
Professor Sir Ian Diamond | National StatisticianThangam Debbonaire MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

12 June 2020

Dear Ms Debbonaire,

As National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, I am replying to your Parliamentary Question asking what the criteria is for adding an ethnicity to the option in the national census (**57248**).

The tick-box options used in the ethnic group question, and other questions, have been informed by the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) extensive programme of research, consultation and engagement over 3 years prior to making its recommendations, which were set out in the Government's December 2018 White Paper '*Help Shape our Future: The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales*'¹.

The ONS received 55 requests for tick-boxes under the ethnic group question alone. It is no reflection of the ONS' recognition of, or respect for, any ethnic group, religion, or national identity that they do not have a specific tick-box response option on the census. It is simply not possible to meet all requests for specific response options. The ONS conducted a prioritisation evaluation against published criteria to consider the strength of the case for inclusion for the requests received.

As set out in greater detail in an ONS report published in June 2019², these criteria were:

- Strength of user need for information on the ethnic group
- Lack of alternative sources of information
- Data quality of information collected
- Comparability with 2011 data
- Acceptability, clarity and quality

This evaluation process led to a recommendation to add a 'Roma' ethnic group tick-box³.

You may be aware that the Census (England) Regulations 2020⁴ were laid in Parliament on 2 June 2020; the Regulations for Wales were laid before the Senedd on 1 June. These Regulations prescribe the census questions and contain facsimiles of the paper questionnaires, in line with ONS' recommendations.

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2021-census-of-population-and-housing-in-england-and-wales>

²<https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/census/censustransformationprogramme/questiondevelopment/ethnicgroupnationalidentityreligionandlanguage/theethnicgroupprioritisationtool2021censusinenglandandwales.pdf>

³See the December 2018 Topic Report section on Ethnic Group:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/questiondevelopment/2021censustopicresearchupdatedecember2018#ethnic-group>

⁴<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/560/contents/made>

In the 2021 Census, everyone will have the opportunity to identify as they wish in the ethnic group question. This will be by using tick-box response options, write-in options and a new online search-as-you-type facility.

The ONS will work with local groups and organisations to ensure that anyone who wishes to identify as a particular ethnic group knows that they can use these options to do so. We would welcome engagement with, and support from, parliamentarians and representative organisations in this work and to promote participation in the Census.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Diamond', written in a cursive style.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond