

OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL INTERESTS

WORKING DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

June 2009

For some time, the Office of Multicultural Interests has been aware that terms used in the field of multicultural interests are subject to a range of different definitions, interpretations and understanding amongst groups and individuals. The following list of definitions, have been developed by OMI and have been adapted and drawn from a variety of sources. The definitions are not prescriptive and the list is not definitive. The working definitions are aimed at bringing a level of consistency in the use of terminology and are intended to be updated and amended based on comment by ethnic communities, government agencies and service providers.

Acculturation

The process whereby the attitudes and/or behaviours of people from one culture are modified as a result of contact with a different culture. Acculturation implies a mutual influence in which elements of two cultures mingle and merge.

Ancestry

Describes the ethnic or cultural heritage of a person, that is, the ethnic or cultural groups to which a person's forebears are or were attached. In practice, Ancestry is the ethnic or cultural groups which the person *identifies* as being his or her ancestry.¹

Anglo-Saxon

The collective term commonly used to describe people whose ancestry originates from the country of England in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Anglo-Celtic

The collective term commonly used to describe people whose ancestry originates from England and /or Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Assimilation

The process whereby members of an ethnic group shed their traditions and culture and adopt the customs and attitudes of the mainstream culture. In Australia, assimilation policy was the Government's response to the influx of refugees and immigrants from war-torn Europe from 1945 to the early 1960s. Although this was officially replaced by a policy of 'integration', until the early 1970s, assimilation remained the final goal and reflected the values embedded in the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901 (known as the White Australia Policy).

Asylum seekers

People who have applied for recognition as refugees under the United Nations *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. but whose cases have yet to be determined.

Caucasian

A term based on the now discredited method of racial classification. The term is used by some Australian agencies, for people of fair complexion and usually of European origin. It is also a definition for a “broad division of humankind covering peoples of Europe, Western Asia, South Asia, and parts of North Africa.”ⁱⁱ The Office of Multicultural Interests does not encourage the use of this or similar racial descriptors, such as “mongoloid” or “negroid”.

Celtic

The collective term commonly used to describe people whose ancestry originates from the countries of Ireland Scotland, Wales, the county of Cornwall and the Isle of Man in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Citizenship

Citizenship traditionally signifies legal, political and national identity. It brings with it certain rights and responsibilities. **Active citizenship** refers to individuals working towards the betterment of their community through economic participation, public service, volunteer work and other such efforts. Active citizens may not have formal/legal citizenship status. **Democratic citizenship** reflects sensitivity to different needs, claims and interests within the accepted principles, practices and legal norms of the broader political community.ⁱⁱⁱ

Cross-Cultural Training

A process aimed at developing the awareness, knowledge and skills need to interact appropriately and effectively with culturally diverse customers and co-workers.

Cultural Competence

The ability of systems, organisations, professions and individuals to work effectively in culturally diverse environments and situations.

Cultural Competencies

A set of skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that individuals, professions, organisations and systems use to work effectively in culturally diverse situations The ability of systems, organisations, professions and individuals to work effectively in culturally diverse environments and situations.

Two subsets of cultural competency are:

Cultural awareness: the understanding that there is difference. Also an understanding of the social, economic and political context in which people exist.

Cultural sensitivity: legitimising this difference: a process of self-exploration that enables us to see how our own life experiences impact upon others.^{iv}

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CaLD)

Culturally and linguistically diverse refers to the wide range of cultural groups and individuals that make up the Australian population. It includes groups and individuals who differ according to religion, race, language and ethnicity except those whose ancestry is Anglo-Saxon, Anglo Celtic, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. For ease, CaLD is commonly used as an abbreviation for culturally and linguistically diverse.

Cultural Diversity

A description of a society composed of people from many cultural and linguistic groups. This term is frequently used to mean multiethnic, multifaith or multilingual in the Australian context.

