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ar Chiníochas agus Idirchultúrachas

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**Observations on the Consultation Process on the  
Northern Ireland Census 2011**

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

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## **1. Introduction**

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process on the Northern Ireland Census for 2011. The following comments are largely confined to observations and information about the forthcoming Census 2006 in the Republic of Ireland. The NCCRI hopes that these comments will contribute to a context of enhanced comparability in terms of the situation of black and minority ethnic groups in Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. That is not to underestimate the range of communities and divergences in the history of cultural and ethnic diversity in the three jurisdictions.

The NCCRI worked closely with the Census Statistics Office (Dublin and Cork) around the introduction and framing of an ethnicity question in the forthcoming Census 2006. In addition the NCCRI has worked with Pavee Point Traveller Centre and the Department of Health and Children in the piloting of an ethnicity question in the Hospital In Patient data collection system (HIPE). This pilot has proved successful and the results will be published in the near future. The NCCRI in partnership with the Equality Authority is the National Focal Point (NFP) for the European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) based in Vienna. This initiative seeks to promote greater consistency between EU 25 countries on the collection of data related to both ethnic and cultural diversity and racism.

The NCCRI was established in 1998 as an independent expert body focusing on racism and interculturalism. The NCCRI is a partnership body which brings together government and non-government organisations to:

- Develop an inclusive and strategic approach to combat racism by focusing on its prevention and promoting an intercultural society
- Contribute to policy and legislative developments and seek to encourage dialogue and progress in all areas relating to racism and interculturalism
- Encourage integrated actions towards acknowledging, celebrating and accommodating cultural diversity
- Establish and maintain links with organisations or individuals involved in addressing racism and promoting interculturalism at national, European and international level
- Provide a national framework for responding to and consulting with key European and international bodies on issues related to racism and interculturalism.

Further information about the role and the activities of the NCCRI is available at: [www.nccri.ie](http://www.nccri.ie).

## **2. Background**

A Government decision in July 2003 authorised the taking of a Census of Population in 2006. It also agreed that Central Statistics Office (CSO) should:

- Commence consultations with users on the questions to be included in the 2006 Census; and
- Test the methodology to be used and any new or revised questions in a Census pilot survey.

In response to the Government decision, a wide scale public consultation took place in late 2003. As part of this consultation process CSO set up a broadly based Census Advisory Group to assist it in its work. In respect of the question on ethnicity, a sub-group representing the Equality Authority, Pavee Point, and the NCCRI met with CSO to help advise on the approach and layout of the ethnicity question.

The new ethnic/cultural background question in Census 2006 builds on the introduction of the nationality, and Traveller community, questions in the 2002 Census of Population and together will provide an increasingly comprehensive view of diversity in Ireland.

## **3. Why ask an ethnicity question?**

The development of an ethnic and cultural background question is essential for a number of reasons, including to:

- Provide information on the changing diversity in Irish society
- Track inequality and discrimination
- Facilitate local planning
- Target and allocate resources where appropriate
- Promote awareness of cultural diversity in Ireland
- Meet reporting requirements under international human rights instruments (see CERD concluding comment above).

In addition the design of the Census question will provide a template for equivalent data to be collected at an administrative level. This is already beginning to happen through HIPE, the Hospital In Patient Data collection system, which has been successfully piloted in three major hospitals and which has already proved useful in picking up easily treated health concerns that may have been missed. The National Action Plan Against Racism provides a further opportunity to mainstream an ethnicity question in key policy areas including health and social services, housing, education, employment and training and the administration of Justice.

The introduction of the Census question provides a useful framework for the development of ethnic monitoring procedures, both in terms of administrative records, as well as in the development of more comprehensive ethnic monitoring in both the statutory and non-statutory sectors.

#### 4. Census 2006

The NCCRI has welcomed the decision by the Irish Government to include an ethnicity question in the 2006 Census.<sup>1</sup> The decision followed a successful pilot carried out on 25 April 2004.<sup>2</sup> The final sample covered approximately 7,500 households in 32 enumeration areas located throughout the country. These were representative of urban and rural and disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged areas. The commitment to develop a comprehensive framework of social and equality statistics to meet policy and service provision needs was also recently highlighted in the Irish Government's National Action Plan against Racism.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1: Ethnicity question for the 2006 National Census, Source: [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)**

**14 What is your ethnic or cultural background?**  
*Choose ONE section from A to D, then ✓ the appropriate box.*

**A White**

1  Irish

2  Irish Traveller

3  Any other White background

**B Black or Black Irish**

4  African

5  Any other Black background

**C Asian or Asian Irish**

6  Chinese

7  Any other Asian background

**D Other, including mixed background**

8  Other, write in description


The defining and capturing of data related to ethnicity is a difficult process, especially when considerations such as space limits on a national census form are taken into account. Whatever approach is adopted by national statistics authorities in different countries, it is inevitable that there will have to be some compromises. However, with

<sup>1</sup> In its Concluding Observations on Ireland's Combined First and Second Report published in March 2005 the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination welcomed the introduction of the ethnicity question: 'The Committee, recalling the importance of gathering accurate and up-to-date data on the ethnic composition of the population, welcomes the decision by the State party to include a question on ethnicity in the next Census in 2006, and encourages the State party to include in the next periodic report detailed information on the population, including non-citizens', available at: [http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/CERD.C.LAO.CO.15\\_En.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cerd/docs/CERD.C.LAO.CO.15_En.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Census 2006 Pilot Report, available at: [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)

<sup>3</sup> Objective 3.6, the National Action Plan against Racism (NPAR) published in January 2005 is available at [www.justice.ie](http://www.justice.ie).

these limitations in mind, the NCCRI believes that the CSO have adopted a coherent and inclusive approach in the design of the new ethnicity question.

In particular the NCCRI welcomes that the CSO have adopted a 'cascade' approach that allows for four main categories, with a number of choices under each, while at the same time allowing respondents to choose to define their own (including mixed) ethnic and cultural background if they so wish. Further, this approach allows for other categories to be added in future Census exercises as ethnic and cultural diversity continues to grow and change in Ireland.

The categories, such as 'Black or Black Irish' demonstrates an understanding that cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland should be an inclusive concept; that ethnic and cultural identity does not necessarily remain static but can change over time and that ethnic and cultural diversity is not only a product of recent immigration into Ireland.

## **5. Conclusion**

The Northern Ireland Census 2011 and the forthcoming Census programmes in the Republic of Ireland and Britain offer a good opportunity for the development of compatible approaches on a North/South and East/West basis. The framing of the ethnicity question in Britain was taken on board when the 2006 question was designed and piloted in Ireland; likewise it may be possible that a similar consistency of approach might be considered in Northern Ireland in the context of Census 2011. A key advantage of the 'cascade' approach in the 2006 Census question in Ireland allows for additional ethnic origin questions to be added as Ireland's population continues to diversify.

The ethnicity question is vital in terms of designing and monitoring public policy which seeks to address discrimination and promote interculturalism. In order to present a holistic picture of the experiences of black and ethnic minority groups, including the Traveller community, it is important that an ethnicity question can be disaggregated by nationality and religion.