

COLLECTING EQUALITY INFORMATION  
GUIDANCE ON ASKING QUESTIONS ON:

# ETHNIC GROUPS



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scotland  
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

# Introduction: Why is it necessary to collect information about ethnic groups?

Government and public authorities have a statutory duty to collect information on ethnic groups under the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 to tackle discrimination and promote equality. Ethnic group statistics are also important to the private and voluntary sector for monitoring discrimination and inequality. The information is also used to inform resource allocation, policy formulation and service delivery.

“Poor measurement and a lack of transparency have contributed to society and governments being unable to tackle persistent inequalities and their causes. The data available on inequality are utterly inadequate in many ways, limiting people’s ability to understand problems and their causes, set priorities and track progress. And even where data do exist, they are not consistently used well or published in a way that makes sense.”

This was one of the conclusions of *Fairness and Freedom, The Final Report of the Equalities Review* in 2007. This was followed by a report from the Office of National Statistics which identified eight principles for collection and dissemination of equality data. Principle 4 states that:

*“Consistency of methods, concepts and classifications is fundamental in the collection, analysis and presentation of equality statistics.”*

In order to promote more consistency the Scottish Government has been working on providing harmonised questions for use in surveys in Scotland.

Ethnicity is a complex issue. There is no consensus about what constitutes an “ethnic group”. Research shows that it means different things to different people, has a number of possible meanings which can depend on the context or situation, and understanding of the term evolves over time. It encompasses aspects of identity, race, ancestry, history, culture, and it is very diverse. We have provided this guidance to help you use the questions and classifications to get the best quality information you can on **ethnic group**.



# Making changes to the questions and categories

In order to reflect modern circumstances, and respond to concerns over the question used in the 2001 Scottish Census, the ethnic group question has been reviewed. The new ethnic group question was produced using evidence collected from wide consultation with users and extensive question testing. Detailed results of this work can be found at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/07/29095058/0>.

**The ethnic group question has been developed to be acceptable to both respondents and users. It is very strongly recommended that you retain it in its entirety and using the exact format.**

## Presentation of the questions

The words used in the question have been carefully selected to be acceptable, so far as possible, to respondents to aid understanding of what is being asked and to provide the most reliable data for users. If the wording is changed then people may not answer or may answer with a less good response. The capitalisation and bold font are used to emphasise the instructions and help reduce response errors. The ethnic group question is split into categories (which contain a number of tick boxes including write-in boxes) and each one is assigned a letter. The use of these letters is very important and testing showed that they act as a

visual cue to ensure the respondent keeps reading down the list, through each category, until they find the most appropriate tick box, rather than choosing prematurely.

## Length of the ethnic group question

Due to the complex nature of ethnic groups this question is much longer than other survey questions. The number and description of the categories and tick boxes has been selected carefully to best represent the Scottish population and to improve response rates by making the question acceptable to respondents. Removing categories and tick boxes could result in people answering with a less good response and your data will not be directly comparable with other information. It may also result in your question being less acceptable to some people and consequently this could affect response rates. We strongly recommend using the full question as it is. If this is not possible, for example, because your survey is very short and cannot be extended or you require information on people not listed then **please contact us directly for advice.**

### Ordering of the categories and tick boxes

It is important that you retain the order of the categories and tick boxes as they are arranged this way to minimise response errors. Research has shown that people tend to read down the list only as far as the first suitable answer and for that reason the categories and tick boxes are generally listed by population size. The Mixed or Multiple ethnic group category is placed after the White category as tests have shown that this category is likely to be missed if placed further down the list.

### Write-in boxes

The list of tick boxes is by no means definitive and, as a result, write-in boxes are present in each section and under “Other” at the end so that people can identify in another way if they wish. These write in boxes are very important to the acceptability of the question. Removing these could have implications for the response rate and acceptability of your survey. Ethnic group is a self-defining concept and people should be able to identify as they wish. We would strongly recommend that you retain them. If resources are not available to process and output the write in responses and you need to reduce their number, **please contact us directly for advice.**

### Single tick response of the ethnic group question

Respondents are requested to answer the ethnic group question with a single response only. It is strongly advised that you adhere to this. The length of the ethnic group question means the number of combinations that could be produced by multiple responses would make it difficult to output usable data and it would be extremely difficult to cross reference ethnic group data with other data (for example on health, education or housing) to obtain information about inequalities. Response errors, where a respondents has ticked one category at the top of the question and then selected a more appropriate category lower down (which they did not initially see), without crossing out the earlier response, occurred in question testing. Allowing multiple responses would make it difficult to determine if this type of response error has occurred or if the response is a genuine multiple tick.

