

Gender

Definitions to better understand
and data to envision change

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Is there a difference between sex and gender?

A person's **"biological" sex**, whether male or female, is that which is assigned at birth essentially on observation of external genitalia. It is also called "sex assigned at birth." **Gender identity**, on the other hand, is how a person feels: female, male, non-binary, fluid or other. Queer is a word that can be used to reflect gender diversity.

British sociologist Ann Oackley was one of the first to describe this difference in the 1970s.

If a person feels that the sex they were assigned at birth and their gender identity match, they are considered a **cisgender** person, an example could be someone assigned the male sex at birth who also identifies as male. When this is not the case, individuals can choose to how they wish to identify e.g., as a **transgender or non-binary** person: a transgender woman, although having been assigned the male sex at birth, is someone who identifies with the female gender. The discomfort felt by the incongruence between sex assigned at birth and gender identity is called **gender dysphoria**. **Gender affirmation** or **transitioning** is the path transgender people take in order to resolve this conflict and have their gender identity publicly recognized. Currently, under Italian law, external genital surgery or hormone therapy is no longer necessary if someone would like to change their name and the gender on their identification documents.

It should also be highlighted that a person's sex is not determined by external genitalia alone; there are many sexual characteristics such as hormones, chromosomes, and other secondary anatomical features like having an Adam's apple or breasts that are also considered. About one in 60 people have variations in these characteristics, the medical community uses the term **"intersex"** as a descriptor for individuals with such attributes.

Sexual orientation is another matter. Individuals can be **heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual** or **asexual, aromantic or other**, for example a transgender woman can be heterosexual if she is attracted to men or homosexual if attracted to other women.



The insights in this dossier were taken from the **"Gender Report - South Tyrol 2024"**, which was edited by Alexandra Tomaselli, Katharina Crepaz, Mirjam Gruber and contains the contributions of more than 40 authors from Eurac Research and beyond. You can request one or more hard copies from communication@eurac.edu. The full PDF can be downloaded at www.eurac.edu (Gender Dynamics interdisciplinary research group).

If the sex assigned at birth and the identity of an individual's gender match, that person is described as cisgender, if these two elements do not match, the individual concerned is considered a transgender or non-binary person.

What are gender studies?

Gender studies is the scientific discipline that emerged in the second half of the 20th century which employs an interdisciplinary analysis to examine all issues and aspects in which the category of gender is socially relevant. Gender researchers acknowledge that attributing certain characteristics and inclinations to people on the basis of their sex is incorrect; rather, it is socialization into often stereotyped roles that leads to these differences and that these inequalities could be overcome by reinforcing alternative models. An example could be that of men doing care work becoming more normalized whether professionally as educators in day care centers or as caregivers to the elderly, or in family settings. Gender studies collect data on alternatives for gender coexistence and collaboration so that individuals feel comfortable, and society as a whole overcomes discrimination and recognizes equal rights for all individuals. Although they can influence each other, gender studies and gender activism are two different fields.

Only since 1993 have women
been included in clinical trials.
Before, the only reference model
was the cisgender male body.

Is it true that gender ideology wants to deny the sexes?

No. And it should be made clear that “gender ideology” is a term used by those who challenge gender studies, suggesting that these studies aim to destroy the idea of traditional society and family. The term originated in far-right circles and is now used more broadly, but a gender ideology does not exist as gender studies is a scientific discipline and not a belief. That said, gender studies do not deny “biological” sex and, on the contrary and as a priority, seek to better study and collect more data on the differences between genders in both a social and biological sense. Typically, the **cisgender male body has been the only model** for clinical studies, and this has caused and causes many problems. Only since 1993, has it been necessary to include women in clinical trials. It used to be thought that menstruation got in the way of the results, but today it is known that because of menstruation and the associated hormonal changes, drugs act differently on men and women. This means that for medicines to work better, it is important that they be studied in a targeted way. The same goes for safety tests on motor vehicles, which used to be done only on the basis of the male body. However, since men generally have different measurements and their organs are positioned differently, in the event of a crash a safety device designed for a male body might not be as safe for a woman’s.

What is intersectionality?

In general, difficulties and discrimination tend not only to add up, but to influence and entangle themselves in specific vicious nexuses called “intersections,” which are very difficult to break. An example: transgender people often face prejudices in their daily lives; if they also have a migrant background, it is compounded by the fact that they are often automatically identified as sex workers even when they are not, which makes their lives even more strenuous. Another, more common example: elderly women who live alone are at greater risk of poverty than male peers in the same condition because their pensions are generally lower; in fact, women usually have fewer savings from paid work because they often spend more time caring for family rather than being in the workplace.

