

From Evidence to Action: Empowering Ethnic Enterprises

Ethnic Xchange 2025 Insights Report

December 2025



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Foreword from the Chief Executive



We live in an era of profound global disruption where geopolitical tensions, climate volatility, and economic shocks are reshaping the world economy. At the Ethnic Xchange Symposium 2025 (EX25), Professor Prasanna Gai captured this uncertainty in his keynote, describing it as a 'global economic fog'. To navigate the rapidly shifting world, social cohesion and economic prosperity are inseparable: businesses flourish when communities are stable, connected, and confident; and communities thrive when businesses create opportunity, growth, and hope.

Our Ethnic Communities now number over one million people. They are the fastest growing population group in New Zealand. This growth creates significant opportunities to strengthen our economy and enrich our society. Ethnic businesses are a strategic economic asset: when Ethnic Communities thrive, New Zealand thrives. That is why the Ministry for Ethnic Communities continues to invest in forums such as Ethnic Xchange – to facilitate connections, share knowledge and highlight the contributions ethnic entrepreneurs, innovators and investors make to Aotearoa New Zealand.

Building on the successful inaugural business symposium in 2024 (EX24), EX25 attracted an even larger audience. The event brought together ethnic businesses, wider New Zealand enterprises, trade and industry representatives, sector leaders, and key stakeholders. More than 460 participants from across New Zealand and overseas came together at the Cordis hotel in Auckland on 14 November to explore strategies for overcoming barriers to economic growth and enhancing New Zealand's global competitiveness.

We heard from ministers, senior government officials, researchers and local and international business leaders. They shared insights, success stories, and the latest business trends alongside Government economic initiatives. This report summarises the key themes, actionable insights, and calls to action that emerged from EX25.



EX25 built on the momentum of the inaugural symposium and the work undertaken since EX24. Over the past year, the Ministry has advanced priorities identified at EX24 by convening business roundtables and commissioning research to strengthen the evidence base for ethnic businesses. At EX25, we launched two reports and celebrated the rapid growth of an ethnic women entrepreneurs' network – now over 140 members.

EX25 was possible because of deliberate partnerships and a shared commitment to building a stronger, more inclusive economy. Our sponsors – KPMG, Xero, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Auckland Business Chamber, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Ministry for Women – played a critical role in advancing this agenda. We also acknowledge ministers, high commissioners, ambassadors, our keynote speaker, master of ceremonies, moderators, and panellists for contributing their expertise and leadership. And Ngāti Whātua, for welcoming us to their whenua for this event.

Ethnic Xchange 2025 leaves us energised and focused on the work ahead. Together, through purposeful collaboration, we are shaping an inclusive and dynamic Aotearoa New Zealand – one where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential.



Mervin Singham
Chief Executive, Ministry for Ethnic Communities



Ethnic Xchange: From evidence to action

Ethnic Xchange is New Zealand's premier ethnic business symposium series, designed to harness the economic power of diversity and turn evidence into action. These symposia provide a platform for ethnic businesses, innovators, and entrepreneurs to connect with decision-makers, share insights, and shape strategies that strengthen New Zealand's global competitiveness.

Ethnic Communities and the international markets they are connected with are a major driver of New Zealand's economic success. At EX25, we released the report *Economic Contribution of Ethnic Minority Communities 2001-2023*¹, which revealed that Ethnic Communities contributed \$87 billion – or 22% of New Zealand's GDP – in 2023, up from \$64 billion in 2021.

EX24: Boosting Innovation, Trade and Investment

The inaugural Ethnic Xchange Symposium in 2024 marked a milestone in harnessing diversity as a catalyst for innovation, trade, and investment. EX24 highlighted the significant role ethnic businesses play in advancing New Zealand's economic aspirations and their ability to navigate international markets.

In the year ended December 2024, seven Asian economies ranked among New Zealand's top ten export markets: China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Following EX24, the Ministry published New Zealand's first Ethnic Evidence report, commissioned research on barriers to business, and convened roundtables to identify practical solutions – all summarised in the Appendix. These initiatives laid the groundwork for turning insights into action.

¹ - <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/31550-economic-contribution-of-ethnic-minority-communities-2001-2023>

EX25: Going for Growth – Expanding Ethnic Enterprises

EX25 built on this foundation and sharpened its focus on global trade and connections, innovation, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and investment, while also highlighting the contribution of ethnic women entrepreneurs. Its theme, Going for Growth – Expanding Ethnic Enterprises, reflects the Government’s commitment to unlocking the full economic potential of Ethnic Communities for New Zealand.

