

Ethnicity standard classification:
Findings from public consultation
November 2019





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Citation

Stats NZ (2020). *Ethnicity standard classification: Findings from public consultation November 2019*.

Retrieved from www.stats.govt.nz.

ISBN 978-1-98-858390-7

Published in June 2020 by

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Summary

Ethnicity standard classification: Findings from public consultation November 2019 summarises the findings from the analysis of submissions, and explains the processes used by Stats NZ to collect and analyse feedback. It also presents the changes to the classification and discusses the steps we will take to manage the ethnicity standard classification in the future.

Introduction to our public consultation

Ethnicity is a key social factor used to describe the New Zealand population. Information collected on ethnicity is used by a wide range of organisations, local authorities, and government agencies to inform, plan, and evaluate services and policies.

Over several years, Stats NZ has captured feedback on a number of issues with the ethnicity classification. However, to ensure that all potential issues were identified, we used a public submissions process during November and December 2019 to collect information about any issues with the ethnicity classification.

This public consultation was the first step in collecting this information. Further consultation with a focus on Māori engagement is a critical next step to progress this work.

See [Ethnicity standard classification: Consultation](#) for the public consultation documentation.

Initial changes to the ethnicity standard classification

We analysed the findings from the public consultation and updated the classification to include three descriptor changes to more accurately reflect the contemporary reality of these ethnicities in New Zealand. These are identified in the [Incorrect name or label](#) section. The changes to the classification described in this paper are the result of the thematic analysis that was carried out, together with the consideration of advice from internal experts and users.

The updated version of the classification is available at [Ethnicity New Zealand Standard Classification 2005 V2.1.0](#). These amendments are effective from 18 June 2020.

Descriptor changes

Stats NZ has changed the descriptor labels for three categories:

Code	Old label	New label	Description of the changes
12934	Gypsy	Romani	Changed descriptor to Romani to address the inappropriateness of the term Gypsy.
44411	Afghani	Afghan	Changed descriptor to Afghan. We have amended this to recognise a shift in general usage and to address the outdated term Afghani which has been confused with the currency of Afghanistan.
44413	Nepalese	Nepali	Changed descriptor to Nepali to address the reduced contemporary usage of the term Nepalese. Nepalese is one of the

			correct ways of referring to people from Nepal but Nepali is the correct way to refer to people of Nepali ethnicity.
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Changes to these descriptors in the classification will not influence the way that respondents answer. Responses of Gypsy, Afghani, and Nepalese will still be captured and included with data under the appropriate category labels.

Following this minor update to the classification, our intent is to engage further and wider on other issues before considering further changes. Issues raised during this recent consultation will be considered as part of the ongoing review of this classification.

Methodology

This section outlines the process used to collect public submissions.

Consultation process

The first step in identifying issues associated with the ethnicity classification was to collect feedback through a public consultation process. The primary aim of the consultation was to investigate the suitability of the existing classification in meeting current and future data needs of users. The consultation sought to assess if the current classification:

- was fit for purpose, and was performing adequately
- reflected current practice and the contemporary reality of the ethnicities of people in New Zealand.

An online submission form was developed with the assistance of Stats NZ's questionnaire design team and subject matter experts. The submission form was loaded into Survey Gizmo, an internet-based survey tool, for the public consultation. [Appendix 1](#) has the survey questions.

Public consultation began on 25 November 2019 and was open for three weeks. Invitations to the consultation were emailed to government agencies, as well as groups and individuals identified as having a potential interest in the topic. The consultation was also available to the public via the Stats NZ website and Facebook page. Submitters were able to complete the survey online or complete and email a PDF version. Late submissions were accepted, by arrangement, up until April 2020. Ethnicity enquiries sent to Stats NZ during the previous three years were also included with the submissions.

All submissions were downloaded daily to a secure area within the Stats NZ IT system. The submissions were permanently deleted from Survey Gizmo daily. Completed submissions were given a unique code identifier that was used during the analysis.

