

NEARC LANGUAGE STUDY • ROUND 3 FINDINGS

ANTI-RACISM LANGUAGE: A PRACTITIONER GUIDE.

This guide draws on a three-round Delphi study carried out with NEARC's panel of expert practitioners working across anti-racism in the North East. It sets out the terminology the panel recommends, explains the caveats that come with it, and records the one statement on which the panel could not agree.

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01 NEVER CALL A PERSON "ILLEGAL".

"Illegal migrant" and "illegal asylum seeker" are out. A human being cannot be illegal – only actions can. Speak of *documented* / *undocumented* status, or of *people seeking asylum*.

02 LET PEOPLE DEFINE THEMSELVES.

Ask, where you can, how someone wants to be described – and follow that lead. Don't apply labels to communities; let communities apply them.

03 EXPLAIN THE WORDS YOU USE.

Don't assume your audience shares your meaning of *minoritised*, *integration*, or *far right*. Define your terms. Terminology is contested and not fixed.

04 LOOK BEYOND THE FAR RIGHT.

Focusing only on far-right extremism risks ignoring the more widespread problem: casual, everyday, and institutional racism – often normalised in mainstream discourse.

05 INTEGRATION IS A TWO-WAY STREET.

If you use the word at all, frame it as mutual adaptation – not as an expectation that racialised communities give up their culture. Prefer *inclusion*, *belonging*, or *social cohesion*.

06 CONTEXT DECIDES.

No single term is right or wrong everywhere. Audience, purpose, and who has been consulted all matter – and many terms have been politicised against the communities they describe.

FIVE-POINT CHECK BEFORE PUBLISHING.



01 • SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Have I asked, where possible, how the person or community describes themselves – and followed that?



02 • SPECIFICITY

Have I named the specific community rather than reaching for an umbrella term?



03 • EXPLANATION

Have I explained any specialist term ('minoritised', 'racialised', 'global majority') the first time it appears?



04 • HUMANITY

Have I checked that no person is being labelled 'illegal', and used person-first phrasing where it adds dignity?



05 • CONTEXT

Have I thought about who is reading or listening – and adjusted the term to fit the room?

THE TERMS, IN DETAIL.

VERDICT KEY ■ USE ■ USE WITH CARE ■ NEVER USE ■ OPEN QUESTION

Each entry carries the panel's verdict and agreement, the *verbatim statement* the panel voted on, the practitioner guidance, and the documented minority view. Continued overleaf.

ASYLUM SEEKER

USE WITH CARE

The term 'asylum seeker' is a neutral legal term that should continue to be used in anti-racism work, but it should be complemented with person-first alternatives such as 'person seeking asylum' or 'person seeking sanctuary' when referring to individuals.

- A factually accurate legal term that can continue to be used – but be aware it has been negatively politicised and is no longer perceived as neutral by many communities.
- Where possible, complement with person-first alternatives – 'person seeking asylum', 'person seeking sanctuary' – particularly for individuals rather than legal processes.
- Which term to use should, where possible, be guided by the preferences of the people being described.

MINORITY VIEW One panellist wanted person-first used universally; another who agreed rejected the word "neutral," since political narrative has made the term dehumanising.

BROWN

USE WITH CARE

The term 'Brown' may be used in anti-racism work when individuals self-identify with it, but it should not be used as a formal institutional label because it is vague, not universally accepted, and can obscure the specific identities and experiences of South Asian, Middle Eastern, Arab, and other communities.

- **Do not use** 'Brown' as a formal or institutional label. Use specific terms: *South Asian*, *Arab*, *Middle Eastern*, or specific nationalities/heritages.
- If an individual or community self-identifies as 'Brown', respect that choice – it has meaning for some as an informal identity marker.
- Colour-based terminology can obscure important differences between communities who experience distinct forms of discrimination.

MINORITY VIEW Two panellists disagreed; one argued colour-based classification always leads to confusion and descent-based terminology is preferable.

"ILLEGAL" MIGRANT / ASYLUM SEEKER

NEVER USE

Anti-racism work should never use the term 'illegal migrant' or 'illegal immigrant'. The distinction between documented and undocumented status can be made without labelling a human being as 'illegal'.

The word 'illegal' should never be used to describe a person seeking asylum. A human being cannot be 'illegal' – only actions can be described as illegal or unlawful.

- Make the distinction between **documented** and **undocumented** status instead – without labelling a human being as 'illegal'.

