



Ministry for
**Ethnic
Communities**
Te Tari Mātāwaka

The Ministry for Ethnic Communities is a separate Ministry but operates as a departmental agency with the Department of Internal Affairs – Te Tari Taiwhenua as the host agency.

2024/25

Annual Report of the Ministry for Ethnic Communities –

Te Pūrongo ā-Tau a Te Tari Mātāwaka



Who we are

Driven by purpose – the why behind our Ministry

Our Ministry was established on 1 July 2021 in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Inquiry following the terrorist attack on Christchurch mosques in March 2019.

Since our inception, we have embraced our role of the Government's lead for supporting Ethnic Communities and working to maximise the benefits of diversity and inclusion for all people in New Zealand.

Our values

We lead by example, living the values we champion among the Ethnic Communities we serve. These values are the guiding principles of our work, helping us create a truly inclusive Aotearoa.

We encourage all our employees to embody our core values:



Show Manaakitanga (kindness)



Practice Whakakotahitanga (inclusivity)



Display Whakamanawanui (courage)



Be Ngākau Pono (authentic)

Departmental agency

The Ministry for Ethnic Communities (the Ministry) operates as a departmental agency hosted within the Department of Internal Affairs (the Department).

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Statement of Responsibility

I am responsible, as Chief Executive, for:

- » the preparation of the Ministry for Ethnic Communities (Te Tari Mātāwaka) financial statements, and statements of expenses and capital expenditure, and for the judgements expressed in them;
- » having in place a system of internal control designed to provide reasonable assurance as to the integrity and reliability of financial reporting;
- » ensuring that end-of-year performance information on each appropriation administered by the Ministry for Ethnic Communities is provided in accordance with Sections 19A to 19C of the Public Finance Act 1989, whether or not that information is included in this annual report; and
- » the accuracy of any end-of-year performance information prepared by the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, whether or not that information is included in this annual report.

In my opinion:

- » the annual report fairly reflects the operations, progress, and organisational health and capability of the Ministry for Ethnic Communities;
- » the financial statements fairly reflect the financial position of the Ministry for Ethnic Communities as at 30 June 2025 and its operations for the year ended on that date; and
- » the forecast financial statements fairly reflect the forecast financial position of the Ministry for Ethnic Communities as at 30 June 2026 and its operations for the year ending on that date.



Mervin Singham

Chief Executive

Ministry for Ethnic Communities – Te Tari Mātāwaka

30 September 2025

Section 1

Chief Executive's foreword

New Zealand is changing. Our Ethnic Communities now make up over a million people, the fastest-growing population group in the country. With that growth comes both tremendous opportunity and real complexity. Diversity is one of our greatest national assets; however, it does not guarantee unity.

In today's world, inclusion must be actively protected and deliberately built. The rise of foreign interference, global conflicts, mis/disinformation, and anti-migrant sentiment underscores that it is critical to our national interests.

That's where our Ministry steps in. As the government's chief advisor on ethnic diversity and inclusion, we sit at the intersection of social cohesion, national resilience, and economic prosperity. We lead work in spaces where no other agency is solely responsible, protecting the integrity of our diverse social fabric and strengthening national unity.

You'll see in this report how we intentionally weave together evidence, community voice, and strategic influence into one integrated system of action.

The Ethnic Evidence report, a first for New Zealand, provides a nationwide view of how our communities are performing across critical systems, including health, employment, justice, and inclusion. This data helps shape more informed policy and investment decisions.

At the same time, our regional forums and flagship events, such as Ethnic Advantage and Ethnic Xchange, are expanding our reach, ensuring the human stories and lived realities behind the data are heard when decisions are made.

Community resilience begins with awareness, trust and people feeling seen and supported. When communities are informed, engaged and included, they are more resistant to manipulation and division. This is why social cohesion supports our nation's resilience. Social cohesion helps us stay strong in the face of adverse events and enhances safety and security for everyone in New Zealand. It starts in our homes, our communities, and the everyday relationships between people and government.

The impacts of our work extend far beyond our borders. A cohesive and inclusive society strengthens New Zealand's international reputation as a peaceful and welcoming nation that values diversity and talent. It directly affects our ability to attract international students, skilled migrants, foster trade relationships, secure long-term investments, enhance diplomatic influence, and promote tourism. With a sharp vision, social cohesion becomes central to our global competitiveness and national identity.

That's why we continue to invest in ethnic businesses and leadership, fund grassroots initiatives through the Ethnic Communities Development Fund, and champion the systems-level changes needed to create lasting and meaningful inclusion. These efforts contribute to developing an ecosystem where all New Zealanders, regardless of background, can thrive. Social cohesion is not a feel good, one-time outcome, it is a national asset and building it is serious work.

This report tells that story.

I'm proud of what we achieved this year. Thank you to all who walk alongside us, from staff and community leaders to ethnic businesses and government partners. I encourage you to explore this report to see the real-world impact of our work and the powerful outcomes it delivers for New Zealand.



Mervin Singham

Chief Executive
Ministry for Ethnic Communities

2024/25 Highlights



Ethnic Evidence report – A first for New Zealand

- » First **comprehensive overview** of how New Zealand's 1.1 million Ethnic Community members are faring across health, employment, business, justice and safety, income and wealth.
- » The indicators in this report draw on over **120 measures across three outcomes** – contribution to the economy, access to high quality public services, and valuing diversity and inclusion.
- » The report has had over **5,000 views** since its publication on the Ministry's website in November 2024 and has been presented to over 15 government agencies.



Inaugural Ethnic Xchange - Unlocking potential

- » Ethnic Xchange business symposium brought together **over 300 participants from diverse backgrounds** for the Ministry's flagship event.
- » Showcasing the **economic benefits** that Ethnic Communities bring to New Zealand and the practical steps needed to remove some of the barriers experienced.



Security and resilience resources now available

- » Information about foreign interference to provide practical support to help communities understand and resist threats, has been produced and released in **24 different languages** on the Ministry's website.



More funding grants awarded

- » 615 total applications processed, and **408 grants awarded** for a total value of \$4.2 million towards supporting Ethnic Communities to develop skills, celebrate culture and participate in society building social cohesion for New Zealand.



Strengthening our reach with communities in person and digitally

- » Piloted and launched **Regional Initiative for Ethnic Communities Empowerment (RIECE)**, with forums in Palmerston North and Hawkes Bay, and another planned for Southland.
- » **Expanded our digital communication channels** to better engage with diverse Ethnic Communities and reach new demographics. We introduced targeted webinars to **support two-way dialogue** and improved the performance of our other digital platforms.

Section 2

Progress on Strategic Intentions

Strategic Intentions 2024 - 2028

We work with communities, other government agencies and a range of organisations to help increase social cohesion, improve economic performance, and ensure New Zealand is a place where everyone feels welcome, valued and empowered.

Our mandate comes from the communities we engage with, and their priorities are ours:

- 1. Promoting the value of diversity and improving the inclusion of Ethnic Communities in wider society**
- 2. Ensuring government services are accessible for Ethnic Communities**
- 3. Improving economic outcomes for Ethnic Communities, including addressing barriers to employment**
- 4. Connecting and empowering ethnic community groups.**

Priority 1:

Promoting the value of diversity and improving the inclusion of Ethnic Communities in wider society

The Ministry is operating in an increasingly challenging and evolving environment. Global conflicts and other events have domestic and wider impacts on New Zealand's social cohesion, and consequently the work of the Ministry is also becoming more complex.

This year we have used our connections into Ethnic Communities to bring communities together in a variety of new and innovative ways.

Regional Initiative for Ethnic Communities Empowerment (RIECE)

In November 2024, the Ministry piloted the Regional Initiative for Ethnic Communities Empowerment (RIECE) forum in Palmerston North to ensure regional Ethnic Communities perspectives are reflected in its evidence base.

The forum attracted around 50 representatives from Ethnic Communities and government agencies to discuss employment, immigration, equitable access to services, and ethnic business potential. Building on its success, a second forum was held in Hawkes Bay in March 2025¹, where 50 stakeholders shared insights on migrant exploitation and family violence.

Feedback confirmed the RIECE addresses a real need in the regions, strengthening connections between Ethnic Communities and government agencies. A further forum will be held in Southland in July 2025 and planned for other regions such as Tauranga, Queenstown and Taranaki in 2026.

¹ <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/news/riecce-2-hawkes-bay>

RIECE responds to community concerns about the Ministry's regional presence and ensures Ethnic Communities' voices remain valued and included. Summary reports were produced after each forum and shared with partner agencies and all attendees. Forums are tailored to regional contexts, with timely follow-ups and ongoing engagement essential to maintaining trusted relationships and supporting robust, evidence-based advice.