Submitters were given the opportunity to say if they agreed with the current structure/design of the classification and the ethnicities represented in the classification, and whether having definitions available explaining each classification category would be helpful.

The following section outlines the analyses of the feedback, and summarises the themes and issues identified in the submissions received during the three-week consultation period. These submissions, together with enquiries received during the previous three years, were evaluated and used to make changes to the classification.

Findings

We were interested to know people's thoughts and perceptions on how the current ethnicity standard and classification reflected their ethnic identities. Ethnic identity is subjective and personal. Public feedback comments were quite diverse. Hence, it requires a robust qualitative data analysis.

A total of 136 completed submissions were received during the three-week consultation period. All submissions received during the consultation process, along with the additional issues (around 50) identified from the last three years, were then qualitatively analysed and categorised into themes and sub-themes.

The first part of the analysis involved manual coding, where two analysts coded all submission responses and identified common themes. Each analyst worked independently and then the outcomes were re-analysed to identify the final list of major themes and corresponding sub-themes.

The second part of the analysis involved machine coding. All submissions were imported into an in-house qualitative analysis tool which used R, a programming language and software package used by statisticians for data analysis. This enabled a natural language processing (NLP) to categorise submissions into common categories. This was used as a check that the manual coding process had not missed any themes or sub-themes. [Appendix 2](#) lists all themes and sub-themes from this analysis.

Please note that quotes are used to provide context to the issue that has been identified. Quotes were paraphrased to protect individuals' identities. They are a selection of comments that represent the various themes seen in the submissions. Quotes were only used when they didn't identify an individual. The use of a quote in no way implies or represents the expression of any opinion by Stats NZ.

Some submissions were also on a topic related to, but not directly about, the standard and classification. These were considered out of scope of the current work but were noted for future analysis.

Clarification of definition of ethnicity

Some submitters identified a need to clarify what the standard and classification defined and measured as 'ethnicity' as they expressed their unfamiliarity with the concept. This could indicate a need to provide more information (or information in plain English) other than what is currently provided in the standard.

I'm not aware what the NZ Stats definition of ethnicity is, this could be clearer.

Explanation is required, people have been asked to report on self-identified ethnicity for some time without explanation on what that means. As a result, the concept will keep changing. The description should explain the principles and be applied consistently.

More information should be provided about how ethnicities are aggregated into groups. For example, it would be a surprise to many to know that Americans are considered to be 'European'.

There were also calls to update the definition. It was suggested by a number of submitters that the standard was based on outdated ideas of ethnicity, and the current classification is not relevant to their identities. Submitters stated that Stats NZ should consult with experts in the field and ethnic community groups to better address these ideas, as well as to identify and address limitations of the standard and classification.

You may need to consult with various ethnicities to discover how they want to be grouped. We need to ensure the importance of having the categories in the classification as accurate and as broad as possible. If not, then some groups may miss out on the help they deserve.

The ethnicity definition needs to be updated. The definition should include things like local ancestry, physical location with ties to a specific place or homeland and shared practices that link us to one another.

Limitations of categories should be stated. Where broad labels such as Caucasian or European are used, the differences between ethnic groups are not captured. What subgroups are included under broader categories should be clear in the definition.

The clarification of definition of the standard and classification of ethnicity has two aspects: 'Ethnicity or nationality/country of origin or race?' and 'Clarify use' which are described below.

Ethnicity or nationality/country of origin or race?

Closely related to the clarification of definition of ethnicity, this theme also emerged having a lack of clarity over how people would differentiate their ethnic identities from nationalities, country of origins, or races. The statistical standard specifies that ethnicity refers to "ethnic group or groups that people identify with or feel they belong to...is a measure of cultural affiliation, as opposed to race, ancestry, nationality or citizenship...". A number of submitters identified a need to further clarify the classification or question more specifically to distinguish ethnicity from countries of origin.

The standard combines ethnicity and country of origin together. I think Stats NZ needs to collect these two forms of information separately. For instance, Chinese Malaysians may share some traits with Muslim Malaysians, and some with Chinese nationals and/or potentially Singaporean Chinese.

