



**Improving Government Services  
to Minority Ethnic Groups**

# **Useful Terminology for Service Providers**

**National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)**



*This publication is dedicated to our friend and colleague,  
Dave Ellis 1949–2007.*

## Introduction

The NCCRI has produced this booklet as part of its materials designed to respond to the growing ethnic and cultural diversity in Ireland and in particular to assist Government service providers in improving their services to minority ethnic groups.

The booklet will also be used in delivering the NCCRI's Anti-racism and Intercultural training and may be useful for service providers in delivering their own in-house training.

A more detailed discussion of how to improve Government services for minority ethnic groups is available. The report *Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups* was published in 2006 as a result of research commissioned by the Officer of First Minister and Deputy First Minister in Northern Ireland, and carried out by researchers in Ireland, Scotland and Northern Ireland.<sup>1</sup> Also, a practical handbook for service providers entitled *Improving Government Services to Minority Ethnic Groups: Key Considerations for Service Providers* is being produced to accompany this terminology publication.

Terminology in this area is constantly changing. It is also the case that what is acceptable and widely used in one country is not acceptable in another. The NCCRI acknowledges that any attempt to discuss and interpret terminology in this sensitive and sometimes contested policy area is sometimes seen as mere 'political correctness'. We seek to avoid this by offering the current publication as a contribution to the debate, rather than a static glossary set in stone; and have limited ourselves to terms related to the specific objective of this publication, namely to help inform service providers.

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<sup>1</sup>Watt, P. & F. McGaughey (ed.s) (2006) *Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups*. Available at: [www.nccri.ie](http://www.nccri.ie)

This is the first edition and it is anticipated that the booklet will be updated in future. We welcome comments and suggestions on this edition.

*Fiona McGaughey*

NCCRI Research and Policy Officer

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# Useful Terminology

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## **Anti-Racism and Intercultural Training**

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Anti-racism and intercultural training seeks to challenge racism and to contribute to creating the conditions for a positive and inclusive working environment for everyone within an organisation.

## **Assimilation**

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Assimilation was an unsuccessful policy aiming to absorb minority ethnic groups into the majority community, with an expectation that communities, their needs and their culture would become invisible or would expire. It was applied in countries with a longer history of migration (for example the UK and Australia), but also in Ireland in relation to Travellers. The 1963 Commission on Itinerancy referred to the "absorption" of Travellers into the general community. Assimilation has been largely discredited and has been superseded by concepts of integration, multiculturalism and interculturalism. *(See also Integration).*

## **Asylum Seeker**

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An asylum seeker is a person seeking to be recognised as a refugee under the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Ireland is a signatory. If someone is granted this recognition, they are granted refugee status and are no longer considered to be an asylum seeker.

*(See also Refugee).*

## **Benchmarking**

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Benchmarking is about setting and reaching targets within a time-scale. It relies on data collection through ethnic or equality monitoring to establish targets and measure progress against those targets.

B

## Black

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People can describe themselves as Black for a number of reasons for example, in relation to their physical appearance, their ancestry, as a political term, or all of the above. Some people use the word Black to mean 'of African origin'; whereas others mean 'non-white' and would include people from Asia for example. Black is not generally considered to be a derogatory term and in Ireland, the term 'Black and minority ethnic group(s)' is often used.

## C Citizenship

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Citizenship can be a problematic concept, particularly in relation to migrants who may not have legal citizenship of the country they are living in. It is often seen as a legal status with associated rights (for example voting) and responsibilities (for example paying taxes); however broader definitions of citizenship recognise it as civil, political and social in nature.

## Coloured

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The word 'coloured' is now considered to be a derogatory term in Ireland and many other countries. It was frequently used in the US in the past and was enshrined in law in South Africa during the apartheid era when the term Coloureds was one of the four main racial groups identified by law (Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Indians). 'People of Colour' is an accepted term in some countries but it is not commonly used or understood in Ireland.

In general, 'Black' is preferred as a term; in Ireland, it is generally used in the context of 'Black and minority ethnic groups'.

*(See also Black)*

## Consultation

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Seeking views of interested parties on a particular service or policy. Interested parties can include people from minority ethnic backgrounds, staff NGOs and special bodies. Engagement and participation are sometimes preferred as approaches and terms, as they suggest more ownership and power for minority ethnic groups.

*(See also Engagement).*

## Data Collection

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In the context of improving Government service provision to minority ethnic groups, data collection refers to the process of capturing data from one or more primary or secondary sources. Some key data categories are: ethnicity, country of birth, religion and language.