Ethnic Advantage 2025 – United Against the Headwinds

On 28 June 2025, the Ministry held its flagship social cohesion conference, Ethnic Advantage 2025: United Against Headwinds², in Auckland.

The event brought together over 400 community leaders from across the country, representing diverse ethnicities. It highlighted the incredible contributions Ethnic Communities make – especially during times of global tensions, rising living costs, increasing unemployment, and other national challenges.

A key insight, echoed from previous forums, is that Ethnic Communities are eager to contribute to solutions that benefit all New Zealanders, not just their own communities.

Discussions focused on the role of Ethnic Communities in fostering social cohesion, with panel sessions addressing the need to protect our communities from foreign interference, and respond to the local impact of global tensions. One session also reviewed progress since the 2023 conference around emergency recovery, highlighting the role of ethnic service providers and councils in civil defence responses during natural disasters.

Social cohesion cannot be achieved overnight. As new challenges arise, we need to find fresh ways to face them together. Effective programmes help bridge differences, build trust, and create a shared sense of purpose. The Ministry remains committed to working closely with communities to understand their needs and deliver meaningful support.

Faith Leaders Forums

Following successful forums in 2023 and 2024, the Ministry hosted additional Faith Leaders Forums in August 2024 and February 2025. Around 16 leaders from national peak faith organisations gathered to discuss shared challenges and promote social cohesion and inclusion.

The Ministry plans to continue hosting these forums.

Future Leaders Programme

In May 2025, the Ministry piloted the Future Leaders Programme in partnership with the Federation of Islamic Associations of New Zealand (FIANZ). Over four days, 22 young leaders, selected from 106 applicants, connected with senior public, private and media figures.

Workshops covered leadership essentials, conflict resolution, and media skills. The pilot generated strong interest in expanding the programme. An evaluation is under way and, if positive, similar initiatives will be launched for other Ethnic Communities in 2025/26.

² More details can be found at <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/news/registrations-now-open-for-ethnic-advantage-2025>

Ethnic representation on public sector boards and committees

The Ministry maintains a database of over 250 individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds who have expressed interest in serving on public sector boards and committees. Over the past year, the Ministry has delivered three online learning events with guest speakers to support governance capability building.

Priority 2:

Ensuring government services are accessible for Ethnic Communities

This year, we provided strategic guidance to government agencies, helping shape more inclusive policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of Ethnic Communities.

Ethnic Evidence – Making data and evidence visible

In December 2024, the Ministry launched its Ethnic Evidence report³ at Parliament's Grand Hall – the first comprehensive overview of how New Zealand's 1.1 million Ethnic Communities are faring across health, employment, business, justice and safety, income and wealth.

The report is a key resource for public sector agencies to embed Ethnic Communities perspectives into policy, service design, and investment decisions. It addressed a critical gap and was well received by both communities and public sector partners, for its clear, practical insights for more inclusive decisions.

While the report highlights key strengths and challenges, further work is needed. It offers a foundation to deepen our understanding and improve data and insights, ensuring Ethnic Communities are fully reflected in government decision-making.

Emergency preparedness

Recent events highlighted gaps in emergency responses to the linguistic, cultural, and religious needs of Ethnic Communities, who often support all communities during crises.

In April 2025, the Ministry organised a meeting with the Minister for Ethnic Communities, (also the Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery), and around 50 Ethnic Service Providers working across social, health, mental health, and support services for various groups including ethnic, regional, Rainbow and senior communities. The meeting enabled providers to share challenges, strengthen collaboration, begin problem solving, and develop Emergency Preparedness programmes.

Language Assistance Service

Interpreting services play a critical role in removing barriers to accessing government services for all New Zealanders. In April 2025, we began transitioning the Language Assistance Service from MBIE to the Ministry. From July 2025, the Ministry will continue to focus on its role of lead agency as well as reviewing the programme for future improvements and longer-term sustainability.

3 More details can be found in <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/our-communities/our-communities-in-the-data>

Priority 3:

Improving economic outcomes, including addressing barriers to employment

There is a clear link between economic performance and social cohesion. New Zealand's super-diversity is an opportunity to drive stronger economic outcomes. The Ministry is uniquely positioned to facilitate the contribution of ethnic businesses, drawing on trusted relationships built since the Ministry was established.

Ethnic Xchange 2024

On 11 October 2024, the Ministry held the inaugural Ethnic Xchange business symposium⁴ in Auckland, focused on unlocking the full potential of ethnic businesses for New Zealand.

