



Ministry for  
**Ethnic  
Communities**  
Te Tari Mātāwaka



# Briefing to the Minister for Ethnic Communities

January 2025



**Te Kāwanatanga  
o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government



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# Welcome

Minister, congratulations on your appointment, and welcome to your role as Minister for Ethnic Communities.

Unlocking the full potential of Ethnic Communities creates opportunities and improves the lives of all New Zealanders. In your role, you can advocate for and influence improvements in New Zealand's social, cultural and economic systems.

The fastest-growing population group in New Zealand, Ethnic Communities are skilled and well-educated. They already contribute significantly to New Zealand and have told us they want to contribute more. By leveraging the diverse talents and perspectives of Ethnic Communities, New Zealand can enhance its global image as a welcoming and vibrant nation, attracting international partnerships, investment and tourism.

During national emergencies such as the Covid 19 pandemic and weather-related events, we learnt the value of a coordinated response from Ethnic Community organisations in supporting our country to respond and recover from crisis.

However, challenges remain, with Ethnic Communities still facing racism and discrimination, persistent pay gaps, employment barriers such as lack of recognition of foreign qualifications, issues with retail crime, barriers to accessing healthcare services, concerns about mental health and the impact of foreign interference. Furthermore, a range of issues such as overseas conflicts playing out domestically or religious differences can erode race relations and the unity within communities that New Zealand is known for.

The Ministry for Ethnic Communities is a relatively young, small and agile agency. We are the Government's Chief Advisor on Ethnic Communities and their inclusion in New Zealand society. We take a strategic approach to creating an inclusive nation that draws on the benefits of ethnic diversity, acting as trusted brokers to government agencies and Ethnic Communities to help address challenges and unlock opportunities. The



Ministry works with a broad range of stakeholders across the public sector, not-for-profit, private sector and communities to achieve tangible results.

This briefing provides you with an overview of the Ethnic Communities portfolio, your roles and responsibilities, and the Ministry's role, functions and work programme.

I look forward to working with you and to briefing you in more detail on the opportunities and challenges in the portfolio.