The Scottish Census in 2001 used a single tick response. If multi-tick responses are used the data will not be comparable with the 2001 Census and consequently changes over time could not be explored reliably.

# How to deal with multiple ticking of the ethnic group question

Despite respondents being asked to answer the ethnic group question with a single response, inevitably there will be a few who give multiple responses, either within a category or across categories.

Due to the significance of ethnic group data and the small numbers that can be associated with some of the categories in Scotland, it is important that information is available at the most specific level possible. Therefore, the general rule is where more than one box has been ticked the more specific or smaller group should be retained. This will show if a specific ethnic group is more likely to be experiencing discrimination or has specific service needs.

If multiple responses occur:

- when one response is a subset of another, the most specific response should be retained. For example, if both 'Scottish' and 'British' are ticked, then the 'Scottish' response should be retained;
- when two non-overlapping responses are given in the same category the smaller population ticked should be retained. For example, if 'Scottish' and 'Polish' are both ticked then 'Polish' should be retained;
- when boxes have been ticked in two different categories then the tick that occurs in the category with the smallest population size should be retained;

- when a respondent has ticked a response and then provided a write in response to an 'Other' box then the write in answer should be retained as this information is most likely to reflect their ethnic group;
- when boxes have been ticked in three or more categories the response should be recorded as 'unknown'.

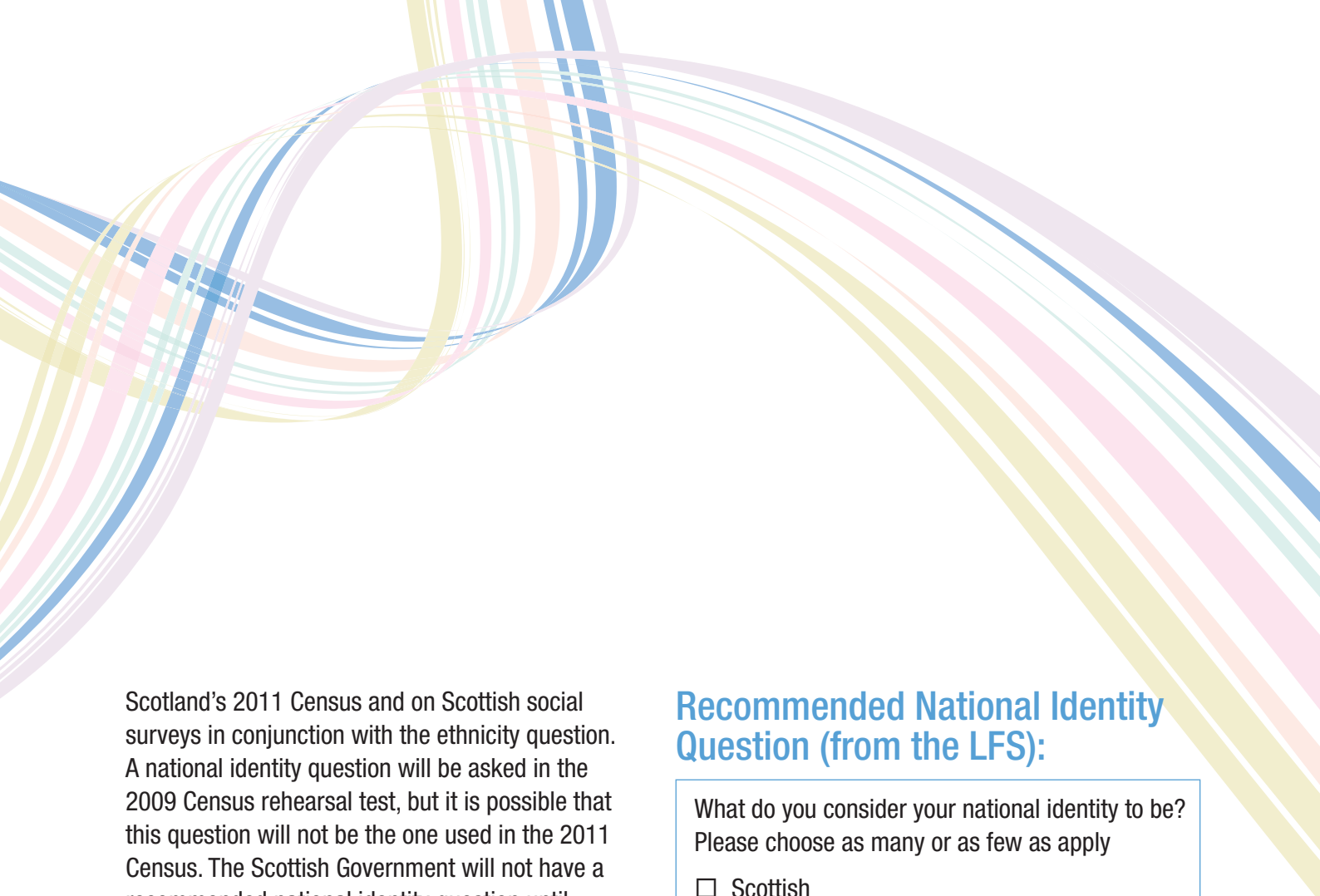
Information on population size can be obtained from the GROS website using the link below.

