

Please note that our reflections about gender equality and diversity are continuously evolving and content from this lexicon may be outdated.

Gender and Sexual Identity Lexicon

equitas

Centre international d'éducation aux droits humains
International Centre for Human Rights Education



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About This Lexicon

As a human rights education organization, gender equality is integrated into all of Equitas' programs and practice and is reinforced by a Gender Policy, Gender working group and participation in the Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale (AQOCI) *Community of Practice on Gender*. Further to the development of the Gender Policy in 2013, Equitas wishes to implement these objectives in a more concrete way. With the aim to reinforce the institutionalization of gender inside the organization and support the implementation of the Gender Policy in every project and programs, Equitas established this Gender and Sexual Orientation Lexicon. The later seeks to equip staff members, directors and partners of Equitas with the goal to standardize conceptions about equality of gender within projects and programs.



Definitions of General Terms about the Equality of Gender

Equality

Principle embodied in the Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Equality is the notion that all human beings are entitled to the same human rights without distinction of any kind. See also sex-equality, women's equality, gender - equality.¹

Equity

The state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair which involves having access to the means to achieve it.²

Gender¹

Gender is made up of the characteristics, roles, and behaviors that individuals are given in a society based on their sex. It also refers to the power relation between women, men and any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional male and female gender norms. Gender roles do not always reflect reality and may be based on stereotypes and reinforced in a community. The term “gender” is different from the term “sex” which refers to the biological differences between men and women. Moreover, it is important to specify that social gendered roles can change and evolve.³

Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men, girls and boys or any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional male or female gender norms. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men or any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional male and female gender norms are taken into consideration - recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a 'women's issue' but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Gender equality is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development. Women and men, girls and boys or any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional male and female gender norms may experience not only discrimination on the grounds of sex, but may also experience the compounding effects of discrimination based on race, ethnic and religious identity, disability, age, class, sexual orientation.⁴

¹ The use of the term “gender”, unlike the term “sex”, has been favoured here in order to reflect the diversity of social sexual relations existing in our societies. The term sex, which is often understood as the binary male/female relation, limits the analysis of gender subordination. Equitas adopts a more inclusive intersectional approach that takes into consideration different patterns of possible subordination such as sexual orientation, class/cast, race, ethnicity and age. See the definition of intersectional approach for more details.

Gender Equity

Gender equity is the mean by which the goal of gender equality can be achieved. It refers to measures and specific practices that take into considerations the needs and the specific interests of women, men or any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional male and female gender norms.⁵

Women’s Rights

Women’s rights refer to the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled, which are enshrined in international conventions and covenants beginning with the International Bill of Human Rights. The obligation to eliminate sex-based discrimination against women to achieve gender equality is an essential piece of the international human rights framework. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) reinforces the commitment to women’s rights, providing specific guidance on the range of actions that must be taken to achieve gender equality.⁶

Definitions of Concepts that Broach the Themes of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

LGBTQI Rights

The basic principle of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guides actions for the promotion and protection of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex people (LGBTQI) rights. Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. Equality presupposes that all individuals have the same rights and deserve the same level of respect. Sexual orientation and gender identity are fundamental dimensions of personal identity. LGBTQI people should be able to enjoy their rights. Because LGBTQI people have been denied their basic rights for many years, legal and/or social practices have contributed to marginalizing them. Their basic civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights have been denied, such as the right to equality before the law, the right to non-discrimination, the right to freedom from violence and harassment, the right to freedom of assembly and movement, the rights to privacy, the right to work, the right to social security, the right to participate in cultural life, etc. In 2006, 29 experts from 25 countries adopted the Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. These principles address a broad range of international human rights instruments and their application to LGBTQI rights. The principles explain, through a list of recommendations, how States should implement human rights standards for LGBTI people.⁷

In Canada, homosexuality has been decriminalized in 1969. Today, LGBTQI people have a complete juridical equality (child adoption, marriage, social advantages, etc.) In Quebec, since 1977, the Charter of rights and freedom denounces every kind of discrimination based on sexual orientation (art. 10).⁸



Gender Identity

Gender identity describes each person's deeply-felt, internal and individual experience of gender. This may not be the same as the sex they were identified as at birth. A person might change their body, the way it functions, or the way they dress, speak, or behave to more closely match their own gender identity over the course of their life. Gender identity highlights how gender must be seen as a spectrum, and is not comprised of only two categories, man or woman.⁹

