

**An Coiste Comhairleach Náisiúnta
ar Chiníochas agus Idirchultúrachas**

**National Consultative Committee
on Racism and Interculturalism**

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National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)

2003 Census of Population Consultation on Questionnaire Content

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Introduction

The NCCRI welcomed the introduction of the nationality, and Traveller community, questions in the 2002 Census of Population. The 2002 Census does not however provide a picture of ethnic diversity in Ireland because the ethnicity question was limited to a question on the Traveller community.

Defining ethnicity is difficult. Conceptualising it involves many characteristics but is not limited to any of them. Consequently data collection mechanisms should be careful not to link ethnicity too closely to individual concepts such as race or nationality. A more detailed discussion of ethnicity is contained in Annex 1.

In order to facilitate an understanding of the processes of both direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of ethnicity it is imperative that the Central Statistics Office should collate accurate and reflective data concerning minority, and majority, ethnic groups.¹

Specifically this data is essential in order to:

- Monitor the changing diversity of Irish society
- Track inequality and discrimination
- Assess integration
- Facilitate local planning
- Target and allocate resources
- Promote awareness of cultural diversity in Ireland
- Meet legal requirements under international human rights instruments

In addition comprehensive census data will facilitate ethnic monitoring through comparative analysis with other data collection exercises. It will facilitate ethnic monitoring initiatives at local and national level, in both the public and private sectors.

The question is how we address classification in such a way that ensures the effective implementation of policies which will combat discrimination and inequality?

The following formulation and discussion have been drafted with reference to the formulation which has been proposed by the CSO in its letter to the NCCRI dated 24 November 2003.

¹ In the Irish context racism is a specific form of discrimination based on skin colour and ethnicity, which deprives people of their basic human rights and denies people of their human dignity and respect. Institutional racism happens when the practices, policies and attitudes of institutions result in the systematic exclusion of some minority groups, either consciously or unconsciously. According to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, institutional racism is, 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviours which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people'

Proposed formulation and Justification

The NCCRI would propose the inclusion of the following, categorised, formulation in the 2006 Census. This formulation of based on an ethnicity question which is currently being piloted by the Department of Health for the HIPE/Perinatal Pilot.

13	What is your ethnic group? Tick one box only.																				
1. White																					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Irish																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Irish Traveller																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	British																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other White background																				
2. Black/Black Irish																					
<input type="checkbox"/>	African																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other Black background																				
3. Asian/Asian Irish																					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chinese																				
<input type="checkbox"/>	Any other Asian background																				
4. Other including mixed background, write in description																					
<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>																					
5. Not Stated																					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not Stated																				

This formulation has been drafted on the basis of careful consideration of a range of factors. Key considerations include the complex nature of ethnicity (and multi-ethnicity), existence of non-white Irish communities, scarcity of existing data, practicality and the burden on respondents, and potential for corresponding analysis. The NCCRI is concerned that the proposed CSO formulation associates ethnicity too closely with colour/race.

1. A Categorised Approach

A categorised approach, such as that outlined in the NCCRI's proposed formulation, provides a framework which goes some way towards separating ethnicity from race/nationality by including multiple options in each category. This approach begins to represent some of the complexities associated with defining ethnic groups. The NCCRI recognises that this is an extraordinarily complex issue but believes that this formulation provides a value-added starting point.

In Britain 'Irish' is recognised as a separate ethnic group. In light of sensitivities concerning Northern Ireland and the reality that nearly half of all foreign nationals in Ireland are British the NCCRI would argue that the inclusion of a British category is very important.

2. Recognising Black/Asian Irish Communities

Understanding that data will also be generated by nationality it remains important to include a category for Black Irish/Asian Irish, in order to identify those individuals who

may, or may not be legally Irish but who would categorise their ethnicity in this way. Such a question also recognises the reality that there are significant numbers of black people who are Irish. In addition to the quantitative value of this approach, it serves as an important official acknowledgment of a growing community who identify as Irish but are not white.

3. Increased Data

Providing categories of questions facilitates more representative data as well as provides the opportunity for the addition of extra categories in the future. For example it may prove useful to add an 'Indian' option to the Asian category, or a 'White and African' option to the mixed category.

