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A glossary for the first World Congress on Migration, Ethnicity, Race and Health

Introduction

A universally agreed glossary for terms used in the field of migration, ethnicity, race and health is not available and some words, especially from older sources, are now widely considered inappropriate or derogatory. The Executive Committee of the Congress judged that providing its own glossary could promote dialogue amongst participants and be of use to a wider readership. Sources consulted for the definitions are many, including the International Organisation for Migration's terms and others referenced here.^{1–6} The glossary is not comprehensive, but the principles it illustrates can be applied across countries and populations (e.g. the principles underlying the definitions of labels such as Indian and Hispanic could readily be applied to other populations such as Turkish). It is hoped it will be helpful in promoting shared understanding and stimulating constructive discussion.

Identification as a member of an ethnic or racial group should naturally be a matter for the individual, but category labels are used and assigned for many reasons, including legal ones. When words are used as labels for an ethnic or racial group, we recommend they are capitalised, such as White or Black, a common practice in census reports.

- **Aborigine/Aboriginal:** In general, it refers to the original inhabitants of a land (see First Nation, Native and Indigenous) but is most commonly associated with the original inhabitants of Australia and unless qualified would be likely be interpreted as such. The term Aboriginal is seen as less pejorative and preferred in Australia.
- **Acculturation:** This usually refers to the process by which one group adopts the values and customs of the other—but it can be a two-way process affecting both dominant/majority and minority groups.
- **African:** A person with ancestral origins in Africa, usually excluding those of other ancestry who are born or live in that continent, e.g. Europeans and South Asians. This is the currently preferred prefix for more specific categories, such as African-American. In practice, people of countries to the north of the Sahara are not so categorised (Algeria, Morocco, etc). (See also **Black**)
- **African-Caribbean/Afro-Caribbean:** A person of African ancestral origins whose family settled (possibly following slavery) in the Caribbean and who self-identifies or is identified as such. African-Caribbean is preferred.
- **Alien:** A foreigner from another place, usually another country. This term is not much used in our field but is used in official texts and rules on immigration. **We do not recommend it** except when referring to such official texts.
- **Asian Indian:** A term currently used synonymously with **South Asian** but one that major South Asian populations such as Pakistani and Bangladeshi may not identify with. It is used in the USA to distinguish people with ancestors in India from Native Americans, also known as American Indians, and Asians of Chinese/South East Asian origin.
- **Asian:** Strictly, this label applies to anyone originating from the Asian continent. In practice, it is often used in the United Kingdom to mean people with ancestry in the Indian subcontinent. In the United States, it has a broader meaning, mostly being used to denote people of Far Eastern origins, e.g. Chinese, Japanese and Filipino. **More specific terms should be used whenever possible.**
- **Assimilation:** Adaptation of one ethnic or social group—usually a minority—to the customs, language and values of another. Acculturation is a similar but distinct concept.
- **Assisted voluntary return:** Administrative, logistical, financial and reintegration support to rejected asylum seekers, victims of trafficking in human beings, stranded migrants, nationals and other migrants unable or unwilling to remain in the host country who volunteer to return to their countries of origin.
- **Asylum seeker:** A person seeking asylum, i.e. leave to stay in a foreign country on the grounds of fear of persecution or actual persecution/serious harm in their country of origin. Often erroneously used as a synonym for refugee but having a different legal status in most cases.
- **Black:** A person with ancestral origins in Africa who self-identifies or is identified as Black, African or African/Afro-Caribbean. Black is sometimes used to signify all non-White minority populations and in this usage serves political purposes.
- **BAME/BME:** An acronym standing for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or Black and Minority Ethnic used as a

shorthand for groups excluded or disadvantaged by racism and xenophobia.

