

Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) Resolution

The Federal government does not currently collect or produce data on the race and ethnicity of Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) populations and has not updated its standards for data collection on race and ethnicity since 1997.

Our national diversity has changed significantly since then and, at the same time, conditions have gotten worse for marginalized groups, particularly for those not recognized in federal data, like individuals from the MENA region.

Demographic data on MENA populations is currently aggregated under the “White” racial category on the decennial census and other federal information collection forms.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) sets the standards for all federal data collection on race and ethnicity under Statistical Policy Directive Number 15 (SPD 15) and is considering a revision to SPD 15 which requires all federal agencies to collect data on race and ethnicity through a single question that includes a “Middle Eastern or North African” response.

The systematic exclusion of MENA populations from federal data bars MENA communities from accessing equal protection from discrimination and equal opportunity to benefit from federal programs that serve culturally specific or linguistically isolated groups.

Data on race and ethnicity is a critical tool for communities to advocate for protection under the Voting Rights Act, assistance under the Small Business Act, and health care services under the Public Health Service Act, to name just a few federally supported programs that are connected to SPD 15.

The City of Dearborn has taken steps to promote equality and equity in its provision of services and protections for all communities through additional language access initiatives, and would benefit greatly from being able to identify inequities, such as health, education, or employment, experienced by MENA populations in all federal surveys and information collections.

ACCESS is advocating for the OMB to require that all federally conducted and supported data collection activities, including the decennial census, collect data on race and ethnicity through a combined question that includes a “Middle Eastern or North African” response category.

Collecting racial and ethnic data on MENA populations will ensure that federal, state, and local governments recognize and meet the needs of all communities.