Over 300 participants and speakers from a diverse range of backgrounds discussed trade, investment and innovation, highlighting how ethnic businesses can support New Zealand's global trade through expertise in international markets and environments.

The symposium showcased the economic value of Ethnic Communities, explored ways to reduce barriers and provided networking with trade and investment partners, entrepreneurs, experts and government representatives.

A report with key insights and recommendations was shared with relevant government agencies, business support organisations, and ethnic businesses.

The main challenge remains adapting to a fast-changing business environment and diverse sector needs. To address this, business round table events are being held around the country to meet varied needs.

Ethnic Business Roundtables

In 2024/25, the Ministry hosted two Ethnic Business Roundtables, supported by external partners, to explore challenges facing ethnic businesses and gather insights on breaking down barriers to growth.

Over 60 leaders from the private sector, public sector and ethnic businesses attended sessions on governance, business growth and overcoming common challenges.

As part of the Ministry's ongoing engagement strategy for economic growth, two more round tables are planned for late 2025.

Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme

In March 2025, after three successful intakes yielding 53 graduates, the Ministry concluded that the Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme had achieved its objective of increasing ethnic representation in entry-level public service roles.

With solid representation now established in the lower tiers of the public sector, the programme was discontinued. Resources have been redirected to new high-impact initiatives supporting Ethnic Communities' aspirations.

4 More details can be found in <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/events/ethnic-xchange>

Priority 4:
Connecting and Empowering Ethnic Community groups

Security and Resilience

Foreign interference is a growing threat to the safety and security of everyone in New Zealand. Some Ethnic Communities face unwanted attention from foreign states that undermines their rights, discouraging communities from speaking out, protesting, or expressing their opinions freely.

As part of an all-of-government response to foreign interference, the Ministry has delivered two thematic reports based on engagement with communities, helping to inform our work and our partner agencies.

Resources⁵ have been released in 24 languages covering:

- » Your rights in New Zealand
- » How to report foreign interference
- » Keeping safe online
- » Information about the draft Crimes (Countering Foreign Interference) Amendment Bill.

Foreign Inference is a challenging and growing problem. The resilience of Ethnic Communities is a key national security asset. The Ministry is providing practical support to help communities understand and resist these threats.

Ethnic Communities Development Fund

The Ethnic Communities Development Fund (ECDF) provides \$4.2 million a year for one-off projects that support Ethnic Communities to develop skills, celebrate their culture and participate in society.

In 2024/25, a total of 615 applications were processed (up from 583 in 2023/24) and 408 grants were awarded (up from 306 in 2023/24) to the total value of \$4.2 million.

The Fund is highly valued by Ethnic Communities, with demand consistently exceeding available funding.



2024/25 -
408 grants awarded

The table below shows how the 2024/2025 grants align with the Ministry’s strategic priorities:

Ministry Priorities	Number of Grants Awarded
1. Take action to promote the value of diversity and improve inclusion of ethnic communities	163
2. Ensure equitable provision of, and access to, government services for ethnic communities	11
3. Develop and support initiatives to improve economic outcomes, including addressing barriers to employment	13
4. Work to connect and empower ethnic community groups	221
Total grants	408

In 2025/26, the Ministry will explore ways to encourage more funding applications from Ethnic Communities for projects focused on Priorities 2 and 3.

5 More details can be found at <https://www.ethniccommunities.govt.nz/programmes/security-and-resilience>

Strengthening community connections through digital growth

Recognising the fast-paced and digitally driven world we live in, the Ministry continued to enhance its digital presence to improve communication and engagement with Ethnic Communities.

These efforts contributed to broader reach, improved access to information, and increased public engagement with Ministry initiatives.

- » **Social media** - The Ministry maintained an active presence on Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube, and added Instagram in early 2025 to extend its reach to wider demographic groups. Our Facebook followers increased by nearly 10%, and total YouTube video views rose by 138% (or more than double), indicating greater engagement with visual content. LinkedIn continued to perform strongly.
- » **Webinars** - Introduced to support two-way engagement with communities, offering real-time dialogue and information-sharing. We organised six webinars in 2024/25: three focused on the Ethnic Communities Development Fund, and three supported Nomination services.
- » **Website performance** - The Ministry's website continued to serve as a central source of information for Ethnic Communities and stakeholders. Active users more than doubled and overall site traffic increased by over 110%.