It appears subcategories under the category of European: Other European (such as Canadian and Australian) are based on concepts of 'race' (that is, perceived whiteness).

I have British and Indian parents. I was born in Iran but grew up in France and speak French. I am unsure what my ethnicity is and how that question is helpful.

Clarify use

Aside from clarifying the definition of ethnicity, some submitters also raised concerns as to how the classification will be used. While the ethical use of the classification is up to the agency or group using it, some submitters indicated that the standard should specify how, and when it would be appropriate, to use some or all the categories. These concerns also highlighted issues around the inappropriate reporting of ethnicity data, which might unfairly portray some ethnic groups.

The 'purpose' of the classification needs to be clear. People using it would then know what it can and can't be used for.

Unsure why you are collecting ethnicity information. If it's for health reasons, then simply identifying as Pacific should be enough. Also how do Māori feel when they tick Māori and iwi is collected elsewhere?

Representation of ethnicities

Submissions received during the public consultation period and a number of queries previously received by Stats NZ, expressed their frustrations and highlighted that the classification does not allow for a full representation of all ethnicities or groups. Submitters highlighted the importance of being represented, acknowledged, and recognised within the classification and, subsequently, any agency that uses it.

I have NZ permanent residency. I am a Commonwealth citizen, born in the UK of Caribbean origin. However, I can't see myself represented in the classification.

The 2017 update of the standard resulted in categories with small counts (like Tunisian and Yemeni) collapsed into 'not further defined' categories. The number of respondents is not a valid reason to remove a category from the classification.

This issue particularly resonated with the following:

- Submitters who wanted to be identified with one or more of their ethnicities prefixed by 'NZ' similar to 'NZ European', for example 'NZ Chinese', 'NZ African'.

The issue with NZ European is that it appears to exclude other ethnic groups from the use of a NZ label. It reinforces the ideology that only those of European descent can be NZers. There should be categories for NZ Indian, NZ Tongan, etc. What would be more inclusive is if all NZers can tick the NZ box and then tick their ethnic identity box.

I understand that 'New Zealand' is not really an ethnicity. I consider myself a 'New Zealand Asian'. Only European people have the privilege of being 'New Zealand Europeans', this should be extended to other groups.

Every ethnic category should have the option of a NZ prefix, for example NZ Pacific or NZ Asian, otherwise none should have them.

- Submitters of multiple ethnicities raised the perception that an individual could only affiliate with one ethnicity. The standard states "Ethnicity is self-perceived and people can affiliate with more than one ethnic group" although this appears to be not commonly known.

There are many who now identify with multiple ethnicities rather than just one, for example, between Samoan, Tongan.

I am Australian and Lebanese. I don't see how I have the option of choosing multiple ethnicities.

Not having an option for people to identify with multiple ethnicities alienates them from their ethnicity, culture and/or nationality.

- Some submitters pointed out the usability issues around the classification where ethnic minorities are potentially grouped with unrelated bigger ethnic groups. This means that their identities may not be easily seen as being part of the classification as they are grouped at lower levels of the classification.

Are there any intentions to include some of China's ethnic minorities, such as Uyghurs? It would appear that the 'Chinese' and other 'X Chinese' mainly refer to the Han Chinese.

A very distinct group of Goan, Mangalorean, and East Indians residing in NZ needs to be included as part of the Indian sub-categories under the Asian group. Goan, Mangalorean, and East Indians are just as ethnically distinct as the Sikhs and Anglo Indians.

- Submitters who wanted to better represent generational identities, either within New Zealand or as part of a diaspora.

Although we are proud of our Chinese descent, we are not 'from' China. My family have lived in New Zealand for several generations. This is similar to how New Zealand

European families have been in NZ for generations without being 'from' Scotland, Wales, England, etc.

Some people have lived in New Zealand for several generations but are not completely accepted as New Zealanders.

