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Glossary of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Terminology

(Version: April 2026)



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This Glossary aims to support a shared understanding and consistent use of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) terminology across our organisation and communications, while also encouraging partner organisations to follow best practice. The definitions provided offer general guidance, however, EDI language is highly personal, and individuals may choose different terms to describe themselves.

We should always respect these preferences and avoid making assumptions about how people self-identify. Equally, it's important to stay mindful of evolving language, recognising that as awareness and understanding of EDI issues grow over time, the language we use must continue to evolve too.

If you feel we have missed anything from this glossary, please reach out to:

[**hspinfo@herts.ac.uk**](mailto:hspinfo@herts.ac.uk)

Declaration:

- Please note that this terminology varies in person-first vs identity-first language
- Some definitions reflect current social justice or academic perspectives
- This is a recommended guide only, please use appropriately
- Please note we have not included all sexualities, however please see the link here for a more comprehensive guide: <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/list-lgbtq-terms>

Guide on how to use:

This EDI glossary is a practical guide designed for both our organisation and external users to support inclusive, respectful, and informed language. It can be used across workstreams, communications, and in day-to-day life to help ensure the terminology we use reflects current understanding and best practice. The definitions provided are recommendations based on the most up-to-date language we are aware of and may evolve over time. Language is personal and contextual, so this glossary should be used as a supportive reference rather than a definitive authority. If you have questions, suggestions, or are aware of alternative terms or sources, please contact us at hspinfo@herts.ac.uk.

Ally	Is often defined as someone who is not a member of a marginalised group but wants to support and take action to help others in that group. (Inclusive Employers, n.d.)
Ableism	Discrimination which favours non-disabled people (Inclusive Language Guide, Oxfam page 17)
Asylum Seeker, Person/People Seeking Asylum	A person seeking international protection but whose claim to refugee status has not yet been accepted. Not all asylum seekers will be recognised as refugees, but every recognised refugee was initially an asylum seeker. Even if an asylum seeker's refugee status is not granted, they might still be entitled to complementary protection under the principle of non-refoulement. (Inclusive Language Guide, Oxfam page 55)

<p>Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)</p>	<p>This is an outdated term and is now considered a subtype of ADHD. (Logsdon, 2021)</p>
<p>Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)</p>	<p>ADHD is a disorder that is defined through analysis of behaviour. People with ADHD show a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with day-to-day functioning and/or development. (ADHD UK, n.d.)</p>
<p>Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)</p>	<p>Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a diverse group of conditions. They are characterised by some degree of difficulty with social interaction and communication. Other characteristics are typical patterns of activities and behaviours, such as difficulty with transition from one activity to another, a focus on details and unusual reactions to sensations. (World Health Organization, 2025)</p>
<p>ACE</p>	<p>An umbrella term used specifically to describe a lack of, varying, or occasional experiences of sexual attraction. This encompasses asexual people as well as those who identify as demisexual and grey-sexual. Ace people who experience romantic attraction or occasional sexual attraction might also use terms such as gay, bi, lesbian, straight and queer in conjunction with asexual to describe the direction of their romantic or sexual attraction. (Stonewall, N.D)</p>

Bi/Bisexual

A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree. Sometimes used interchangeably with pansexual.

(Human Rights Campaign, 2023)

Cisgender or Cis	A person whose sense of gender identity correlates with the sex that they were assigned at birth. (OXFAM - page 35)
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Disabled Person, Disabled People	To describe a person with an impairment that results in a particular disability/disabilities (OXFAM page 17)
Disablism	Discrimination against disabled people. Used to describe more direct, conscious acts of discrimination or abuse against disabled people. (Oxfam page 18)

English for speakers of other languages (ESOL)	English for speakers of other languages: used, especially in the UK, to refer to the teaching of English to students whose first language is not English, but who are living in an English-speaking country (Cambridge University Press, n.d.)
Ethnically Diverse People	Ethnic Diversity refers to the presence and recognition of people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, cultures, national origins, and racial identities within a given environment. In the DEI context, it involves not only representation but also the equitable treatment, respect, and inclusion of all ethnic groups in social, organisational, and institutional settings. (The Oxford Review, n.d.)

Ethnicity

A social construct that divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioural patterns, language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. **(OXFAM - page 70)**

Gay	Someone who experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of the same sex or gender. (OXFAM page 36)
Gender	Gender refers to a person's innate sense of their own identity, which may or may not correspond to the sex they were assigned at birth. (University of York, n.d.)
Gender Fluid	Not having only one gender, or moving freely between genders (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)

Heterosexual/straight	Refers to someone who has romantic and/or sexual orientation to someone of the opposite sex.
Hearing Impaired (HI)	A person who is not able to hear as well as someone with normal hearing – hearing thresholds of 20 dB or better in both ears – is said to have hearing loss. Hearing loss may be mild, moderate, moderately severe, severe or profound. It can affect one ear or both ears and leads to difficulty in hearing conversational speech or loud sounds. (World Health Organisation, n.d.).

Intersex	A term used to describe a person who has biological attributes of both male and female sexes or whose biological attributes do not fit with societal or medical assumptions about what constitutes male or female. Intersex people may identify as male, female, non-binary or otherwise. (Stonewall, N.D)
Intersectionality	Intersectionality recognizes how various parts of our identity – like race, sex, gender, sexuality, class and ability – overlap to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. The term was created to reflect how Black women face both racism and sexism. Nowadays, it's applied more widely to other aspects of identity, and it's vital that we start but do not stop with race. (OXFAM - page 76)
Immigrant	A person who moves from one place to another permanently, with a view to gaining residence there. (OXFAM - page 56)

Learning Disability (LD)	<p>A learning disability is different for everyone. No two people are the same.</p> <p>A person with a learning disability might have some difficulty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understanding complicated information• learning some skills• looking after themselves or living alone <p>(NHS, n.d.)</p>
Lesbian	<p>A woman who is sexually or romantically attracted to other women.</p> <p>(Merriam-Webster, n.d.)</p>
LGBTQIA+	<p>An acronym that indicates the spectrum of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual + other people whose identities are not heterosexual and cisgender. (OXFAM page 38)</p>

Migrant	<p>A person who moves away from their place of residence to another, whether this is within their own country or across borders. This may be, but is not necessarily, for improved work conditions or due to other concerns. (OXFAM page 57)</p>
Migration	<p>Migration refers to the movement of a person or an expression of mobility. Often used in reference to a nearing or crossing of human-made borders, migration is simply a movement of a person, be it temporary or permanent. Migration is a natural phenomenon and never a crisis. (OXFAM page 57)</p>
Microaggression	<p>Microaggressions are comments or actions that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally express a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalised group. (Royal College of Nursing, n.d.)</p>
Moderate learning disability (MLD)	<p>Moderate learning difficulties (MLD) refer to conditions where individuals have a different pace of learning and understanding new concepts compared to their peers. These learning differences are more pronounced than mild learning difficulties but not as extensive as severe learning difficulties. (SenTutors, n.d.)</p>

Non-binary	Non-binary refers to a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or exclusively feminine, i.e. identities that are outside the gender binary. (OXFAM page 39)
Non-disabled person	Neutral term for describing individuals who do not have a disability. (Welly, n.d.)
Neurodiversity	Neurodiversity encompasses a range of conditions that affect how individuals think, learn, and process information. (MyNeurodiversity, n.d.)

Pansexual	<p>A pansexual person is one whose romantic and/or sexual attraction towards others is not limited by sex or gender. Pansexuality and bisexuality are not quite the same; a bisexual person experiences attraction to people of two or more genders. The term pansexual has evolved and gained popularity within the queer community because it is more explicitly inclusive of trans and gender non-conforming people.</p> <p>(OXFAM page 39)</p>
People of colour, person of colour (POC), Black, Indigenous and People of colour (BIPOC)	<p>'People of Colour' has become a preferred term over time as previously used phrases are now understood to be outdated. See also Racialized Groups, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC)', above. (OXFAM - page 80)</p>
Person with short stature, person with restricted growth, person with dwarfism	<p>To describe a person with short stature or dwarfism (OXFAM - page 21)</p>

<p>People with hearing impairment, hard of hearing person, deaf person</p>	<p>To describe a person affected by hearing loss, recognizing that there are different degrees of impairment. (OXFAM 20)</p>
<p>People experiencing poverty, people living with/in poverty, people living in extreme poverty.</p>	<p>People who currently live in a situation of economic poverty that might affect them in different ways. The key is that poverty is a situation they are experiencing and not an inherent characteristic of that person or community of people. (OXFAM - page 80)</p>
<p>Pronoun</p>	<p>Pronouns are words we use to refer to people's gender in conversation - for example, 'he', 'she' or 'they'. (Stonewall, N.D)</p>

Profound multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)	People with PMLD have profound intellectual and multiple disabilities, very severe communication problems, often extreme physical and/or sensory disabilities, and complex health needs. (PMLD Link, n.d.)
Physical Impairment (PI)	A physical impairment refers to a condition that affects a person's body structure or function, leading to limitations in movement, dexterity, or stamina. (Biology Insights, n.d.)
Physical and Neurological Impairment (PNI)	Physical and Neurological Impairment (PNI) refers to a range of physical and/or neurological conditions that significantly affect an individual's ability to move, learn, communicate, or access educational and everyday environments. It typically includes impairments affecting fine and gross motor skills, mobility, coordination, memory, attention, fatigue, and sometimes visual perception, depending on the underlying neurological or physical condition. (Hertfordshire County Council, n.d.)

Queer	A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ+ movement (YMCA DownLink Group, 2021)
Questioning	A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity (HRC). (YMCA DownLink Group, 2021)

Race	A social construct produced by the dominant group in society to exert power over different groups. (OXFAM - page 82)
Refugee	A person who has fled war, violence, conflict or persecution and has crossed an international border. Many international legal documents, especially the 1951 Refugee Convention and subsequent protocols, define a refugee as 'someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion' (OXFAM - page 60)

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)	Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) is a term used to describe learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for a child or young person to learn compared to children of the same age (Sense, n.d.)
Severe learning difficulty (SLD)	A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability, usually identified soon after birth or in the early years, and will last a person's whole life. (Mencap, n.d.)

Trans	People whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth. (Oxfam, page 44)
Transgender Man	A transgender person who identifies as a man (or whose gender identity is of a man) and was assigned female at birth. (OXFAM - page 42)
Transgender Woman	A transgender person who identifies as a woman (or whose gender identity is of a woman) and was assigned male at birth. (OXFAM - page 44)
Transitioning	<p>The steps a trans person takes to live in their gender. Each person's transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this.</p> <p>Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, using different pronouns, dressing differently and changing official documents. (Stonewall, N.D)</p>

Underrepresented	Sport England defines underrepresented as groups that face significant barriers to participation in sport and physical activity. (Sport England, n.d.).
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Visual Impaired (VI)

Visual impairment , or vision impairment , usually means that someone's eyesight is reduced (impaired) to the extent that it can't be corrected to a normal level. This means full correction is not even possible with the help of glasses, contact lenses, medication or vision surgery. (**Barden, 2021**)

Wheelchair User

An individual who uses a wheelchair either some or all of the time in order to assist them when moving around. This may be due to a temporary injury or a disability or health condition, resulting in their mobility being impaired. (**University of York, n.d.**)

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