If you require help when dealing with multiple responses **please contact us directly**.

## National identity

The ethnic group question has been developed so that it can be used as a stand-alone question, however, sometimes it is desirable to collect more specific information on national identity.

National identity is a self-defining concept in which a person expresses what country or countries, nation or nations, they feel most connected to and like ethnicity it involves a range of concepts. The complex nature of national identity means that detailed and careful consideration needs to be given to the development of a question. The Scottish Government and the General Register of Scotland are currently in the process of developing and testing a national identity question for use in



Scotland's 2011 Census and on Scottish social surveys in conjunction with the ethnicity question. A national identity question will be asked in the 2009 Census rehearsal test, but it is possible that this question will not be the one used in the 2011 Census. The Scottish Government will not have a recommended national identity question until autumn/winter 2009 at the earliest when the results from the Census test and other testing will be available. We will update you on any progress made when it becomes available.

If you need to collect information on national identity then we recommend you use the question used by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as this has been used for a number of years. The Labour Force Survey question does mirror the beginning of the ethnicity question, and for this reason the testing being conducted by the SG and the GROS is looking at different approaches relevant for Scotland.

## Recommended National Identity Question (from the LFS):


What do you consider your national identity to be?  
Please choose as many or as few as apply

- Scottish
- English
- Welsh
- Irish
- British
- Other

It is advised that you place the national identity question **before** the ethnicity question as this is how it is presented in the Labour Force Survey.

## Data collection method

There are a number of considerations to be made when deciding on the mode of data collection. When a survey is administered by an interviewer, it is important to remind the interviewer to provide the respondents with clear instructions to read or listen to the whole question before answering and to respond with a single answer on the ethnic group question, although multiple responses can be given for the national identity question. Having an interviewer present means that extra guidance can



be provided to respondents who are having difficulty understanding the question. If show cards are being used, they should reflect the questions as they are published here, with all the categories and in the same order.

Using a computer, either for self or interviewer completion, can limit the respondent to a single tick for the ethnic group question as the script can be moved to the next question after one box has been completed. However, it should be noted that the ethnic group question is long and does not fit fully on a computer screen. The GROS are conducting research on developing a solution to presenting the question in full on a computer screen and this guidance note will be updated as soon as the results of this work are known.

When using computers to administer surveys or when employing an internet based survey, it is especially important that the bold font and capitalisation of the question are adhered to.

When conducting a telephone interview, it is important that all the response options are read out before the respondent gives an answer.

For postal surveys and other data collections administered using paper forms, it is important that the form is clearly designed, easy to read and the ethnic group question is presented as published here.

## Proxy responses

These questions are designed to collect information on a person's self-defined ethnic group and national identity and should be addressed directly to the respondent. Where the respondent is unable to provide an answer another member of the household, or the person's carer, can be asked to give a response on the respondent's behalf. This should be a last resort and the interviewer should record that a proxy response was given. It is very important that interviewers, administrative staff or anyone other than the individual's family member or carer does not provide an answer on behalf of the respondent.

