# Institutional policy on gender equality

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BUREAU INTERNATIONAL DES DROITS DES ENFANTS | INTERNATIONAL BUREAU FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS | OFICINA INTERNACIONAL DE LOS DERECHOS DEL NIÑO | المكتب الدولي لحقوق الطفل

**Gender equality is a
fundamental human right.**

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# Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental human right **essential to the equal distribution of power and resources**. It ensures that all individuals, including women and girls, can fully participate in the decisions and changes that affect their community. Gender inequality intersects with outside factors, creating complex vulnerabilities. These include age, ethnic background, socio-economic and migratory status, disability, geographic context, gender identity and sexual orientation.

The International Bureau of Children's Rights' (IBCR) Institutional Policy on Gender Equality reflects the organisation's desire to contribute to

### a world in which every child has equal rights regardless of their circumstances.

Accomplishing the IBCR's mission requires inclusive participation by all child protection stakeholders and strengthened coordination and deployment practises that protect children's rights through gender- and age- appropriate protection systems.

This Policy is closely aligned with Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy and with Goal 5 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):
**"Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls."**
The Policy is also based on the international framework for human rights, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). These conventions work together to promote children's universal right to non-discrimination, dignity and citizenship while recognising the additional focus required to ensure the rights of women and girls throughout their lives.

The IBCR monitors **33 international conventions** that address gender issues and discriminatory practices, which provide the framework for our Policy's inclusive and intersectional approach to gender in all its diversity, ensuring that children are protected against all forms of discrimination (Article 2.2 of the CRC).

In adopting this Policy, **the Bureau commits to ensuring the respect of recognised gender-based rights.** The Policy is a tool for institutionalising this commitment to strengthening the capacities of child protection systems to create meaningful change in gender inequality. It underpins the approaches, principles and commitments that govern the structure, programming and partnerships that govern the IBCR's gender equality work both in its internal structure and operations and its programming and partnerships.
The IBCR's Institutional Policy on Gender Equality is an addition to the IBCR institutional framework, which includes *The IBCR Child Participation Policy*, *The IBCR Guide to Gender-Inclusive Writing*, *the Code of Conduct* and *the IBCR Child Safeguarding Policy*.

# Rationale

Gender inequality underlies many disparities around the world and, while gender equality is a fundamental human right, girls and non-binary people are most affected by this kind of discrimination.
For instance, girls are more likely than boys to take on the responsibility for household chores. An estimated **54.6% of children who do not attend school are girls, and 44 out of 1,000 pregnancies are teen pregnancies**[1].

That said, gender discrimination also affects boys in the form of forced labour, gang violence and recruitment into armed groups. Sexual and ethnic minorities, children with disabilities and children living in rural areas or conflict zones are especially at risk of rights violations when it comes to protection and gender equality.

Sexual and gender-based violence are the most virulent forms of gender inequality. In countries where genital mutilation and child marriage are practised, an estimated one in five adolescent girls are **married before the age of 18**, and one in three **has been cut**[2].
Some 1 in 20 girls have experienced **forced sex** in their lifetimes, and 1 in 4 teenage girls have experienced **intimate partner violence**[3].

The social acceptance of sexual and gender-based violence remains high.

In South Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, nearly **40 per cent** of adolescent girls think a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances[4].

An estimated **7.9 per cent** of boys worldwide experience some form of sexual abuse before they turn 18, though this number is likely higher given the stereotypes that normalise male sexual behaviour at a young age and stigmatise men and boys who are victims of sexual abuse[5].

**Sexual and gender-based violence** is the IBCR's preferred terminology to refer to any act perpetrated against a person's will based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It includes physical, emotional, psychological and sexual violence, and can take the form of a denial of resources or access to services.

(Ref.: UNHCR, Sexual and gender-based violence: https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/60283/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-sgbv-prevention-and-response)

1 - UNICEF, 2020, 'A new era for girls': https://www.unicef.org/media/65586/file/A-new-era-for-girls-2020.pdf
2- UNICEF, 2020, 'A new era for girls': https://www.unicef.org/media/65586/file/A-new-era-for-girls-2020.pdf
3- IBID
4- IBID
5- Pereda et Al., 2009, The prevalence of child sexual abuse in community and a sample : A meta-analysis, Clinical Psychology Review 29, 328-338

Gender inequalities are the result of implicit or explicit social norms that are widespread from a young age and which influence expected behaviours and a gender-based division of tasks.