*(See also Ethnic/Equality Monitoring).*

## Engagement

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Engagement is about the participation of key stakeholders in the policy and service provision processes, including people from minority ethnic backgrounds, NGOs and special bodies. Engagement involves identifying those who should be involved and developing culturally appropriate strategies to engage with them. It includes consultation.

*(See also Consultation).*

## Ethnic Group

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In the UK an ethnic group was defined by the House of Lords as a group that regards itself or is regarded by others as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics that will help to distinguish the group from the surrounding community.<sup>2</sup>

*(See also ethnicity and minority ethnic group).*

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<sup>2</sup>Commission for Racial Equality, [www.cre.gov.uk/duty/grr/glossary.html](http://www.cre.gov.uk/duty/grr/glossary.html)

## **Ethnic Monitoring/Equality Monitoring**

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Ethnic or equality monitoring is the process used to collect, store, and analyse data about people's ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic monitoring can be used to:

- highlight possible inequalities;
- investigate their underlying causes; and
- remove any unfairness or disadvantage.<sup>3</sup>

(See also *Data Collection*).

## **Ethnicity**

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Shared characteristics such as culture, language, religion, and traditions, which contribute to a person or group's identity. Ethnicity has been described as residing in:

- the belief by members of a social group that they are culturally distinctive and different to outsiders;
- their willingness to find symbolic markers of that difference (food habits, religion, forms of dress, language) and to emphasise their significance; and
- their willingness to organise relationships with outsiders so that a kind of 'group boundary' is preserved and reproduced.<sup>4</sup>

## **Equality Proofing**

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Ensuring that all policies and decisions have taken full account of the needs of different equality groups and considered the possible impact of policies on different groups.

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6 <sup>3</sup>Commission for Racial Equality, [www.cre.gov.uk/gdpract/monitoring.html](http://www.cre.gov.uk/gdpract/monitoring.html)

<sup>4</sup>Tovey, H. and Share, P. (2003) *A sociology of Ireland*, pp.470-471 in Equality Authority (2006) *Traveller Ethnicity*.

## Foreign National/Non-Irish National/Non-National

These terms are increasingly used in Ireland, particularly in a legislative context. However, such terminology can be limited in other contexts. Terminology that solely focuses on nationality will become obsolete for most second and third-generation migrants living in Ireland.

The term 'non national' should be avoided altogether as it is both inaccurate (most people have a nationality from their country of origin) and has negative connotations. 'Foreign national' has most recently been used in draft immigration legislation to refer only to people who are not EU citizens and so using the term to refer to all migrants to Ireland may also cause confusion. 'Non-Irish national' may be the least problematic.

However, outside of a legislative context where nationality is relevant, it is useful to ask why the word 'national' is required. For example, would I describe myself as Irish or 'an Irish national'? Or, as an Irish person living in France, would I describe myself as 'a non-national/non-French national'? Also, would I describe people from the UK or America as 'non-nationals'? Where possible, the NCCRI prefers the term 'minority ethnic groups'.

## 'Illegal'

Migrants who do not have a valid work permit or visa in Ireland are sometimes described as 'illegal'. There are a number of reasons why someone could find themselves in such a situation, sometimes through no fault of their own, for example people who have been trafficked or workers whose employer did not renew their work permit. In this context, an alternative to the use of the term 'illegal' is 'undocumented'.

Asylum seekers are sometimes been described as 'illegal'. This is a misnomer. Asylum seekers cannot be illegal as everyone has a recognised human right to seek asylum.<sup>5</sup> There are then processes in place to decide whether an asylum seeker has met the definition of refugee.

## **Institutional Racism**

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"The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin which can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantages minority ethnic people."<sup>6</sup>

Institutional racism is similar to systemic racism, except that systemic racism primarily relates to systems, policies, and procedures; whereas institutional racism relates to the entire institution, including people. (*See also Systemic Racism*).

## **Integration**

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The concept of integration is a complex one and while there are many different views as to what constitutes integration, it is still part of an ongoing debate in Ireland. In the most simplistic terms integration can be a one way process (in effect assimilation) where minority communities are expected to adapt or change without any expectation of change from the state or majority communities. On the other hand, integration can be a multi-faceted, intercultural process that requires the state, majority and minority ethnic communities to work together and to make accommodation of diversity, without glossing over challenges and barriers such as extremism or racism.

