National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee

Progress towards improving inclusivity of UK data on ethnicity

Purpose

1. This paper summarises the latest picture across UK government and the Devolved Administrations to improve inclusivity of UK data and evidence in relation to issues of recording and reporting ethnicity, in line with Inclusive Data Task Force (IDTF) recommendations.

Recommendations

2. Members of NSIDAC are invited to:

   i.   Comment on the progress made in improving inclusivity of data and evidence in relation to ethnicity;

   ii. Consider whether the initiatives reported collectively address the IDTF recommendations and advise on how best to ensure they add up to more than the sum of parts and avoid duplication across the system.

   iii. Advise on priority areas for further progress;

   iv. Advise on any areas where further collaboration to improve ethnicity data across the UK statistical system would be beneficial;

   v.   Consider how NSIDAC members may wish to contribute to future work to improve ethnicity data and evidence.

Background

3. The Inclusive Data Taskforce (IDTF), whilst recognising that the UK has relatively rich ethnicity data compared to other European countries, identified several areas for improvement. Key amongst these were issues of missingness in data due to issues like high levels of non-response, leading to bias in data. Potential barriers to participation identified by the IDTF report, included:

   - Issues of perceived trust in and trustworthiness of government and government statistics, particularly – though not exclusively – among minoritised ethnic groups;

   - People being unable to identify themselves in the options included within data collection tools, and feeling excluded by constraints on self-identification e.g. not having the opportunity to express multiple ethnic categories; and

   - Exhaustion from over-research.

4. There were specific recommendations that ONS should transition its measures of ethnicity so that they better correspond to the current conceptual understandings, reflect the diversity of the population and are recognisable and meaningful to all ethnic groups.

5. The following sections summarise key initiatives in these and other areas across UK government.

Discussion

<u>Emerging insights from *Census 2021*</u>

6. People identified their ethnic group in Census 2021 using one of the 19 tick-box response options or through a write-in response. The census has provided us with a unique opportunity to provide insights not only for the 19 ethnic groups, but for 287 ethnic groups derived from the write-in responses. This information provides greater understanding of the size and demographic profiles of ethnic groups as well enabling further insight into equality of outcomes across groups.

7. The classification of 287 ethnic groups was built around user needs identified through stakeholder engagement and public consultation whilst also considering consistency and comparability with Census 2011 data.

8. On 29 November 2022, ONS published a topic summary, [Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021](#), which provided counts for the 19 and 287 ethnic groups to low levels of geography. It also provides information as to how ethnic diversity has changed since 2011 at a national and local level.

9. More recently, we've published Census 2021 analysis on ethnic group by age and sex, and will add further insights to the data across the year in 2023. This will include considering outcomes such as education, health, housing and employment as well as how ethnic identities intersect with the other cultural identity questions on the Census, such as religion, national identity and main language.

10. Additional information and products from Census 2021 will include data published through flexible outputs that allows users to interact with the data themselves, as well as additional tables provided for small population groups.

<u>Research into producing ethnicity statistics from administrative data</u>

11. ONS does not currently produce annual population statistics broken down by local authority and ethnic group. The only official statistics available are from the Census every 10 years, with Census 2021 being the most recent. As part of the [ONS population and social statistics transformation programme](#), research is currently underway into the potential to produce statistics on the population by ethnic group using administrative data. The first research outputs were published in August 2021, with further articles published in May 2022 and another two due out on 7th February (See Annex A for links to these publications).

12. The research has so far taken a record-level approach, using the administrative data-based Statistical Population Dataset as the population base and linking on ethnicity data from a variety of administrative data sources and the 2011 Census. Across all administrative data sources, guidance is that ethnicity should be self-reported. However, this may not always be the case in practice. As ethnicity information has been combined across time and across data sources, some

people have multiple recorded ethnicities in the administrative data. A rules-based approach was used to select a final ethnicity per person, largely based on taking the most recently recorded ethnicity (see Annex B). The publications explore the proportion of people with a stated ethnicity in the final linked dataset, and of those with a stated ethnicity, the proportion of people in each ethnic group. The February publications will compare these proportions with those produced from Census 2021, to explore how representative those with a stated ethnicity in the linked dataset are of the underlying population.