NOTE The single strongest result in the study – perfect unanimity at the highest level (15 strongly agree on 'illegal migrant').

BLACK

USE

The term 'Black' is most commonly used to refer to people of African and Caribbean heritage. However, it also has a history as a broader political identity term. Anti-racism practitioners should be aware of both uses, and should follow the self-identification preferences of the individuals and communities they are working with.

- Always **capitalise** 'Black' when referring to racial and cultural identity.
- Follow the self-identification preferences of the individuals and communities being engaged.
- A single term carrying two distinct meanings can cause confusion – where possible, clarify the specific or political sense.
- Communities with darker skin tones not of African or Caribbean descent (e.g. some South Asian) may also experience **colourism**.

MINORITY VIEW One panellist warned the dual meaning causes confusion; some communities once described as 'Black' in the political sense have since moved away from that usage.

FAR RIGHT

USE

Classified Tier 1 (strong consensus) and adopted as-is into the coalition's guidance; the statement addressed the definition and use of 'far right' in anti-racism work.

- Appropriate to describe organised extremist politics in anti-racism work.
- Don't make it the only frame: pair with attention to everyday and institutional racism (Principle 04).

SEE ALSO Complements *Everyday racism* (B13), which cautions against an exclusive focus on far-right extremism.

THE TERMS – CONTINUED.

INTEGRATION

PREFER ALTERNATIVES

Terms such as 'inclusion', 'belonging', or 'social cohesion' are more appropriate than 'integration' in anti-racism work, because they place the responsibility for change on society as a whole rather than on individuals from racialised communities.

- Preferred terminology is 'inclusion', 'belonging', or 'social cohesion' rather than 'integration'.
- If 'integration' is used (e.g. policy frameworks), always define it as a two-way process of mutual adaptation, not one-way assimilation (B10).
- Reclaiming 'integration' by actively redefining it is legitimate – provided the definition is made explicit.

MINORITY VIEW One panellist argued 'integration' is itself a powerful concept when properly understood, and that replacing it risks losing that power.

MINORITISED

USE WITH CARE

The term 'minoritised' is useful because it highlights how inequality is created by systems and structures, rather than by the characteristics of the people affected. However, it should be used with an explanation of its meaning, as it is not widely understood by the general public.

- Use where its structural emphasis adds value, but **always explain it** – e.g. "communities who have been placed in a position of disadvantage by social and institutional structures."
- In public-facing comms, if the audience won't understand it, prefer 'communities facing racial inequality' or name specific communities.
- The term can be misappropriated (e.g. claims that majority populations are 'minoritised') – contextual explanation helps prevent this.

MINORITY VIEW One panellist disagreed, holding that 'minoritised' is jargon and risks denoting helplessness.

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

USE WHERE IT HELPS

Anti-racism work should use person-first language wherever possible (e.g. 'person seeking asylum' rather than 'asylum seeker', 'people from migrant communities' rather than 'migrants') to centre the humanity of individuals.

- Use particularly where label-based terms may dehumanise or stigmatise – 'person seeking asylum', 'person seeking sanctuary'.
- Established terms (e.g. 'asylum seeker', 'migrant') may still fit when people self-identify with them, or in legal and policy contexts.
- The goal is to centre the humanity of individuals – where a choice exists, prefer the person-first formulation.

MINORITY VIEW Three were neutral (none disagreed); some felt it can read as "less personalised," and queried whether "a migrant" constitutes "a community."

More vocabulary and the cross-cutting approaches, each shown with the verbatim statement the panel agreed and its practitioner guidance.

MIGRANT

USE WITH CARE

The term 'migrant' is factually neutral and appropriate for use in anti-racism work, but practitioners should be aware that it has been racialised in public discourse – typically applied to non-white people moving to the UK, while white people who move internationally are more often called 'expatriates'.

- A factually accurate, appropriate term – but not applied consistently: often reserved for non-white, non-Western populations while others are called 'expatriate'.
- The inconsistency is not solely racial: white EU migrants (e.g. Eastern European communities) are also routinely called 'migrants'.
- Use 'migrant' **consistently** regardless of origin, and avoid 'expatriate' as an alternative implying a different status by nationality or race.

MINORITY VIEW A white panellist working with Eastern European communities noted their community self-identifies as 'migrants', challenging the racial binary.

MIXED RACE / MIXED HERITAGE

USE

The term 'mixed race' is acceptable for general use in anti-racism work, but 'mixed heritage' should be considered as an alternative as it avoids implying that races are biologically separate categories and focuses instead on cultural and ethnic heritage.

