

Module 2: Background Reading on Gender Equality

A. ‘Gender Equality’ A useful Definition



Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.



Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

UNWomen: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsanddefinitions.htm>

Gender Equality is a major plank of the gender commitments of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) yet is not clearly defined. In this session, we examine definitions of gender equality that apply to all women, including those in host countries, local NGOs, INGOs and women globally. While many of these are structural and embedded in social institutions, in this section we will focus on the impact these of these on individual women.

In the context of these resources, we have defined **Gender equality** as equal access to human rights, resources and opportunities, including economic participation and decision-making regardless of gender. It means respecting **all** people without discrimination. **Gender inequality** is discrimination on the based ones given, or chosen sexual identity and gender, when one is routinely privileged or prioritised over another. These inequalities include uneven access to education, lack of employment equality, livelihoods, job segregation, lack of legal protections, lack of bodily autonomy, poor medical care, lack of religious freedom, lack of political representation to name just some.

Many men also do not enjoy all of their rights and we must fight for equal human rights for everyone. Gender equality does not require that girls and boys, or women and men, be the same, or that they be treated exactly alike. It does require that they have equal access have their needs addressed and access to their rights. This will differ based on gender differences. However, research and statistics from around the world have provided solid evidence that women have unequal access to all these rights, and their needs are often subsumed. Gender inequality is experienced differently across different cultures, often linked to religion and ideology. It also adversely affects members of the LGBTQI+ communities and non-binary people.

The additional needs of refugee women and girls often mirror the experiences of many women and girls in host communities (Parcesepe et al. 2016). The majority of refugees are in the Global South, where women suffer disproportionately from the impact of poverty (Badiora 2017). Girls generally have less access to education, resources and paid employment than their male

counterparts, and less freedom of choice about their lives; these inequalities are entrenched in patriarchal social structures (UNFPA 2015; Omotoso and Fajimbola 2017). In the Global North, women are also more likely to live in poverty than men. This is a clear case of structural inequality that must be addressed at a global level before it can become the norm in refugee situations.

References and Further Reading

Pittaway. E and Bartolomei. L (2018) *From Rhetoric to Reality: Achieving Gender Equality for Refugee Women and Girls*, WRC Research Paper No. 3, World Refugee Council Research Paper Series- <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/rhetoric-reality-achieving-gender-equality-refugee-women-and-girls>