



Key Concepts and Definitions related to Sex and Gender

3 minutes, 30 seconds

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Note from the Gender Equity Unit

Our work is deeply motivated by a commitment to women and girls, in light of longstanding systemic discrimination and barriers which continue to affect their full participation and access to opportunity. We also combat discrimination and harmful gender norms that affect people of all genders: women and girls—including transgender women and girls, gender nonbinary and gender diverse people, as well as men and boys.



The following **concepts and definitions** were created by partners in Data for Health led by the Gender Equity Unit.

Sex

- Label often assigned at birth by health care professionals
- Based on biological characteristics, including genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes



- Captured in birth certificates
- Categories:
 - Male
 - Female
 - Intersex

Gender

- Social construct based on expectations and characteristics set forth by society on appropriate behavior, norms, and established roles
- Gender is not limited to the binary
- Categories:
 - Man (boy)
 - Woman (girl)
 - Nonbinary
 - Third gender
 - Transgender
 - Other

Sexual Orientation

- Physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to members of the same, different, or any gender
- Categories:
 - Heterosexual
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Pansexual
 - Asexual

KEY CONCEPTS on Sex and Gender

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Sex: Sex refers to the biological and physiological reality of being male or female or intersex



based on external genitalia, hormones, and chromosomes.

Intersex: Individuals who are intersex or third sex can have a variety of chromosomal compositions beyond the more common XX or XY chromosomes and can display a range of sex characteristics, including those associated with being male or female. A very small percentage of the global population is intersex.[1]

Gender: Gender encompasses the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth.[2] Gender-based roles and other attributes can change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. Many cultures recognize genders beyond the binary where individuals have an internal sense of both masculinity and femininity or neither.

Gender is a classification system that influences access to power and resources and shapes how individuals (particularly women and men) relate to one another. This concept is useful in analyzing how commonly socialized gender norms legitimize discrepancies between the sexes.[3]

Gender identity: One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. For most people, gender identity is not developed until around the age of three.[6] See definitions of the many types of gender identity [here](#).

Gender expression: Gender expression is how we express our gender through actions and appearance. Gender expression can be any combination of masculine, feminine and androgynous. People whose gender expression does not fit into society's norms and expectations, such as men perceived as "feminine" and women perceived as "masculine" may face harsh sanctions in some societies, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence and bullying. A person's gender expression is not always linked to the person's biological sex, gender identity or sexual orientation.[5]

Sexual orientation: Each person's enduring capacity for romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, other people. Encompasses hetero-, homo-, bi-, pan- and asexuality, and a wide range of other expressions of sexual orientation.[5] See definitions of the many different types of sexual orientation [here](#).



Gender equality: The concept that women and men, girls and boys and people of diverse genders have equal conditions, treatment, and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural, and political development. It is based on women and men (and people who are gender diverse, where legal) being full partners in the home, community, and society. Equality does not mean that all people will become the same but that each person's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male, female, or intersex.[4] Gender diversity is unfortunately often not considered in discussions of gender equality.

Gender equity: The process of being fair to men and women, boys and girls, and people of diverse genders, and the equality of outcomes and results. Gender equity may involve the use of temporary special measures to compensate for historical or systemic bias or discrimination. Equity ensures that people of all genders have an equal chance, not only at the starting point, but also when reaching the finish line. It is about the fair and just treatment of people of all genders that considers the different needs, cultural barriers and (past) discrimination of the specific group. True gender equity also includes equity for gender diverse individuals, who often face the greatest amount of disadvantage or bias because they do not fit the male/female gender binary.

Intersectionality: Is the acknowledgment that the determinants and systems of inequity (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, economic status, etc.), are overlapping and interdependent, and the interactions of these factors create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality recognizes that efforts to prompt equity need to consider such interactions and connections and address different forms of inequality simultaneously to prevent reinforcement from each other.

Gender mainstreaming: Gender mainstreaming is a global strategy adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995 in Beijing, China highlighting the urgent need to ensure that gender equality is a primary goal in all area(s) of social and economic development. The concept has broadened to include ensuring that women, men, girls, boys, and all gender diverse people have equal access to existing opportunities, as well as fair treatment in the process, system, outcomes and advancement of gender equal measures in social, cultural, political, and economic empowerment.



Gender integration: Implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy requires systematic integration of gender perspectives in policies, programs, financing, and thematic issues.[4]

Gender sensitive: Gender sensitive policies and programs consider different gender norms, roles, and relations, but do not consider the consequences of the existing inequalities between genders. These programs and policies acknowledge that there is a problem without providing solutions.

Gender responsive: Addressing the different situations, roles, needs, and interests of people of all genders in the design and implementation of activities, policies, and programs. A program, policy, or activity that is gender responsive addresses gender-based barriers, respects gender differences, enables structures, systems, and methodologies to be sensitive to gender, ensures gender parity is a wider strategy to advance gender equality, and evolves to close gaps and eradicate gender-based discrimination. Sometimes also referred to as **gender transformative**.

Further Definitions of Terms

[Sexual Orientation](#)

[Gender Identity](#)



The Gender Equity Unit works to combat discrimination and harmful gender norms that affect people of all genders: women and girls -



including transgender women and girls, gender nonbinary and gender nonconforming people, as well as men and boys.

References

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[2] UN GLOBE Resources/Training: International Organization for Migration (IOM), Full Glossary of Terms to describe sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, updated November 2020, available at: <http://www.unglobe.org/resources>

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<https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/1761/file/Genderglossarytermsandconcepts.pdf>

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TAGS:

1. Gender Basics



- 2. Global
- 3. Human Rights