13. ONS plan to continue to develop and improve this work with the long-term ambition of producing annual ethnicity statistics down to local authority level and below. Planned development work includes adding in further administrative data sources, reviewing and refining the ethnicity selecting rules, further exploring methods to adjust for missingness in the administrative data and engaging with data suppliers to better understand and improve data collection practices. There are also plans to further utilise Census 2021 data to understand and assess the admin-based ethnicity statistics.

Progress with work on harmonised standards

14. As an evolving topic, ethnicity definitions, terminology, and concepts are changing and developing as society changes. ONS are responding to the Inclusive Data Task Force's recommendation to ensure appropriateness and clarity over the concepts being measured and that the harmonised standard for ethnicity reflects the diversity of the population.

15. In late February 2023, we will be publishing initial research and findings from research and engagement around how ethnicity is currently asked. We then plan to move into the early design phase exploring how best to update the question. The aim of our work is to explore a more inclusive question that would allow respondents to self-identify their ethnicity. We will continue engagement with data collectors, data producers and data users, as well as wider stakeholders such as community groups and the public. An example of our engagement is the 'Language Terminology project' (see paragraphs 18 and 19).

16. We are aware of different priorities in updating the way ethnicity data are collected, such as capturing data in more inclusive ways whilst also ensuring comparability of ethnicity measurement across datasets. We also acknowledge there is no right answer in terms of the categories into which data about ethnicity should be grouped. We currently recommend that data owners also use the national identity and religion harmonised standards when asking any questions about ethnicity. This helps people to give details about their full cultural identity.

17. As well as exploring a new harmonised question, we support teams in ONS and across Government to improve inclusivity in both survey and administrative data. We provide bespoke support around how to collect ethnicity data. In 2022 we advised Civil Service Human Resources on the collection of ethnicity data in their administrative data systems and we are currently supporting NHS England who

are looking to update the way they collect protected characteristics information across their data collections.

<u>Language and Terminology Project</u>

18. The Equality Hub in the Cabinet Office (CO) is also undertaking a **Language and Terminology** project. This relates to action 7 from the <u>Inclusive Britain strategy</u> which states:

'The Race Disparity Unit (RDU) will lead work to:

- engage with people from different ethnic groups to better understand the language and terminology that they identify with (7a)

- review how media coverage of race and ethnicity issues impact the communities being covered (7b)

- develop recommendations which will encourage responsible and accurate reporting on race issues by June 2023 (outcome)'

19. The Language and Terminology project will

- Consider how people from a range of ethnic minorities and backgrounds identify, and the factors associated with this (e.g. national identity, religion, language, etc)

- Seek feedback on the existing ethnicity classification, with particular interest in colour terminology, "other" and "mixed"

- Gather steers from participants on what types of language are inclusive, neutral or stigmatising

- Explore the consequences of non-inclusive or stigmatising terminology

20. This research is also important as it will provide insight and evidence to support the work of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonisation Team in their development of an updated ethnicity harmonised standard.

21. <u>Ethnicity facts and figures</u> is an online service led by the Equality Hub to provide ethnicity data and descriptive commentary for over 180 different subjects, disaggregated by additional characteristics where possible. The Equality Hub put a series of proposals to reform the Ethnicity facts and figures website out to public consultation between June and August 2022. The results have been analysed and nine actions identified. Users were particularly concerned about a proposed reduction in commentary for lower priority subjects (identified by CO against a set of criteria and confirmed with users).

22. In response we have developed a programme of work to streamline the website to make it more useful and responsive to users, as well as more efficient, sustainable and cost-effective to maintain. Measures will continue to be updated as automation and streamlining are rolled out through 2023.

23. The Equality Hub put three proposals out for <u>consultation on a set of draft Standards for Ethnicity Data</u> in August 2022. The standards have been

developed in response to action 6 in the Inclusive Britain report: "To ensure more responsible and accurate reporting on race and ethnicity, the RDU will by the end of 2022 consult on new standards for government departments and other public bodies on how to record, understand and communicate ethnicity data."

