

Lexicon – Equalities Definitions

Introduction

This Lexicon is intended as a guide for staff and students of AUB on the most commonly used definitions within the equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) space.

Definitions that have a legal basis, such as those found within the Equality Act 2010, have been defined under their legal parameters. AUB is aware that some of these legal definitions are controversial, however, it is important that the institution complies with these legal definitions when considering any potential discrimination. Therefore, if a word is legally defined, AUB will continue to use its legal definition and will highlight these legally defined words with a * against them.

However, the University is also committed to providing an inclusive and respectful environment for everyone, irrespective of whether they have a protected characteristic. The University benefits from the diverse experiences of its staff and students and promotes inclusivity for all.

AUB is particularly respectful of an individual's preferred gender pronoun/s, and as such, expects the entire AUB community to be aware and respectful of the same.

AUB have sought to include all the relevant definitions within this Lexicon but are aware that in this rapidly changing space, there may need to be regular amendments or additions to its contents. This is a continuous learning experience, and we are always open to new suggestions and inclusions. Therefore, the Lexicon will be formally reviewed and amended as necessary every 12 months or whenever a legal definition is updated by an amendment to the statute under which it is found.

Please contact edi@aub.ac.uk with any comments or suggested amendments to be considered at our next review meeting which will be held in December 2026.

It's crucial to bear in mind that while certain definitions may not be widely accepted today, some individuals may still employ them. AUB's primary goal is to promote comprehensive education on all definitions. Nevertheless, if anyone has experienced negative consequences due to the definitions featured in this Lexicon, assistance can be sought from the following available resources.

Staff – please speak to your HR Partner.

Students – please refer to your Course Leader or Student Services and you will be signposted to any appropriate support available - studentadvice@aub.ac.uk

Additionally, you can use our Report and Support website where you can report anonymously if preferred - [Report and Support](#)

A

Ableism

Discrimination in favour of non-disabled people.

Accessibility

Ensuring that environments, services, and information are usable and inclusive for everyone, regardless of disability or other needs.

Accommodations/Adjustments

Changes made to remove barriers and support equal participation, often used interchangeably with “reasonable adjustments.”

Affinity Bias

The tendency to connect with people who look, seem and act like ourselves.

Affirmative Action

The practice or policy of favouring individuals from groups known to have been discriminated against.

Ageism

Age discrimination, also called ageism, is when someone is treated unfavourably because of their actual or perceived age.

Agender

Agender people do not consider themselves to have a gender.

All Workers

This includes Established Staff, Visiting Tutors and Casual Staff.

Ally

Ally is a term used for people who support a social group other than their own. They acknowledge disadvantage and oppression, educate themselves, and take action on behalf of others.

Antisemitism

AUB has adopted the working definition of Antisemitism from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

Anti-Black

The specific exclusion and prejudice against people of (or perceived to be) Black or of African descent.

Anti-Racist

A person who opposes racism and promotes racial equality.

Aromantic

A person who experiences little or no romantic attraction to others.

Asexuality

A sexual orientation where a person does not experience sexual attraction to others. Asexual people may still experience romantic attraction, form relationships, and/or engage in sexual activity, but the absence of sexual attraction is a core aspect of their identity.

B**BAME /BME**

An acronym that stands for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or Black and Minority Ethnic. It is important to recognise that these acronyms cover a diverse range of minority ethnic groups, and it is important to avoid implying all ethnic minorities are part of a single homogenous group. This acronym is widely criticised for being an unhelpful broad administrative term which conflates and diminishes ethnic minority backgrounds.

Belonging

An individual sense of security support, acceptance and inclusion.

Bi-gender

Bi-gender people experience two gender identities, either simultaneously or varying between the two. These two gender identities could be male or female but could also include non-binary identities.

Bigotry

An obstinate or unreasonable attachment to a belief or opinion. In particular, prejudice against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a minoritised group.

Bisexual refers to a sexual orientation in which a person is attracted to more than one gender.

Black Lives Matter / BLM

BLM stands for Black Lives Matter and is a movement that aims to address structural racism and violence against Black people and other groups with ties to Black culture.

Bullying

Bullying can take the form of physical, verbal, or non-verbal conduct. Bullying is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving the misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined, or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority but can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation.

C

Cisgender

Someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth, for example a female who identifies as a woman.

Cisnormative

Believing or suggesting that cisgender people (people whose gender matches the body they were born with) are normal or right and all other people are not.

Colonialism is the practice of one country taking control of another territory and exploiting its land, people, and resources for its own political, economic, or cultural benefit.

Colourblind

The idea people can choose not to see colour or race, and therefore should, in theory, treat people in the same way. The outcome, however, is that the issues of racial disparities, discrimination, and racialised privilege that exist in our society are not seen, are largely ignored and are therefore allowed to persist.

Colourism

Discrimination or prejudice against individuals with a darker skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group.

Confirmation Bias

Seeking out or only noticing information that reinforces existing beliefs.

Cultural Competence

The ability to understand, communicate, and interact effectively with people across different cultures.

Crossdresser

Crossdresser is a term to describe people who dress in clothes associated with their opposite sex, as defined by socially accepted norms, but who identify with the gender that matches their sex assigned at birth.

Cultural Appropriation

The adoption or use of elements of one culture—such as dress, symbols, language, or practices—by members of another culture, particularly when members of a dominant group use aspects of a marginalised group's culture without permission, understanding, or respect. It can perpetuate stereotypes or strip cultural practices of their original meaning.

D

Deadnaming

The act of referring to a transgender or non-binary person by their birth name (a name they no longer use).

Demiromantic

Someone who experiences romantic attraction only after forming a deep emotional bond.

Demisexual

A person who experiences sexual attraction only after forming a strong emotional connection with someone.

Disabled (social model)

The model of disability which proposes that people are disabled, not by their impairments, but by the barriers that society erects to restrict disabled peoples' full participation in it.

Disabled (medical model)

A now problematised, but previously dominant model, which defines disability as a biological defect of the impaired individual and seeks to exclude, cure or rehabilitate them.

Disability

The Equality Act 2010 states that someone is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Discrimination (Direct)*

Direct discrimination is where someone is treated less favourably than another person in the same or similar situation based on one, or more, of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. An example would be not hiring someone because they are black.

Discrimination (Indirect)*

Indirect discrimination is where a rule or practice is applied to all but has the effect of disadvantaging a particular group of people compared to others outside of the group, unless the rule or practice is required to meet a legitimate business aim and the means of achieving the aim are appropriate and necessary. An example of this may be the requirement of someone being clean shaven. Such a requirement could potentially result in discrimination against individuals who have a protected characteristic related to their religion or belief.

Discrimination by Association (Associative Discrimination)*

Discrimination by association (a form of direct discrimination) is the act of discriminating against an individual because of an association with another person who has a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. However, this does not include the protected characteristics of marriage and civil partnerships, and

pregnancy and maternity. An example would be treating a student less favourably because they have been seen out with another student who is gay.

Discrimination by Perception (Perceptive Discrimination)*

Discrimination by perception (a form of direct discrimination) is the act of discriminating against an individual based on the perception that the individual has a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. However, this does not include the protected characteristics of marriage and civil partnerships, and pregnancy and maternity. An example would be refusing to hire someone because they have an Arabic name and are wrongly perceived to be Muslim.

Discrimination by failing to make Reasonable Adjustments*

Reasonable adjustments remove or minimise disability related disadvantages experienced by disabled people. What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances of each individual case and failing to make reasonable adjustments may be discrimination.

Diversity

Diversity means that everyone is unique; understanding diversity means we recognise our individual differences.

E

EDI

This acronym stands for equity, diversity, and inclusion. EDI tends to focus on changing an institution's culture with the aim of attracting and promoting talent from different backgrounds.

Ethnic Minority, minority ethnic or minoritised ethnic

These terms usually refer to racial and ethnic groups that are in a minority in the population. 'Minority ethnic' is sometimes preferred over 'ethnic minority'.

'Minoritised ethnic' (or the similar term 'racially minoritised') has been recommended more recently as it recognises that individuals have been minoritised through social processes of power and domination rather than just existing in distinct statistical minorities. It also better reflects the fact that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK are majorities in the global population.

These are preferred over the use of the term BAME/BME.

Ethnicity

The fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition.

Equality

When everyone starts out on equal footing with equal opportunities to make the most of their lives and talents.

Equality of Outcome v Equality of Opportunity

Clarifying the difference between creating a “level playing field” (opportunity) versus ensuring proportional representation or results (outcome).

Equity

Aims for a fair outcome for people or groups by addressing barriers that are specific to their characteristics, it thereby levels the playing field. If an institution treats everyone the same without realising that certain people need specific support or services, there will be inequality. Equity is the pathway to true equality.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 provides the legal framework to protect the rights of individuals with protected characteristics and to advance equality of opportunity.

E

Feminism

The belief in and advocacy for equality between the sexes or genders. Although there are many strands of feminism, most aim for equality in the social, political and economic realms.

G

Gay

Gay refers to people who have romantic and/or sexual orientation towards the same sex and is a generic term used interchangeably by the LGBTQ+ community to express their sexual preferences.

Gaslighting (In EDI Context)

Manipulating someone into questioning their own lived experience of discrimination or oppression.

Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities associated with being male, female, both, neither, or anywhere along the gender spectrum. It differs from sex, which is typically assigned at birth based on biological characteristics. Gender is diverse and fluid, encompassing identities such as woman, man, non-binary, genderqueer, agender, and others. How someone expresses their gender can vary across cultures and over time.

Gender Bias

Prejudiced gender-based actions or thoughts leading to or unfair treatment, such as discrimination in the workplace. Gender bias can be conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit.

Gender Binary

The classification of gender into two distinct and opposite forms – masculine and feminine. Most cultures and social systems use a binary gender classification but

increasing numbers of people identify as non-binary. See below for 'non-binary' definition.

Gender Critical

Critical of or opposed to the belief that gender identity is more important or significant than biological sex (typically used in contexts relating to the rights of transgender people). Gender critical beliefs can be legally protected from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

Gender Discrimination

A distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on a person's sex and/or gender identity rather than their skill or merit.

Gender Equality

A situation that would see people being able to make choices and develop personal abilities regardless of the limitations set by gender norms. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration.

Gender Expression

The external presentation of a person's gender, through aspects such as clothing, hairstyle, voice, mannerisms, or name. Gender expression may or may not align with societal expectations of masculinity or femininity, and it does not necessarily indicate a person's gender identity or sexual orientation.

Gender Fluid

Gender fluid is not having a fixed sense of gender identity or expression.

Gender Gap

The disparity between women and men's position in society based on gendered norms and expectations. The gender gap refers to an unequal distribution of opportunities, resources or outcomes.

Gender Identity

A person's deeply held sense of their own gender, which may be male, female, both, neither, or something else entirely. Gender identity may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth.

Gender Norms

These are the collective expectations and beliefs about how people should behave and interact based on sex or gender identity.

Gender Pay Gap

The gender pay gap is the difference between average earnings for men and women. The gap is caused by occupational segregation (with more men in higher paid industries and women in lower paid industries) and vertical segregation (with fewer women in senior roles with better paying positions). It is also often attributed to women working more part-time jobs and fewer hours. In the UK, all private and voluntary sector employers with 250 or more employees must publish data on their gender pay gap.

Gender Privilege

Gender privilege usually refers to heteronormative male privilege, meaning a set of advantages granted to men based on their gender.

Gender Reassignment

Gender reassignment is a way of describing a person's transition towards the gender with which they identify. Gender reassignment can include undergoing some sort of medical intervention, changing names, pronouns, dressing differently and living in their self-identified gender. Gender reassignment is a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010.

Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC)

This enables transgender people to be legally recognised in their affirmed gender and to be issued with a new birth certificate. Not all transgender people will apply for a GRC and you currently have to be over 18 and have lived in your new gender for two years to apply. You do not need a GRC to change your gender markers at work or to legally change your gender on other documents such as your passport.

Global Majority

A collective term for people of Indigenous, African, Asian, or Latin American descent. Used in place of terms like "ethnic minority", "person of colour" (POC), "visible minority", and "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic" (BAME).

Global South

A term commonly used to refer to regions of the world including Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania that are often economically or politically marginalised in global systems of power. The term highlights global inequalities that emerged from histories of colonialism, imperialism, and uneven development. It is increasingly preferred over older terms such as "developing countries" or "Third World" as it acknowledges global power dynamics rather than implying a hierarchy of progress.

Greysexual (or Gray-Asexual): Someone who experiences sexual attraction rarely, occasionally, or under specific circumstances.

H

Harassment*

Under the Equality Act 2010, harassment is where an individual is subjected to unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating their dignity or of creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. This can be a serious single act or a campaign of harassment of smaller acts.