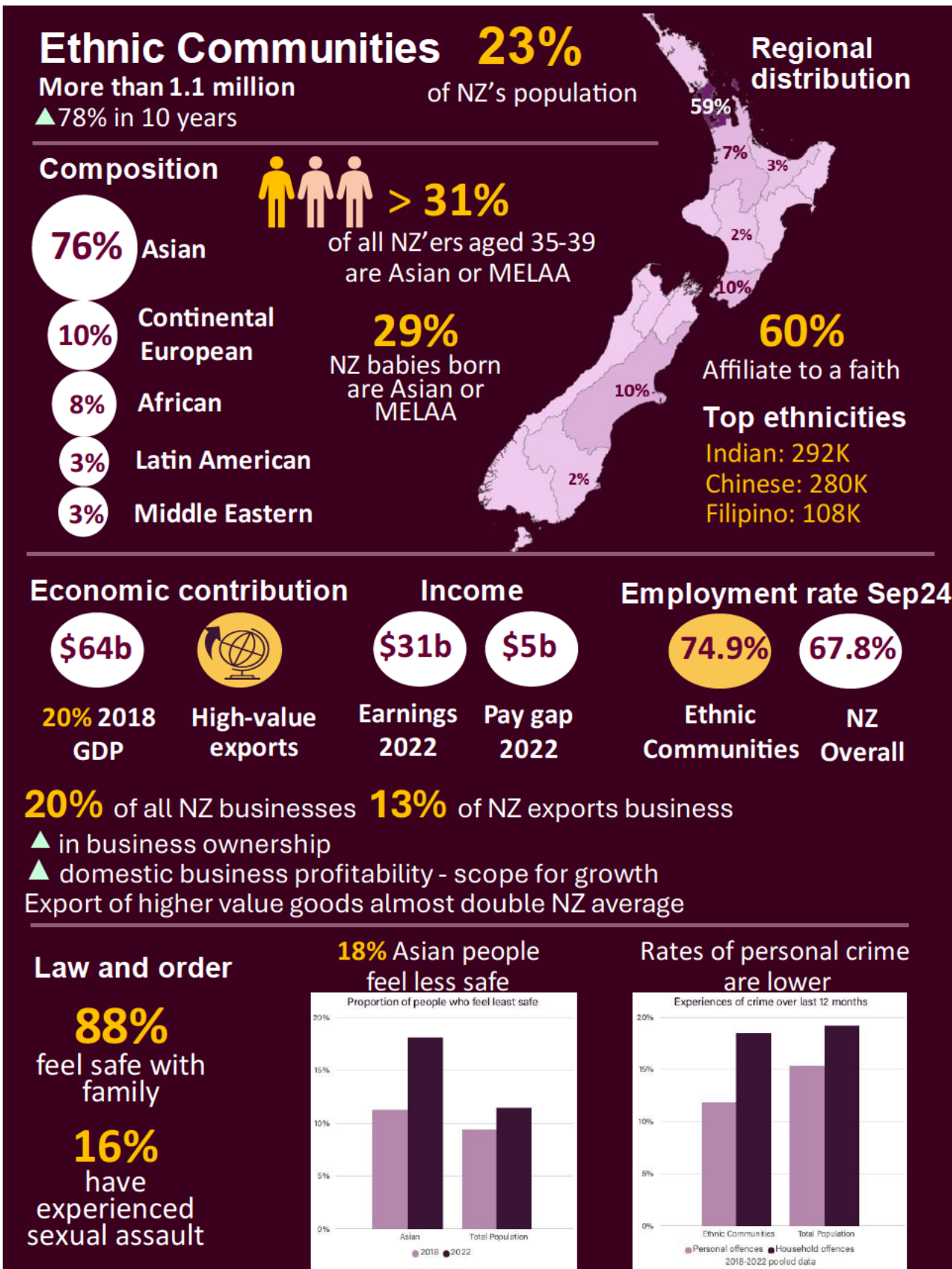
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mervin Singham'.

**Mervin Singham**

Chief Executive, Ministry for Ethnic Communities | Te Tari Mātāwaka



# Ethnic Communities by the numbers



Source: Ethnic Evidence and Provisional Census 2023  
MELAA – Middle Eastern, Latin American and African



# Your portfolio responsibilities

The Minister for Ethnic Communities is the Government's lead for supporting Ethnic Communities in New Zealand.

## You advocate for and influence change

Many outcomes for Ethnic Communities are shaped through policies and services led by other Ministerial portfolios. You advocate for change across the Government to remove barriers and open up opportunities to enable Ethnic Communities to achieve their potential. You also ensure the needs of Ethnic Communities are considered and addressed. Your leadership and dialogue with your Ministerial colleagues to influence their work is instrumental in achieving this. The significant portfolios include economic growth, health, national security, and social development and employment.

You are also likely to be asked to respond to emerging issues, such as the domestic impact of geopolitical events, crime and other disruptive events.

The Minister for Ethnic Communities has been on the Family Violence and Sexual Violence Ministerial group, led by Minister Chhour. You will also be invited by Minister Simmonds to a meeting in February, along with other Ministers, on developing the New Zealand Carers' Strategy Action Plan.

The Ministry will support you by providing advice, evidence and insights.

## You engage with Ethnic Communities

You have an important role in engaging with Ethnic Communities and hosting Parliamentary events such as Lunar New Year, Eid-al-Fitr and Diwali. You will be regularly invited to a range of events hosted by Ethnic Communities and faith groups.

The Ministry can assist you with prioritising these invitations and support your engagement with community leaders and organisations.

## You may wish to make nominations

You may wish to acknowledge ethnic people who have made substantial contributions to their communities by nominating them for New Year or



King's Birthday Royal Honours. The Ministry can assist you in identifying suitable candidates and with the nomination paperwork for candidates you wish to nominate.

Ethnic Communities are proportionally underrepresented on public sector boards. You may wish to nominate candidates for public sector boards and committees in response to requests from other ministers. The Ministry can assist you with identifying suitable candidates from its nominations database.

### **You are the Settlor of the Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust**

The Chinese Poll Tax Heritage Trust (the Trust) is a statutory body. It was established in 2004 as a gesture of goodwill to the descendants of poll taxpayers in recognition of the hardship caused by the New Zealand Parliament's decisions in the 1800s.

The Department of Internal Affairs | Te Tari Taiwhenua (DIA) is responsible for administering the Trust. As Minister, and acting on behalf of the Government, you are the Settlor of the Trust and can appoint its eight members. When there are upcoming vacancies on the Trust, the DIA will brief you on the process of appointing new Trust members. No appointments are anticipated in 2025.

### **You hold the Supporting Ethnic Communities Appropriation**

The Ministry is funded through the Supporting Ethnic Communities Appropriation, which sits within Vote Internal Affairs. The funding consists of \$17.9 million in departmental expenditure including \$4.232 million in non-departmental expenditure. The purpose of the Appropriation is to improve the wellbeing of Ethnic Communities, including through the Ministry providing grants from the annual Ethnic Communities Development Fund (ECDF).

The Minister of Internal Affairs is the Vote Minister, and you are one of the Portfolio Ministers within that Vote. You will represent the Government at select committees as part of the annual scrutiny undertaken by Parliament. You will also present the Ministry's Annual Report to the House. The Ministry will support you in these procedures.



# Strategic opportunities to deliver higher impact for New Zealand

New Zealand is a superdiverse country. It has the fourth highest proportion of overseas-born residents among the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations. Auckland, with a population of 1.7 million, has been ranked as the fourth most ethnically diverse city in the world.

Ethnic Communities are a significant and rapidly growing part of New Zealand's population. They include migrants, former refugees, long-term settlers, and multi-generational New Zealanders who identify their ethnicity as African, Asian, Continental European, Latin American, or Middle Eastern. New Zealand is home to people from over 160 different ethnic groups, who speak more than 150 languages.

While Ethnic Communities make up over 23% of New Zealand's population according to Census 2023, this is projected to increase to 31% by 2043. This presents further opportunities for Ethnic Communities to positively contribute to New Zealand's economy through skills, business development, international trade and foreign direct investment. At the same time, rapidly changing demographics can add complexity and result in unmet needs for some communities.

We have set out below five critical areas that offer opportunities, for your consideration. Officials are available to meet at your convenience to discuss your priorities and areas of interest.

## Increase focus on better data and evidence to determine need and impact

There is a paucity of information about Ethnic Communities. They are relatively invisible in government. As a result, the specific needs of Ethnic Communities are often missed in government investment decisions, policy and service delivery.

The Ministry has actively taken steps to start filling these gaps. In





December 2024, we released the first [Ethnic Evidence](#) report, spotlighting the contributions, challenges, and lived realities of our 1.1 million Ethnic Community members.

It is the first comprehensive report on Ethnic Communities in New Zealand and covers areas such as health and wellbeing, work and employment, business development, income, consumption and wealth. Ethnic Evidence revealed that there are some areas in which Ethnic Communities excel and do not need further government investment or intervention. For example, the high achievement rates of Asian students. But there are other areas where ethnic people fare worse, such as persistent pay gaps. The report received a warm welcome from both Ethnic Communities and the public sector for filling a systems-level gap.

But more needs to be done. This report in particular highlighted significant gaps in data and evidence across a range of areas. There is an opportunity for Government to continue to improve the data and insights available on Ethnic Communities and ensure it is reflected in its policy, service delivery and investment decisions.

A summary of the evidence from this report about the strengths of and challenges facing Ethnic Communities is provided in Appendix A. However, the broad domain trends can mask specific issues. For example, while work and employment appears to be on an upward trend with high skill levels and labour market engagement, there are persistent pay gaps and barriers to employment (eg recognition of overseas qualifications).

## **Leverage Ethnic Communities' connections and talent for economic growth**

The contributions of ethnic businesses are crucial in supporting the Government's economic growth agenda. A Sense Partners report commissioned by the Waitakere Ethnic Board (2021) found that Ethnic Communities contributed \$64 billion to New Zealand's GDP in 2021 (\$352 billion), underscoring their economic impact.