24. The standards are based around the Office for Statistics Regulation pillars of trustworthiness, quality and value from the Code of Practice for Statistics.

25. The standards consolidate best practice and guidance and give public sector data producers and data users information about how to better collect, analyse and report on ethnicity data. The standards include, for example, the importance of using harmonised standards; how to aggregate and analyse ethnic groups; and the importance of understanding and reporting on missing ethnicity data. This guidance is clear that users follow GSS harmonised standards and the work complement harmonised standards by providing additional support on ensuring trustworthiness and value

26. The Equality Hub is revising the draft standard based on the consultation responses and working with the Office for Statistics Regulation to consider how review the use and impact of the standards over the next two years.

Work to *improve ethnicity data and evidence across the Devolved Administrations*

Wales

27. The Welsh Government's Race Disparity Evidence Unit (RDEU) was established in January 2022 alongside the distinct Equality, and Disability Evidence Units to improve the availability, quality, granularity, and accessibility of evidence about individuals with protected and associated characteristics. The establishment of the RDEU will drive Wales towards better outcomes for people with protected and associated characteristics and contribute to our goal of 'A more equal Wales' as set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

28. The Race, Disability and Equality Evidence Units have published an Equality Evidence Strategy with input from communities and we plan to shape our ethnicity priorities further with the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan External Accountability Group once they are in place from January 2023. A crucial part of the RDEU's work is to engage with people with strong interests and lived experience. Therefore, a programme of work is being undertaken to develop an approach to co-producing research and analysis. Internal and external stakeholders, particularly those with lived experience, have been involved to help shape and steer the initial stage of this work stream.

29. The RDEU is committed to developing a programme of work to improve the collection of data relating to ethnicity across all government departments. A major part of this work includes the measurement of the impact of the Welsh Government's flagship 'Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan' and to better understand if the plan has resulted in real change to people's lives and experiences. The RDEU is currently undertaking several scoping exercises to record and map existing ethnicity data and gaps in relation to the actions set out in the Anti-Racist Wales Action Plan.

30. The RDEU is also delivering an Equality Data Audit to determine what data sources and outputs we hold and produce contain ethnicity data, and ensure they are being fully utilised to inform our priorities further. Initial analysis of the priorities for improving evidence on ethnicity have been produced in advance of the completion of the full data audit based on known gaps. Key work has started, including: an initial assessment of the National Survey for Wales and publishable data on ethnicity; a feasibility exercise around boosting the sample of minority ethnic people in the National Survey; data collection and analysis of the recruitment process of public sector bodies in relation to ethnicity; and work to assess the feasibility of producing ethnicity pay gaps in Wales.

Scotland

31. The Scottish Government's Equality Analysis Team lead on the Equality Data Improvement Programme (EDIP), a wide-ranging programme of work aimed at strengthening Scotland's equality evidence base. The EDIP project board is co-chaired by the Scottish Government's Chief Statistician and Chief Social Researcher and has external membership from a number of key partner organisations. The EDIP has the buy-in of Ministers and analytical leaders across the Scottish Government, including its Analytical Leaders Group (ALG). Analytical Services Divisions (ASDs) have a strong role to play in the implementation of robust equality analysis.

32. The ALG approved the formation of a network of internal analysts to help take forward key elements of the programme. This network drove a comprehensive internal Equality Data Audit in late 2021 using a RAG analysis to show which official and national statistics datasets produced statistics broken down by each of the equality characteristics. Further to this, these lead analysts also produced draft improvement plans which formed the basis of an external consultation that ran between July and October 2022. This consultation, and findings from the supporting stakeholder engagement events held throughout September 2022, will form the basis of Scotland's next Equality Evidence Strategy which is to be published by spring 2023.

33. Analysts from around the Scottish Government routinely include equality breakdowns in their analytical outputs and these help to populate the Equality Evidence Finder: http://www.equalityevidence.scot/ which presents analysis across the protected equality characteristics. This is a first point of call for policy makers to inform Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) which inform policies and spending decisions to avoid adverse impacts on particular groups. Analysts also provide equality breakdowns for National Performance Framework (NPF) indicators. As part of the EDIP, the Scottish Government analysis team refreshed its guidance notes around the collection of data on ethnicity Collecting equality data - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) in line with Scotland's Census 2022.