Professor Prasanna Gai, Reserve Bank Monetary Policy Committee member, opened the symposium by urging clarity and coherence in policymaking to navigate what he described as a ‘global economic fog’. He called for transparency in fiscal and monetary strategies to provide direction in uncertain times – a challenge that resonates strongly with ethnic businesses seeking to expand internationally.

More than 460 participants from across New Zealand and overseas – including ministers, public sector leaders, high commissioners, ambassadors, business councils, ethnic entrepreneurs, and industry representatives – engaged in open and honest conversations about global trade, investment, AI, and the use of evidence. EX25 served as a platform to showcase research and insights, and to translate them into actionable steps that strengthen competitiveness and shared prosperity for all New Zealanders.

“

You are always thinking about the larger world. That mindset is the mindset that we need to infect the whole country with. That’s why we want to champion Ethnic Communities – because you bring that global orientation.

Hon. Nicola Willis, Finance Minister

”

These conversations reinforced the importance of evidence-based action and collaboration to unlock growth opportunities. The following themes summarise the key insights and priorities that emerged from EX25.



EX25 insights and strategic priorities

1. Activate diaspora connections to strengthen global competitiveness

One of the five pillars of the Government's Going for Growth strategy is promoting global trade and investment. The participation of the Prime Minister (via video message) and senior ministers at the symposium underscored the Government's commitment to this goal and recognised the strategic value of Ethnic Communities in driving New Zealand's global competitiveness.

New Zealand enjoys a strong international reputation and offers an attractive ecosystem for starting and growing businesses. Many migrants, ethnic entrepreneurs and international students leverage their international market knowledge and cultural insights to connect New Zealand with the countries of their ancestral origin. This advantage helps them navigate both local and global markets with confidence and agility.



Panellists attributed their success to qualities such as resilience, adaptability, and a strong work ethic shaped by their upbringing. The entrepreneurial spirit of Ethnic Communities was a recurring theme throughout the day, reinforcing their role as a dynamic force in New Zealand's economy.

Countries from the South and Southeast Asia region took centre stage at EX25, reflecting recent progress in diplomatic and economic relations. Heads of missions emphasised the underutilisation of diaspora communities here in New Zealand.

Participants called for government agencies to work together to unlock the potential of Ethnic Communities' global connections, through initiatives including the alignment of foreign and trade policies, improved immigration settings, and business environments designed to help ethnic enterprises thrive. Speakers encourage entrepreneurs to network and support one another.

Prime Minister Christopher Luxon shared a video message with participants, noting their contributions and value, while participating ministers emphasised the Government's commitment to listening to and valuing ethnic communities. They spoke about reducing red tape to improve the business environment for everyone.

“

We see you; we value you; we back you.

Rt. Hon. Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister

”



2. More evidence, better understanding and improved visibility

Data becomes meaningful when transformed into evidence that tells a story and drives action. When communities see their contributions reflected in evidence, it fosters a sense of belonging and pride. This visibility also enables the public sector to make informed decisions about government investment, policy development and service delivery intervention.

EX25 frequently and intentionally referred to evidence. The updated report, Economic contribution of ethnic minority communities 2001-2023,² shows that Ethnic Communities contributed \$87 billion to the New Zealand economy in 2023, up from \$64 billion in 2021. Increased visibility of this contribution was warmly welcomed by participants, especially those who dug deeper into the data at the afternoon breakout session, Beyond Ethnic Evidence: Unlocking the potential of ethnic businesses.

Other research highlighted at EX25 included a report on ethnic pay gaps by Auckland University of Technology, commissioned by our Ministry.³ The findings revealed persistent pay disparities and limited career progression for Ethnic Communities. Panellists at the breakout session highlighted that ethnic women, at the intersection of gender and ethnicity, face compounded barriers and often feel pressured to work extra hard. The untapped economic potential of Ethnic Communities is estimated to exceed \$10 billion, and more can be unlocked if women can reach their full potential.

Growing evidence points to the need for targeted action to address the systemic barriers highlighted in research, including those outlined in BERL's report for the Ministry: Ethnic Communities' barriers to business.⁴ Key challenges include limited access to capital, procurement biases, and the inaccessibility of some government information – such as resources available only in English.

