# Executive summary

**Ngā take o nga wheako o te kaikiri ki ngā manene o Aotearoa**

**Drivers of migrant New Zealanders’ experiences of racism, March 2021**

Background

The Human Rights Commission (HRC) is committed to promoting a diverse, inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand where everyone feels welcomed, safe and a sense of belonging. Included in this work are initiatives to support the New Zealand Migrant Settlement and Integration Strategy (NZMSIS), which is the government’s strategy ‘to support recent migrants to settle well so they can participate fully and contribute to all aspects of New Zealand life’ (Immigration New Zealand, n.d.). This research was undertaken to contribute to the evidence base around one of the strategy’s five areas: *Inclusion*. The goal of the *Inclusion* area is that ‘migrants participate in and have a sense of belonging to their community and to New Zealand’. One key indicator under the *Inclusion* area is reducing migrants’ experiences of discrimination.

Evidence shows that migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand report having more experiences of discrimination in this country compared with non-migrants, while New Zealanders more broadly are reporting a decline in positivity towards migrants.

In May 2019, HRC commissioned Malatest International to conduct qualitative research on the drivers of migrants’ experiences of discrimination. The research is purposed to support and inform potential and targeted cross-government and non-government agency responses to discrimination.

The research aimed to:

* Explore migrants’ experiences of racism that may have emerged, increased, or changed over the last few years
* Understand how Māori, Pākehā[[1]](#footnote-1) and other tauiwi migrants’[[2]](#footnote-2) attitudes and experiences of racism may contribute to fostering a positive or negative environment for migrants
* Understand how to better support migrants who experience racism
* Explore potential opportunities for all New Zealanders to understand the drivers for racism and strengthen responses to racism.

The research recognises Māori as first peoples and Te Tiriti o Waitangi partners with the Crown. The research team deemed it important to focus on the topic of racism for tauiwi migrants while also recognising the historical and contemporary settler colonial contexts that have been devasting for Māori and that provide context for tauiwi experiences within Aotearoa New Zealand. The research refers to race as purely a social construct used to categorise people, which has very real consequences. The term racism is used throughout the report, inclusive of racial discrimination and prejudice.

Method

Research methods included:

**Literature scan and media analysis:** This included a scan of evidence relevant to migrant experiences of racism and thematic analysis of general public responses to three media articles and significant events in Aotearoa New Zealand. Findings from the literature scan and media analysis were used to develop a research framework and data collection tools and inform the analysis of interviews and focus group discussions.

**Interviews with settlement service providers:** Nine individual and four group interviews were conducted with representatives from 11 national and regional settlement support provider organisations located in urban and rural locations across Aotearoa New Zealand.

**Focus groups with Māori, Pākehā and tauiwi migrants (inclusive of former refugees):** Twenty-eight focus groups were held with Māori, Pākehā and tauiwi migrants aged 18 years and older from different ethnicities, religious affiliations, visa types and length of residence in Aotearoa New Zealand. Groups were held across five localities (covering urban and rural areas in Te Ika-a-Māui and Te Waipounamu). A total of 210 participants representing at least 23 different ethnicities and religious denominations contributed to focus group discussions.

Key research findings

**Racism is prevalent in Aotearoa New Zealand:** Participants’ experiences of racism consisted of institutional, personally mediated and internalised racism across all levels of wellbeing: civic engagement and governance, health, housing, employment, society and social connections, education and the justice system. Findings emphasised that the ongoing impact of historical and contemporary racism toward Māori remained embedded within colonial systems and institutions and extended to tauiwi populations as well as Tangata whenua.

**Racism occurs between different groups and some people also experience lateral violence**[[3]](#footnote-3)**:** Participants described numerous overt and subtle racist behaviours that were expressed in the forms of verbal, emotional and physical abuse. This was primarily shown by one ethnic group towards another, although racist verbal and emotional abuse were also exemplified between members of an ethnic group.

**The impacts of racism are extensive and span across all aspects of wellbeing:** Participants highlighted culture, identity loss and compromise, colonised thinking and judgement of their own culture, eroding self-belief and confidence, fear and disengagement in society, and exclusion and marginalisation. Participants also described learned helplessness and under-reporting.

**The awareness of racism has increased but participants held mixed views about changes in the prevalence and expression of racism in Aotearoa New Zealand:** Most participants noted that the awareness of racism in Aotearoa New Zealand had changed over time – specifically highlighting an increasing recognition and willingness to talk about and respond to racism across all ethnic groups. However, mixed views were provided about changes in the overt and/or covert racist behaviours expressed to migrants.

Recent influences included significant events such as the Christchurch mosque terrorist attack, Black Lives Matter movement, and COVID-19. Participants also noted increasing recognition of diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand, inter-ethnic relationships and a growing but limited awareness reported by some participants about migrants’ skills and contributions to workforce shortages, and a growing recognition of the importance of te reo Māori. The most significant influences for change as identified by participants were increased critical awareness and responsiveness to racism among many young people across Aotearoa New Zealand and increased media, technology and social media exposure. It is important to acknowledge that these factors also have the potential to polarise extreme views at both ends of the racism spectrum.

**The emotional armour used to cope with racism is worn in different ways:** Minimising the impact of racism through emotional suppression, humour and social avoidance were thought to have adverse wider impacts on individuals and their whānau/families. These coping mechanisms also risk increasing the normalisation and validation of racism and stereotypes within society. Living with racism and surviving everyday settlement challenges were sacrifices migrants in Aotearoa New Zealand continued to make to improve future prospects and inclusion in employment, housing, education and society. Actively standing against and responding to racism was a form of addressing racist behaviour as were educating others about racism, reclaiming and strengthening cultural identity, and building resilience for future generations.

Emotional armour was strengthened by migrants through supporting and connecting with other migrants through networks, groups and forums, and supports and services provided by settlement providers. Most participants noted a lack of awareness and access to information about where to seek help and support for experiences of racism.

**The drivers for racism are broad and deeply embedded within institutions, society and individuals:** Findings that there was no single driver for racism were consistent with the literature scan. Participants highlighted colonisation, fear, ignorance, a need to blame others, white privilege, a limited response to racism within Aotearoa New Zealand, racial supremacy, Eurocentricity (including judgement based on Western ideologies about skin colour, physical features, beliefs and cultural expressions), child development and modelling racist behaviours, seeing people as social and economic capital, and negative bias and stereotyping.

Overview and looking ahead

Immigration is a defining and fast-growing feature of Aotearoa New Zealand. Tauiwi have and continue to arrive on these shores in the hopes of pursuing better opportunities for themselves and their children – they also face a range of historical and contemporary challenges adapting to and being accepted within society.

Evidence shows that the impacts of racism are traumatic, intergenerational, broad and affect all aspects of wellbeing. Evidence about the drivers for racism is extensive and identifies numerous personal and external factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

This research explored and synthesised tauiwi migrants’ experiences in and understandings of the drivers for racism. It validated findings within national and international literature and broadened the knowledge base by contextualising these within the Aotearoa New Zealand context.

Findings emphasised that the ongoing impact of historical and contemporary racism toward Māori remained embedded within colonial systems and institutions and extended to tauiwi populations as well as to Tangata whenua. Overall, experiences of different levels of racism (institutional, personally mediated and internalised) across all levels of wellbeing were prevalent in all aspects of participants’ lives.

Findings highlighted increased awareness about racism among participants but little perceived change in racist behaviour(s) over time. Participants generally had their own coping mechanisms and forms of emotional armour to deal with racism; however, further opportunities to support migrant groups, networks and forums, and settlement providers to maintain resilience and respond to racism are necessary.

Findings identified that there are multiple drivers for migrant New Zealanders’ experiences of racism, and multiple responses are required. Social media was particularly noted as a new and contemporary means of uniting and dividing people and a forum to express personal views and opinions, engage in debates and chat forums, and confront others in a virtual sense. Racism used against migrants online and in social media also represent a lack of escape for those who are subjected to it, as it follows them everywhere, including into their homes.

**Participants identified numerous opportunities to influence change and strengthen cross-government and non-government agency** **responses to racism in Aotearoa New Zealand:**

* **Honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi:** Honour commitments, agreements and partnerships between Māori and the Crown. Address biculturalism to ensure Aotearoa New Zealand is a safe and welcoming country for all multicultural communities.
* **Representation that reflects a diverse Aotearoa New Zealand:** Enhance diverse and inclusive leadership within Parliament and across the public sector. A whole of government response is required to address racism and inequities, informed by strong understandings of cultural differences, strengths, and realities for different population groups.
* **Expand our knowledge:** Enhance learning opportunities for:
* children and young people: Balanced perspectives on Aotearoa New Zealand history, the importance of equity, and critical thought and consciousness
* migrant groups (recent and established): Rights and entitlements, and increasing understandings about access to support for experiences of racism within communities
* general public: Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Aotearoa New Zealand’s migration history, immigration policy and the benefits of migrant populations for Aotearoa and society, critical consciousness and diversity within Aotearoa, and how to support victims of racism.
* **Know yourself – replace judgement with inquiry:**
* strengthen identity and personal responsibility: Take personal responsibility within personal spheres of influence, overcome fear and indifference through deepening knowledge and inquiry of self and others, support others to replenish resilience
* form genuine relationships with others: Seek to understand and learn about other cultures from and with people from different ethnic groups, learn to embrace differences and find common ground, celebrate diversity.
* **Support communities to identify their own solutions:** Support community ownership and action in response to racism.
* **Promote collective responsibility – we’re all in this together:**
* increase awareness about racism and systems of support within Aotearoa New Zealand: Normalise conversations about racism and practical and effective ways to respond, flip the script on negative and biased media reporting
* openly talk about racism with purpose and strengthen collective responsibility: Encourage opportunities for people to discuss racism in a safe space and broaden opportunities to foster collective responsibility and resilience.
* **Protect our future:** Build resilience for individuals, whānau/families and communities. Encourage and support children and young people to become change agents.

ENDS

1. Pākehā is used throughout the report to refer to New Zealand-born people of European descent. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tauiwi is used throughout the report to refer to all non-Pākehā migrant groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lateral violence is described as racism and discrimination perpetuated between colonised ethnic minority groups and is an effect of ongoing oppression (Bailey, 2020; Pyke, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)