Failure to respect these norms is often met with socially sanctioned violence, stigmatisation or the rejection of children or their parents by the community. While there have been positive legal developments in support of gender equality, ongoing harmful social norms and local legal customs help uphold discriminatory policies and legal practices, or give precedence to social norms and local law over existing legislation.

**Institutional practices** within the legal, social and education systems **also help uphold discriminatory social norms.** They affect gender disparity in the workforce and have an impact on available resources for implementing gender-responsive practices. These gendered attitudes also affect the enforcement of children's rights within child protection services, resulting in unequal access to services, discriminatory attitudes and behaviours during interventions, sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by professionals, and gender- and age-based disparities in how children's perspectives are taken into account when making decisions that affect them.

# Our policy

## DEFINING GENDER EQUALITY

The notion of gender is closely related to **sex**. The term sex refers to the biological and physiological traits of men and women, while the notion of **gender** refers to socially constructed expectations, roles and behaviours attributed to people according to their sex and gender identity.

**Gender identity** in this context refers to deeply held, personal feelings rather than to biological traits. Unlike sex, gender is not limited to people who identify as male or female; it also includes non-binary individuals and those whose sexual orientation and gender expression do not conform to masculine and feminine norms.
The IBCR uses the term gender to acknowledge and include the diversity of gender identities and expression.

**Gender equality** is defined as a situation where people of all genders enjoy equal rights, opportunities and chances.

**Gender equity** refers to the implementation of gender-differentiated treatment and other exclusionary factors with a view to achieving an equitable distribution of influence, power and opportunity within projects, allowing each individual to reach their full potential.

The IBCR believes that **gender equality is the desired outcome for our projects**, whereas gender equity is the process used to achieve that outcome.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

By adopting this Policy, the IBCR wants to contribute to a world where children can grow into their full potential, with the power and capacity to surmount any structural, legal and cultural barriers.

This Policy also aims to develop safe environments and protection mechanisms that are adapted to children's needs according to their gender and age.

This Policy strives to articulate a clear vision, a common language and consistent messages to guide the integration of a gender-based perspective within the Bureau.

More specifically, the Policy aims to :

**Define** the guiding principles and commitments that inform the IBCR's gender equality and inclusion work.

**Communicate** the Bureau's commitment to upholding gender equality, the rights of girls and boys, and inclusion to all IBCR personnel, partners, funders and allies.

**Guide** the development of internal policies and processes, as well as the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for our projects and programs.

## SCOPE

This Policy applies to the entire organisation, including the IBCR headquarters, its satellite offices, its various contexts and intervention areas. It applies to all levels of the IBCR's personnel, partner organisations and institutions, cooperating parties, consultants and contractors, and interns.

# Our approach

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The IBCR aims to advance gender equality in all aspects of its work and its organisation, by applying the following four principles :

### Welfare

**The welfare and best interests of the child** : We believe that the best interests of the child, as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), must inform every child-related decision, policy, practice and program.

### Non-discrimination

**Non-discrimination** : Our rights-based approach views the child as a subject of rights, a full-fledged citizen whose rights must be respected.

Non-discrimination is one of the guiding principles set out in Article 2 of the CRC, which states that the child has a right to have their rights protected without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or their parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Given that gender equality is a human right covered by the CRC, it requires conditions that enable children of all genders to participate equitably in civic life, to have control over their lives and to exert influence on their societies.

Gender discrimination comes in various forms, depending on the personal situation and the intersecting forms of exclusion that each individual face. As a result, our work towards gender equality will focus on the exclusionary factors that are prioritised according to the intervention context, project objectives and existing power structures and social norms.
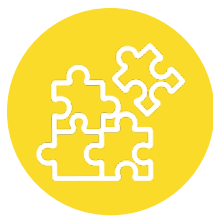
## Participation

**The right of the child to participate and to have their point of view considered in decisions that impact them** : We believe that the meaningful and ethical participation of children is essential in making them subjects of their own protection.