Cultural Pluralism

A term used to describe a society in which ethnic groups are encouraged to maintain and promote their culture, language and heritage within society. The WA Charter of Multiculturalism moves away from this form of multiculturalism due to its potential to create, and further encourage, divisions within society based on factors such as ethnicity, language and religion, and to further marginalise members of the most vulnerable communities. It encourages a focus on celebratory multiculturalism rather than on addressing the barriers that prevent people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds from participating equitably in society.

Culture

Culture comprises four elements – values, norms, institutions and artifacts – that are passed on from one generation to another. Cultures are dynamic and constantly evolving.

Democratic Pluralism

A term used to describe a society in which the rights of all groups to participate as full and equal members of society are safeguarded and protected within a framework of citizenship. It is different from cultural pluralism, which focuses only on cultural difference, because it recognises the range of differences that exist between individuals and within communities, such as age, physical and intellectual ability, gender, and socio-economic background.

Discrimination

Discrimination occurs when a person, or a group of people, are treated less favourably than another person or group because of age; race; colour; national or ethnic origin; sex; pregnancy or marital status; disability; religion; sexual orientation; or some other central characteristic.

Discrimination happens when a person is denied the opportunity to participate freely and fully in normal day-to-day activities. It might include harassment or victimisation in the workplace; being unable to gain physical access to a building or facility; being denied goods and services; difficulty in obtaining appropriate accommodation and housing; or not being able to join a trade union.

Discrimination is characterised into two forms:

- 1) Direct (overt) discrimination occurs when one person or group of people receive less favourable treatment than another person or group in the same position would have received on the grounds of their age, race, colour, national or ethnic origin; sex, pregnancy or marital status; disability; religion; sexual orientation; or some other central characteristic.
- 2) Indirect (covert) discrimination indirect (covert) includes practices and policies that appear to be 'neutral' or 'fair' because they treat everyone in the same way but adversely affect a higher proportion of people of a group of people characterised by age, race, colour, national or ethnic origin; sex; pregnancy or marital status; disability; religion; sexual orientation; or some other central characteristic. It can occur even when there is no intention to discriminate.

Equality

Formal Equality – prescribes equal treatment of all people regardless of circumstances, on the understanding that all have the same rights and entitlements. Its underlying logic is that by extending equal rights to all, inequality has been eliminated. Sameness of treatment is equated with fairness of treatment. Formal Equality does not take into account the accumulated disadvantage of generations of discrimination or the disadvantage faced by groups by a system that fails to recognise different needs.

Substantive Equality – involves achieving equitable outcomes as well as equal opportunity. It takes into account the effects of past discrimination. It recognises that rights, entitlements, opportunities and access are not equally distributed throughout society. Substantive Equality recognises that equal or the same application of rules to unequal groups can have unequal results.

Where service delivery agencies cater to the dominant, majority group, then people who are different may miss out on essential services. Hence, it is necessary to treat people differently because people have different needs.^v

Equity

Equity refers to the quality of being fair and just. **Social Equity** refers to policies, programs and services that meet the needs of all individuals and groups and enable all to participate as full and equal members in all aspects of society.

Ethnic

An adjective used to describe a population of human beings whose members identify with each other, usually on the basis of a presumed common ancestry; recognition by others as a distinct group; or by common cultural, linguistic, religious or territorial traits.

Ethnicity

Membership of a particular cultural group. It is defined by shared cultural practices including but not limited to holidays, food, language and customs. People can share the same nationality but have different ethnic groups, while people who share an ethnic identity can be of different nationalities.

Ethnic Group/Community

A group/community established based on ethnicity (see above).

Ethnocentrism

The tendency to judge all other cultures by the norms and standards of one's own culture,^{vi} especially with regard to language, behaviour, customs and religions, as a way of making sense of the world.

First Generation Australian

A first generation of a family to live in Australia.

Immigrant

A person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another.

In Australia the following terms are used to differentiate between immigrants who arrive in Australia through two immigration programs.

- The term “migrants” is used when referring to people who enter through Australia’s Migration Programs which are the Skilled Stream and the Family Stream.
- The term “refugees” is used when referring to people who enter through Australia’s Humanitarian Program.