Hate Crime/Hate Incident

Acts motivated by prejudice or hostility towards protected characteristics (race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, transgender identity).

Heteronormative

Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the default, preferred, or normal mode of sexual orientation. It assumes there are only two distinct, opposite genders and that sexual and marital relations are most fitting between people of opposite sex.

Homophobia

Homophobia is the irrational hatred, intolerance, and fear of LGBTQIA+ people. These negative feelings fuel the myths, stereotypes, and discrimination that can affect LGBTQIA+ people:

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Identity First Language

Identity-first language emphasises the importance of disability in a person's identity. In opposition to person-first language, the term, created by disabled people, aims to put disability first in order to destigmatise and underline the centrality of disability to individual's identity and lived experience.

Implicit bias

Implicit bias refers to the same area as unconscious bias but questions the level to which these biases are unconscious especially as we are being made increasingly aware of them. Once we know that biases are not always explicit, we are responsible for them. We all need to recognise and acknowledge our biases and find ways to mitigate their impact on our behaviour and decisions.

Inclusion

Inclusion is a basic right, and its objective should be to embrace everyone regardless of individual differences.

Inclusive leader

A leader or boss who is aware of their own biases and preferences. One who actively seeks out and considers different views and perspectives to inform better decision making.

Ingroup/Outgroup Bias

Favouring one's own group (in-group) over others (out-group), reinforcing exclusion and inequality.

Intersectionality

Our multiple intersecting identities can affect the level of privilege or disadvantage a person experiences. These might include gender, race, and sexual orientation. Rather than defining men and women as homogenous groups, an intersectional approach recognises the differences within and among groups of men, women and gender non-conforming individuals and assesses how they are oppressed by power systems.

Intersex

Intersex people are those born with sex characteristics that don't meet medical and social norms for female or male bodies.

Islamophobia

Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.

L

Lesbian

Refers to a woman who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation towards women. Some non-binary people may also identify with this term.

LGBTQ+/LGBTQI/ LGBTQIA+

The acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (or queer), intersex, asexual. The + stands for a range of other identities.

M

Marginalised

A social spatial metaphor for the way in which groups can be excluded from mainstream social and economic life due to their identity, causing a consequential lowering of their social and economic status.

Maternity / Paternity

Terms traditionally used to describe rights, leave, or roles associated with parents following the birth or adoption of a child. Maternity usually refers to the mother or birthing parent, while paternity refers to the father or non-birthing parent.

Increasingly, organisations use terms such as parental leave to be more inclusive of different family structures and gender identities.

Microaffirmations

Subtle acknowledgments of a person's importance and accomplishments that create a feeling of being valued and included.

Microaggressions

Microaggressions may seem to be harmless but are minor everyday slights and exclusions, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes towards members of a marginalised group such as a racist or ethnic minority.

Misandry

A dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against men.

Misogyny

A dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women.

N

Neurodiversity/Neurodivergent/Neurodiverse

Neurodiversity describes the range of neurological differences that might include learning and developmental difficulties such as ADHD, autism or dyslexia.

Please refer to AUB's Neurodiversity Lexicon for definitions in this area.

Non-Binary

Non-binary people do not identify as either male or female, whilst some reject a binary identity entirely.

Non-Disabled

A person who does not live with a chronic condition, mental or physical impairment. The preferred term to 'able-bodied'.

O

Oppression

A situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom.

P

Person/People of Colour (POC)

The term Person of Colour is primarily used to describe any person who is not white.

Following the Race Equality Charter survey of the AUB community, which indicated a clear preference for this term, AUB will now adopt it as the preferred terminology when referencing Black or ethnic minority individuals. This preference will be applied in all internal reporting, except where external reporting requirements, such as those set by the Office for Students, necessitate the continued use of the term "BAME."

Person-First Language

Initially originating in the arena of disability, the person/people-first prioritises the person, above the condition or impairment that they have (person with disabilities), in direct opposition to the identity-first (disabled person) language. It is intended to prevent a dehumanising categorisation of persons, by labelling them first and foremost by one element of their identity.

Prejudice

Refers to the conscious or unconscious attitudes and feelings one has towards an individual or group of individuals based on certain traits.

Privilege

This refers to a set of benefits given to people owing to their membership in a specific social group. This might include race, gender, sexual orientation, ability and religion. Privilege is also often related to wealth and class.

Positive Action

Measures allowed under the Equality Act 2010 that enable or encourage people with protected characteristics to overcome disadvantage or participate more fully. (Important to distinguish from *positive discrimination*, which is generally unlawful in the UK).

Pronouns

Words we use to refer to people's gender identity and/or expression in conversation such as 'he' or 'she'. Some people may prefer to be referred to in gender-neutral language using pronouns such as they/their and ze/zir and it is important to respect people's preferred pronouns. .

Protected Act*

A 'Protected Act' is:

- Making a claim or complaint of discrimination (under the Equality Act).
- Helping someone else to make a claim by giving evidence or information.
- Making an allegation that you or someone else has breached the Act.
- Doing anything else in connection with the Equality Act.

Protected Characteristics*

The Equality Act 2010 has enshrined protection for the following nine characteristics in law: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (including lack thereof), sex, sexual orientation. It is now illegal for any institution or workplace environment to discriminate against people on the basis of any of these characteristics.

Q

Queer

Queer is a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBT community (racism, sizeism, ableism etc). Although some LGBT people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 80s by the queer community who have embraced it.

R

Racism

Prejudice or discrimination against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.

REACH

Acronym for race, ethnicity and cultural heritage.

Reciprocal Mentoring

A mentoring relationship where colleagues at different levels of seniority or from different backgrounds learn from each other's perspectives and experiences. Unlike traditional mentoring, which typically flows one way (senior to junior), reciprocal mentoring emphasises mutual learning, dialogue, and collaboration, often helping to address inequalities and foster inclusion.

S

Sex

The different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc.

In April 2025, the UK Supreme Court issued a significant ruling in *For Women Scotland Ltd v The Scottish Ministers*, confirming that the term "sex" in the Equality Act 2010 refers strictly to biological sex. This means that for the purposes of the Equality Act, a person's sex is determined by their biological reality - male or female - rather than their gender identity.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation is interpersonal and refers to people we are emotionally and/or physically attracted to.

Stereotypes

A set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong.

Systemic/Structural Discrimination

Patterns of discrimination embedded in institutions, policies, and social structures rather than individual prejudice alone.

I

Tokenism

The practice of including one or a few members of an underrepresented group in a team or company, without their having authority or power equal to that of other group members. This places a burden on an individual to represent all others 'like them'.

Trans

An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.

Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, gender-queer (GQ), gender-fluid, non-binary, gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, bi-gender, trans man, trans woman, trans masculine, trans feminine and neutrois.

Transgender man

A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.

Transgender woman

A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.

Transitioning

The steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. 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.

Transitioning might also involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.

Transphobia

The fear or dislike of someone based on the fact they are trans, including denying their gender identity or refusing to accept it. Transphobia may be targeted at people who are, or who are perceived to be, trans.

Transsexual

This was used in the past as a more medical term (similarly to homosexual) to refer to someone whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.

This term is still used by some although many people prefer the term trans or transgender.

U**Unconscious Bias**

Unconscious bias refers to a bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences. (See also Implicit bias)

V**Victimisation***

Treating someone badly because they have done a 'Protected Act' (or because you believe that a person has done or is going to do a Protected Act). For example, a tutor shouts at a student because they believe the student intends to support another student's sexual harassment claim.

W

Wheelchair User

The preferred term for someone who uses a wheelchair as a mobility aid. Peoples' need for using a wheelchair will vary, it doesn't mean that a wheelchair user cannot walk and doesn't leave the wheelchair, hence the term 'wheelchair bound' is unacceptable.

Whistleblowing (EDI Context)

Raising concerns about discrimination, harassment, or other misconduct, with legal protection from retaliation.

White Fragility

Describes the state in which white people are unable to cope with or process the information they receive about racism, whether that be lived experiences or racial disparity data.

White Privilege / White Advantage

The benefit in some societies or situations that a white person can have over a non-white person of similar social or economic circumstances.

X

Xenophobia

The dislike of, or prejudice against, people from other countries leading to bias and discriminatory behaviour.

Please note: Linguistic choices are frequently personal, and nobody should be shamed for adopting a term that isn't fashionable or up to date. It is important to respect personal preferences.

Sources

ACAS found at <https://www.acas.org.uk/>

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