Children have the right to express their opinions and act as actors in their own development, influencing decision-making processes, particularly regarding gender equality.

Adequate participation by children of all genders must take into account their developmental stage, gender-specific barriers and risks, and their wellbeing and best interests.

## Life | Survival | Development

**The right to life, survival and development** : We believe that protecting children's right to survival and development is the collective responsibility of the child, the family, the community, the State and its institutions, and the international community.

To that end, our approach focuses on strengthening protection systems to professionalise practices and change gender-based discriminatory norms.

This requires a standardised framework and interventions that address gender-based rights, risks and vulnerabilities while improving the influence of stakeholders who tend to be left out of decisions made regarding protection systems.

The IBCR takes a global and holistic approach to gender equality. This includes analysing social relationships that create barriers to exercising rights, participating in the decision-making process and empowering children within protection systems. Our approach addresses the power dynamics between women, men, girls, boys and non-binary people who are impacted by the outcomes of the IBCR's projects and programs.
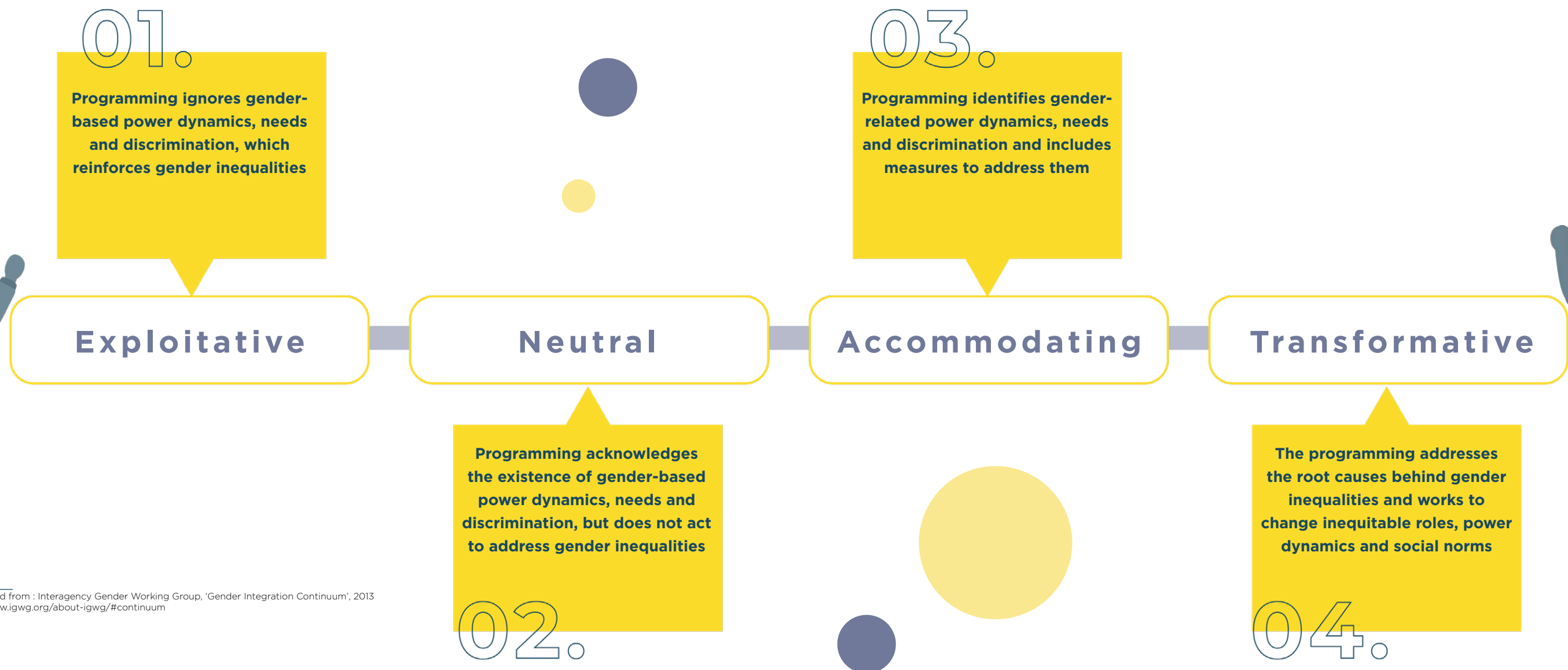
The IBCR employs an evidence-based approach to implementing gender equality measures. As a result, all decisions about the Bureau's programs, practices or policies are guided by experiential field data and relevant contextual data.

