



BIG IDEAS
on global issues



Global
Education
Time

GENDER INEQUALITIES

KEY CONCEPTS
AND **LEARNING OUTCOMES**



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INTRODUCTION: SOME DEFINITIONS

1 WHAT ARE GENDER INEQUALITIES?

In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision making opportunities. (UN Women).

It is a pervasive form of inequality that affects societies worldwide, and it intersects with other forms of inequality such as class, race, and sexual orientation.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses Goal 5 on *achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls*. Some definitions are essential to shape the global issue of gender inequalities.

Sex: every individual is born with a biological sex, which can be male, female or intersex. The sex, or sex assigned at birth, is a medical and legal distinction as to whether the newly born person falls into the category 'man' or 'woman'. It is clear that these binary definitions do not take into account all the sexual and identity realities of intersex and trans people^[1]

Gender: is a social construct framed by a society's understanding of masculinity and femininity as related to roles, behaviors, expectations, activities, identities, and attributes. This term is often understood as a binary, however, historically and presently, gender concept is expansive and dynamic.

Gender identity refers to a person's innate, deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the person's physiology or designated sex at birth. (It includes both the personal sense of the body, which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical, or other means, and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech, and mannerisms.)^{*}

^[1] Daguzan Bernier M., Tout Nu! Le dictionnaire bienveillant de la sexualité, 2019, Les Éditions Cardinal, Canada



In many societies as well as in many international documents, including the 2030 Agenda, a predominantly binary schema continues to be adopted, while some countries have adopted laws to accommodate non-binary gender identities, such as: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Chile and others.

The terms gender and gender identity are very often mixed up in public debate. However, it is important to understand the term gender as it is meant (i.e. as a social role) and to use it in this context. There are many other terms associated with the concept of gender and gender related differences or relationships (e.g. gender pay gap, gender health gap, gender-based violence) that point to certain aspects of the concept.

This resource looks specifically at and understands women as subjects of historical gender inequalities, in the knowledge that injustice also extends to people with non-normative identities and roles.

Gender roles refer to the social conventions associated with different genders and are determined by culture: each person have been transmitted patterns, norms and behaviours that reflect social relations and have been constructed over thousands of years as appropriate to their gender following a binary idea of what it means to be a woman or a man.

Traditionally, men and women have had different roles within family and social relations, economic resources management and property, labour market and public affairs governance, in the majority of societies.

These roles typically assigned men the task or power to make most decisions in the private sphere (for themselves, their wives and children) as well as in the political sphere. Gender roles have often been enshrined in laws. In many countries, regulations discriminating against women and people with non-normative gender identity are still in force.



Learning outcomes

- Students can explain the differences between the concepts of sex, gender and gender identity.
- Students know what gender roles are and how they influence persons' lives.

2

GENDER NORMS

Gender norms are ideas about how men and women should be and act. We internalize and learn these “rules” early in life. This sets-up a life cycle of gender socialization and stereotyping. Gender norms are **socially constructed** and vary widely over time, according to culture, religion and community influences. Put another way, gender norms are the standards and expectations to which gender identity generally conforms, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time.

Many modern societies have a **patriarchal** history in which men have predominated in roles of political leadership, moral authority, and control of the economy. In the family sphere, they exercised authority over their wives and children. There are still societies where women are not allowed to make autonomous decisions about their own lives, even in adulthood.

Gender norms can develop into **gender stereotypes**. A gender stereotype is a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men. Some examples of gender stereotypes and norms: “Women are natural nurturers; men are natural leaders” (about ‘natural attitudes’), “women are nurturing” (seemingly benign), “in heterosexual couples, women should take time off to care for children or elders, women are irrational” (overtly hostile), not criminalizing marital rape (perceiving that women are the sexual property of men), believing that victims of sexual violence expose themselves to sexual acts (as they were not dressing and behaving “modestly”), women as care givers (childcare responsibilities often fall exclusively on women).



These stereotypes and norms have a negative impact, for example limiting women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and/or make choices about their lives.

Societies and cultures change over time, and gender norms, as socially constructed, change too. Economic transformations, the spread of technologies, and the initiative of individuals and groups contribute to changing social norms and push institutions to promote laws and actions that are better adapted to new social norms.

For example, the women's suffrage movement and the First World War impact influenced women's access to the vote in many European countries, such as Poland, Germany, the UK, Austria etc. in 1918; in 2016, the Democratic Republic of Congo reformed its family code, which gave married women the right to work, open bank accounts and register a business without needing their husband's consent; in 2023, the EU adopted a directive on pay transparency (to promote equal pay for women and men)^[2]



Learning outcomes

- Students can point out some factors that shape gender norms. They explain how gender stereotypes are created and how they can negatively affect persons' lives.
- Students are able to explain what patriarchy is (and give examples of how it operates in a society).
- Students can explain how gender norms change over time and give examples of drivers of change.

^[2] https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en



3

GENDER INEQUALITIES

Gender inequalities can be ranked by a number of indicators, such as in "The Global Gender Gap Index", which compares inequality in the following areas: economic participation and opportunities, education attainment, health and survival, political empowerment. If progress towards gender equality continues at the same average rate observed (as measured by the Index) between 2006 and 2023, the overall gender gap is expected to close in 131 years.

Discriminatory laws and practices prevent women from working or starting businesses on an equal footing with men: an example of the lack of economic opportunities for women is the pay gap^[3]

Although a gender pay gap is not necessarily illegal, it reflects discrimination within companies. Then the majority of women into more insecure and low-paid jobs, rarely in managerial or top positions.