4. Representing the Traveller community

Including an option for 'Traveller community' in the White category provides a more inclusive approach to representing Traveller ethnicity. Providing for separate 'White' and 'Traveller community' categories would create confusion and ambiguity.

5. Multi-ethnicity

The NCCRI notes with interest developments within the United States which allow individuals to tick more than one category. However this remains a contentious issue and the NCCRI believes that in the first instance it would be more useful to restrict participants to one box, as has been suggested by the CSO. The NCCRI would recommend that the question of representing multi-ethnicity be reconsidered for the 2011 census.

6. Data already available

In Ireland there are a range of data collection mechanisms at both national and local level, such as the Quarterly National Household Survey. This formulation of an ethnicity question in the Census will provide a model for other national instruments, as well as for public and private organisations who wish to implement an ethnic monitoring mechanism.² It will thus facilitate a growing body of knowledge in relation to the experiences of minority ethnic groups in Ireland.

7. Corresponding Analysis

The suggested formulation will provide the opportunity for analysis of the position of minority ethnic groups across a range of areas already elaborated in the Census. Key areas for cross analysis include accommodation status, educational achievement, geographical location, nationality, disability, income and employment status.

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² The use of the national census as a model by non-statutory agencies is recommended by the Commission for Racial Equality in the United Kingdom in its publication 'Ethnic Monitoring – A Guide for Public Authorities (Non-Statutory)'.

Annex 1: Defining Ethnicity and Ethnic Minorities

There is a gulf between specialist and non-specialist usage of the term 'ethnic'. For specialists it is an adjective derived from the noun 'ethnicity', similar conceptually to words such as 'religious', 'national' or 'linguistic'. In popular usage, however, it implies not Western for example 'ethnic food'.³

In brief ethnicity is a cultural phenomenon that is distinct from 'race' which has a perceived biological basis.⁴

However definitions of ethnicity and ethnic minorities are not clear-cut. A review of the literature does provide a general sense of some of the common characteristics which are widely accepted as distinguishing ethnic minorities from majority populations. Definitions regularly refer to concepts such as race, origin or ancestry, identity, language and religion. For example:

Broadly an ethnic minority is a group of people who share certain background characteristics such as common ancestors, geographical origin, language, culture and religion. This provides them with a distinct identity as seen by both themselves and others.

According to Statistics New Zealand, ethnicity is:

The ethnic group or groups that people identify with or feel they belong to. Ethnicity is a measure of cultural affiliation, as opposed to race, ancestry, nationality or citizenship. Thus, ethnicity is self-perceived and people can affiliate with more than one ethnic group.

Statistics Canada acknowledges that the difficulties of developing a conceptual analysis of ethnicity are reflected in attempts to collect unambiguous data, however ethnicity is a fundamental factor in human life; it is a phenomenon inherent in human experience.⁵ And, as such, data must be generated which reflects this phenomenon.

What is perhaps most important in conceptualising ethnicity is how it differs from, but does not exclude, concepts such as nationality, culture and race. These factors can play an important part in determining which ethnic group or groups people feel they belong to, but people may choose an ethnic group on other grounds if they wish. Table 1 provides a break down of some of the key concepts which are frequently associated with ethnicity.

	Characteristics⁶	Determined by:
Race⁷	Physical characteristics	Genetic ancestry
Culture	Ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge behaviour, attitude, traditions shared by a group	Social experience
Nationality	Country to which a person belongs by citizenship	Birth or naturalisation
Ethnicity	Shared identity based common characteristics	Group identity

Table 1: Concepts commonly associated with the elaboration of ethnic minorities

³ Parekh, B (2000) Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain

⁴ Farrell, F. and Watt, P. (2001) Responding to Racism in Ireland, Dublin: Veritas, p. 25

⁵ Statistics Canada (2003) Concept: Ethnicity, available at: www.statcan.ca (26.11.03)

⁶ Adapted from Fernando (1988) Race and Culture in Psychiatry

⁷ The term 'race' has been discredited as a residual concept from the 19th Century when it was used to define recognisable categories within the human species.