Ethnic Evidence found that businesses owned by Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and African (MELAA) people represent one in five businesses in New Zealand, and around 13% of New Zealand businesses



that export goods. Research from the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) shows that migrant investors have a significant impact on economic growth. This positions them well for the challenges of building a business in a competitive global economy. With more support to address barriers, ethnic businesses can play a stronger role in New Zealand's growth.

Overseas, Asian-Australian entrepreneurs, for example, are leading transnational collaborations in manufacturing, digitalisation and e-commerce. There is recognition that fostering stronger engagement with Asian-Australian business communities could be pivotal for Australian businesses seeking to expand into Asia.

In New Zealand, the growing influence of Asian diaspora business communities presents a valuable opportunity to do the same. These communities offer critical insights that can support New Zealand's economic expansion and international partnerships. With a deep knowledge of Asian markets, ethnic businesses are uniquely positioned to innovate and drive trade with, and investment from, China, India, ASEAN countries, the Middle East and beyond.

In October 2024, the Ministry launched [Ethnic Xchange](#), a conference for ethnic businesses, with extensive funding and other support from the private sector. It brought together over 300 attendees, including business leaders, industry experts, innovators, investors and entrepreneurs, with the aim of boosting innovation, trade and investment. Feedback from those who attended was that they want to increase exports and grow their investment in New Zealand, as well as bring in more foreign direct investment.

## **Build a better understanding of health inequity**

Many Ethnic Communities have highlighted that health is an area of significant concern. The Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022 does not provide for a standalone ethnic health strategy, unlike for other population groups, meaning Ethnic Communities cannot see how their specific needs will be addressed. As a result, groups such as the Ethnic Health Collective have been doing their own research and advocating for government to improve health equity for Ethnic Communities.



There is no disaggregated health data on Ethnic Communities. What we do know is that:

- the Asian population has substantially lower levels of enrolment with primary health organisations (90.1%) than the general population (94.4%)
- mental health is an area of concern. For example, 39% of young people of MELAA ethnicity have seriously contemplated suicide (compared to 26% of all students). MELAA youth also have the lowest wellbeing scores at 40%, much lower than the New Zealand average (58%).

There is an opportunity to improve outcomes by addressing barriers to accessing healthcare, such as language, cost, cultural perceptions and practices, and discrimination.

### **Address domestic impact of geopolitical events**

International conflicts continue to increase. This plays out domestically through tensions between communities.

The Ministry is seen as a connector between government agencies and communities, due to its deep and trusted relationships with ethnic and faith-based communities and their leaders across New Zealand.

Expectations of the Ministry have expanded to include convening and brokering between Ethnic Communities and other stakeholders on sensitive issues. We have been involved in situations such as the Taliban's return to Afghanistan (2021), the Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022), the release of the Kashmir Files film (2022) and the Hamas-Israel conflict in Gaza (2023-2024).

We have learnt that these situations require nuanced skills to empower the community to take the lead in de-escalating potential conflict and maintaining social cohesion. We continue to work with ethnic and faith leaders to prevent aggressive responses in New Zealand.

It is vital to have more focus on building safe and cohesive communities as New Zealand's population diversity increases as forecasted.



## **Support communities to build resilience to foreign interference**

The New Zealand Security Intelligence Services report 'New Zealand's Security Threat Environment 2023' provided visibility into foreign interference activity in New Zealand. We know that some Ethnic Communities experience foreign interference making them feel unsafe and infringing on their rights in New Zealand.

In Budget 2023, we received \$9 million over four years to:

- support engagement with Ethnic Communities to assess the impact of foreign interference activities in New Zealand
- build awareness, community resilience and government-community relationships to mitigate against the risk of foreign interference.

Due to the sensitive nature of this work, officials will brief you separately.



# The Ministry's role

The Ministry was established in July 2021. We are the Government's chief advisor on Ethnic Communities and their inclusion in New Zealand society.