Celebrating community events at Parliament

Delivering key community events at Parliament reaffirms our commitment to fostering understanding, respect and unity in New Zealand. Hosted by the Minister for Ethnic Communities, close to 500 Ethnic Communities and business stakeholders attended one of the events held in celebration of Diwali in November 2024, the Lunar New Year 2025 and Eid in April 2025. These events showcase New Zealand's rich multicultural heritage and provide opportunities for collective celebration of culture and social cohesion.

Using art to connect and empower Ethnic Communities

As part of our ongoing efforts to engage communities in new ways, we partnered with the Pan Asian Screen Collective⁶ to deliver *Being Seen* – a film-based initiative exploring cultural identity, belonging and inclusion.

Four curated short films by Pan-Asian filmmakers were screened across Auckland, attracting over 140 attendees. The films addressed themes such as identity, racism, migration, isolation and inclusion.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants valuing stories that mirrored their own experiences and then discussing those themes in-depth with others.

6 <https://www.pasc.co.nz/>

Section 3

Assessment of operations

Overview of Delivery

As the Government's chief advisor on ethnic diversity and inclusion, we delivered the following key outcomes across three focus areas in 2024/25.

Economic growth

We engaged with ethnic business leaders, ethnic business councils, private sector organisations and government agencies to identify the critical economic priorities for Ethnic Communities. The Ethnic Xchange conference (refer to story on page 201) highlighted key barriers and opportunities for enhancing their contribution to New Zealand's economy.

Security and resilience

Our work on foreign interference takes a social cohesion-focused approach, building both community resilience and public sector capability. This unique model has attracted international interest, with Australia being the only other country using a similar approach (refer to story on page 202).

Social cohesion and wellbeing

Through targeted programmes, stakeholder engagement and support via the Ethnic Communities Development Fund, we've strengthened Ethnic Communities' sense of belonging and integration into New Zealand society (refer to story on page 202).

Advice to Government

In 2024/25, the Ministry used its data and analytics capability to produce the *Ethnic Evidence Report* (refer to story on page 202 to 203). This report has improved the visibility of Ethnic Communities in existing data, helped identify system issues and supports more detailed ethnicity data collection and reporting.

Implementing the Government's priorities

Ministerial priorities

In 2024/25, both Melissa Lee and Mark Mitchell as Ministers for Ethnic Communities, have directed initiatives to enhance Ethnic Communities' economic contribution, strengthen social cohesion and improve access to government services.

Minister Mitchell's speech in April 2025 outlined his key priorities for the Ethnic Communities portfolio⁷.

The Ministry has progressed the priorities of both Ministers in 2024/25. Refer to the previous Section 2 - Progress on Strategic Intentions for more information.

Baseline savings and reduction in contractors and consultants

The Ministry's baseline was reduced by \$1.244 million in 2024/2025 because of the Budget 2024 Initial Baseline Exercise. These savings were achieved through:

- » Workforce optimisation
- » Reduced reliance on contractors and consultants
- » Review of all discretionary spending, including travel.

For more details, refer to page 35 to 36 in Section 3 - Assessment of operations.

Reduction in expenditure on contractors and consultants

The Ministry achieved a \$46,000 reduction in contractors and consultants' expenditure in 2024/25. The 2024/25 spend on contractors and consultants was \$146,000.

This compares with expenditure of \$192,000 in 2023/2024.

For more details, refer to page 36 in Section 3 - Assessment of operations.

Budget Significant Initiatives

For Budget 2024 and Budget 2025 we did not have any significant Budget initiatives.

Year-end performance information on appropriations

In 2024/25, the Ministry reviewed all its non-financial performance measures. We revised the Ministerial Satisfaction performance measure to reflect the broad range of advice the Ministry provides to the Minister, not just policy advice. The Ministry also established a standard for this measure.

The Ministry will continue annual reviews of our performance measures, to improve or update measures as needed. For more details, refer to pages 80 to 81 in Section 3 - Assessment of operations.

⁷ <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/ethnic-communities-minister-outlines-key-priorities>

Section 4

Organisational health and capability

As a departmental agency, the Ministry manages its own resources but receives corporate support in some areas from the Department. Below is a unique overview of the Ministry’s organisational health and capability.

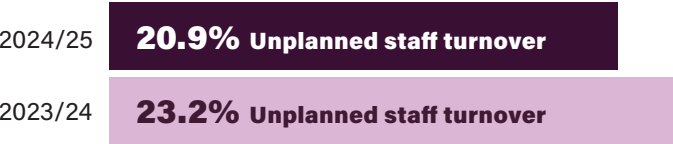
Long term capability and our people

In 2024/25, the Ministry introduced a new operating model, refocusing on our four strategic priorities by targeting key issues rather than broad engagement with communities. We have also facilitated discussion with communities on complex and sensitive issues. We still respond to emerging issues but carefully choose priorities with the most impact.