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8 <sup>5</sup>For example under Article 14(1) of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

<sup>6</sup>*The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny*, (1999) Cmd 4262-1, London: HMSO

(See also *Assimilation and Interculturalism*).

## **Interculturalism**

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Interculturalism is essentially about interaction between majority and minority cultures to foster understanding and respect. It is about ensuring that cultural diversity is acknowledged and catered for. "Developing a more inclusive and intercultural society is about inclusion by design, not as an add-on or afterthought. It is essentially about creating the conditions for interaction, equality of opportunity, understanding and respect."<sup>7</sup>

## **Irish Born Child**

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'Irish born child', sometimes referred to as IBC, usually refers to a child born in Ireland whose parents are not Irish or EEA citizens. Prior to January 2005, Irish born children were entitled to Irish citizenship. Following the Citizenship Referendum in 2004, legislation was passed so that it was no longer possible for persons born in Ireland to obtain automatic Irish citizenship.

## **Leave to Remain**

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Also known as 'permission to remain'. This is a statement of the conditions and duration on which a non-EEA citizen is permitted to remain in Ireland. It is given on behalf of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in the form of a stamp in the person's passport. The main grounds upon which further permission to remain can be obtained are: for the purposes of employment, to study, to operate a business or as a dependant family member of an Irish or EEA citizen residing in the State.

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<sup>7</sup>Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, (2005) *Planning for Diversity, the National Action Plan Against Racism*, p.38.

Another type of leave to remain is humanitarian leave to remain, typically granted to an asylum seeker who does not succeed in being recognised as a refugee through the asylum process but who is recognised as having humanitarian grounds on which to stay in Ireland.

## M **Mainstreaming**

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Mainstreaming means ensuring that policies and processes are inclusive of the needs of minority ethnic groups, including consideration of these needs in the planning, implementation and review of policies and practices for their impact on minority ethnic groups.

Mainstreaming does not mean that there is one 'mainstream' model of service provision of the 'one size fits all' kind, rather than the awareness of different needs and thus different models of service provision becomes central to an organisation's modus operandi.

## **Migrant Worker**

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The term migrant worker refers to a person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national.<sup>8</sup>

## **Minority Ethnic Group(s)**

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Sometimes also described as 'Black and minority ethnic group(s)', this means a group whose ethnicity is distinct from that of the majority of the population. The term 'ethnic minority' is sometimes used, but the term 'minority ethnic' draws attention to the fact that there are majorities and minorities, all with their own ethnicity – white Irish people are the majority ethnic group. Although this is the NCCRI's preferred term, one limitation of the term 'minority ethnic group' is that it can infer that people from a minority ethnic background are

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10 <sup>8</sup>Article 2, United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

immediately identifiable with, or would wish to be identifiable with, a particular group. Service providers should be aware that this is not always the case.

(See also *Ethnic Group and Ethnicity*).

## **Multiculturalism**

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Multiculturalism acknowledges the need for recognition and celebration of different cultures in a society. Multiculturalism differs from one country to another and has had varied success. One criticism has been that it allowed the growth of parallel communities with little interaction between them, whilst glossing over issues such as racism and economic deprivation.

(See also *Interculturalism*).

## **National Action Plan Against Racism (NPAR)**

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Ireland's *National Action Plan Against Racism: Planning for Diversity* covers the period 2005–2008. It originates from commitments given by Governments at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in South Africa in 2001. The decision to develop the NPAR was further reaffirmed in Sustaining Progress, the Social Partnership Agreement 2003–2005. The NPAR sets out a plan of action for key areas of public life in order to develop measures to accommodate cultural diversity in Ireland.

## **Prejudice**

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Prejudice involves 'pre-judging' someone and is frequently used to describe the negative attitudes some people have towards certain groups, such as religious or ethnic groups.

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## R 'Race'

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The term 'race' is a social construct used to classify people. Originally race was based on a false belief that biologically there were different species of humans, with the implication that some 'races' were superior to others. However, research has proved that there is no single race-defining gene and therefore no biological basis for dividing the human population into different 'races'.

The term race is still widely used in legislation. In Irish equality legislation, the 'race' ground is described as "race, colour, nationality, or ethnic or national origins." The NCCRI encourages the use of inverted commas when use of the word 'race' is unavoidable.

### **Racial Discrimination**

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Racial discrimination can be **Direct** or **Indirect**.