Gender discrimination can be aggravated, for example, when the woman is a person with a disability, or a migrant, or belongs to a minority or marginalised social group. Where discrimination is based on several interacting factors that can no longer be distinguished and separated, called **intersectionality**.



Learning outcomes

- Students can give examples of gender inequality and discrimination.
- Students can make connections between gender and other forms of discrimination (intersectionality).

^[3] World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index 2017 <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/economy-profiles-5932ef6d39/>



4

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Although all people can be victims of **gender-based violence (GBV)**, there is ample evidence that most victims are women and girls. Gender-based violence is a consequence of unequal power relations between men and women and is a serious violation of human rights.

The Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe mentions, for example, the following types of gender-based violence: psychological violence, persecution, physical violence, forced marriage, sexual violence, including rape, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilization, sexual harassment, aiding and abetting and attempted sexual harassment, unacceptable justification of crimes, including crimes committed in the name of so-called honour⁴.

The new State of World Population Report from the United Nations United Population Fund, released in 2024, says that despite some progress, the world is taking some steps backwards, in the wake of sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination. The document reveals that in 40% of the countries with available data, women's bodily autonomy is decreasing⁵.



Learning outcomes

- Students can define gender-based violence and its connection to unequal power relations.
- Students can justify why women and girls belong to a more vulnerable group and give examples of gender-based violence.

⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/types-of-gender-based-violence>

⁵ <https://www.unfpa.org/swp2024>



EQUALITY AND GENDER EQUITY

Gender equality occurs if all people have equal opportunities, status, rights and equal access to resources and services, with the possibility to participate in the activities of a community (larger or smaller) without any barriers, regardless of gender.

To ensure such equality, institutions should adopt laws, policies and strategies aimed at compensating for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on an equal footing. Example of Gender Equality is equal opportunities and access of boys and girls to learn in school.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to compensate, historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Example of Gender Equity is providing safe transport for girls to reach school.

Equity is a means. Equality is the result. Achieving equality also requires bottom-up approaches - changing societal norms and values leading to mutual respect.



Learning outcomes

- Students can explain the difference between gender equality and gender justice/equity.
- They are able to explain why policies are needed to adjust women's social and historical disadvantages and guarantee a level playing field.



WOMEN FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Many women in history acted to assert their rights. Christine de Pizan or Cristina da Pizzano (1364 - 1430) asserted the intellectual equality of women and that only education, social role and circumstances benefited men and relegated women to second place. Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) reiterated the idea that men and women should receive the same educational opportunities and called for the rights acquired by men to be extended to women, including political representation. Sojourner Truth (c. 1797-1883) campaigned both for women's rights and against slavery, distinguishing herself as an intersectional activist.

Feminisms^[6] are the movements demanding women's equality; the body of research and theory that addresses the root causes of gender inequalities. Everyone can be feminist and act for change.

Among the promoters of change are literary authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ding Ling, Maya Angelou; activists such as Malala Yousefzai, Angela Davis and Wangari Maathai; political leaders such as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir; advocates such as Shirin Ebadi; filmmakers, Deniz Gamze Ergüven and people from all walks of life.



Learning outcomes

- Students understand that several women acted for gender equality along history.
- Students know what feminisms are and what they stand for.

^[6] <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus/terms/1058>



7 POSITIVE ACTIONS (AND BENEFITS)

The United Nations addresses gender inequality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Global Goal 5 aims to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls through the promotion of women's rights, economic empowerment and poverty reduction”^[7]. UN Women is just one of the UN organisations dedicated to supporting this goal, as Goal 5 achievement requires transversal efforts by a wide range of global and local stakeholders.

The **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025** aims to make progress through the ‘Pay Transparency Directive’ (2023), the ‘Directive on gender balance in corporate boards’ (2022), the proposal for a directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence (2022), to support women living in European Union.

In ... (**your country**) central/regional Institutions have promoted... (National Action Plan? Anything similar?)

Gender equality would reduce poverty and contribute to a more sustainable social and economic development, in Europe and worldwide.

Girls' education empowers women, both at home and in the workplace, allows to earn higher incomes, participate in the decisions that most affect them, improves the health of women and children, delays marriages and early pregnancies.



Learning outcomes

- Students understand that all societies go through a process of dynamic cultural change as a consequence of internal processes, which are often supported by international initiatives.
- They are able to discuss positive examples of agendas or initiatives that promote gender equality.
- Students understand that gender equality produces justice and the benefits extend to the entire community and enable sustainable development for all.

^[7] <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>



* There are different gender identities since gender is a fluid concept and can be thought of on a spectrum between woman-ness and man-ness. See some examples in this box.

- **Cisgender:** cisgender refers to person/someone whose gender aligns with their birth assignment. For instance, if they were designated female at birth due to being born with a vagina and identify as female.
- **Transgender:** the term is often used as an umbrella term that embraces all gender variant individuals, including transsexuals (people who seek or have undergone gender reassignment therapy or surgery); people who alter their social gender through non-surgical means; intersexed individuals, people whose external genitalia or internal reproductive systems is not strictly male or female bodies; cross-dressers; and others who do not conform to social norms for typical men and women.
- **Non-binary:** person/someone who doesn't identify themselves strictly as male or female, or exclusively with either gender. It's commonly used as an umbrella term for identities outside the male/female binary. Non-binary can encompass a range of meanings for different individuals, making this definition intentionally expansive.



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