We believe that our work to ensure gender equality and inclusion must be informed not only by rigorous data collection processes within an intersectional gender perspective but must also capitalise on best practices and lessons learned.

Child protection systems can bring about lasting change for the wellbeing of children. By ensuring that girls, boys, women and non-binary people are fully included in the processes to strengthen these systems, we ensure that they benefit from the outcomes of our programs and contribute to positive social change.

**The IBCR aims to ensure that our programming is, at minimum, 'accommodating' per the Gender Integration Continuum outlined in Table 1.**

## Table 1   The different levels of gender integration in programming[6]

**01.**
Programming ignores gender-based power dynamics, needs and discrimination, which reinforces gender inequalities

**03.**
Programming identifies gender-related power dynamics, needs and discrimination and includes measures to address them

| Exploitative | Neutral | Accommodating | Transformative |
|---|---|---|---|

**02.**
Programming acknowledges the existence of gender-based power dynamics, needs and discrimination, but does not act to address gender inequalities

**04.**
The programming addresses the root causes behind gender inequalities and works to change inequitable roles, power dynamics and social norms

6 - Adapted from : Interagency Gender Working Group, 'Gender Integration Continuum', 2013
https://www.igwg.org/about-igwg/#continuum

# Our commitment

## INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS

To help ensure gender equality and social inclusion within the organisation, the IBCR will :

Establish communication mechanisms for sharing this Policy with personnel, consultants, interns, cooperating parties and partners, and deploy ongoing accountability measures to monitor its application.

Provide tools and training to strengthen technical skills needed to implement an intersectional approach to gender throughout the IBCR's project cycles and organisation.

Implement recruitment, orientation, promotion and retention mechanisms that encourage the participation of women and diverse communities at all levels of the organisation, including governance, management and decision-making roles, and develop key gender equality competencies.

Develop, distribute and apply human resources policies and organisational practices that promote work-life balance, at the head office and satellite offices.

Allocate sufficient financial and human resources to ensure that the IBCR's gender equality commitments and programming are realised.

Ensure that communications employ gender-neutral, inclusive and accessible language and images and help deconstruct stereotypes associated with gender and diversity.

Promote a healthy work environment free from abuse for all IBCR personnel by developing and deploying mechanisms to prevent and address sexual abuse, discrimination or harassment based on gender, ethnicity, sexual identity or orientation, or disability.

# OPERATIONAL COMMITMENTS

To ensure the deployment of quality programming that addresses the root causes of inequality based on gender and diversity, the IBCR will :

Systematically include a gender inequality analysis in its projects and programs, including any intersectional aspects, to ensure that people of all genders benefit equally.

Ensure that program and project planning, deployment, monitoring and evaluation processes take into account intersectional gender rights, constraints, interests and exclusionary factors while encouraging the participation of girls, boys, women and non-binary individuals.

Lobby protection systems for reform, action plans, legislation, and formal and informal institutional practices that promote gender equality and changes to power dynamics.

Ensure the sustainable integration of courses that help change harmful gender behaviours, practices, social norms and discriminatory attitudes into introductory and ongoing training initiatives for child protection professionals.

Promote the civic engagement of boys and girls in the fight against gender inequality and in defending their gender rights to protection.

Involve men and boys, especially those in positions of power, in identifying which actions and strategies should be employed to encourage positive expressions of masculinity within child protection systems.

Design inclusive monitoring, evaluation and learning mechanisms for collecting data broken down by gender and age, monitor the impact of our work to advance gender equality and share our experience and knowledge.

# PARTNERSHIPS

**Build partnerships and allies** with institutions and decision-making bodies that are open to advancing gender equality and inclusion.

**Consult and collaborate with stakeholders** who are often overlooked by the protection system, including organisations that represent the interests of girls, women and marginalised communities.

**Work to strengthen our partners' capacities** by providing training, institutional tools and resources to address the various gender-related issues that affect children.

**Ensure that our coordination efforts to advance gender equality are shared and sustained** by participating child protection stakeholders.

# Implementation & Responsibilities

Successful implementation of this Policy depends on an ongoing commitment by the IBCR's Board of Directors, personnel from headquarters and satellite offices, consultants, interns, cooperating parties and partners. To ensure a lasting integration, the requirements set out in this Policy must be institutionalised across the Bureau's tools, practices and organisational culture, including recruitment procedures, performance evaluations, planning tools and program and project management tools.

The Director General will oversee the application of this policy and align the IBCR's actions accordingly. The IBCR's Gender Equality Advisor will provide technical support for disseminating and deploying this Policy, along with the team's other advisors and key Bureau stakeholders.

The Monitoring and Evaluation department at our headquarters is developing a set of gender equality indicators which will be added to the organisation's monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and tools. The outcomes will form the basis for monitoring our progress in implementing this Policy.

**This Policy is a living document and will be evaluated and updated at least once every three years.** Ongoing reviews and revisions will reflect the experience and knowledge that the IBCR gains through its application.

# Glossary

**Sex** : Refers exclusively to biological differences between women and men. Statistical data, for example, are broken down by sex.

**Gender**[7] : Socially constructed differences and relationships between women and men, girls and boys. They vary considerably from one society, culture and time to another. Thus, the analysis of women's and men's roles, responsibilities, constraints and needs in all areas and in a given social context is based on gender.

**Best interests of the child**[8] : The best interests of the child is one of the guiding principles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It states that decisions that affect the child, whether made by public or private social protection agencies, the courts, or administrative or legislative bodies must reflect the ultimate aim of fostering and encouraging the child's happiness, safety, mental health and long-term physical and emotional development.

**Non-discrimination** [9] : Non-discrimination, a guiding principle set out in Article 2 of the CRC, affirms that each child's rights are to be ensured without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or their parents' or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

**Gender equality**[10] : The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of girls, women, boys, men, and non-binary people. Gender equality is also defined in terms of the equal distribution of power and should be understood as a distribution of influence, power and opportunity based on parity. It does not mean that women and men become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on whether they were born male or female.

**Gender equity**[11] : Gender equity means that girls, women, boys, men, and non-binary people should be treated impartially according to their respective needs. This treatment may be the same or different, but it must be equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. In other words, gender equity is the means by which gender equality is achieved. Equity programs implement measures to provide equal access to resources with a view to addressing protection programs, policies and social initiatives that tend to disadvantage marginalised groups, including women, girls and non-binary people.

**Heterosexual norms**[12] : A set of attitudes, practices, and perceptions that privilege heterosexual identities or relationships, and stigmatise all non-heterosexual identities, orientations, and behaviours.

**Gender norms**[13] : Behaviours, expectations and roles typically associated with each gender, which are transmitted from a young age via social structures, notably through the family, schools and peer groups. These norms justify differential treatment among genders and threaten the acceptance of those whose behaviour does not align with society's perceptions of their biological sex.

**Intersectionality**[14] : Intersectionality is a concept that aims to expose the impact of multiple discrimination that an individual can experience simultaneously, according to the different identity groups to which they belong. It states that gender dynamics are not only influenced by sex, but also by ethnic origin, social class, skin colour, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc.

**Gender expression**[15] : Behaviours, dress, body language, hair and other choices an individual makes to openly express their gender.

**Gender identity**[16] : A person's internal and individual experience of gender. Most people identify with the gender that matches their biological sex. Some have a gender identity that is inconsistent with their biological sex and/or the traditional concept of feminine and masculine.

**Non-binary or gender non-conforming**[17] : Individuals whose gender identity does not fit the binary male/female classification.

**Marginalised groups** : Groups, communities or identities that are excluded or underrepresented in decision-making processes, community services, institutions and public life. These groups are typically minority groups excluded because of their gender, cultural background, skin colour, age, functional ability, gender expression or identity, sexual orientation or religion.

