

Together, Terminology around race and ethnicity

Examining the strengths, shortcomings and implications of different terms.

There are a significant number of words, phrases and acronyms that appear when talking about race and ethnicity. It is important to understand the strengths, limitations and implications of different kinds of terminology.

Racism, ethnic discrimination, xenophobia and related prejudice and discrimination prevent the equal realisation of children and young people's rights. It is everyone's responsibility to do what they can to address this. Language is important because it has a very real impact in terms of shaping culture, how people see themselves and are perceived and treated by others. For instance, terminology can perpetuate racial inequality by implying subordination.

This document exists as a guide for Together staff members and for external use by anyone whose decisions impact children and young people to address a range of different terms that are used to refer to children and young people in the context of race and ethnicity. Together will use this to consider the shortcomings and implications of these various terms in order to make decisions about which terminology is most appropriate in a given situation. When Together is describing a piece of work hosted by another organisation we will use this document to inform which terminology is most suitable. An exception to this will be projects which are designed and led by children young people who have themselves chosen to use a specific term e.g 'BAME' to self-identify.

It is **our aim** to tackle racial disparity respectfully and this document is an important step in becoming, and helping our members to become, anti-racist organisations.

Language and terminology, as well as the acceptability of different terms, are constantly evolving, highlighting the need for this to be a living document which is updated as we learn. It is acknowledged that despite good intentions, white privilege may have impacted the research and writing processes of producing this guide. We are always seeking feedback on how we adapt and improve, so please do not hesitate to get in touch on info@togetherscotland.org.uk if you have any comments on anything contained in this document or our work in general.

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1. Talking about race

Historically, characteristics such as skin colour, facial features, and stature, were used by white Europeans to place people into different groupings or races. This idea of race was used to 'prove' the natural superiority of light-skinned people and maintain their dominance. This belief that white people are superior to others because of their race is called 'white supremacy'.

Whilst it is now widely recognised that race is a social construct, the effects of this history prevail today. It continues to impact how societies are structured and function, as people continue to experience racism –pejorative treatment, including harassment and victimisation, on the basis of their skin colour.

People can experience both direct and indirect racism. Direct racism refers to being treated worse than someone else in a similar situation because of race, whilst indirect racism is related to laws, policies or ways of doing things which put people from racialised groups at a disadvantage.

Race is integral to many Black and Brown people's sense of identity - it can foster pride and connection to heritage and culture. All adults working directly with children and young people can

What does the Equality Act 2010 say about race?

In the Equality Act 2010, the protected characteristic of 'race' is defined as including colour, ethnic or national origin, or nationality.

There is some overlap with the characteristic of religion or belief too with Jews and Sikhs considered to be ethnic groups under the act. although Muslims are not considered an ethnic

Systemic, structural and institutional racism

Systemic racism is a term to designate the whole societal structure that maintains a racially oppressive system that privileges and oppresses different racial groups in society. Manifestations of systemic racism are for instance, structural and institutional racism.

Institutional racism refers to the systematic racial bias inferred into policies or laws as well as practice within institutions (e.g. enforcement and judicial systems). Such bias can be explicit or made by systematically ignoring the needs of minorities.

Structural racism refers to inequalities rooted in the system-wide operation of a society that excludes substantial numbers of members of particular groups from significant participation in major social institutions.

support them to develop a positive racial identity.

1.1 Children and young people who have experienced racism

Strengths: This term is an example of person-first language because it emphasises the person rather than defining them primarily by their race. It posits its subjects first and foremost as children and young people, albeit those who have in common the experience of some form of racism.

With the incorporation of the UNCRC into domestic law in Scotland, children and young people are increasingly being recognised as rights-holders. Terminology which defines its subjects as people rather than subordinating them to a racial category, means that others are more likely to act towards them in a way that sees them as possessing fundamental human rights.

Limitations: This term does not recognise that children and young people experience different forms of racism, for example anti-black or anti-Asian racism. It is also a vague term which could be interpreted as including those beyond whom racism is directed at, for example children and young people who have witnessed it.

1.2 Children and young people from racialised groups

Strengths: Like above, this term emphasises that its subjects are first and foremost individuals and therefore rights-holders.

This term is further advantageous insofar as it recognises that certain groups have been subjected to a process of racialisation by others – power has been exercised by one group to define another set of people as ‘less than’ or ‘other’. It indicates that some groups of children and young people may therefore be negatively impacted by attributes which have been assigned to their race.

Limitations: This term does not recognise that children and young people experience different forms of racism, for example anti-black or anti-Asian racism.

1.3 Racial minorities

Strengths: as well as concise, this term is already used and understood in the UK.

Limitations: This term, unlike the examples examined above does not utilise person-first language. By reducing people to a category, it may be considered depersonalising and dehumanising.

The term ‘minority’, has also been problematised because it defines people by a negative, as lacking a quality that would place them in the majority category, thereby implying subordination to those racialised as white. It does not recognise that their minoritisation is a social process shaped by power.

Lastly, it blurs the diversity between different groups, identities and experiences of Black and Brown people.

1.4 Racially minoritised children and young people

Strengths: Using the term ‘minoritised’ is advantageous insofar as it shows that people are actively minoritised by others through social processes of power and domination. It also better reflects the

fact that individuals that have been labelled as minorities in the UK are majorities in the global population.

Limitations: People are not racially minoritised in the same way and it is important to recognise that different racially minoritised groups have different experiences.

Whilst the terms above serve specific purposes there is a need to always be careful when using such umbrella terms. Users of the term should be aware of the negative consequences of grouping all minoritised individuals together, especially when there is significant diversity between them.

2. Talking about ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably but it is important to know the difference.

Ethnicity is broader than race and has usually been used to refer to long shared cultural experiences, religious practices, traditions, ancestry, language, dialect or national origins (for example, African-Caribbean, Indian, Irish).

In the UK, the term ethnic minority is usually used to refer to ethnic groups that are a minority in the population. This includes white minority ethnic groups such as Polish or Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller.

People can encounter racism, prejudice and discrimination on the basis of their ethnic origin.

2.1 Ethnic minority children and young people

In the UK, the terms 'ethnic minority' and 'minority ethnic' are usually used to cover all ethnic groups except White British.

Strengths: as well as concise, this term is already widely used and understood in the UK.

Limitations: As mentioned above, the term 'minority', implies subordination to those racialised as white.

2.2 Minority ethnic children and young people

The phrase 'minority ethnic' is often preferred over 'ethnic minority'.

Strengths: Use of minority ethnic was proposed to help counter the use of the term 'ethnic' when referring to people who are not White British. By not putting 'ethnic' first, 'minority ethnic' better recognises the fact that everyone has an ethnicity including White British people.

Limitations: As above, the term 'minority' can imply subordination. The term is often used inappropriately to conflate race and ethnicity and where it would be more appropriate to mention race or racism.

2.3 Ethnic minorities

Strengths: as well as concise, this term is already used and understood in the UK.

Limitations: Like the term 'racial minorities', this may be considered depersonalising and as implying subordination to those racialised as white.

It fails to recognise the diversity between different groups, identities, and experiences of Black and Brown people.

This 'ethnic minority' term can be used to talk about people's experiences of racism. Where race or racism is referred to, this should be explicitly stated as such rather than discussed as an issue of minority rights or ethnicity.

This broad and vague term groups people of many different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds together. More specific terms might be more suitable to talk about the identities and experiences of individuals or groups, for example Arab, Chinese or Black Caribbean children and young people.

2.4 Minoritised ethnic children and young people

Strengths: 'Minoritised ethnic' has been put forward more recently as it recognises that individuals have been minoritised through social processes of power and domination. It also better reflects the fact that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK are majorities in the global population.

Limitations: This term is not currently widely used or understood in the UK.

2.5 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) or Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) children and young people

These terms are used to refer to people of ethnicities which are minoritised in the UK. Both BAME and BME are frequently used when making comparisons with the white population in the UK and reflect a common way of gathering and collating statistics.

Strengths: BAME/BME may be appropriate in some contexts. For example, when referring to data that has been collected by institutions that use this term, such as the Office for National Statistics.

These should be written in full at first use to let the reader know what they stand for.

Limitations: BAME is frequently inappropriately used, and few individuals identify with the acronym. It is criticised for cementing the difference between white and 'other' and for grouping people of many different racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds together, disregarding the differences between them. The term fails to recognise that people may have very different experiences of discrimination and racism.

BAME does not acknowledge the fundamental problem of systemic racism and conflates issues of race and ethnicity. BAME or BME should not be used as a replacement for directly addressing a specific racial or ethnic group or individual when that is who we are speaking about - instead use the racial categories with which people identify, such as Black, Asian, Latino, and mixed race.

3 Other terms

There are several other terms frequently used in the UK to talk about people from racialised groups.

3.1 Children and Young People of Colour

'People of colour' is used to describe anyone who is not white.

Strengths: This term is preferred by some because it does not include the word 'minority'.

Limitations: Like BAME, the POC label also homogenises by grouping together people of great ethnic diversity, identities and experiences of discrimination and racism. Few people self-identify as a 'person of colour', often preferring 'Black' or 'Brown'.

It is critiqued for 'erasing' racial hierarchies, especially the experiences of people who encounter anti-black racism.

It has been expressed by white people who do not belong to the majority ethnic group in the UK, e.g. white Asians, that 'people of colour' is not inclusive of them.

3.2 Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPoC)

Strengths: There is an important difference between POC and BIPoC (sometimes referred to as BPoC in the UK context). BIPoC recognises that Black and Indigenous people face the greatest discrimination and a long history of oppression around the world.

Some organisations use the term 'Black and People of Colour children and young people' thereafter shortening this to 'BPoC children and young people'. When referring to Scottish children and young people, a preferable term might be 'young Black and People of Colour Scots' or 'young BPoC Scots'.

Limitations: By grouping people with very different identities into one category, BIPoC or BPoC is used as a 'catch-all' acronym. Where you are referring to the experiences many Black children face, be specific and use the word "Black" rather than the wider term "BPoC children and young people".

3.3 Black children and young people / Black and Brown children and young people

Strengths: There is increasing acknowledgement that Black and Brown are not just adjectives but nouns referring to groups with "collective identities, shared experiences and shared histories".¹ These racial designations are frequently claimed by individuals as social identities.

Limitations: These terms group together Black children and Brown children with very different identities and experiences. They may not be appropriate when talking about a specific group of children and young people, for example the experiences of Muslim or Latino children.

¹ Peace Direct, ["Time to Decolonise Aid,"](#) 8

Important points

- Ask children and young people how they describe their identity and use their preferred terminology where appropriate.
- Acknowledge the roles that systemic racism and white supremacy have had and continue to have on children and young people's rights being realised.
- Refer to specific types of racism where relevant e.g. anti-black or anti-asian racism.
- Consider which racial or ethnic groups you are talking about and ensure the terms you are using accurately reflect them.
- When using oral or written communication, always explain acronyms in full. If using BAME, when speaking spell out 'B-A-M-E'.
- In pieces of writing, ensure to capitalise Black and Brown.
- Respect people's preferences and allow options to self-describe when asking survey questions. When asking about ethnicity instead of giving tick boxes, you may want to leave an open space to respond.
- Be prepared to listen and learn as terminology continually evolves.
- Own and learn from mistakes, apologise if you get terminology wrong and cause offence.