## Our strategic priorities and outcomes

We developed our operational priorities and outcomes after extensive consultation with New Zealand's Ethnic Communities.

**Take action to promote the value of diversity and improve inclusion of Ethnic Communities**

**Outcome:** New Zealanders value diversity and actively include Ethnic Communities across all spheres of public life.

1

**Ensure equitable provision of, and access to, Government services for Ethnic Communities**

**Outcome:** Ethnic Communities have access to, and experience positive outcomes from high quality public services.

2

**Develop and support initiatives to improve economic outcomes, including addressing barriers to employment**

**Outcome:** More Ethnic Communities are fully employed and continue to make a strong contribution to New Zealand's economy.

3

**Work to connect and empower Ethnic Community groups**

**Outcome:** Ethnic Communities are connected, empowered and flourishing.

4



## **Our approach**

The Ministry is a small agency with 62.1 full-time equivalent roles (including permanent and fixed-term staff). We have offices in Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch.

Given the breadth of the needs of, and opportunities for, Ethnic Communities, our work programme could span the full range of the Government's business. As a result, demands on our resources are high. So we need to make deliberate choices to focus on areas that are critical to achieving the Government's priorities and are important to Ethnic Communities.

While we have a proactive work programme, meeting and reacting to immediate needs inevitably shapes some aspects of the Ministry's work. For example, supporting our communities during emergencies (such as the North Island Severe Weather Events) to ensure that specific needs were addressed. We were able to share lessons with other government agencies about how effective ethnic service providers were in supporting communities during the Covid-19 pandemic and following the Auckland flooding.

## **Our governance arrangements**

The Ministry is a departmental agency of DIA, which means it is operationally independent. The Ministry is headed by our Chief Executive, who is directly responsible to you for our activities and performance.

Under our departmental agreement, DIA provides corporate services, such as the provision of information technology, property, finance and human resources. DIA also administers our appropriation (Supporting Ethnic Communities Multi-Category Appropriation) within Vote Internal Affairs.

## **Our structure and functions**

We have a simple structure. In addition to the Chief Executive's Office, we have three business units: one that is government-facing, one community-facing and corporate services.



The table below sets out the functions of each business unit.

Business unit	Functions
<b>Government-facing</b> Advisory, Analytics and Ministerial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security and Resilience</li> <li>• Ministerial Services</li> <li>• Government Relations and Advisory</li> <li>• Analytics, Monitoring and Evaluation</li> </ul>
<b>Community-facing</b> Strategic Engagement and Stakeholder Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Stakeholder Engagement</li> <li>• Strategic Programmes</li> </ul>
<b>Corporate Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnic Communities Development Fund (ECDF)</li> <li>• Governance, Reporting, Communications, Finance, and Human Resources</li> </ul>

More details on our functions are set out in [Appendix B](#).

Contact details for the Executive Leadership team are provided in [Appendix C](#).

## Our current programme of work

The Ministry's current programme of work is focused on economic growth, security and resilience, social cohesion and wellbeing, and all-of-government services. We keep our ears to the ground. One of our key strengths is the extensive relationships of trust we have built with ethnic and faith community leaders, ethnic business councils and other critical stakeholders in this sector. We work in tandem with them to deliver our work.

Current intended key deliverables for 2025 are set out in [Appendix D](#).

Officials are available to meet at your convenience to discuss your priorities and areas of interest and shape our programme of work accordingly.



## **Economic growth**

We engage with a broad range of stakeholders such as ethnic business leaders and entrepreneurs, ethnic business councils, private sector organisations and government agencies to build consensus on the critical economic priorities for Ethnic Communities. For example, the Ethnic Xchange conference highlighted a range of issues that ethnic businesses raised about barriers and opportunities that they would like to tackle to help them make a bigger economic contribution to New Zealand. We look forward to discussing these with you.

## **Security and resilience**

Our work aims to understand the nature and impact of foreign interference, support and enhance community resilience and public sector capability. It deliberately takes a social cohesion (rather than a securitised) approach. As a result of this approach, there is high interest internationally in our work, as the only other country taking a similar approach is Australia.