- Both are acceptable; 'mixed heritage' is preferred in formal contexts as it foregrounds cultural identity over racial categorisation.
- Always prioritise how the individual describes themselves – 'mixed race', 'mixed heritage', *dual heritage*, *multiracial*, or specific heritages.
- Some find race-based classification itself problematic; where possible, refer to specific cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

MINORITY VIEW One panellist argued 'mixed race' is too close to the historically offensive term 'half caste' and represents another attempt to classify people by colour.

SPECIFICITY OVER UMBRELLA TERMS

USE

Where possible, anti-racism work should use specific terms (e.g. 'Black British', 'South Asian', 'Irish Traveller') rather than broad umbrella terms (e.g. 'BME', 'Brown', 'Traveller'), because umbrella terms can erase the distinct identities and experiences of different communities.

- Use the most specific language the context allows – *Black British*, *South Asian*, *Irish Traveller*, or a nationality.
- Umbrella terms may be necessary (funding applications, data collection, word limits) – accompany them with acknowledgement of the diversity within.
- Even 'specific' terms like 'South Asian' are themselves umbrellas. The goal is not to ban them, but to be as specific as the context allows.

MINORITY VIEW Two strongly disagreed on practicality: naming every community is hard under funding word limits, and the 'specific' terms are themselves umbrellas.

COLLECTIVE TERMS, & THE METHOD.

The collective-terminology question the panel resolved by ranking, the one term left open, and how consensus was measured.

01 · Threshold

CONSENSUS

≥ 75% selecting Agree or Strongly Agree, combined with an interquartile range (IQR) ≤ 1.

02 · Panel

RECRUITMENT

23 expert practitioners took part at Round 1, narrowing to 15 at Round 2 and 14 at Round 3.

03 · Closure

RANK & STABILITY

BME settled by lowest mean rank (options within 0.5 both reported). Items moving ≤ 5 pp between rounds close as stable.

COLLECTIVE TERMINOLOGY · RESOLVED ROUND 3 BY FORCED-RANK

PHASING OUT ~~BME / BAME~~ → NAME COMMUNITIES, OR SAY "RACIALISED"

Which of the following approaches do you most prefer for the coalition's use of collective terminology? Please rank from most preferred (1) to least preferred (4).

RANKED PREFERENCES (N=12)

- 1= Avoid any single collective term; name specific communities
Mean rank 2.08 · jointly 1st
- 2= Replace BME with 'racialised' or 'ethnically minoritised communities'
Mean rank 2.17 · jointly 1st
- 3 Replace BME with 'Global Majority'
Mean rank 2.75 · 3rd
- 4 Continue using BME / 'Black and Minority Ethnic'
Mean rank 3.00 · last · one first-choice vote

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

- Use specific terms as the default; reserve collective terms for where they are genuinely unavoidable.
- Where a collective term is needed, prefer '**racialised communities**' or '**ethnically minoritised communities**', with a brief explanation.
- Phase 'BME' out of coalition materials. Retain 'Black and Minority Ethnic' only where a funder requires it – noting it isn't your preferred term.
- 'Global Majority' is not recommended as the primary collective term (see below).

NO CONSENSUS · STUDY CLOSED (STABLE) GLOBAL MAJORITY

The term 'global majority' may be useful in some anti-racism contexts as it highlights that non-white populations constitute the majority of the world's population. However, it should always be accompanied by an explanation, and practitioners should be aware that it does not capture all forms of racial and ethnic marginalisation (e.g. the experiences of Eastern European or Jewish communities in the UK).

57% agree · mean 3.43 · **IQR 3 – the most dispersed result in the study** · n=14. The split held steady from Round 2 (–2.9 pp), so the panel closed the item without consensus. **The coalition recommends neither for nor against the term**; anyone using it should always explain it.

SUPPORTERS SAY

- A statistically accurate reframing that **centres non-white populations** worldwide.
- Current unfamiliarity can be addressed through education.

OPPONENTS SAY

- **Excludes white minoritised groups** who face discrimination (e.g. Eastern European, Jewish communities).
- Not widely understood; risks division over unity.
- May only resonate with those already in anti-racism.

WHERE IT STANDS

- Use only **with an explanation, every time**.
- It doesn't capture all communities facing UK discrimination.
- To be revisited at the next terminology review.

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