

## **International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Glossary of terms related to Gender Equality and Inclusion (GEI)**

The purpose of this glossary is to present concise definitions for core concepts central to IDRC’s efforts to advance gender equality and inclusion (GEI) through research. These definitions will be updated periodically, and new ones added, to reflect evolutions in the meaning and interpretation of these terms more generally, and IDRC’s understanding of them more specifically.

Definitions presented in this glossary are based on a variety of Canadian and international sources. They have been discussed extensively with an interdisciplinary group within IDRC and with external experts from around the globe, with an emphasis on those from the Global South.<sup>1</sup> The process to engage and learn from researchers, practitioners, activists and policymakers from around the world is intentional and aligned with IDRC’s commitment to decolonize knowledge systems and international assistance.

The glossary is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, its purpose is to provide a common lexicon for IDRC-supported efforts. The list of terms can be tailored to specific functions, geographies, and thematic issues.

Recognizing that language, especially for matters relating to gender equality and inclusion, is context-specific, complex, constantly evolving, and often contested, we are conscious that the choices made in this document may bring interrogations and discussions. We are open to and welcome these discussions and debates.

Feel free to provide any feedback on this glossary to <[GEI-EGI@idrc.ca](mailto:GEI-EGI@idrc.ca)>, which can help shape and inform future revisions.

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<sup>1</sup> “Global South” and “Southern” refer to the geographies in which we work, and to the grantees from these diverse spaces with whom we work. While recognizing that there are a range of terms that could be used, a Southern Steering Group on Knowledge Translation, including researchers and practitioners, advised us on the preference of this terminology. The use of language and terms is evolving rapidly in the context of calls to decolonize international development. IDRC is monitoring these discussions and will revisit the language we use as we move forward.

[A](#) | [B](#) | [C](#) | [D](#) | [E](#) | [F](#) | [G](#) | [H](#) | [I](#) | [J](#) | [K](#) | [L](#) | [M](#) | [N](#) | [O](#) | [P](#) | [Q](#) | [R](#) | [S](#) | [T](#) | [U](#) | [V](#) | [W](#) | [X](#) | [Y](#) | [Z](#)

## Glossary

- **Agency:** Agency is a key part of empowerment processes. It refers to an individual's (or group's) ability to make informed choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes. Agency can take individual, instrumental, institutional and collective forms.
- **Cisgender:** A person who identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Discrimination/discriminatory:** The unfair exclusions, prejudices or restrictions of opportunity and choice by individuals and institutions because of one's belonging to a group of people (e.g., on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, class, race, caste, ethnicity, citizenship status, migration status, religion and disability).
- **Diversity:** The conditions, expressions, experiences and inclusion of groups identified by gender, sexual orientation, age, class, race, caste, ethnicity, citizenship status, migration status, religion and disability (and other identity factors).
- **Empowerment:** A process by which a person or people take(s) control over their lives, setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems, and ultimately developing agency and self-reliance. Empowerment does not occur in a vacuum; individuals, families, communities, and institutions can hinder or support an enabling environment for self and collective empowerment.
- **Feminist research:** Research that endeavours to understand and eliminate unequal power relations that exist within patriarchal systems/structures that historically oppress and discriminate against women. Increasingly, feminist research is focused on the intersectional nature of inequalities and identities. It is also concerned with recognizing and removing power imbalances throughout the research process. Feminist research encompasses various strands and approaches, reflecting the diversity of perspectives within the broader feminist movement.
- **Gender:** The socially and culturally constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes assigned to women and men, girls and boys, and people whose gender identities do not fit neatly into those categories (i.e., gender-diverse people). Societies and cultures may structure gender categories and power relations in ways that result in stereotyping and limit expectations about the range of an individual's lived experiences, possible identities and abilities.
- **Gender analysis:** The variety of methods used throughout an activity (e.g., communication, research project, hiring process) to understand relationships between women and men, girls and boys, and gender-diverse people, their access to resources, their activities and the constraints they face relative to each other, given their different lived experiences, needs, issues and priorities. While the

specific frameworks and tools will differ from one activity to another, the goal of gender analysis is to identify and understand how groups may participate in, benefit from, or be negatively impacted by research based on their gender.

