



13 August 2020

S20.18

Submission to Statistics NZ on the Sex and Gender Identity Statistical Standards

Introduction

- 0.1. The National Council of Women of New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Wahine o Aotearoa (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing over 200 organisations affiliated at either national level or to one of our 15 branches. In addition, about 450 people are individual members. Collectively our reach is over 450,000 with many of our membership organisations representing all genders. NCWNZ's vision is a [gender equal New Zealand](#) and research shows we will be better off socially and economically if we are gender equal. Through research, discussion and action, NCWNZ in partnership with others, seeks to realise its vision of gender equality because it is a basic human right.
- 0.2. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Parliamentary Watch Committee] after consultation with the membership of NCWNZ and based on relevant NCWNZ Resolutions and submissions.

1. Overview

- 1.1. NCWNZ has a vision for a gender equal New Zealand. We understand the importance of an inclusive society where all New Zealanders can see themselves in official statistics that better meet the information needs of a wide range of users.
- 1.2. NCWNZ advocates for the human rights of all people, in particular Māori, Pacific and migrant women, women with disabilities, older women and LGBTQI people. To reflect our position on gender a Remit was passed in 2019 'That NCWNZ acknowledges the rights of people of all genders, including those who identify as female, male or non-binary and further, NCWNZ recognises trans women as women, and trans men as men'.

- 1.3. Gender Equal NZ, led by the NCWNZ, draws on and contributes to research on gender. Two [Gender Attitudes Surveys](#) were conducted with Research NZ in 2017 and 2019. The respondent profile includes a question 'What is your gender?' and the survey tests attitudes around gender roles and the level of knowledge of gender diversity. Although most New Zealanders do believe gender equality to be a fundamental human right for all, there still exists a minority with outdated beliefs and/or attitudes that keep the status quo of gender inequality in place.
- 1.4. Accurate and inclusive data on gender and sex is critical for informing policy, implementing strategies, and undertaking comparable research to improve the intergenerational and systemic gender inequalities currently found in every sphere of life.

2. Qns 7 & 8: Gender by default principle: strongly agree

- 2.1. NCWNZ supports the need for a clear distinction in the statistical standards between sex at birth and gender, and that a person's gender is most relevant for policy making and research. A person's gender can change over time and they need to feel their social and personal identity is accepted by society.
- 2.2. We also endorse the decision diagram whereby the first question when considering collection of data is 'Is sex or gender data needed?' We ask that Statistics NZ guidance include a message that unnecessary collection of sex and gender data may contribute to unconscious bias of those accessing the data.

3. Qns 9 & 10: 'Gender' concept definition: strongly agree

- 3.1. NCWNZ supports the adoption of the Statistics Canada 'Gender of a person' definition as it uses Plain English to cover key points. As per Q15&16 we recommend a wording change from 'sex reported' to 'sex assigned':

'Gender refers to a person's social and personal identity as male, female, or another gender such as non-binary. Gender may include how a person describes themselves ('gender identity'), and/or the gender a person publicly expresses ('gender expression') in their daily life. A person's current gender may differ from the sex **assigned** at their birth and may differ from what is indicated on their current legal documents. A person's gender may change over time. Some people may not identify with any gender'.

4. Qns 11 & 12: Another gender: strongly agree

- 4.1. NCWNZ **strongly agrees** that replacing the 'gender diverse' third category with 'another gender' will reduce confusion in particular for trans people. However, guidance will be needed to ensure those who do not identify with 'male' or 'female' feel genuinely included in this open category. Where a questionnaire can accommodate a 'write in response' a person will be able to self-identify with their preferred term.

- 4.2. NCWNZ supports Statistics NZ intention to consult with Māori and Pasifika on future additional concepts and standards that reflect culturally specific identities to better meet their information needs.

5. Qns 15 & 16: 'Sex at birth' concept definition: strongly agree

- 5.1. Although NCWNZ **strongly agrees** with the proposal to adopt the two-step approach to reduce ambiguity of responses to questions on sex at birth and gender, we support the [Gender Minorities Aotearoa](#) proposed change to 'What is your sex **assigned** at birth?' This more accurate reflection of the assessment made at birth being based on visible reproductive and other physical characteristic may help improve access to gender affirming healthcare earlier in life and may ultimately reduce discrimination in the longer run.
- 5.2. Member feedback did include support for the continued use of the 'prefer not to say' category. However, NCWNZ accepts the rationale that respect for privacy be carefully considered with respondents able to answer in private where possible, and that in most cases collection of gender data will be sufficient with data of sex not required.

6. Qns 17 & 18: Intersex information needs: agree

- 6.1. NCWNZ agrees with the additional intersex variation question where intersex population data is required and supports further consultation on the most useful place to include an intersex question.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. NCWNZ commends Statistics NZ for addressing the issues of sex and gender, as the statistical categories that we use to define people can often be a source of discrimination. We wholeheartedly support the attempt to change the discourse around binary gender in Aotearoa New Zealand.



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