- **Caucasian:** Blumenbach's eighteenth-century term for the White race of mankind. *We do not recommend the use of such historical race terms.*
- **Chinese:** A person with ancestral origins in China, who self-identifies or is identified as Chinese.
- **Circular migration:** The fluid movement of people between countries, including temporary or long-term movement, if voluntary.
- **Colour/Color:** The use of the term 'people/person/woman' of colour is gaining traction as a self-identification term, usually personal. As a general rule, it should not be applied to other individuals.
- **Country of origin:** The country that is a source of a migrant or migratory flows (regular or irregular).
- **Creole:** Usually, a person of mixed European and African ancestry living or originating from the Caribbean and parts of Central and South America. It is also used for languages of similar origin.
- **Discrimination:** A failure to treat all persons equally for no objective reason or failure to treat them differently when necessary to avoid injustice (see 'indirect racism'). Discrimination is prohibited under international law in respect of 'race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status' (Art. 2, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*).
- **Emigration:** The act of departing from one country with a view to settling in another.
- **Ethnic minority group (or Minority ethnic group):** This phrase is used to refer to populations other than the dominant majority of a country. The word minority not only refers to numerical proportions but also indicates relative power positions in society.
- **Ethnicity/ethnic group:** The social group a person belongs to and either identifies with or is identified with by others, as a result of a mix of cultural and other factors including language, diet, religion, ancestry and physical features traditionally associated with *race*. All people have an ethnicity—not only minorities.
- **Ethnocentrism:** The tendency to perceive and interpret the world from the standpoint of one's own culture or group.
- **Equity:** The absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically or geographically.
- **European:** An inhabitant of Europe or one with ancestral origins in Europe. Commonly, this is used as a synonym for White or as qualifying the term White, e.g. European White (see below).
- **Facilitated migration:** Fostering or encouraging regular migration by making travel easier and more convenient. This may take the form of a streamlined visa application process or efficient and well-staffed passenger inspection procedures.
- **Forced migration:** A migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes (e.g. movements of refugees and internally displaced persons, people displaced by natural or environmental disasters, chemical or nuclear disasters, famine or development projects, slavery or trafficking).
- **First Nation(s):** A term gaining in use in Australia and North America (especially Canada) to refer to the indigenous populations whose ancestors predated European contact and settlement.
- **Foreign/foreigner:** From another place and usually another country—sometimes used pejoratively.
- **Freedom of movement:** A human right comprising three basic elements: freedom of movement within the territory of a country, the right to leave or enter a country and the right to return to his or her own country.
- **General population:** Everyone in the population being studied but sometimes used to indicate the population other than ethnic or social minorities.
- **Gypsy:** See Roma (sometimes used pejoratively).
- **Hindu:** Strictly, anyone who practises the religion of Hinduism. This term (or **Hindustani**) is sometimes used to describe the ethnic group of people of Indian subcontinental ancestry living in Caribbean region nations including Suriname and Guyana.
- **Hispanic:** A person of Latin American descent (with some degree of Spanish or Portuguese ancestral origins), who self-identifies or is identified as Hispanic, irrespective of other racial or ethnic considerations. In the US, it is often used interchangeably with Latino and is considered an indicator of ethnic origin. *More specific terms should be used whenever possible.*
- **Illegal migrant:** See Irregular Migrant. *Only an action can be illegal, not the person who commits it.*
- **Immigrant** See **Migrant:** The term is sometimes used pejoratively.
- **Indian:** A person with ancestry in the Indian subcontinent who identifies or is identified as Indian (see **South Asian**). *Similar rules define other 'national' labels used for self-identification.*
- **Indo-Caribbean:** A person of South Asian ancestral origins whose family settled (possibly following indentured labour) in the Caribbean and who self-identifies or is identified as such.
- **Indigenous:** A person who belongs to a place in the sense of ancestral origins (see **Aboriginal** or **Native**). It is sometimes inappropriately used to identify the majority population.
- **Indirect/Institutional racism:** See **Racism**.
- **Internally Displaced Person:** A person who has been obliged to leave his or her home or place of habitual residence, in particular to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters and who has not crossed a recognised international border.
- **Intersectionality:** The recognition that people have multiple identities (gender, sexual orientation, disability/impairment, faith, etc) as well as 'ethnicity/race'—and that these may create multiple levels of disadvantage or discrimination, while rendering the causes of discrimination hard to define.
- **Inuit:** One of the principal categories of First Nation(s) in Canada, referring to people of the northern region (formerly called Eskimo/Esquimaux).