- **Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+):** An analytical process used by the Government of Canada to assess how diverse groups of women and men, girls and boys, and gender-diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives based not only on their gender and sex but the interaction of other identity factors such as age, class, race, caste, ethnicity, citizenship status, migration status, religion and disability.
- **Gender budgeting:** Adopting a gender-analysis approach to ensure the consistent, equitable distribution of resources and benefits to women and men, girls and boys, and gender-diverse people, including specific investments to redress inequities. The approach must begin at the design stage but should also be carried throughout the life of any project whenever budgets are reviewed and adjusted.
- **Gender-disaggregated data:** Data that is broken down by gender for collection, analysis and reporting purposes (e.g., women, men, and gender-diverse groups). Data can often be further disaggregated by sub-categories, such as by sexual orientation, age, class, race, caste, ethnicity, citizenship status, migration status, religion and disability, among other identity factors. This data can help to expand the parameters of analysis.
- **Gender-diverse person:** A gender-diverse person is someone who may not identify with the sex that they were assigned at birth. This term describes the range of identities and expressions people experience along a gender spectrum. Other terms which are similar, and which individuals may feel more comfortable using, include gender non-conforming, non-binary, and gender queer.
- **Gender equality:** The equal access to rights, resources and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys, and gender-diverse people. Equality refers to the state of being equal. However, equality of opportunity by itself does not guarantee equal outcomes.
- **Gender equity:** Fairness, impartiality and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men, girls and boys, and gender-diverse people. Gender equity explicitly recognizes and actively promotes measures to address historical and social disadvantages to all groups. Gender equity is needed to achieve gender equality.
- **Gender fade:** The inability to advance gender equality and inclusion outcomes over the life of a project or program. That is, considerations related to gender feature more in the project rationale and design than in its implementation and outcomes.

- **Gender identity:** An internal and deeply felt sense of being a man or woman, both, neither or anywhere along the gender spectrum. A person’s gender identity may or may not align with the sex they were assigned at birth and exists independently of physical/biological sex characteristics.
- **Gender-integration continuum:** A spectrum of approaches for how gender considerations are integrated into activities. This may vary depending on the nature of the activities, contexts, and types of interventions and design.

Figure 1: Gender-integration continuum



- **Gender-limited research:** Research that, in its design and implementation, does not recognize the roles and responsibilities that are ascribed to or imposed upon women and men, girls and boys, and gender-diverse people in specific social, cultural, economic and political contexts. There is limited recognition of the range of associated experiences (privileges and oppressions), social categories, and identity factors influencing opportunities and outcomes. Gender-limited research is unlikely to challenge the status quo, risks worsening gender inequalities, and as a result, will not help transform unequal gender norms, structures and relations. *IDRC does not support gender-limited research.*
- **Gender-sensitive research:** Research that considers gender – including the range of associated experiences (privileges and oppressions), social categories, and identity factors – in the research project’s rationale and addresses it in the project design and methodology. It may address specific gender needs but does not (yet) extend to analysis and action to address gender inequalities, different forms of exclusion and underlying power imbalances.
- **Gender-responsive research:** Research that considers gender – including the range of associated experiences (privileges and oppressions), social categories,

and identity factors – in the research project’s rationale, design and methodology; is rigorously applied to the analysis; and informs implementation, communication and influence strategies. Gender-responsive projects are unlikely to inform long-term changes in structural power relations and norms, roles, and inequalities.