Integration

Generally describes the process of developing a society that respects, values and draws on the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the population. Unlike the process of assimilation, integration does not involve the shedding of traditions and cultures by ethnic groups and adopting the customs and attitudes of the mainstream. Rather it involves the development of a dynamic culture that draws on the diversity of the traditions of the variety of ethnic groups.

Mainstream

Refers to the prevalent attitudes, values, and practices of the majority group in a society.

Minority Communities

Everyone belongs to an “ethnic group” of one sort or another. However, non-dominant ethnic groups are often referred to as “minorities”. Minority groups can include ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

Multiculturalism

A term used to describe the recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity. In Western Australia, it means all Western Australians are entitled to exercise their rights and participate fully in society, regardless of their different linguistic, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The principles of Multiculturalism, as stated in the “Western Australian Charter of Multiculturalism” (2004), are:

- Civic Values – the equality of respect, individual freedom and dignity for all members of society subject to the acceptance of the rule of law, social, political and legal institutions and constitutional structures.
- Fairness – the pursuit of public policies free of prejudice, discrimination and exclusion on the basis of characteristics such as origins, perceived ‘race’, culture, religion, ethnicity and nationality.
- Equality – Equality of opportunity for all members of society to achieve their full potential in a free and democratic society where every individual is equal before, and under, the law.
- Participation – the full and equitable participation in society of individuals and communities, irrespective of origins, culture, religion, ethnicity and nationality.^{vii}

New and emerging communities

A term used to describe ethnic communities that are small in number, have recently settled in Australia and often lack established family networks, support systems, community structures and resources, relative to more established communities.

Prejudice

Unfounded opinions or attitudes relating to an individual or group that represents them unfavourably or negatively. Prejudice may be directed at a person the basis of race, skin colour, language, religion or culture.

Race

The term 'race' is an artificial construct used to classify people on the basis of supposed physical and cultural similarities deriving from their ancestry. Although there is no scientific evidence to support the existence of human races, people tend to assume that there are racial categories.

Under the Western Australian *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* race includes colour, descent, ethnic or national origin or nationality and may comprise two or more distinct races.

Racism

A belief or ideology that creates artificial social divisions on the basis of characteristics or abilities specific to a particular "race" which distinguishes it as being either superior or inferior to another "race" or "races".

Refugee

Any person who has left their own country of nationality due to an established fear of being persecuted on the basis of ethnicity, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable to, or is unwilling to return to it.^{viii}

Second Generation Australian

A person born in Australia who has at least one parent born overseas.

Social Capital

Generally refers to the quality of social interactions, trust and networks between individuals, families, communities and governments for mutual benefit. The core idea of social capital is that social networks have value.

Social Cohesion

A process that involves a complex set of social relations. It is constructed on the foundations of institutional, political and social structures that ensure the wellbeing of all citizens. Social Cohesion takes in four aspects of welfare: equity in access to rights, the dignity and recognition of each person, autonomy and personal fulfilment, and the possibility of participating as a full member of society.

Social Exclusion

Relates to the sense of isolation and estrangement that certain people experience within a society, and the discriminatory practices of individuals and institutions that limit, or prevent, the exercising of rights, such as democratic participation, and access to opportunities and resources such as housing, employment and healthcare. The sense of exclusion may be based on characteristics such as culture, ethnicity, nationality, religion, perceived 'race', sexuality and physical or intellectual ability.

Social Inclusion

Suggests that members of society, irrespective of age, ethnicity, social background etc, have a sense of belonging to and a stake in the social, economic, political and cultural systems of their society.^{ix}

Tolerance

Willingness to recognise and respect the beliefs or practices of others. The Office of Multicultural Interests avoids the use of the word in the context of multiculturalism due to its association with the act of enduring something that is troublesome or of which one does not approve.

Youth/Young People

In Australia, the terms "youth" and "young people" are used interchangeably and refer to people between the ages of 12 and 25 (inclusive).

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