2 - <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/31550-economic-contribution-of-ethnic-minority-communities-2001-2023>

3 - https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/83042/Pay-gaps-among-Ethnic-Communities-V2.pdf

4 - https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/82607/Ethnic-communities-barriers-to-business.pdf

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3. Highlight success to inspire growth

As evidence of ethnic businesses' contribution to New Zealand's economy grows, it is equally important to celebrate the success stories of ethnic entrepreneurs, innovators and investors.

Research shows that many ethnic entrepreneurs, particularly migrants, entered business out of necessity, either to supplement household income or after dissatisfaction with salaried roles.⁵ Their ambitions are often constrained by the environment in which they operate.

“



The solution is not in some distant theory or elusive policy fix. It is embodied in the resilience and innovation in this room. The real architects of our economic prosperity are the very people assembled here today.

Professor Prasanna Gai, Reserve Bank Monetary Policy Committee member

”

Seeing people from similar backgrounds succeed is both powerful and inspirational. Panel sessions, Global Traders and Innovators, and Breaking Barriers: The Stories of Ethnic Women Entrepreneurs, showcased how ethnic entrepreneurs have overcome obstacles to build thriving businesses.

⁵ - <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/533896/apec-summit-nz-puts-best-foot-forward-ahead-of-trump-taking-office>



Speakers shared their journeys, answered questions, and offered practical advice. This visibility and recognition reinforced the belief that success is possible, even in the face of tremendous challenges.

The report released at the symposium, *Ethnic Women Entrepreneurs – Amplifying impact for New Zealand*,⁶ documented many inspiring stories, some of which were shared on the day.

Responding to feedback from EX24, the EX25 programme placed a stronger spotlight on the contributions of ethnic women entrepreneurs. In August, we convened the Ethnic Women Entrepreneurs' Roundtable, bringing more than 60 women together. This engagement led to the creation of a WhatsApp network for women to connect and share information. Starting with 40 women, it has grown to an active group of around 140 women nationwide. Their experience demonstrates the value of platforms and networks in connecting, sharing information, addressing barriers, and supporting one another.



6 - https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/data/assets/pdf_file/0021/102567/Ethnic-Women-Entrepreneurs-Report-Nov-2025.pdf

4. Attract investment to drive growth

The Government is committed to attracting more Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into New Zealand to boost productivity, innovation, and job creation. To support this, Invest New Zealand has been established as a dedicated 'shopfront'. Its Director, Simon Ansley, outlined improvements made to date, including faster application processing times.

New Zealand is well positioned to attract FDI, thanks to our strong global ranking for ease of doing business and high-quality investment opportunities. A weaker currency has also worked to our advantage. There is growing demand for high-value investments in food and fibre and energy sectors, alongside significant opportunities in renewable energy, agritech, tourism, and hospitality.

While local startups such as Xero and Crimson Education have scaled with overseas investment, the challenge remains for more businesses to reach the scale required to attract capital.

Investment flows typically follow trade relationships, and the profile of our investors is shifting – no longer predominantly Anglo-Saxon, but increasingly diverse. In recent years, we have seen an influx of investments from China and the US, and now from countries such as Korea, Japan and Malaysia. The recently signed Yinson deal⁷ with Malaysian investors is a significant example of this shift.

Access to capital and finance was a recurring theme at EX25. Businesses were encouraged to leverage the diversity we enjoy, turn our unique geographic position into an advantage, orient their business propositions to target markets, understand investor needs, and build strong partnerships.

“

One in five New Zealanders work in businesses funded, or part funded, by FDI - we are doing well.

*Matthew Prichard, Board Chair,
KPMG New Zealand*

”

⁷ - <https://www.nzte.govt.nz/blog/major-investments-strengthen-nzs-renewable-energy-and-tourism-sectors>



5. Continue to embrace AI to power growth

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping the business landscape, and its presence at EX25 was difficult to ignore. The humanoid attendees, Auckland University of Technology's AUTo and AUTaia, served as a vivid reminder that we are beginning to see AI in the digital and physical world all around us. While AI offers significant opportunities for growth, it also brings risks, and global investment has outpaced consideration of long-term implications.

Experts at the breakout session, AI Insights: Using AI to Power Growth, compared AI's impact on the job market to the industrial revolution: some roles will disappear, while new ones will emerge. They noted misconceptions about AI often lead to a messy adoption phase, and stressed that AI does not replace critical thinking. Effective use depends on strong user prompts and human judgement.