The questions were designed and tested with adults, but changes should not be made when asking children. If possible the response should be provided by the child although a proxy response may be needed, especially if they are under the age of 12 (ONS, 2003). Proxy responses should only be accepted from a parent or guardian. Extra guidance may be needed for parents when the child is under 12. If you require help with extra guidance **please contact us directly.**

## Analysing and presenting data

Data should be analysed and presented in a way that is most useful to users of the data, with consideration of what kind of analysis would be most likely to reveal any inequalities that require action. In Scotland, many ethnic groups are small in number which could lead to statistical unreliability when analysing data and hinder publication of figures because of the need to avoid identification of individuals. The problem of small numbers can be overcome by combining categories under a section heading, for example combining the counts of people who responded 'African, African Scottish or African British', 'Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British', 'Black, Black Scottish or Black British' and the 'Other, please write in' category within the section D. This is not an ideal solution as it can hide inequalities that occur between each of the separate categories, for example differences in educational attainment occur between S4 African, Caribbean and Other Black pupils. However, sometimes it will be better than publishing no data at all and a decision needs to be made to weigh up the benefits.

Where it is necessary to combine categories, the headings used should be fully reflective of the individual categories that have been combined. In the example above, in which all the categories within Section D are combined, the results must be labelled as 'African, Caribbean **or** Black' and not just

'Black' or 'African, Caribbean and Black'. This is because there are some people who find the term Black offensive and others who feel very strongly that their ethnic group is Black and take pride in that term. It is important that data are presented in a way that is respectful of both these points of view.

If it is necessary to combine categories B, C, D and E you must label the results as 'Mixed or Multiple; Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British; African, Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic groups'. While this is a very long heading to use in a data table, it is important to avoid offence. Combining categories B, C, D and E and labelling them 'Non-White', 'Coloured', 'Black', 'Black or Minority Ethnic', or 'Other' is unacceptable. The term Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BME) should not be used, as it is a very general term, offensive to some people and inaccurate (because some categories under the White section are also small in number).

It is important that the results should be presented in as much detail as possible. It is better to list all of the categories and where possible the figures. If the numbers are too small to publish, then suppress the figures for that category with an explanation of why this has been done, taking care to ensure that if only one figure is suppressed, that figure can then not be calculated by simple subtraction from the totals displayed. Consideration should be given to increasing sample sizes by aggregating several years of data where that can be done.

# Comparing the 2011 Census classification with the 2001 Census classification

You should move to using the new ethnic group classification at the earliest time that is convenient to you, for example when you are reviewing the content of your survey or at the beginning of a new cycle for your survey.

Due to the changes in the classification, new data will not be directly comparable to the 2001 Census data and a number of considerations will have to be taken into account when you are looking at trends over time. It will still be possible to compare the data at the White, Mixed or Multiple, Asian, African, Caribbean or Black and Other level. The differences in the data collected from the new 2011 question and that collected from the 2001 Census for each section are described below:

**‘White’ category.** At category level, total counts of ‘White’ should be broadly comparable. However, some people identifying as ‘Gypsy/Traveller’, ‘Polish’ and to some extent other people from Central and Eastern European countries may have responded in the previous classification using the ‘Other ethnic background’ category. At tick box level only the ‘Scottish’ and ‘Irish’ tick boxes are directly comparable, except that some people identifying as ‘Scottish’ under the previous classification may identify as ‘British’ under the new classification. The ‘Other British’ (2001) tick box is roughly comparable with the sum of the new ‘English’, ‘Welsh’, ‘Northern Irish’, ‘British’ and ‘Gypsy/Traveller’ tick boxes. The ‘Any other White Background’ (2001) is broadly comparable with the sum of the new ‘Any other White ethnic group’ and ‘Polish’ tick box.

**‘Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups’ category.** Total counts of this category are broadly comparable. However, some people identifying as, say, ‘Indian Scottish’ or ‘African British’ (who answered using the ‘Mixed’ category in the previous classification)

may now answer using the new ‘Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British’ tick boxes or the ‘African, Caribbean or Black’ tick boxes.