## **Social cohesion and wellbeing**

Delivering targeted programmes, gathering stakeholder insights, and empowering Ethnic Communities through funding support enables us to foster a sense of belonging to, and integration with, New Zealand society.

## **All-of-government services**

We develop practical tools and resources and provide advice to build inter-cultural capability and influence the policy and service design of other agencies. The aim is to ensure government services are accessible to, and meet specific needs of, Ethnic Communities.
















# Upcoming actions and decisions

Action	Month
Confirm your intent to make a speech at upcoming Parliamentary events that you are hosting: Lunar New Year (17 February) and Eid al-Fitr (7 April).	Early February 2025
Consider attending key stakeholder forums with Ethnic Communities’ representatives, economic development stakeholders and leaders of national community organisations. Upcoming: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the fourth Faith Leaders Forum (26 February)</li> <li>• Regional Initiative for Ethnic Communities Empowerment (RIECE) in Hawkes Bay (20 March). Proposed themes: law and order, emergency recovery, migrant exploitation.</li> </ul>	Early February 2025
Receive (for information) the Ministry’s responses to questions from the Social Services and Community Select Committee as part of the annual review of the Ministry.	11 February 2025
Consider speaking at the Ministry’s national conferences focusing on social cohesion and economic growth respectively: Ethnic Advantage (June 2025) and Ethnic Xchange Business Symposium (19 September or 3 October 2025).	February 2025
Attend meeting convened by Minister Penny Simmonds on a new Action Plan under the New Zealand Carers’ Strategy.	(TBC)
Consider speaking at the Future Leaders Programme, in association with the Federation of the Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ) on 26 May.	March 2025
Redacted - Confidentiality of Advice	(TBC)



# Appendix A – Ethnic Evidence Summary of Strengths and Challenges 1/2

Domain	Strengths relative to the total population	Challenges relative to the total population
<b>Work and Employment</b>  	<p>Highly skilled and have high labour market engagement – unemployment is relatively low.</p> <p>Labour force participation for women has been rising steadily over 10 years.</p> <p>Job satisfaction and work-life balance is as good or better.</p>	<p>Persistent pay gaps exist – gap now narrowing for Asian people.</p> <p>Low representation in public sector leadership roles.</p> <p>Employment barriers remain – eg: qualification recognition.</p>
<b>Income, Consumption and Wealth</b>  	<p>Asian disposable income is now at the same level as European households.</p> <p>Asian families have the lowest % of children living in a household experiencing material hardship.</p>	<p>Notable increase in Asian net worth – but their net worth is only 1/3 of Europeans.</p> <p>MELAA household disposable income is lower but has recently increased.</p> <p>MELAA children have had the largest reduction in child poverty but a wide gap remains.</p>
<b>Business Development</b> 	<p>Ethnic business trade in high value exports – average export value almost double of NZ exports.</p> <p>MELAA-owned businesses are more efficient.</p>	<p>Business profits are growing – barriers could be unlocked to achieve their full potential.</p> <p>Domestic ethnic businesses predominantly trade in lower margin industries.</p>
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>  	<p>Overall report good physical health.</p> <p>Low rates of daily smoking, hazardous drinking and illicit drug use.</p>	<p>Mental health is an area of concern, less likely to seek help – further investigation required especially youth.</p> <p>Face barriers to accessing healthcare services, cost, language, cultural perceptions and discrimination.</p> <p>Asian people are falling behind in terms of physical activity.</p>
<b>Knowledge, Education and Skills</b>  	<p>Adults have the highest levels of education. Those born overseas are among the most educated in the OECD.</p> <p>Are some of the country’s top-performing students both nationally and compared to OECD nations.</p>	<p>Young peoples’ pathways are hindered by bias or lack of support in choosing subjects or careers.</p> <p>Research shows concerns around widespread experience of racist bullying and not belonging at school.</p>
<b>Housing</b>  	<p>Requires further investigation.</p>	<p>Lower than average home ownership rates, MELAA are one of the lowest – face bias and discrimination barriers.</p> <p>Were disproportionately more likely to experience homelessness in 2018.</p> <p>At least 50% of disposable income is spent on housing costs by Asian households.</p>



# Appendix A – Ethnic Evidence Summary of Strengths and Challenges 2/2

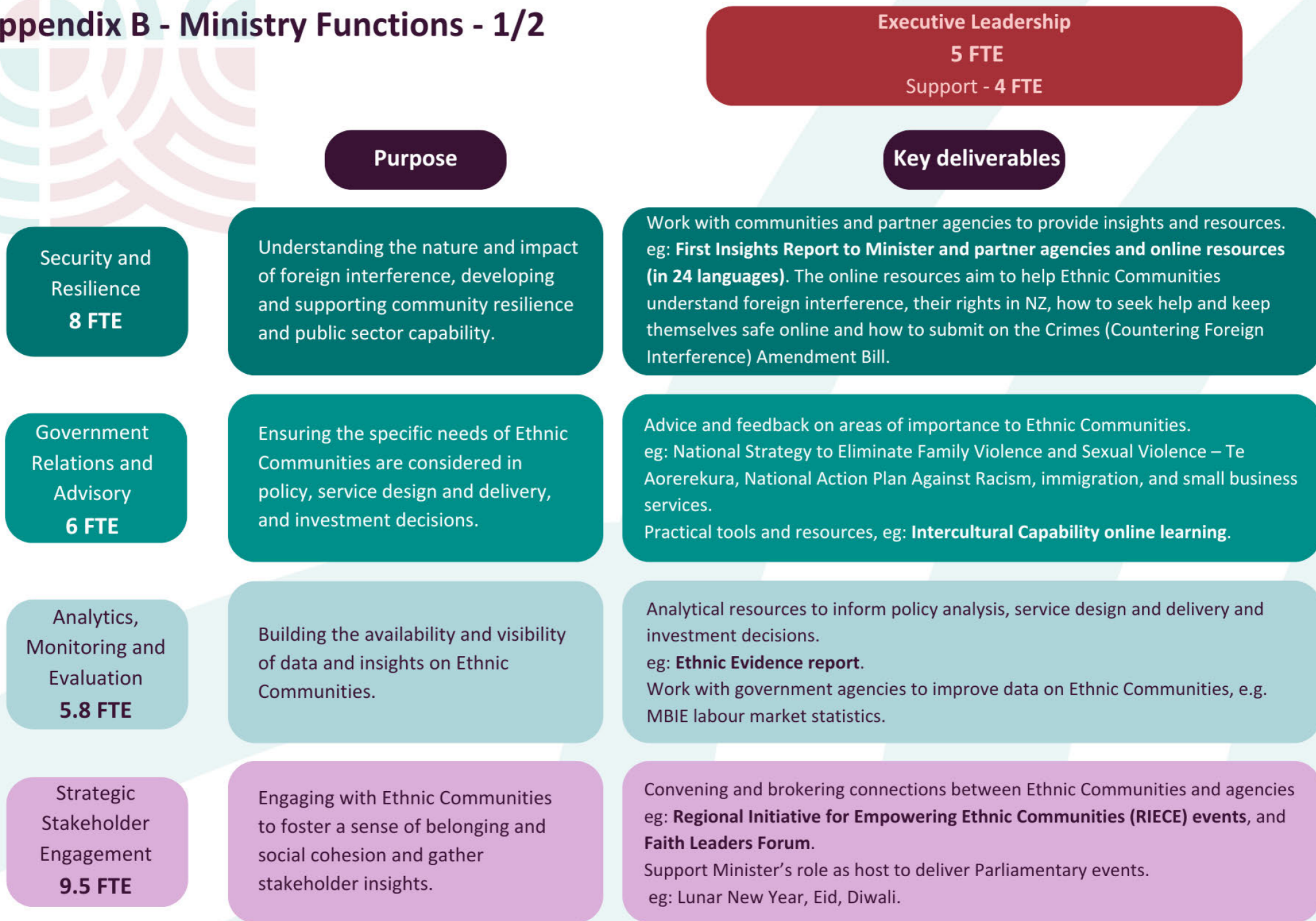
Domain	Strengths relative to the total population	Challenges relative to the total population
<b>Diversity and Inclusion</b> 	New Zealanders are generally accepting of diversity and welcoming of different ethnicities. Asian people report high levels of life satisfaction. Most migrants feel New Zealand provides satisfactory support.	Experience high levels of racism and discrimination. Asian people, especially youth, face challenges in expressing their identity.
<b>Connectedness and Belonging</b> 	Feel a sense of attachment to their ethnicity, to their neighbourhood and to New Zealand. Those connected to faith groups report high levels of connectedness.	Asian people have lower levels of social connectedness.
<b>Engagement and Voice</b> 	Asian people have high levels of trust in government and government institutions.	Underrepresented in local and national government, and government board appointments. Have lower voting rates – some migrants are unsure of voting eligibility.
<b>Justice and safety</b> 	Overall experience less personal and household crimes than average. Have high trust in the New Zealand court system compared to all New Zealanders.	Experience more prejudice and intolerance based crimes than average. Asian people feel less safe, Ethnic Communities – slightly less likely to feel “completely safe” with their families. Women who experience violence face additional barriers around seeking help or reporting abuse. Recent migrants are less likely to have emergency plans and water or food for three days.

