Linklaters

In March 2022, the Government unveiled its Inclusive Britain policy paper, setting out 74 different actions for tackling racism in the UK and creating a more inclusive and integrated society.

Action 6 targeted race and ethnicity reporting:

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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.

As part of that commitment, the Government has introduced draft standards for ethnicity data in respect of which it is seeking feedback.

The standards give guidance on improving:

1. Quality of collection, analysis and reporting

When collecting, analysing or reporting on ethnicity data, the standards identify key considerations (see table below).

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) harmonised categories for national identity and religion should be used.

2. Trustworthiness

The collection, reporting, and analysis of ethnicity data should be done respectfully and in the least intrusive way, in accordance with relevant data protection legislation.

3. Value

Transparent and open decision-making processes should be used.

Data collected should meet its intended use, inform public debate, and evolve and adapt to meet user needs.

Who are they for?

Whilst the standards are intended to apply to public bodies or Government departments, they will also be useful to people outside of the public sector who are collecting or using data about people's ethnicity, in particular, organisations who voluntarily report on their ethnicity pay gap.

Quality: Key considerations

When collecting, analysing or reporting on ethnicity data, the standards identify the following key considerations:

Data collection	Data analysis	Data reporting
At the start, give thought as to how the data will be used.	Weight survey data to correct for bias (weights often include age, sex and geography).	Report potential biases (potential issues include response rates, proxy reporting, and missing data).
Collect data on religion and national identity to help people give details about their full cultural identity.	Use appropriate comparators (for example, the Race Disparity Unit has used the white British group as a comparator which can show any disparities associated with white minority groups, such as Gypsy, Roma and Irish Travellers).	Report measures of statistical reliability such as confidence intervals, standard errors, coefficients of variation, and sample sizes.
Ask people to self-report their ethnicity where possible.	Find out whether the geographic clustering of some ethnic groups has produced counterintuitive results.	Consider whether you report differences using raw data, or report them after adjustment to take into account other socio-economic and demographic factors, or both.
Design data collections to increase response rates for different ethnic groups (for example, using translated materials or multilingual phone lines).	Consider whether you measure differences between ethnic groups by analysis of raw data or after adjustment to take into account other socio-economic and demographic factors, or both (the Government provides the example of people in ethnic minority groups who may be younger on average than white British people and are more likely to live in large urban areas. If this data is not adjusted for age and geography, this could impact comparisons).	Be transparent as to why you have used specific comparators (for example, a particular ethnic group or time period).
Design data collections to increase the representativeness of ethnic groups (for example, consider using bespoke or local surveys.		Follow best practice when writing about ethnic groups.
Combine data on the same person from different sources (i.e. data linkage) to improve ethnicity data quality.		

Pitfalls!

> Using binary categories in analysis (e.g. white/other than white).
> Aggregating data for ethnic groups in a non-harmonised way.
> Not using a range of comparators in the analysis.
> Commissioning data analysis to another organisation which does not use harmonised standards.
> Failure to keep data up to date.

Commentary

By its nature, collecting data on race and ethnicity can be complex. Ethnic identification or membership is self-defined and will necessitate sensitive questioning. Using the standards will help to drive best practice for collecting and presenting data, increasing consistency and comparability not only across organisations but society more generally.

Previously, where different groups have been "lumped" together, data has been misleading. It has resulted in exclusion rather than inclusion, undermining the purpose of reporting. Responsible and accurate reporting on race and ethnicity will help to expose the different challenges faced by different ethnic groups. This can then inform the development of targeted solutions to reduce disparities and foster inclusion.

The Government's consultation closes on 30 August 2022.

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