

# Glossary of Terms

*Please note, the terms and attached descriptions shared in this resource are offered as a starting point upon which to build further self and team education on diversity & inclusion. The resource is not intended to be a definitive glossary or dictionary on diversity & inclusion.*

**Ableism:** The practices or dominant attitudes by a society that devalue or limit the potential for people with disabilities. Ableism is the act of giving inferior value or worth to people who have different types of disabilities (physical, emotional, developmental, or psychiatric).

**Accessibility:** The design of products, devices, services, or environments for people with disabilities.

**Ally:** A term for people who advocate for individuals from underrepresented or marginalised groups in a society.

**Allyship:** The process in which people with privilege and power work to develop empathy towards and advance the interests of an oppressed or marginalised group.

**Anti-racism:** Intentional exercising of individual and collective agency to eradicate race-based discrimination and its direct and indirect effects.

**Assimilation:** A term for the concept where an individual, family, or group gives up certain aspects of their culture to adapt to the beliefs, language, patterns, and behaviors of a new host country.

**Belonging:** The feeling of psychological safety that allows employees to be their best selves at work. Inclusion and belonging make diversity stick.

**Black:** The term Black is used in everyday language, but it has variations in different regions and contexts. Broadly, Black refers to people of African origin or descent, including but not limited to African, Caribbean, Black British/European, Afro-Brazilian and African American.

**BIPOC:** Refers to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour

**Cisgender (CIS):** A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. The abbreviation for Cisgender is CIS.

**Coloured:** Used interchangeably with Black in some parts of the world, it refers to people of mixed Black and White heritage (also known as mixed race).

**Cultural humility:** A process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. It is a basic knowledge of the diversity, worldviews, spiritual, and cultural values of different peoples, and the historical and contemporary issues that influence them.

**Cultural Identity or Background:** The identity or feeling of belonging to a cultural group. It is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception. It relates to any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture and can be defined in groups or individuals, by themselves or others, for example, nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality, etc.

**Cultural competency:** Refers to having the necessary awareness and knowhow to successfully navigate cultural differences. There is a spectrum from being culturally blind (have no awareness to navigate across cultures) to cultural competency. Cultural awareness is the next step after cultural blindness and followed by cultural competency.

**Disability:** A physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions.

**Discrimination:** A term used to describe the unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability, religion, national origin, age, physical or mental abilities, and other categories that may result in differences.

**Diversity:** The variety of similarities and differences among people, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, race, age, sexual orientation, sexual identity, culture, religion, marital status, parental status, appearance, physical ability, mental health, education, nationality, work style, work experience, thinking style, and personality type.

**Equality:** Refers to having equal opportunities whatever our starting point. It is about creating a fairer society where everyone can participate and has the same opportunity to fulfil their potential. In many countries it is backed by legislation designed to address unfair discrimination based on membership of a particular group.

**Equity:** Refers to achieving parity in policy, process and outcomes for historically and/or currently underrepresented and/or marginalized people and groups while accounting for diversity. It considers power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes, in three main areas:

- Representational equity: the proportional participation at all levels of an institution
- Resource equity: the distribution of resources in order to close equity gaps
- Equity-mindedness: the demonstration of an awareness of, and willingness to, address equity issues.

**Ethnicity:** The fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common and distinctive racial, national, tribal, cultural, religious or linguistic tradition or the like.

**Ethnic minority:** Loosely used to refer to people of a different cultural background, and sometimes in conjunction with people of different racial background.

**Gay:** An umbrella term used to refer to people who experience a same-sex or same-gender attraction. Gay is also an identity term used to describe a male-identified person who is attracted to other male-identified people in a romantic, sexual, and/or emotional sense.

**Gender:** Refers to an aspect of people's socially determined identity that relates to masculinity and femininity – it is not binary. Gender roles vary significantly between cultures and can change over time (including over the course of an individual's lifetime). Social and structural expectations to gender strongly influence people's social role, power, rights and access to resources.

**Gender Identity:** A person's perception of their gender. Gender Identity may or may not correspond with their birth assigned sex.

**Implicit Bias:** Refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect a person's understanding, actions, or decisions unconsciously as it relates to people from different groups. Also known as Unconscious Bias.

**Inclusion:** A dynamic state of operating in which diversity is leveraged to create a fair, healthy, and high-performing organisation and a collaborative culture. An inclusive environment ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities for all. It also enables individuals and groups to feel respected and valued for who they are and for their contributions toward organisational and societal goals.