The importance of being represented in the classification of ethnicity has three aspects: incorrect name or label, missing categories, and the problem with 'Other'. These are discussed below.

Incorrect name or label

While some categories were in the classification, some submitters queried whether the label used for these categories was in fact incorrect and, in some cases, inappropriate. This meant that even if the group was in the classification, it was not necessarily a true representation of their ethnic group due to the label. Submitters also raised the appearance of bias in terms of how we have labelled categories in the classification. They also pointed out that labels and categories need to be regularly updated to maintain accuracy and relevance.

Ethnic groups have been listed using white supremacy versions. It's difficult to understand why ethnicities are not identified by their genuine names. Greeks are Hellenas, Gypsies are Roma/Romani. There are significantly more.

The ethnicity of people from Afghanistan is listed incorrectly as 'Afghani'. The correct label is 'Afghan'. The term 'Afghani' refers to the currency of Afghanistan.

Alter the label 'Nepalese' to 'Nepali'.

Some submitters highlighted issues with the label 'NZ European' – specifically, that it did not accurately reflect how people identify today with their European ancestry. Some proposed using 'Pākehā' or 'New Zealander' instead to represent this ethnic group.

Only having European as an option for 'white' Kiwis takes away my identity as a Kiwi.

'Pākehā' is meant to be within the NZ European group, but I do not identify with this definition, so I avoid selecting an ethnicity on surveys if the only choice is NZ European.

Put Pākehā down as its own level 2 with a macron. There are less and less white New Zealanders relating to New Zealand European.

Missing categories

Some submitters identified 'missing categories' from the classification. However, most of these categories are in the classification, though at lower levels. This indicates work is potentially needed to either inform people of this, or greater visibility of categories at lower levels of the classification.

Hong Kong Chinese are different from Chinese. Renaming as 'people of Hong Kong' or 'Hong Konger' would fit better. This is because many 'people of Hong Kong' originated from various other nations (UK, India, etc) and are NOT Chinese.

There is no category for the Caribbean region, and neither my children nor I can be properly classified.

People could have the option to say their ethnicity is of 'Tibetan origin' if their ethnicity is not listed such as TIBET.

The problem with 'Other'

While the category of 'other' is a common feature of classifications, it has unintended consequences when applied to identity and ethnicity. That is, submitters found being classified as 'other' to be demeaning and devaluing of their ethnic group.

The 'other ethnicity' category doesn't describe who we are, and it doesn't give a true indication that we exist.

What does the word 'other' mean in the classification?

On some government forms South African had its own classification, but all other Africans are considered 'Other' and not a classification of their own. This makes South Africa appear to not be in Africa.

Structural issues with the classification

The classification specifies that it is structured in a way that "individual ethnic groups are aggregated into progressively broader ethnic groups from level three up to level one, according to geographical location or origin, or cultural similarities." Some submitters, however, identified issues with how we have structured these categories, with some raising the possibility of bias towards categories that may seem more visible in the classification.

There are three aspects to the structural issues with the classification: Categories at the wrong level or in the wrong grouping, groupings that are too broad, and reorganisation of the entire structure has been requested by submitters based on the issues discussed below.

Categories at the wrong level or in the wrong grouping

Some submitters expressed their concerns, and did not agree with how we have grouped categories or at what level we have placed a specific category. Some found this to be an issue in terms of finding a category (that is, not easily visible due to being at a lower level of the classification) and/or have ascribed some judgement into how we have/have not 'valued' a category (that is, that Stats NZ hasn't given a category the right level of importance by placing a category at a lower level of the classification).

There needs to be a more logical structure for the categories and the reasoning behind the underlying classification explained. For example, MELAA – why does this category exist?

Why is it that New Zealander is Other Ethnicity>Other Ethnicity>Other Ethnicity>New Zealander? We don't say Pacific peoples> Pacific peoples>Pacific peoples>Māori, which would be the equivalent to New Zealander. (**Note:** Ethnicity is a hierarchical classification with four levels.)

Why can't we find New Zealander as an option? I believe it should be placed at the top of the hierarchy not at the bottom.