As of 30 June 2025, the Ministry had 60 employees, with a full-time equivalent (FTE) of 58.7.

Unplanned staff turnover

The Ministry’s unplanned turnover (permanent staff lost due to reasons not planned for such as resignations) as of 30 June 2025 was 20.9 percent (compared with 23.2 percent in 2023/24). This figure reflects redundancies, the ongoing challenge a smaller Ministry faces providing internal career progression opportunities, and continued uncertainty in the public sector environment.



Equal Employment Opportunity

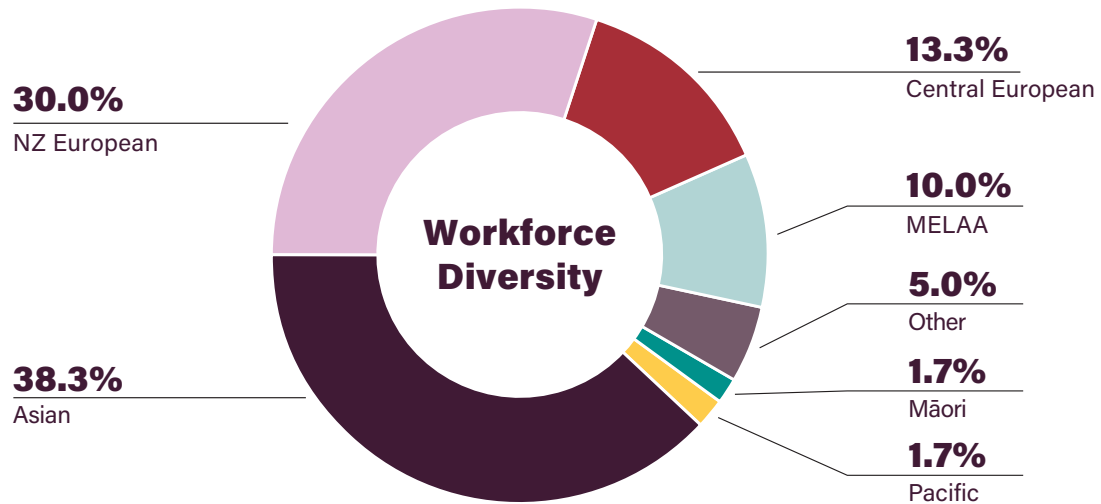
The Ministry is committed to creating an inclusive workplace, where people feel supported, connected, and empowered to be themselves and deliver for New Zealanders.

The gender pay gap on 30 June was -0.9 percent. The Asian pay gap was -7.8% with further ethnicity breakdowns unavailable due to the small number of employees.

Workforce Diversity

Our diverse mix of ethnicities reflects our role and the communities we support. Our people may identify with multiple ethnicities, and the figures below reflect their primary identity (excluding graduates).

Asian 38.3%, NZ European 30%, Central European 13.3%, MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American and African) 10%, Other 5%, Māori 1.7%, Pacific 1.7%



Kia Toipoto and Papa Pounamu

In October 2024, we merged the Kia Toipoto and Whāinga Amorangi plans into the Kia Toipoto and Papa Pounamu Action Plan 2022 - 2025, now on our website. This single plan guides both our work on an inclusive workplace and our Māori-Crown partnership. We regularly review recruitment, salaries and staff data to minimise our gender pay gap. We also provide training in te reo Māori, New Zealand history, the Treaty of Waitangi, tikanga and other Māori practices so our people can engage confidently and respectfully. Progress is tracked and reviewed through reports and updates.

Institutional Knowledge and information

In 2024/25, we strengthened our internal capability to support the Ministry's role as Chief Advisor by:

- » Introducing a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tool to enhance strategic engagement.
- » Offering plain language training to all staff to improve accessibility across all communication channels.
- » Offering intercultural capability eLearning modules for public sector users on the Ministry's website. 155 users completed a survey with 86% saying they were likely or very likely to recommend the course to others.

Systems and processes

- » We successfully trialed and were the first adopters of the Department's information technology platform upgrade from Cohesion to Hukatai.
- » We replaced the Ministry's website. From July 2025, the upgrade will support enhanced analytics and provide a modern platform to host our website, future-proofing one of our key communication channels.