This year, the Government released an AI strategy⁸ and Responsible AI guidance for businesses.⁹ The AI Forum¹⁰ continues to provide free resources to support safe and ethical adoption. Ethical data use remains a key challenge, with trust and security essential for uptake.



Leading ethnic entrepreneurs active in AI urged participants to embrace the technology, because AI is here to stay. Their advice is to upskill, experiment with different AI models, and learn how AI can enhance productivity and growth.

8 - <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/economic-growth/digital-policy/new-zealands-ai-strategy-investing-with-confidence>

9 - <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/business/support-for-business/responsible-ai-guidance-for-businesses>




10 - <https://aiforum.org.nz/>

Looking ahead: Turning evidence into action

As a core pillar of the Ministry's work, Ethnic Xchange symposia are designed to showcase and improve economic outcomes for Ethnic Communities by making evidence visible and stimulating positive action. But they go further reflecting our strategic intent to connect and empower communities, make government services more accessible, champion diversity and inclusion, and foster social cohesion as an essential foundation for shared prosperity.

Ethnic Xchange 2025: Going for Growth – Expanding Ethnic Enterprises provided a platform to turn evidence and experience into practical steps for growth. We set out to connect the dots between government policy, business trends, evidence and technology. It was a day to share insights, inspire and be inspired, build networks, form partnerships and gain new knowledge. Conversations focused on unlocking opportunities through global connections, investment, innovation, and AI, while highlighting the power of networks and collaboration.

Participants captured this in their reflections:

-  *"The atmosphere reminded me that our future here is bright — but it shines even more when we build it with others. When partnerships are formed, when doors open, when we're part of the conversation and part of the solutions."*
-  *"[EX25] reminded me of something important: we are not alone. We're building something bigger than our businesses. We're building belonging."*
-  *"[EX25 was] an inspiring and inclusive gathering that brought together bold thinkers, diverse leaders and communities shaping NZ's future."*

Speakers and participants consistently called for greater access to information and funding, and stronger partnerships across government and the private sector. These priorities, and the actions they expect, are summarised below.



Calls for action: Building momentum together

The table below brings together the priority themes and recommended actions identified across EX24 and EX25, reflecting both continuity and progress. Many actions first raised at EX24 remain relevant and have been reinforced at EX25 alongside new recommendations that respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

The combined actions highlight the need for ongoing collaboration between government agencies, business support organisations, and ethnic enterprises to create an environment where ethnic businesses can thrive and contribute more fully to New Zealand's economy.

Our work does not end here. Together, we can transform evidence into impact and create an economy where diversity drives growth for all New Zealanders.

“ The best way to forecast the future is to invent it — together. ”

— Mervin Singham, Chief Executive, Ministry for Ethnic Communities

Themes	Recommended actions		
	Government agencies	Business support organisations (e.g. business councils, banks and corporates)	Ethnic businesses, entrepreneurs and investors
Global trade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together to activate Ethnic Communities' global connections for trade and bilateral relationships. • Diversify markets beyond traditional partners, exploring regions such as Latin American and Africa, and specialised market segments like Halal food. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate to amplify voices and strengthen New Zealand's global competitiveness. • Share information on trade agreements and ensure Ethnic Communities are included in implementation. • Consider partnering with schools to introduce business and cultural awareness programmes that help students understand diversity and global markets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage diaspora identity as an asset for cultural knowledge and global connections. • Share insights on emerging global growth areas, such as renewable energy and agritech. • Seek clarity on trade deals through business and diplomatic platforms like ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) forums.