- **Irish:** A person with ancestry in Ireland who self-identifies as Irish or is identified by others as Irish.
- **Irregular migrant:** A person who, (for example) owing to unauthorised entry, breach of a condition of entry, failure to gain asylum or the expiry of his or her visa, lacks legal authorisation to reside in the country where they are living. Synonyms in use include clandestine/undocumented migrant or migrant in an irregular situation (see: Illegal migrant, above).
- **Labour migration:** Movement of persons from one country to another or within their country of residence for employment. Some countries take an active role regulating labour out-migration and seeking opportunities for their nationals abroad.
- **Majority population:** The population, excluding ethnic minority groups. When used in race/ethnicity studies this phrase is usually used as a synonym for White or European.
- **Māori:** A person who identifies or is identified as a member of the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, with Polynesian ancestry.
- **Meti(s):** A distinct group recognised in Canada as descendants of both First Nation and European settler heritage.
- **Migrant:** While there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, most experts agree that an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with a duration between 3 and 12 months and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of 1 year or more. The term is sometimes wrongly applied to the offspring of migrants born in the country of settlement. An error of the opposite kind is made when people born abroad, but with ancestry in the country of settlement, are not referred to as migrants (e.g. ‘Aussiedler’ in Germany, descendants of colonists or possibly expelled from other countries).
- **Migration:** The movement of people either across an international border or within a country, including refugees, displaced persons, economic migrants and persons moving for other purposes, including family reunification.
- **Migration management:** A planned approach to the development of policy, legislative and administrative responses to key migration issues.
- **Minority ethnic group:** See **Ethnic minority group**.
- **Mixed race or ethnic group:** People identifying themselves as offspring of parents (or more distant ancestors) of different ethnic or racial groups.
- **Native:** Usually used to refer to individuals or populations born or with family origins in the country or place referred to (see **Indigenous**). In the recent past, this was a pejorative term.
- **Native American:** A person who belongs to or is perceived to belong to one of a large number of indigenous peoples of North America. Also known as American Indian or Indigenous American. In Alaska, Alaskan Natives include Aleut, Tlingit, Yupik and some Northern Athabaskan cultures
- **Naturalisation:** Granting nationality/citizenship to a non-national.
- **Negro:** A person of Black African ancestry. Traditionally, one of the major classes of race (meaning Black) and in use in the US Census forms before 2013. It is pejorative except when used by Black Africans themselves or in historical, census-related or scientific contexts. **We do not recommend the use of such historical race terms.**
- **Non-Asian/Non-Chinese/Non-White, etc.:** Such terms are rarely defined but self-evidently imply those not belonging to the group under study. This degree of non-specificity is not usually recommended except where there is no alternative.
- **Orderly migration:** The movement of a person from his or her usual place of residence to a new place of residence, in keeping with the laws and regulations governing exit of the country of origin and travel, transit and entry into the destination or host country.
- **Oriental:** A native or inhabitant of the Orient (East). **The term is too general to be useful.**
- **Pacific Islander:** Used in the US Census to describe diverse peoples of Polynesian or Melanesian ancestry (the principal island groups of the Pacific). May be self-described as **Pasifiki**.
- **POC:** Person of Colour—see **Colour** above.
- **Race:** By historical and common usage the group a person belongs to as a result of a mix of physical features such as skin colour and hair texture, which reflect ancestry and geographical origins, historically as identified by others or, increasingly, as self-identified. The importance of social factors in the creation and perpetuation of racial categories has led to the concept broadening to include a common social and political heritage, making its usage similar to ethnicity. **We recommend that when using the term ‘race’ it is applied with this latter meaning.** Race and ethnicity are increasingly used as synonyms causing some confusion and leading to the hybrid terms race/ethnicity. The concept of race is vital to understanding racism, whether historical or contemporary, and in referring to legislation and policy to reverse the effects of racism.
- **Racial prejudice:** Negative beliefs, perceptions or attitudes towards one or more ethnic or racial groups, but also extended by law and usage to religious, cultural and national groups.
- **Racialisation:** The process by which societies become organised by racial (or ethnic or migrant) group because of the use of racial group concepts and classifications.
- **Racism (individual, institutional, direct and indirect) (also racial discrimination):** Belief that some races are superior to others, used to devise and justify individual and collective actions which create and sustain inequality among racial/ethnic groups. Racism is against international law. Individual racism is usually manifested in decisions and behaviours that disadvantage individuals or small groups. **Internalised racism** occurs when victims of racism internalise the race-based prejudicial attitudes towards themselves and their racial or ethnic group, resulting in a loss of self-esteem and potentially in prejudicial treatment of members of their own racial or ethnic group. **Structural or institutional racism** is race-based unfair treatment built into policies, laws and practices. It is often rooted in intentional discrimination that occurred historically but exerts its effects even when no individual currently intends to discriminate. Racial residential segregation is an example, whereby people of particular ethnic minority