**‘Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British’.** At category level, total counts should be broadly comparable. However, as detailed above, we may expect some who responded using the ‘Mixed’ category in the previous classification to identify as, say, ‘Indian Scottish’ in this category using the new ‘Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British’ tick box for example. The same applies to all the ‘Asian’ groups listed in the new classification.

**‘African, Caribbean or Black’.** At category level, total counts should be broadly comparable. However as detailed above, some respondents who previously responded using the ‘Mixed’ category may now identify as, say, ‘African Scottish’ in this category using the new ‘African, African Scottish or African British’ tick box. At tick box level, comparisons are not advisable, since testing has indicated that some people will now opt to identify as ‘Black, Black Scottish or Black British’ rather than ‘African’ or ‘Caribbean’ as in the previous classification. It is possible that some people identify as ‘White African’ or ‘White Caribbean’ and may choose to do so under this category (although small-scale testing indicated that the majority of those identify as ‘White African’ did so using the ‘White’ category on the new classification).

**Changes affecting all the above categories.** An analysis of responses from people identifying as ‘Arab’ in the 2001 Census, shows that 47 per cent did so under ‘Any other ethnic background’, 22 per cent under the ‘Asian’ category, 13 per cent under the ‘Mixed’ category, 7 per cent under the ‘White’ category, 1 per cent under the ‘Black’ category and 9 per cent gave multiple responses across several

categories. The inclusion of the new 'Arab' tick box in the 'Other Ethnic Group' category means that, most of these people are now likely to respond here instead. This will have reduced somewhat the total counts of each of the above categories.

**'Other Ethnic Group'**. At category level, total counts should be broadly comparable. However, as detailed above, the inclusion of the new 'Arab' tick box should mean that more people identifying as 'Arab' use this category (with the possible exception of the people identifying as say 'Arab Scottish' or 'Arab British' who may continue to identify using the 'Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Group' category). As detailed above, we may expect fewer people from Central and Eastern Europe to identify using this category than under the previous classification, because the inclusion of the new 'Polish' tick box under the 'White' category is likely to encourage such respondents to give their answers here instead. The same is true to some extent of people identifying as 'Gypsy/Traveller'.

## UK data comparisons

It is important to some data users that there are UK and GB level figures and that Scottish data can be compared to that of the other UK or GB countries. Scotland has different user requirements for ethnic group data and a different ethnic group profile than the other UK countries and as a result there are differences in the categories in the Scottish census question and those of England and Wales and Northern Ireland. It will not be possible to directly compare the Scottish data at the tick box level with that of the other UK or GB countries but it can be compared at the category level and a UK and GB count can be achieved for the category level.

## Religion

It is recommended that a question on religion should be asked along with the ethnic group question as religion and ethnicity are closely related concepts. In order to get a better understanding of how these two concepts interact, these two questions should be asked and analysed together. The religion question should be placed before the ethnic group question as this is how it appears in the census.

### Recommended religion question:

What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

- None
- Church of Scotland
- Roman Catholic
- Other Christian
- Muslim
- Buddhist
- Sikh
- Jewish
- Hindu
- Pagan

Another religion, please write in

## Contact us

This document has been provided to help people collect information on ethnic groups in Scotland and covers a range of issues. We welcome any comments you have on this guidance note, especially any relating to the practical application of the guidance. It will be revised and updated when necessary.

[social-justice-analysis@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:social-justice-analysis@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

## References

ONS, 2003, *Ethnic Group Statistics, A guidance for the collection and classification of ethnicity data*, HMSO.

## Useful links

General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) home page:

<http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/index.html>

Census Results:

<http://www.scrol.gov.uk/scrol/common/home.jsp>

GROS population estimates:

<http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/population/index.html>

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) home page:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/Pages/default.aspx>

Scottish Government's equalities duties including race:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/PublicEqualityDuties>

Government Equalities Office:

<http://www.equalities.gov.uk/>

Office for National Statistics (ONS) home page:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/default.asp>

Scottish Government High Level Summary of Equality Statistics:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/11/20102424/0>

Equalities Review:

<http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview/publications.html>

ONS Report from the review of equality dates:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/measuring-equality/equality-data-review/review-of-equality-data--final-report.pdf>