**Key**

- The domain has improved overall from the baseline period
- This domain is an overall area of strength
- This domain shows no change from the baseline or there is no data since the base line
- This domain is an overall area of strength at a smaller scale
- This domain has decreased overall from the baseline period
- This domain is an overall area of challenge

Note: the direction from the baseline and areas of strength and challenges are indicative only – Ethnic Evidence report provides detail on 120 measures.

# Appendix B - Ministry Functions - 1/2



## Appendix B - Ministry Functions - 2/2

### Purpose

### Key deliverables

Strategic Programmes  
**6.5 FTE**

Delivering targeted programmes and activities for Ethnic Communities to gather stakeholder insights.

Conferences and events, eg: **Ethnic Xchange 24 business symposium**, nominations for public sector boards and Royal New Zealand Honours.

Ethnic Communities Development Fund  
**4.5 FTE**

Empowering Ethnic Communities through funding support.  
DCE is final funding decision maker.

Administering a **\$4.2 million a year fund** to support a wide range of projects that help Ethnic Communities build capability, grow a sense of belonging and express cultural identity.  
**306 projects funded** in 2023/2024.

Ministerial Services  
**5 FTE**

Providing high-quality ministerial support.  
Provide your office with a Private Secretary.

Provide support services to meet statutory accountability requirements. For example, last year, the Minister's Office received **15 Ministerial Official Information Act requests, 208 Written Parliamentary Questions** and **191 invitations to events**.

Corporate Services  
**7.8 FTE**

Provide high-quality communications and other support for the rest of the Ministry.

Provide communications, human resources, risk, finance, planning and reporting, health and safety, evaluation and governance.

# Appendix C - Executive Leadership Team



**Mervin Singham**

Chief Executive

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**Berlinda Chin**

Chief Advisor to the Chief Executive

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## Advisory, Analytics and Ministerial



**Pratima Namasivayam**

Deputy Chief Executive

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### Teams

- Ministerial Services
- Government Relations and Advisory
- Analytics, Monitoring and Evaluation
- Security and Resilience

## Corporate Services



**Fleur Murray**

Deputy Chief Executive

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### Teams

#### Funding and Accountability

- ECDF
- Governance
- Reporting

Graduate Programme (to Feb 2025)

#### Corporate services

- Finance
- Human Resources
- Health, Safety and Wellbeing
- Communications
- Property and Security

## Strategic Engagement and Stakeholder Insights



**Malcolm Foo**

Deputy Chief Executive

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### Teams

- Strategic Stakeholder Engagement
- Strategic Programmes

# Appendix D - Intended Key Deliverables 2025

Redacted - Confidentiality of Advice