**Direct** racial discrimination occurs when a person receives less favourable treatment or a less favourable outcome than another person in the same situation would have received on the grounds of their 'race'. In Irish equality legislation, the 'race' ground is described as "race, colour, nationality, or ethnic or national origins."

**Indirect** racial discrimination occurs when a seemingly neutral policy or requirement actually has an adverse impact on a person from a minority ethnic background. Indirect discrimination can be unintentional.

## Racism

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Racism is a specific form of discrimination and exclusion faced by minority ethnic groups. It is based on the false belief that some 'races' are inherently superior to others because of different skin colour, nationality, ethnic or cultural background.

The United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination defines racial discrimination as "Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on 'race', colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on a equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life".

## Refugee

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A refugee is a person who has left his/her country and cannot return due to a well-founded fear of persecution on the basis of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.<sup>9</sup>

In Ireland, membership of a social group includes "...membership of a trade union... membership of a group of persons whose defining characteristic is their belonging to the female or male sex or having a particular sexual orientation."<sup>10</sup>

*(See also Asylum Seeker, Leave to Remain and Subsidiary Protection).*

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<sup>9</sup>According to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, to which Ireland is a signatory.

<sup>10</sup>Section 1 Refugee Act 1996 (as amended).

## S **Stereotyping**

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Generalising about particular minority ethnic groups and labelling them, thus creating false expectations that individual members of the group will conform to certain (often negative) traits or characteristics which have been attributed to the wider group or community.

## **Subsidiary Protection**

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Under an EU Directive implemented in Ireland in 2006<sup>11</sup>, a status of subsidiary protection was introduced. A person eligible for subsidiary protection is described as: "a third country national or stateless person who does not qualify as a refugee but in respect of whom substantial grounds have been shown for believing that the person concerned, if returned to his or her country of origin... would face a real risk of suffering serious harm...".

## **Systemic Racism**

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System racism is found in the systems of an organisation, for example in policies, procedures and practices. It is often unintentional but can have a negative impact on a minority ethnic group(s). It is unlikely to be identified and tackled unless proactive steps are taken by the organisation.

Systemic racism is similar to institutional racism, except that systemic racism primarily relates to systems, policies, and procedures; whereas institutional racism relates to the entire institution, including people. (*See also Institutional Racism*).

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14 <sup>11</sup>Council Directive 2004/83/EC of 29 April 2004 on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted.

## Targeting

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Targeting is about the development of specific policy and service provision priorities and strategies tailored to meet the needs of minority ethnic groups. Targeting can include, but is not limited to, positive action measures.

## Third-Country National

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This term is often used to describe people who are not citizens of the EU. It is problematic for some of the same reasons as described above in relation to foreign national/non-Irish national/non-national.

## Tolerance

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Tolerance was once a commonly used term in relation to inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations. However, it is now considered inadequate as it assumes superiority of the persons who tolerates towards the supposedly inferior group/person to be tolerated. Tolerance is most often used in connection to something people do not like; as such, to tolerate another person or persons is a minimum standard, not an ideal such as interculturalism (*see above*).

## Traveller

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"Travellers are an indigenous minority, documented as being part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers have a long shared history and value system which make them a distinct group. They have their own language, customs and traditions."<sup>12</sup> Travellers may or may not live a nomadic lifestyle.

The recognition of Travellers as an ethnic group is a contested issue. To date the Irish Government has not recognised Travellers as an ethnic group whereas many NGOs, expert and specialised bodies do recognise Travellers as an ethnic group, and in Northern Ireland

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<sup>12</sup>Pavee Point, [www.paveepoint.ie/pav\\_culture\\_a.html](http://www.paveepoint.ie/pav_culture_a.html)

Irish Travellers are recognised as an ethnic group. Until this issue is resolved, the compromise achieved in the National Action Plan Against Racism is to refer to 'Cultural and Ethnic Minorities in Ireland', a term which is inclusive of Travellers, without necessarily recognising Travellers as an ethnic group.

## **W** Whole Organisation Approach

A holistic approach to address racism and support inclusive, inter-cultural strategies within an organisation, with reference to equality policies and equality action plans. The National Action Plan Against Racism uses a whole organisation approach with four components: mainstreaming, targeting, benchmarking and engagement.

## **X** Xenophobia

Fear or hatred of foreigners or people perceived to be from a different ethnic or cultural background.





NCCRI



IRELAND EMBRACING  
CULTURAL DIVERSITY

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN AGAINST RACISM

