



AT THE CROSSROAD  
OF INEQUALITIES /  
DISCRIMINATION

**Online training  
on intersectional  
discrimination**

## **2. Gender equality and gender discrimination**

**The aim of this section is to introduce the basic vocabulary and concepts regarding gender equality. The vocabulary, concepts and links between them are based on internationally accepted documents.**

**After completing this section, you will:**

- be able to define basic gender equality terms;
- identify the link between biological sex and society;
- identify the ways in which social systems perpetuate gender inequalities.

## 2.1 Gender equality

### Equality

The first step is the legal equality of women, men and non-binary persons, i.e. equality written in laws.

But gender equality is more than just equality before the law, because it means equal opportunities and options for women, men and non-binary people, in addition to legal equality. So legal, social, political, economic and social equality.

Gender equality does NOT mean that all genders are the same. Gender equality embraces differences and diversity, and stands for true partnership, equality, equal worth, equal opportunities, equal rights and equal dignity.

### Sex and gender

When we are born, we are assigned a biological sex based on our outward physical characteristics. We are categorised as either female or male. The gender system that divides people into women and men is called gender binary.

Gender is a social category that is not based on the binary gender system, but rather on the individual's right to self-identification, i.e. to (re)shape and (un)define one's own gender identity.

### Sexual orientation and gender identity

Sexual orientation tells us who we feel physically and/or romantically attracted to, have intimate and sexual relationships with, either of a different, same or more than one gender.

Gender identity is a reflection of our internal experience of our own gender. It may or may not match our biological sex.

**LGBTQIA+** is a term that encompasses a very diverse group of people with different gender identities and sexual orientations:

- **L – lesbians** are individuals who identify as women and are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.
- **G – gays** are individuals who identify as male and are romantically and/or sexually attracted to other men.
- **B – bisexuals** are individuals who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to more than one gender.
- **T – transgender individuals** are those who have a gender identity different from the sex assigned at birth. This is an umbrella term that encompasses different gender identities that are not cisnormative (sex assigned at birth matches the gender identity). A transgender person may identify as male or female but may also identify outside this binary. They may choose to live their lives with or without modifying their body, dress or legal status, and with or without medical treatment and surgery.
- **Q – queer individuals** are those who do not identify exclusively as either women or men.
- **I – intersex individuals** (formerly called hermaphrodites) are those who have biological/physical characteristics that cannot be categorised as exclusively female

or male. This is an atypical gender development, with an average of one in 2,000 children born with an intersex condition.

- **A – asexual individuals** are those who experience low levels or a complete absence of sexual desire.
- **+ – all of the gender identities** and sexual orientations that letters and words cannot yet fully describe.

## Gender norms and gender stereotypes

In our societies, there is often no distinction between biological sex and gender. Biological sex is thus often seen as the reason for the 'femininity' and 'masculinity' of persons, and is thus linked to the characteristics, expectations and roles that society ascribes to women and men at a given time. This is also linked to the opportunities that different genders have in society at a given time.

Gender is not the same everywhere in the world. Expectations and roles in Slovenia and Italy and Romania and India and other countries differ. Gender is also not static. The perception about roles and expectations is different from what it was 100 years ago.