LGBTQI

Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender / trans-identified, Q for queer and I for intersexual. We can also add another Q for Questioning, a 2-S for Twospirited and an A for Allies. Synonymous with sexual minority.¹⁰

Lesbian

A female who is attracted physically and emotionally to other females.¹¹

Sexual Orientation

Feelings of affection and attraction a person has, both emotionally and physically, for another person of opposite gender, of same gender or of many genders. For example, a person can be bisexual, homosexual (lesbian or gay) or heterosexual.¹²

Gay

A person who is physically and emotionally attracted to someone of the same sex.¹³

Bisexual

A person who is attracted physically and emotionally to both people of the opposite gender and of the same gender.¹⁴

Heterosexual

A person who is attracted physically and emotionally to persons of the opposite gender. We also say « straight ».¹⁵

Intersex

A person whose biological or assigned-at-birth sex naturally shows characteristics that are not strictly male or female.

Note: Term conventionally used by the medical community to refer to persons before qualified as hermaphrodites.¹⁶

Transsexual

A person who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and has changed or is in the process of changing his or her sex, whether by surgery or hormone therapy, and wishes to live as a person of the resulting sex. A sex change is generally irreversible.¹⁷



Transvestite

A person who, for occasions or permanently, shows the expression of the opposite gender to his or her habitual gender identity.¹⁸

Drag King

A person of female gender who dresses with clothes and accessories generally associated to male gender with the aim of entertaining.

Drag Queen

A person of male gender who dresses with clothes and accessories generally associated to female gender with the aim of entertaining.

Queer

Person who doesn't subscribe to the traditional binary sexual and gender division but rather identifies herself or himself to a gender identity or a sexual orientation that is non-compliant or free-flowing.

Note: Once a negative term used to describe those who did not meet societal norms of sexual behaviour, queer is now used by many LGBTI people to describe people who are opposed to nonstandard practices and norms of heterosexuality (heteronormativity). In that sense, this term symbolized self-determination and contestation.¹⁹

Transgender

A person whose gender identity or biological sex is situated outside traditional male or female roles, who does not identify herself or himself with her or his assigned sex at birth or who started a process to better correspond with her or his expression of gender and gender identity.

Note: Sometimes, the term indicates trans persons whose transition does not imply hormonal treatment or surgery of sexual reassignment.²⁰

Two-spirited

Two-spirited is a First Nations term for individuals who are considered to be neither women nor men. It often implies a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit living in the same body. Traditionally, two-spirited individuals were seen as having a gift and they performed traditional duties of both genders.²¹

Definition of terms related to discrimination

Gender discrimination



Discrimination based on socially constructed ideas and perceptions of men and women and any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional male and female gender norms.²²

Systematic Discrimination

Discrimination that takes root in practices, uses and customs apparently neutral but that have discriminatory effects integrated in job structures of enterprises that exclude members of certain groups for motives that are not related to job requirements.²³

Heterosexism

Institutionalized system of thoughts that can defend and promote the superiority of heterosexuality by exclusion of other sexual identity and orientations.²⁴

Homophobia

All negative attitudes that can lead to rejection and discrimination, whether direct or indirect, against gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender and intersex people, or any person whose appearance or behaviour fails to conform to traditional female and male gender norms.²⁵

Pink Ceiling

Limitation of LGBTQI persons to access higher posts in an enterprise or in an organization.

Note: Derived from the term “glass ceiling”, the pink ceiling is the result of a direct or indirect discrimination that prevents LGBTQI persons to affirm their identity at their workplace.²⁶

Glass Ceiling

Limitation of women to access higher posts in an enterprise or in an organization that results of direct or indirect gender discrimination. We also say vertical professional segregation.