groups are coerced into less desirable residential areas. **Indirect racism** occurs when an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of a particular racial or ethnic origin at a disadvantage.

- **Refugee:** A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinions, is living outside the country of his or her nationality. In the European Union, this term is used of a person who has specifically sought and received legal asylum.
- **Repatriation:** The right in international law of a refugee, prisoner of war or a civil detainee to return to his or her country of nationality. Increasingly however it is being used in relation to the return (deportation) of irregular migrants and those who have not been granted asylum.
- **Roma/Romany:** This is the preferred term for a minority ethnic group also known as Gypsy/Gypsies, found across Europe.
- **South Asian:** A person with ancestry in the countries of the Indian subcontinent, including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and sometimes other surrounding countries. This label is typically used by scholars: individuals rarely identify with it. (See also **Indian**, **Asian Indian**, **Asian**, **Pakistani**, **Bangladeshi**.)
- **Stateless person:** A person who is not considered as a national by any country and hence lacks those rights attributable to national diplomatic protection of a country, inherent right of sojourn in the country of residence and right of return in case he or she travels.
- **Structural racism:** See **Racism**.
- **Superdiversity:** A phrase used to indicate the increasing numbers of ways in which people may be categorised, usually by reference to their state/stage or 'cohort' of migration or nationality (cf **Intersectionality**).
- **Trafficking/Trafficked person:** Moving someone/a person moved, often against her or his will or full knowledge and consent, for enforced labour, domestic servitude, prostitution and other such reasons.
- **Traveller:** A member of a number of traditional groups of people who live a nomadic lifestyle, such as Irish Travellers. Gypsies are also sometimes known as Gypsy Travellers (See **Roma**).
- **Undocumented migrant:** See **Irregular Migrant**.
- **Western:** A person or population with ancestry in a region comprised effectively of Europeanised countries. **This term is not recommended** especially as some authors include industrialised countries such as Japan as Western.
- **White:** The term usually used to describe people with European ancestral origins who identify or are identified as White. The term is widely acceptable to the populations so described. It has served to distinguish these groups from those groups with skin of other colours (black, yellow, etc.) and hence derives from the concept of race but is used increasingly as an indicator of ethnicity. There are sub-groups of White populations, who suffer from deprivation or exclusion (i.e. are minority ethnic). **A breakdown of the category is recommended**, e.g. White Polish, White Irish, etc.
- **Xenophobia:** Negative attitudes, prejudices and behaviours towards outsiders or foreigners. There is a close link between racism and xenophobia, two terms that can be hard to differentiate from each other.

Author statement

Competing interest

None declared.

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FURTHER READING

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Other useful websites:

<http://www.who.int/healthsystems/topics/>
<https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>
<https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions>

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