify and where we are working closely with partners we may have to have a conversation about the language that we will use. This is also true of limitations that are presented with data sets that we report on.

Racism and racial discrimination

Racism is insidious, pervasive and deeply embedded in society. There is clear evidence that racism and racial discrimination underpin socio-economic and health inequality. It is essential that we openly discuss racism and highlight its enormously damaging effects on the lives of racially marginalised people, and its contribution to the unequal outcomes experienced in later life.

Racism refers to the prejudices or beliefs, which either directly or indirectly asserts that one group is inherently superior to others. Racism operates at a number of levels, in particular, individual, institutional and societal (or 'structural').

Racial discrimination is when prejudicial action, whether intentional or not, is taken towards a group or individual, based on their race or ethnicity.

We talk about 'anti-racist' action which involves conscious efforts and deliberate actions to identify, challenge and dismantle racism at both an individual and a systemic level.

Intersectionality

We recognise that protected characteristics such as race intersect with others, such as gender or age. When these difference forms of inequality and discrimination combine, they create 'intersectional' effects.

The Equality Act 2010 makes it against the law to discriminate against someone because of any of the protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Sources:

https://centerforhealthprogress.org/blog/race-social-construct/

https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/en/topics/ethnic-minority-lawyers/a-guide-to-race-and-ethnicity-terminology-and-language

https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/blog/finding-consensus-on-race-and-ethnicity-terminology-in-conversation-with-janine-la-rosa-and-adeola-agbebiyi/

The Power of Language: A Consultation Report on The Use Of Collective Terminology At The NHS Race and Health Observatory - NHS – Race and Health Observatory

Writing about ethnicity - GOV.UK