Transphobia

The irrational fear of people who transgress, challenge or break from stereotypical expressions of male and female gender norms. Transphobia is often expressed in subtle and overt ways that may include stereotyping, harassment, discrimination and violence.²⁷

Gender-based Violence

Gender-based violence refers to all violence resulting from an unequal power relation. According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women.” The violation of women’s rights - safety, physical integrity and health - prevents active participation and involvement of women into the economic, social and political life.²⁸

Definitions on Useful Expressions to Implement Action Plans, Analysis Politics or Evaluation Related to Gender

Gender Analysis

Gender analysis centers on understanding the causes and consequences of gender discrimination and the unequal power relations between women and men or any person whose appearance or behaviour fails to conform to traditional male and female gender norms. In a specific context, we want to evaluate the prevailing social attitudes and customary practices or discriminatory laws and policies, among other factors. Gender analysis also refers to the variety of methods used to understand the relationships between women and men or any person whose appearance or behaviour fails to conform to traditional female and male gender norms, their access to resources, their activities, and the constraints they face relative to each other. Gender analysis provides information that recognizes that gender, and its relationship with race, ethnicity, culture, class, age, disability, sexual orientation and/or other status, is important in understanding the different patterns of involvement, behavior and activities that women and men have in economic, social and legal structures. For instance: sociological analysis of the context according to gender and LGBTQI discriminations, analysis of the sexual division of labour, etc.²⁹

Gender-based Approach²

The gender-based approach looks at the differential impact of proposed and/or existing policies, programs and legislation on women and men and any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional female and male gender norms. It makes it possible for policy to be undertaken with an appreciation of gender differences, of the nature of relationships between women and men and any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional female and male gender norms of their different social realities, life expectations and economic circumstances.³⁰

Intersectional Approach

The intersectional approach aims to reveal diverse identities (class/caste, sexual orientation, ethnic group, age, sex, etc.), to expose different types of discriminations and disadvantages that result from the set of these identities. It tries to tackle the way racism, patriarchy, class-based oppression and other systems of discrimination create inequalities that structure the status related to women and any person whose appearance or behaviour fails to conform to traditional female and male gender norms. It takes into consideration historical, social and politic contexts and recognizes also unique individual experiences that are the result of the convergence of different identity types.³¹

² Synonymous to “Gender perspective”



Gender-mainstreaming

Gender Mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Gender mainstreaming emphasizes the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all policies and programs to ensure that all decision-making processes include an analysis of the effects on women and men and any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional female and male gender norms respectively.³²

Empowerment

Process by which women and other gender identities subordinated to the dominant majority become aware (individually or collectively) of the impacts of power relations on their life and by which they acquire the necessary confidence in themselves to question gender inequalities. For instance, empowerment can be obtained through a more equitable access to resources and a control on natural and economic resources, basic social services, reduction of gender-based violence, a fairer participation to decision taking in households and in civil and politic life, a changing of gender stereotypes and of discriminatory behaviours towards women, etc.³³

Sexual Division of Labour

The division of tasks according to the sex refers to tasks executed in general by women and men within the community or the household. Factors such as education, technology, and economy modify gender roles and the division of tasks. An analysis of the division of tasks according to sex clearly illustrates the interdependence of work between women and men and that it is women that execute the major part of unpaid tasks within the household (reproductive sphere) and the community.³⁴

Feminism

Social movement that rose from in the 1970s and that fought for gender equality. Feminism is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, cultural, and social rights for women.³⁵

Masculinity

Masculinity is defined as a gender identity that is socially and historically built. This makes reference to a set of norms, values and behaviours that express (implicitly or explicitly) expectations in regards to men's actions and behaviours. Considering gender relations, masculinity is an element to take into consideration to achieve gender equality. Many development projects incorporate the concept of masculinity. Work on masculinity implies to identify and demonstrate advantages for men to modify their behaviours by adopting alternative models of masculinity.³⁶

Gender Neutrality



Assessment of a problem without the insertion of a gender-sensitive analysis. The myth of gender neutrality in human rights eliminates recognition that treating people identically despite unequal situations perpetuates rather than eradicates injustices.³⁷

Gender-related Development Index (GDI)

An index that measures average achievement in the three basic dimensions that are captured in the human development index—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living—but adjusted to account for inequalities between men and women and any person whose appearance or behavior fails to conform to traditional female and male gender norms.³⁸

Gender in Evaluation

In human rights education, the application of a gender perspective to educational evaluation means assessing the differing implications for women, girls, men, boys and any person whose appearance fails to conform to traditional male and female gender norms at each step of the evaluation process. Concretely, a gender perspective should inform everything from the questions that are developed for a training needs assessment to the decision about which learners should attend a focus group, to the indicators that are developed for an impact assessment.³⁹

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