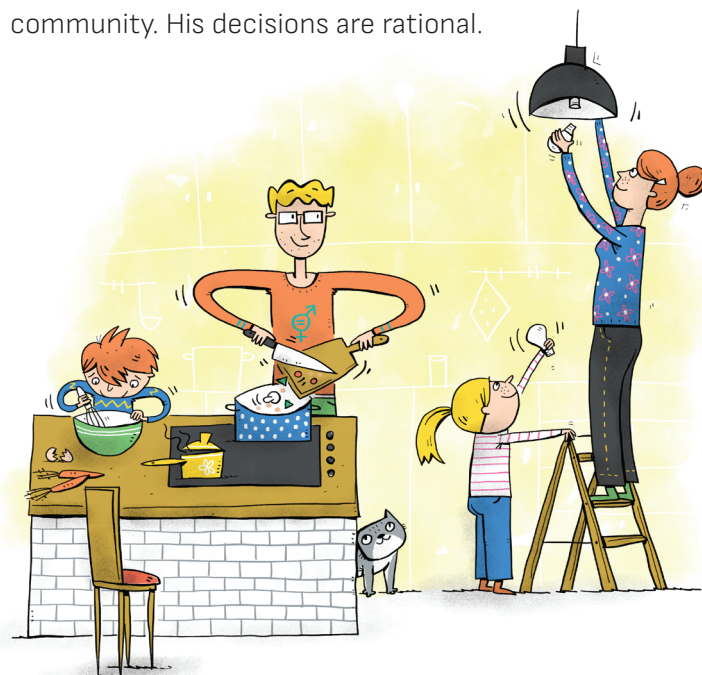
If understanding of gender is based on society, what is the thing that influences how we look at it? Gender norms that influence gender roles and gender stereotypes, among other things, contribute to our understanding of women, men and non-binary persons. These understandings can be harmful for all genders:

- Gender norms are the unwritten rules in society and the ideas and expectations that dictate how people should behave in society according to their biological sex.
- Gender stereotypes are generalised ideas, assumptions about the characteristics, abilities and interests of people based on their biological sex. Gender stereotypes create an unrealistic idea of what all people should be like based on their biological sex.



## Let's look at some examples of societal norms around 'femininity' and 'masculinity'.

The man is the breadwinner, bringing in the money. He is active in the community and outside the home. He makes major decisions both at home and in the community. His decisions are rational.



Women take care of the family and its members. They make sure the household runs smoothly on a daily basis. This means they are in charge of tasks such as cooking, washing, ironing, helping children with school-work and so on. They also take care of the emotional support of the family.

### Consider

- Have you heard of these social norms?
- Do you think norms influence how women, men and non-binary persons live?

Gender norms also vary between societies and change over time. Messaging about how women and men should behave, look or act according to their biological sex are harmful to all genders. They confine persons in specific patterns, where men are supposed to be dominant and women are supposed to be protected. Discriminatory patterns of behaviour towards women and towards LGBTIQ+ individuals stem from these very patterns.

Let's look at some examples of gender stereotypes:

- **Lesbians are butch.**
- **Women are obedient, kind, helpful, gentle and sensitive.**
- **Men are courageous, assertive, dominant and strong.**
- **Gays dress well.**

### Consider

- Have you heard of these gender stereotypes?
- Do you think norms influence how women, men and non-binary persons live?

Transgender people are often perceived and seen as “confused,” and their situation is viewed as one of “suffering,” but this is not always the case: not all transgender people experience gender dysphoria (psychological pain that can arise from the incongruity between the sex assigned at birth and gender identity), and even among those who do, there are many variations (it can be a condition that changes over time, it can concern the entire body or only certain parts). These are, therefore, stereotypes. In Italy, for instance, transgender people still face high levels of discrimination: from homo-bi-transphobic bullying to workplace exclusion, to reduced access to healthcare. According to the Istituto Superiore di Sanità, about 40% of transgender people report discrimination in accessing healthcare services.

### Sexual socialisation

None of us grows up in a vacuum, we are all located in a space where there are written and unwritten rules of behaviour. As far as gender is concerned, we are brought up in accordance with the gender norms and stereotypes that prevail in our society, which dictate what is and what is not appropriate for a person, linked to their biological sex.

### Gender roles

Gender roles are linked to gender stereotypes and norms and are based on expectations of what is ‘feminine’ and what is ‘masculine’.

**Gender roles have both visible and invisible influences on our lives**, affecting how we see the world. Due to the perception of gender roles, traditionally women do not choose careers in (data for Slovenia):

- construction (11.5% of women),
- water supply, sewage and waste management, environmental sanitation (17.3% of women),
- electricity, gas and steam supply (25.7% of women).

**The professions below are seen as caring, which is in line with the traditional role of women in society:**

- healthcare and social welfare (21.7% of men),
- education (22.1% of men),
- hospitality industry (42% of men).

Research shows that heterosexual men working in 'traditionally female' occupations are perceived as less successful and less deserving of respect, while gay men are valued similarly in both 'traditionally male' and 'traditionally female' occupations.

### Unequal balance of power

Women, men and non-binary people do not have equal power in society. This creates and perpetuates gender inequalities.

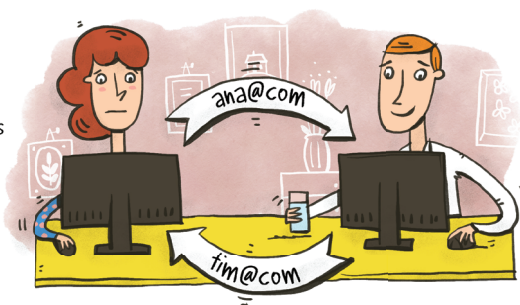
#### How does an unequal balance of power manifest itself in society (data for Slovenia)?

- Women are still excluded from decision-making. This is the case in the National Assembly (2022: 40% women, 2018: 25% women) and in the largest listed companies (0% female chairpersons, 23.8% female board members). It was only in the 2018 national elections that Slovenia's National Assembly got its first openly LGBTIQ+ person.
- Women earn less than men (7.9% less than men in 2019 and 3.1% less than men in 2020). A 2014 global survey found that gay men earn on average 11% less than heterosexual men and lesbians 11% more than heterosexual women. The latter was attributed to the additional discrimination faced by women with children (lower proportion among lesbians).
- Women do less paid and more unpaid work than men per day (paid work: 234 minutes for women, 300 minutes for men / unpaid work: 286 minutes for women, 166 minutes for men).
- Women are more exposed to violence than men (22% of women and 16% of men have been subjected to physical or sexual violence since the age of 15). Members of the LGBTIQ+ community are often victims of violence, both by the state and by individuals.

## 2.2 Forms of discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation

**Sexism** is discrimination based on gender. It is perpetuated by power structures in society, according to which men are dominant and women are disadvantaged. Sexism upholds traditional gender roles and justifies patriarchal social structures. Some define such sexism as traditional. Modern sexism denies the existence of discrimination against women and hate against women's demands, and opposes policies that have been created with women's support. It denies traditional sexism and claims that gender discrimination is a thing of the past.

Tim and his colleague Ana changed the signature in the e-mail. He communicated with customers in the same way as always, only signing as Ana.



All of a sudden he had three times more work! He had to convince the clients that he was doing his job well, that he was a professional just because he signed with a woman's name, even though he didn't do anything different. Ana, on the other hand, had more free time because of the man's signature.



**Homophobia** reflects prejudice and discrimination against people who are romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same sex. **Transphobia** reflects prejudice and discrimination against people whose gender identity is different from their biological sex. Both phobias manifest themselves on several levels:

- avoiding contact with such people;
- ignoring their identity;
- belittling;
- various forms of abuse and physical violence.

Homophobic or transphobic discrimination includes all violations of the principles of equal treatment, equal options and opportunities, negative discrimination, exclusion and disadvantage based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

A person's sexual identity is shaped by several factors, biological sex being only one of them.

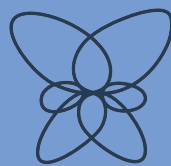
## 2.3 Reflection on discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation

Imagine the following situations and consider if there is suspected discrimination in the following cases.

1. At a job interview at a computer programming company, the head of the department asks the candidate if she plans to have children in the near future.
2. The female partner is not allowed to be present during childbirth.
3. Homosexual men are not allowed to participate in blood donation drives.

### **Answers:**

1. *The question is discriminatory as it relates to personal life and family plans. These should not influence employment decisions. It is gender discrimination because it is often aimed at women.*
2. *This is a case of discrimination, as the partner was deprived of her right solely because of her sexual orientation.*
3. *This is a case of discrimination. HIV and other blood-borne viruses are also transmitted during heterosexual intercourse, but only men who are homosexual or bisexual are prevented from donating blood, as this group is considered to be at significantly higher risk of HIV than the general population. The safety of blood donation is ensured, among other things, by testing all blood donated.*



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