34. Specifically recognising data gaps regarding ethnicity, the Scottish Government's Immediate Priorities Plan for Race Equality, published in September 2021, has at its heart the data improvement and systemic change recommendations made by the Expert Reference Group on COVID-19 and Ethnicity. The Immediate

Priorities Plan aims to ensure a fair and equal recovery from COVID-19 for minority ethnic communities, as well as advancing race equality, tackling racism and addressing barriers that prevent people from minority ethnic communities from realising their potential.   The data-focused recommendations cover improving ethnicity coding in data infrastructure, improving the collection of ethnicity data, as well as improving reporting, accountability and governance.

35. [The Cross Justice Working Group on Race Data and Evidence was](#) set up in late 2020. Its membership includes representatives from the Scottish Government, all the main justice organisations, community groups and academia. One of its key aims is to help improve both the collection and reporting of evidence on race.

Northern Ireland

36. No update was received by Northern Ireland by the time the papers were finalised. If an update is received prior to the meeting on 7th February, we will forward it on to committee members.

Conclusion

37. This paper has set out key initiatives to progress IDTF-aligned work to improve inclusivity of data and evidence in relation to ethnicity in the UK. It summarises work currently happening or in the pipeline in UK central government, the Devolved Administrations, and the Office for National Statistics and UK Statistics Authority. Committee members are asked to note and comment on the progress made; consider whether the initiatives reported collectively address the IDTF recommendations on ethnicity, and how best to ensure they add up to more than the sum of parts; identify priority areas for further progress; suggest areas where further collaboration may be possible across the UK statistical system; and ways in which they might like to be involved in further work to improve UK data and evidence on ethnicity.

John Shale, Centre for Equalities and Inclusion, Statistical Coherence and Inclusion Division, ONS
19 January 2023

Annex A   Research into producing ethnicity statistics from administrative data – links to publications

Annex B   Rules-based approach for selecting a final ethnicity per person

Annex A   Research into producing ethnicity statistics from administrative data – links to publications

August 2021

Admin-based ethnicity statistics for England, feasibility research: 2016

Producing admin-based ethnicity statistics for England: methods, data and quality

