

Greater Manchester

GM = EqAL

Equality Alliance

Inclusive Language
Subgroup

'BAME'

Linguistic challenges

- The language we use plays a pivotal role in helping or hindering progress.
- It is important to name inequalities in society, in order to tackle them.
- This includes being able to name those groups or communities who are being disadvantaged or marginalised.
- Much of the language used in describing diversity is derogatory or at least not self-chosen, and hence lacking any political power.
- There are many sensitivities around language. Different people feel differently about the same terms, even when they share a similar background.

Linguistic challenges

- It is nevertheless important to use language which is acceptable to, and which feels owned by and empowering to those it describes.
- Language is transient and evolves – we should not resist change that becomes needed.
- Avoiding catch-all terms is an important first step in ensuring that diversity doesn't become a tick box exercise.
- It is also important in many contexts to have stable, consistent and widely understood categories – especially to facilitate research, public policy making and service provision.
- All stakeholders - from government bodies and local business leaders to established equality, diversity and inclusion groups themselves - need to work together to promote the use of language that reflects reality.

The issue

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)

- Increasingly, it is felt that these homogenising terms do not help in the quest to root out systemic racism.
- The UK Government style guide says not to use BAME or BME when writing about ethnic minorities, partly because they were not well understood in user research.¹
- BAME is often assumed to exclude the UK's White minorities (who can still experience racism and xenophobia), and people with a Mixed ethnic background.
- However, the terms still appear on the gov.uk website and continue to be widely used by the public sector and many voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

The issue

- Whilst being able to identify individual groups of people to assess their needs, experiences and so on can be helpful, placing them all in one category is usually not.
- A catch-all term ignores the fact that the different communities which face racism in the UK all have different lived experiences, barriers, challenges and needs.
- For example, it can give a false indication of progress when it comes to racial equality. According to the Social Mobility Commission, Indians have enjoyed high rates of social mobility within the UK, but this has not been the case for those from Black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities. To call this a success for 'BAME' communities overall, or even 'South Asian' communities, would be dishonest and unhelpful.²

Background

- Use of the term Black and Minority Ethnic arose from a recognition in the 1970s that there were multiple minority groups in the UK which were facing racial discrimination.
- Initially BME was used but was later joined by BAME in recognition of the size of the Asian population in the UK.
- This in itself is an issue, because Asia is a (racially diverse) continent, whereas Black refers back to an abstract (political) notion of 'race'.
- 'Ethnic minority' is also disliked by some, because although the term 'minority' is meant numerically, for some people it suggests 'less than'.
- Obviously it is legitimate to identify communities which are in a numerical minority within a bounded population.
- Nevertheless, depending on the context or framing, many 'minorities' are not minorities at all.

What's the alternative?

- GM=EqAl encourages the power of communities and their organisations to push for new and better language.
- Communities experiencing racial inequalities should be referred to by their own chosen categorisations, agreed in consultation with the groups concerned.
- For example, Black people face distinct issues, and it is fine to acknowledge this and, for example, to host events specifically for Black people.
- When it comes to public policy, we also understand the importance of consistent groupings and language, and for these to be widely understood.
- In such cases, Census categories such as Black African, South Asian etc. can be used – see the Government Style Guide and UK #BAMEOver Statement for guidance.^{1,3}

GM=EqAl preferred terms

- After discussion and a review of other writing on the issue, the Inclusive Language Subgroup has recommended that GM=EqAl and partners undertake to:
 1. Describe people and groups according to their preferred terms, whether they refer to nationality, ethnicity, culture or race.
 2. Where an umbrella term is needed, follow Comic Relief and others in using: **people experiencing racial inequalities**, or **communities experiencing racial inequalities**⁴
 3. Avoid acronyms as much as possible. However, in writing when space is limited, the above can be abbreviated as **PERI** or **CERI**.
 4. Recognise that occasionally other formulations are needed, for example when White groups (such as Western Europeans) are included under the umbrella, or when the group concerned prefers a neutral term, one that does not reference inequality.

References

1. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide>
2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/798404/SMC_State_of_the_Nation_Report_2018-19.pdf
3. <https://incarts.uk/%23bameover-the-statement>
4. <https://www.comicrelief.com/funding/funding-opportunities/the-global-majority-fund>