**Institutional racism:** Systemic harming and disadvantaging of groups of people based on their skin colour and/or ethnicity.

**Intersectionality:** Refers to the fact that individuals have several layers to their identities, such as gender, ethnic origin, nationality or citizenship, age, disability, language, political opinions, religious beliefs, social background, sexual orientation, physical appearance and colour that are woven together. People suffer discrimination against a combination of these factors.

**Lesbian:** A term that refers to a female-identified person who is attracted emotionally, physically, or sexually to other female-identified people.

**LGBTQ:** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

**LGBTQ+:** New terms can be added under the "umbrella" of the plus at the end of the acronym. In most circles, LGBTQIA+ means lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual. However, the plus allows the term to cover all different subsets like allies, pansexual, androgynous, and polyamorous.

**Masking:** Involves hiding an aspect of one's identity to appear, sound or fit in with a majority group. Also, avoids bringing one's authentic self to the workplace.

**Microaggression:** Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative slights and insults. Often driven by bias and stereotypes, which appear harmless, microaggressions leave those subjected to them feeling undermined, undervalued, and lacking a sense of belonging.

**Neurodivergent (ND):** sometimes known as ND, means having a brain that works in a way that diverges significantly from the dominant societal standards of "normal."

**Neurodiverse:** Is used to describe a group of people where some members of the group are neurodivergent.

**Non-Binary:** What do you call a gender-neutral person? The preferred term is Non-Binary. What does it mean to be non-binary? Non-Binary is a term used to describe people who identify with a gender that is not exclusively male or female or is in between both genders.

**Patriarchy:** Refers to systemic and institutionalised male domination embedded in and perpetuated by cultural, political, economic, and social structures, and ideologies.

**People of Colour (PoC):** Commonly used in the US and some parts of Europe to refer to people with a dark skin tone, such as African American, African, South American etc.

**Prejudice:** To pre-judge or have a negative attitude towards one type of person or group because of stereotypes or generalisations.

**Privilege:** Privilege (in the context of diversity) means an unearned social power for members of a dominant group of society including benefits, entitlements, or a set of advantages in society.

**Race:** What does race mean? Race is a social term that is used to divide people into distinct groups based on characteristics like: physical appearance (mainly skin color); cultural history; cultural affiliation; ethnic classification; social, economic, and political needs

**Racism:** Prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior. It can take the form of individual racism which refers to an individual's racist assumptions, beliefs or behaviors, and structural racism referring to inequalities rooted in the system-wide operation of a society / organisation that excludes substantial numbers of members of specific groups from significant participation.

**Sex:** As it relates to diversity, means the biological classification of male or female based on the physical and biological features of a person. A person's sex may vary from their gender identity.

**Sexual Orientation:** Refers to the sex(es) or gender(es) a person is connected to emotionally, physically, sexually, or romantically.

**Sponsorship:** An action by allies that are taken to advance the career of members of marginalised groups. These may include mentoring, protecting, or promoting.

**Stereotype:** An over-generalized belief about a particular group or category of people. A Stereotype represents the expectation that something is true about every member of that group.

**Transgender:** What do you call a man that becomes a woman? Or a woman that becomes a man? Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender expression or identity is different from their assigned sex at birth.

**Unconscious bias / Implicit Bias:** Unconscious (or implicit, hidden) biases are mental processes that operate outside of our consciousness or intentional awareness. Unconscious biases include:

- Affinity bias: The tendency to show favour and/or feel more kinship towards people who are more like us. It may be based on some aspect of identity that we share with that person, or it could be similar interests and backgrounds.
- Attribution bias: How people explain the behaviour or outcomes for themselves or others. For example, attributing a person's success to their natural abilities, versus seeing that success as the result of luck or favouritism.
- Confirmation bias: The tendency to more easily accept, search for, interpret, or favour information that aligns or agrees with one's existing beliefs and opinions.
- Performance bias: An assessment of people's competence based on some aspect of their appearance or identity.

**White privilege:** Unfair advantage systematically conferred on white people based on their skin colour.

**White fragility:** Deeply held and felt discomfort in discussing issues related to race.

**White supremacy:** Ideology based on the false belief that white people are more superior than people of darker skin tones.

**Workforce Diversity:** Means having a group of employees with similarities and differences like age, cultural background, physical abilities and disabilities, race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.

**Workplace Inclusion:** An intentional effort to create an atmosphere of belonging where all parties can contribute and thrive regardless of their age, gender, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.