- **Gender-transformative research:** Research that examines, questions, analyzes and builds an evidence base to inform long-term changes in structural power relations and norms, roles and inequalities that define the differentiated experiences of women and men, girls and boys, and gender-diverse people for more equitable, fair and inclusive systems. This approach also strengthens the agency of groups at the individual, household and community levels.
- **Gender norms:** A subset of social norms that relate specifically to gender differences. They are informal, deeply entrenched and widely held beliefs about gender roles, power relations, standards or expectations that govern human behaviours, practices, laws, policies and institutions in a particular social context and at a particular time. They may be visible or invisible and are seldom questioned.
- **Gender power relations/dynamics:** The set of roles, behaviours and attitudes that societies define as appropriate for women and men, girls and boys, and gender-diverse people. These roles can be the cause, consequence and mechanism of power relations. These power relations/dynamics are experienced from the intimate sphere of the household to the highest levels of political decision-making.
- **Gender roles:** Socially and culturally constructed expectations that dictate which behaviours, traits, activities, tasks and responsibilities are acceptable, appropriate or desirable for individuals based on their gender. Gender roles stem from gender norms and power relations. They interact with other identity factors, including sexual orientation, age, class, race, caste, ethnicity, citizenship status, migration status, religion and disability, and are shaped by geographical, social, economic and political contexts.
- **Gender-specific strategies:** Strategies for research/projects where the central research question and expected outcomes address gender.
- **Inclusion:** A process or approach in which diversity is leveraged and different forms of exclusion are addressed to create fair, healthy and high-performing individuals, groups, organizations or societies. An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all and enables individuals and groups to feel safe, respected, engaged, motivated and valued for who they are in addition to their participation in, and their contributions toward, individual, organizational and societal goals.
- **Intersectionality:** A theoretical approach or framework for understanding

individuals' lived experiences (of privilege or oppression) which highlights that social categories and identity factors (such as gender, sexual orientation, age, class, race, caste, ethnicity, citizenship status, migration status, religion and disability) are mutually constituted and overlapping in dynamic ways rather than operating in isolation from one another (e.g., gender as separate from race) or in an additive way (e.g., gender plus race equals greater disadvantage).

- **Intersex:** People born with any of several variations in sex characteristics, including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones or genitals that fall outside of typical binary classifications of “male” or “female” bodies.
- **LGBTIQ2+:** An acronym used to refer to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, two-spirit and more. Different communities use different acronyms because LGBTIQ2+ communities are diverse and because language and terminology are constantly evolving. It should be noted that these acronyms include identities related to sex, gender and sexual orientation.
- **Non-binary:** An umbrella term to reflect a variety of gender identities that do not align with a binary understanding of gender, such as man or woman. Identities that may fall under this category include genderqueer, genderfluid, agender, bigender or pangender.
- **Privilege:** Unearned power, benefits, advantages, access and/or opportunities that provide unfair advantage for members of the dominant group(s) in society. People are not always aware of the privileges they have. Examples include cisgender privilege, straight privilege, male privilege, caste privilege, able-bodied privilege, White privilege and “White-passing” privilege.
- **Patriarchy:** An ideology/system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family, descent is traced through the male line, and men and boys hold social, political and economic power. Patriarchy is substantiated by biased gender norms and structures that favour a certain ideal of masculinity, to the exclusion of other ways of being.
- **Sex:** A person's biological and physiological characteristics. A person's sex is most often designated by a medical assessment at birth. This is also referred to as “birth-assigned sex”.
- **Sexual orientation:** The level and direction of one's emotional, romantic and sexual interest towards people of various genders and physical characteristics. Orientations are typically categorized by whether one feels sexual attraction, the number of genders to which one feels attraction, and whether one feels attracted to members of the same or different gender(s).
- **Structural barrier:** Socially and historically constructed obstacles that negatively and disproportionately affect a group and perpetuate or maintain stark disparities in outcomes. Structural barriers can be policies, practices and other norms that

favour an advantaged group while systematically disadvantaging a marginalized group.

- **Trans or transgender:** A person whose gender identity or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. “Trans” is often used as a shorthand for transgender.
- **Two-spirit (also two spirit or two-spirited):** A term used to broadly capture concepts traditional to many Indigenous cultures in the Americas. It is a culturally specific identity used by some Indigenous people to indicate a person whose gender identity, spiritual identity and/or sexual orientation comprises both male and female spirits.
- **Unconscious bias:** An implicit attitude, stereotype, motivation or assumption that can occur subconsciously without one’s knowledge, control or intention. Examples of unconscious bias include gender bias, heterosexual bias, hegemonic masculinity, cultural bias, race/ethnicity bias, age bias, language bias and institutional bias.

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