**Diversity** : A group of people who differ from the mainstream society and/or the norm in a given context based on their physical and intellectual abilities, or their geographic, religious, or socio-cultural identities and backgrounds

**Masculinity**[18] : Masculinity refers to the set of behaviours, roles and attributes considered characteristic of the male gender. Traditional stereotypes convey a dominant masculinity that is associated with social dominance, aggressiveness, virility and emotional control, and contributes to unequal gender relations. In contrast to the concept of dominant masculinity, positive masculinity aims to deconstruct the gender expectations that men and boys must adhere to in order to foster equitable relationships with other genders.

7 - Adapted from the Genre en Action webpage, Questions et réponses sur les rapports de genre [in French]: https://www.genreenaction.net/Questions-et-reponses-sur-les-rapports-de-genre.html
8- Adapted from the UNICEF webpage, Four principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: https://www.unicef.org/armenia/en/stories/four-principles-convention-rights-child
9- IBID
10- Adapted from the Genre en Action webpage, Questions et réponses sur les rapports de genre [in French]: https://www.genreenaction.net/Questions-et-reponses-sur-les-rapports-de-genre.html
11- IBID

12 - Adapted from a document about definitions on sexual diversity and gender, from UQAM's research chair on homophobia [in French]: https://chairedspg.uqam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/upload_files_fiches-realises_Definitions_diversite_sexuelle_et_de_genre.pdf
13- Cislaghi, B. & Heise, L., 2019, Gender norms and social norms: differences, similarities and why they matter in prevention science, Sociology of Health and Wellness, 42:2, 407-422
14- Adapted from the Ontario Human Rights Commission webpage, An introduction to the intersectional approach: http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/intersectional-approach-discrimination-addressing-multiple-grounds-human-rights-claims/introduction-intersectional-approach
15- Inspired by Canada's Justice Department webpage, Gender Identity and Gender Expression: https://www.canada.ca/en/department-justice/news/2016/05/gender-identity-and-gender-expression.html l
16- IBID
17- IBID
18- Inspired by the AQOCI webpage on masculinities [in French]: https://aqoci.qc.ca/les-masculinites/

**Gender analysis or comparative gender analysis**[19]: Gender analysis is a tool for diagnosing gender differences in activities, conditions, needs, access to and control over resources, such as access to protection and decision-making powers in their lives. It examines the relationships between these and other factors within a country's socio-economic, political and environmental context. This analysis begins with the collection of gender-disaggregated data and information on gender equality issues, accompanied by a review of the legislative framework for protection and equality. It is the first step in planning to address differential barriers to promoting gender equality.

**Gender mainstreaming**[20]: Gender mainstreaming involves assessing the gender implications of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programs aimed at their protection. It is a strategy for incorporating the concerns and experiences of girls, other marginalised groups and boys into the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of protection policies and programs. This strategy ensures that proposed programs or projects have equal impact for all and take into account gender-based needs, barriers, and economic and social disparities.

**Sexual and gender-based violence**[21]: Any act of gender-based violence, including violence against women, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering. This violence is often based on stereotypes about a person's biological sex and warrants a distinct response.

**Child protection systems** : Every child is part of a protection system, consisting of girls and boys, women and men, and non-binary people with specific roles and responsibilities within a protective environment. As advocates for their own rights, children are at the heart of this system, which involves families, the community, the State and the international community, both formally and informally. Any approach to strengthening child protection systems must take into account these different spheres of intervention and equip them so that each stakeholder fully plays their role in promoting and protecting children. It is important to note that the social system is an integral part of the protection system, as is the education system, the health system and the community system.

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19- Adapted from the Genre en Action webpage, Questions et réponses sur les rapports de genre [in French]:
https://www.genreenaction.net/Questions-et-reponses-sur-les-rapports-de-genre.html
20- Adapted from the Genre en Action webpage, Questions et réponses sur les rapports de genre [in French]:
https://www.genreenaction.net/Questions-et-reponses-sur-les-rapports-de-genre.html
21- Inspired by UNHCR, Sexual and gender-based violence:
https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/60283/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-sgbv-prevention-and-response

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