May 2022

Developing admin-based ethnicity statistics for England: 2016
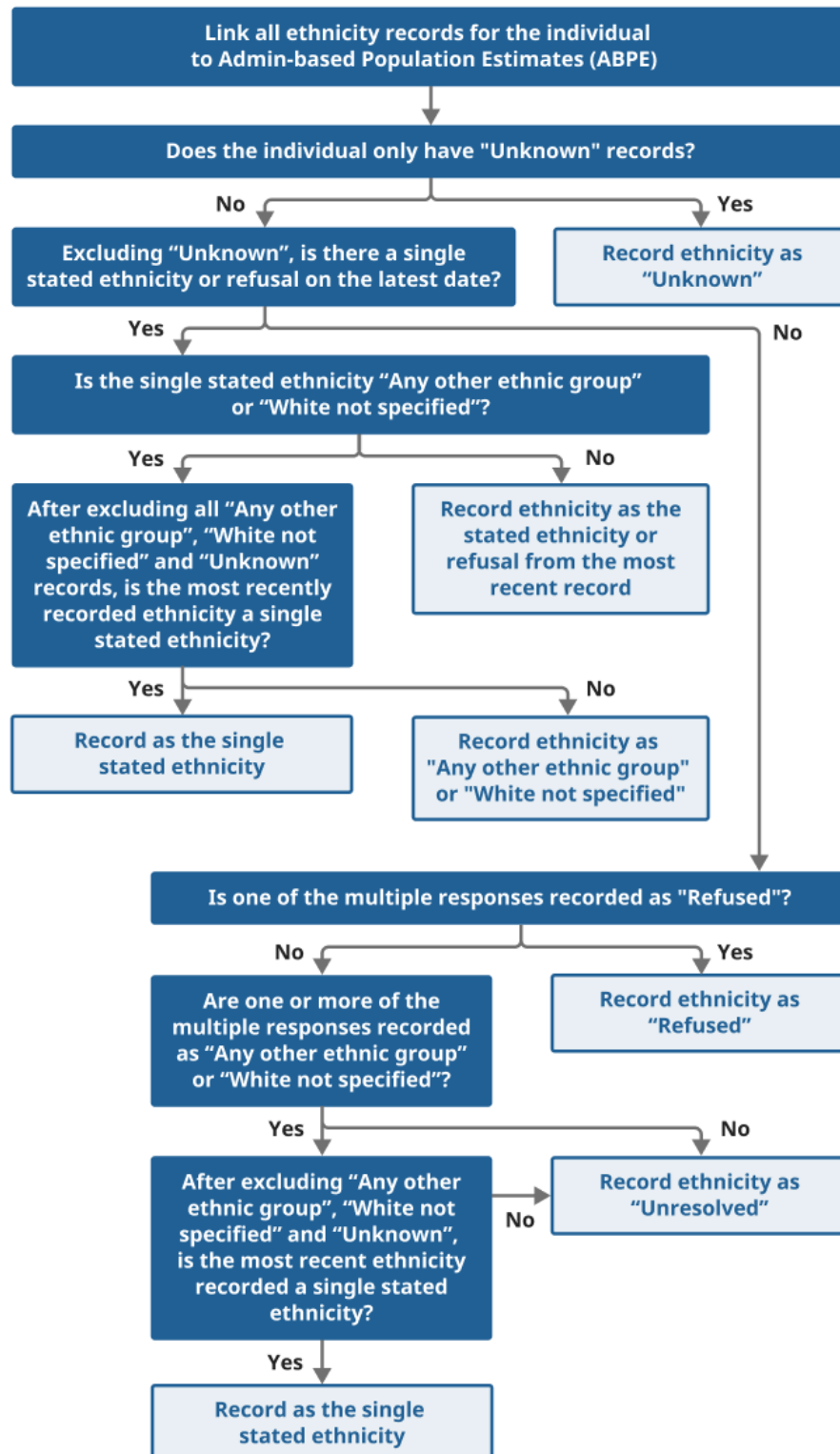
Change over time in admin-based ethnicity statistics, England: 2016 to 2020

Producing admin-based ethnicity statistics for England: changes to data and methods

Annex B   Rules-based approach for selecting a final ethnicity per person

More detail can be found in the [methods publication](#).

Link all ethnicity records for the individual to Admin-based Population Estimates (ABPE)

↓

Does the individual only have "Unknown" records?

- No →
- Yes → Record ethnicity as "Unknown"

Excluding "Unknown", is there a single stated ethnicity or refusal on the latest date?

- Yes →
- No →

Is the single stated ethnicity "Any other ethnic group" or "White not specified"?

- Yes → After excluding all "Any other ethnic group", "White not specified" and "Unknown" records, is the most recently recorded ethnicity a single stated ethnicity?
- No → Record ethnicity as the stated ethnicity or refusal from the most recent record

After excluding all "Any other ethnic group", "White not specified" and "Unknown" records, is the most recently recorded ethnicity a single stated ethnicity?

- Yes → Record as the single stated ethnicity
- No → Record ethnicity as "Any other ethnic group" or "White not specified"

Is one of the multiple responses recorded as "Refused"?

- No →
- Yes → Record ethnicity as "Refused"

Are one or more of the multiple responses recorded as "Any other ethnic group" or "White not specified"?

- Yes →
- No → Record ethnicity as "Unresolved"

After excluding "Any other ethnic group", "White not specified" and "Unknown", is the most recent ethnicity recorded a single stated ethnicity?

- No → Record ethnicity as "Unresolved"
- Yes → Record as the single stated ethnicity

Note: Since publication, the name of the underlying admin-based population base has changed from Admin-based Population Estimates (ABPE) to Statistical Population Dataset (SPD).