Issues were also raised about the grouping of some categories and how the classification may be incorrectly combining groups, therefore misrepresenting ethnic groups. Some submitters specifically raised issues with the 'Other European' group due to the association and assumption that this refers to someone 'white'.

Some people may identify themselves as Israeli but are not Jewish (conceivably including Arabs living in Israel, and Israelis who don't relate to the Jewish religion), and it is concerning the combination of Israeli and Jewish end up in the wider category of Middle Eastern.

The countries Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, etc are individual countries and should not be suffixed with or categorised under Chinese.

Why are 'Canadian' 'Australian' 'New Caledonian' and 'American' included in the subcategories European: Other European? This suggests they are categorised on the concept of 'race' (that is, perceived whiteness).

Groupings are too broad

A number of submitters stated that some categories were too broad and questioned the usefulness of groupings without enough detail. They were particularly critical of the Middle Eastern/Latin American/African (MELAA) category for being too broad and having a tenuous connection between categories in the group.

The groupings within MELAA are too wide and equivalent to the 'other' classification and does not meet the needs of the Latin American, Middle Eastern, and African communities, respectively, as they are quite diverse.

The Level 1 categories are too broad. For example, 'Asian' is problematic as key differences become blurred when large categories are merged – for example Chinese and Indian being aggregated into Asian, when each has their own characteristics.

There was also criticism for only having one option for Māori, without allowing people to identify their iwi or hapū. For this and other categories, submitters wanted more detailed categories, rather than the broad grouping. Note that the classification allows for this (that is, by using categories at the lowest level), but we recognise that surveys may not have the capacity to ask for specific ethnicities and may instead rely on the higher levels of classification and use broader categories.

There is only one category for Māori in the classification. Having a wider definition that incorporates iwi and hapū would be more effective and potentially show the difference in outcomes between iwi and hapū.

Reorganisation needed

As mentioned, some submitters wanted reorganisation of the classification, including rethinking the basis for the structure. Some proposed reorganising the classification based on the Treaty of Waitangi, or by continents (then sub-continents), or tailoring the classification to specific uses/surveys/agency needs.

Māori should be listed first in the order of categories under the Level 1 classification to acknowledge Māori as the tangata whenua of New Zealand. Statistics Canada listed the First Nations People first and followed by others.

When splitting categories on the continent, subcontinent level, categories should be North Asia, Central Asia, Western Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Let go of the classification or remodel it for other purposes, for example, healthcare.

Operational issues

Submitters also identified operational issues with using the classification.

- There were requests to produce categories in the native language(s) of the group, rather than in English or te reo Māori:

Having the script of a language would be useful, for example, 華人 for Chinese.

A move away from colonial terminology in the descriptor and use of terminology as determined by groups themselves would be ideal.

- The 'search' function was also mentioned – that is, submitters wanted an easier way to search for specific categories in the classification, or be allowed to respond with their ethnic group without having to tick a box or select 'other':

Providing a blank space so people can write down their own take on identification of their ethnicity might be better than being forced into categories they don't comfortably identify themselves as belonging within.

In many government forms, I couldn't find my ethnicity. I want my ethnicity to be part of the main selection and not in 'others'.

- Some submitters also highlighted the need for macrons in labels. (Note that macrons are present in the existing classification.)
- There were a few submitters who requested that 'nec' (not elsewhere classified) and 'nfd' (not further defined) were explained clearly, not just in terms of classification terms, but how a response is determined as belonging to these categories.
- There were also requests for identifying one's 'primary' or 'prioritised' ethnicity. Note that this is an operational issue associated with the survey (that is, how a question is phrased and how response options are formatted), not the classification. Also, Stats NZ moved away from the practice of prioritising an individual's ethnic group responses, while acknowledging that other surveys or agencies may continue to collect and use prioritised responses.

It could be useful for people to state a 'primary' ethnic group which could be 'no primary ethnic group (mixed ethnicity)'. This would make it easier as having multiple ethnic groups for each person can cause a data model to become overly complicated and difficult to manage.