Themes	Recommended actions		
	Government agencies	Business support organisations (e.g. business councils, banks and corporates)	Ethnic businesses, entrepreneurs and investors
Business growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translate procurement and business support information into multiple languages and simplify navigation on government websites. • Develop workforce strategies to connect diverse talent with high-value industries, and review visa settings that limit labour mobility. • Review procurement criteria to reduce barriers for ethnic businesses and embed anti-bias measures in government procurement processes. • Consider business grants or rebates to support ethnic business growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer tailored financial products and culturally responsive business advisory services. • Create targeted programmes for Ethnic Communities, including women, to support start-up funding and growth. • Facilitate access to professional networks for ethnic entrepreneurs, including ethnic women entrepreneurs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use available evidence and insights to advocate for change. • Provide feedback to local MPs and/or Ministers on government processes or legislation that hinder businesses growth. • Support and collaborate with women entrepreneurs to break down barriers and promote growth. • Actively seek resources and form networks to strengthen support.
Foreign Direct Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work proactively with Ethnic Communities to activate diaspora connections for investment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect investors with businesses ready to scale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase investment readiness by securing partnerships and leveraging corporates services.
Technology and innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use AI to support accurate, multilingual access to government information and make services easier to navigate. • Offer clear guidance and guardrails for secure and ethical AI use. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote AI tools through channels accessible to ethnic businesses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt AI tools to improve efficiency and productivity. • Invest in upskilling to keep pace with technological advancements.

Appendix – The Ministry’s economic development work since EX24

Following EX24, the Ministry undertook a series of initiatives to respond to recommended actions and lay the groundwork for EX25. These actions focused on strengthening evidence, addressing barriers, and creating platforms for collaboration.

Ethnic business roundtables

We hosted a series of roundtables and panel discussions, supported by external partners, to explore challenges facing ethnic businesses and identify practical solutions for growth:

- **Ethnic Growth Exchange Roundtable** - February 2025, Auckland
Brought together ethnic business owners and entrepreneurs to discuss expansion strategies and how ethnic connections can drive growth.
- **Ethnic Women Entrepreneurs’ Roundtable**¹¹ - August 2025, Auckland
More than 60 ethnic women entrepreneurs and funders shared experiences and barriers, leading to actionable recommendations and the creation of an Ethnic Women Entrepreneur Network.
- **Tourism, Hospitality, and Film Roundtable**¹² - September 2025, Christchurch
Explored how Ethnic Communities can contribute cultural intelligence and market insights to strengthen these sectors.

¹¹ - <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/news/ethnic-women-entrepreneurs-united-by-shared-experiences>

¹² - <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/news/Role-of-Ethnic-Businesses-in-Hospitality-Tourism-and-Screen-sectors>



Ethnic Evidence: Making data and evidence visible

» **Ethnic Evidence Report** - December 2024

Launched at Parliament's Grand Hall, this was the first comprehensive baseline overview of how New Zealand's 1.1 million Ethnic Communities are faring across health, employment, business, justice, income, and wealth.¹³

» **Evidence resources** - August 2025

Released a suite of tools, including:

- An interactive Power BI dashboard (updated with 2023 Census data), enabling users to explore key information by ethnicity, location, religion, language, age and more.

[Ethnic Communities' Data Dashboards](#) | [Microsoft Power BI](#)

- Research on barriers to business, outlining challenges ethnic businesses face in scaling and navigating New Zealand's business environment.

[Ethnic Communities' barriers to business](#) | [Ministry for Ethnic Communities](#)

- Ethnic Business Demographics fact sheet, providing a snapshot of ethnic business owners in New Zealand.

[Snapshot of Ethnic Business Owners in NZ](#) | [Ministry for Ethnic Communities](#)

- Research on pay gaps, examining earnings differences across Ethnic Communities and the factors influencing them.¹⁴

[Pay gaps among Ethnic Communities in NZ](#) | [Ministry for Ethnic Communities](#)

13 - <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/our-communities/our-communities-in-the-data>

14 - In addition to the full report, a summary Insights Brief is available at:

https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/83042/Pay-gaps-among-Ethnic-Communities-V2.pdf

► **Commissioned reports shared at EX25 – November 2025**

- Economic Contribution of Ethnic Minority Communities 2001–2023, prepared by Shamubeel Eaquib and Nihal Sohanpal, commissioned by the New Zealand Government’s Auckland Policy Office, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, Ministry for Ethnic Communities and Waitakere Ethnic Board. It revealed Ethnic Communities contributed \$87 billion to the economy in 2023, up from \$64 billion in 2021.

[Economic contribution of ethnic minority communities 2001–2023 | MBIE](#)

- Ethnic Women Entrepreneurs: Amplifying impact for New Zealand, commissioned by the Ministry and authored by Ziena Jalil, showcasing the success stories of 16 ethnic women entrepreneurs and the challenges they overcame.

[Ethnic Women Entrepreneurs Report Nov 2025 | Ministry for Ethnic Communities](#)





Thank you to our valued partners