When using prioritised ethnicity counts, everyone has only one ethnicity assigned to them, but this does not fully capture their identification. Total count is better in terms of ethnicity, but it can mean that individuals are counted more than once, which is a challenge for planning. It would be good to find a way to get a more accurate identification while still only assigning one ethnicity.

Next steps

Our intent is to engage further and wider before making any decisions on what changes to make, including potential concept, structural, and operational changes. The issues raised during the consultation will be considered as part of the ongoing review of this classification. Further consultation with a focus on Māori engagement is a critical next step to progress this work.

We are also keen to work with users, stakeholders, and key topic experts on solutions. This includes:

- refreshing our engagement plan with iwi and Māori organisations
- working closely with other government agencies to improve the quality for supply and reporting of ethnicity data
- engaging further and broader before making decisions about potential changes raised in the public consultation process. Issues raised around:
 - the clarification of ethnicity is conceptual in nature
 - the representation of ethnicities included the need to address ethnic groups not fitting within the present structure to better reflect increased diversity, and representativeness of ethnic groups within New Zealand
 - the categories at the wrong level or in the wrong grouping, groupings that are too broad, and reorganisation of the classification are structural in nature
 - the use of native language(s) for the descriptor labels of categories, and one's 'primary' or 'prioritised' ethnicity, for instances, are operational in nature
 - any further updates to correct name or label of ethnic groups to reflect more accurately the contemporary reality of the ethnicities in New Zealand
- exploring new and innovative ways to address these issues. We need more time to evaluate the approaches we are developing to support the ethnic data and further analysis will be required to better understand the issues with the classification.

Glossary

Natural language processing: Also known as NLP, applies computational techniques to analyse natural language. NLP uses machine-learning text-mining and topic-modelling to find keywords, concepts, patterns, and themes in large amounts of text.

Qualitative analysis: Technique that seeks to understand behaviour by using mathematical and/or statistical modelling, measurement, and research. Quantitative analysis aims to represent a given reality by using a numerical value.

R: Programming language and environment for statistical computing and graphics.

Survey Gizmo: Online tool used to create and conduct surveys and questionnaires.

Thematic analysis: Also known as topic analysis; a common form of qualitative analysis. It is used to identify meaningful patterns across a dataset.

Appendix 1: Consultation survey questions

1. The structure/design of the Ethnicity New Zealand Standard Classification 2005 V2.0
 - a. Looking at the [Ethnicity New Zealand Standard Classification 2005 V2.0](#), do you agree with the ethnicity categories and how the classification is structured?
 - b. Looking at the [Ethnicity New Zealand Standard Classification 2005 V2.0](#) sub-categories (ethnicities listed under each top level category/group, please expand the view to see), do they adequately cover each grouping?
2. Ethnicities in the classification
 - a. Looking at the [Ethnicity New Zealand Standard Classification 2005 V2.0](#), do you see all of your own ethnicities, or the ethnicities of the group you are representing?
 - b. In your view, or in the view of the group you are representing, is the terminology/name of your ethnicities correctly shown in the classification?
3. Definitions
 - a. Looking at the [Ethnicity New Zealand Standard Classification 2005 V2.0](#), would you find additional text explaining each classification category helpful? Additional text could include an outline of what is included in the classification categories and other helpful information.
4. Further information you would like to share
 - a. Is there any other information you would like to share to help us update the Ethnicity New Zealand Standard Classification?

Appendix 2: Themes and sub-themes from thematic analysis

- 1. Clarification of definition of ethnicity**
 - a. Ethnicity or Nationality/Country of origin or Race?
 - b. Clarify use

- 2. Representation of ethnicities**
 - a. Incorrect name or label
 - b. Missing categories
 - c. The problem with 'Other'

- 3. Structural issues with the classification**
 - a. Categories at the wrong level or in the wrong grouping
 - b. Groupings that are too broad
 - c. Reorganisation needed

- 4. Operational issues**