Having an **intersectional approach** means taking into account all the elements that cause situations of discrimination, studying how they affect each other, and making proposals to solve them. The factors that most often come into play are gender, class, ethnicity or one's origins (and what may come with that, e.g., racism), sexual orientation, disabilities, religion, and age. **Intersectional feminism** is a movement that focuses not only on the rights of women and other gender minorities but also addresses other injustices such as discrimination based on religion, ethnicity or disability as well as those for environmental protection, etc.



The metaphor behind the concept of intersectionality

The concept of intersectionality was formulated by jurist Kimberlé Crenshaw who used the metaphor of a road intersection to describe compounded discrimination. According to her reasoning, just as traffic at an intersection can come from different directions, discrimination also has various origins. Not only can an accident be caused by the impact coming from any one side, but it can also involve vehicles coming from all directions at once, similarly if a Black woman is injured at an “intersection” the cause could be either sexist or racist discrimination.

So many people in affluent Western societies have the belief that genders have roughly equal rights. Do they?

Unfortunately, the weakness lies in the “roughly”. Although it may sound repetitive, the example of the workplace is very clear. At present, Iceland and Norway are the only states in the world where the gender employment gap is considered to be almost closed, that is, they are the only countries where women and men have almost equal job opportunities. In the other countries, women are concentrated in certain occupations which are usually related to education or care, they earn less for the same tasks and fail to reach top positions. Even in South Tyrol, a province where things are significantly better than elsewhere, the problem is perceived: according to the local public statistics agency ASTAT's data from the 2021/22 school year, about 75 percent of girls attended a high school compared to 63 percent of boys. University attendance and graduation rates are also significantly higher for women. Yet in the workplace, the proportions do not add up. Some examples.



Even in the provincial administration, an environment where there are clear and strong anti-discrimination measures, as of December 31, 2022, only about 30 percent of managerial positions were held by women, yet women make up 70.4 percent of the total personnel employed.



In South Tyrol where agriculture is a major industry, women have only had equal rights with men in terms of the hereditary line of the closed farmstead also known as the undivided farm, for a little over two decades. And male tenure prevails, in 2016, only 13.5 percent of farms were run by women compared to the national figure of 30.7 percent and the European figure of 27.9 percent.



Even in South Tyrol's leading research institutions, the percentage of women decreases as one moves up the top-ranking positions. At Eurac Research, there are 14 men and three women who head its 11 institutes and six centers; at the university, 31 percent of the professorships are held by female professors and at the Laimburg Research Centre, the staff is divided 50 percent between men and women, but the percentage of women leading working groups is 34.1 percent.

Does this mean that women are always discriminated at work? Or are they just less career driven due to making different life choices? There isn't a clear-cut answer. Several explanations are involved but so much revolves around the fact that women tend to take on most of the work of caring for families: children, aging family members, family activities and vacations, etc. This is often unrecognized and not always undertaken of their own free choice. On the one hand, some employers have qualms about hiring women or offering them the key roles which are often the higher paying ones too, in the fear that women will need to take more time off. On the other hand, women are often the only ones who ask for or feel obliged to take, parental leave or to work part-time to follow their families, distancing themselves more and more from the world of work and also reducing their own prospects, both in terms of careers and economics. Seventy percent of the 300 to 400 annual requests made to the South Tyrol Anti-Mobbing Service are from women who feel penalized when they returned after maternity leave or after the age of 45, when they start having to ask for more leave to care for their aging family members.

In women's radiology reports, descriptions of pain are often rendered more briefly than in those of their male counterparts.

How can the vicious cycle between work and family care be resolved?

It is definitely not simple and because it is such an entrenched system, deep, structural changes are needed. In Italy since 2019, the total number of fathers taking parental leave has increased, but on average, for a much shorter time: 23 days compared to 78 for mothers. In the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, 95.6 percent of parental leave days are requested by women. According to ASTAT data, in South Tyrol, compared to only two out of ten fathers, six out of ten mothers take leave and many request part-time employment. Often the choice is justified by the fact that in a heterosexual couple it is more convenient for the man to keep the full-time job because it pays better. Social stigma and lack of acceptance of the man's role as caregiver, that is, as the main person in charge of family care work, also play a key role. With regard to caring for the elderly or sick, there is less official data; how a family is organized is even more informal and unpaid work is much less visible, but it can be assumed that the discourse is the same. For things to be different, an extensive and effective network of services is essential.

In other countries, establishing a minimum time period for fathers' parental leave has helped at redressing these disparities. This ensures that men can take on family care responsibilities despite social pressure to stay at work, and employers find themselves rethinking hiring and promotion policies. For example, in Sweden, since 1974, parental leave has amounted to 480 days (16 months): each parent can take 90 days for themselves, while the remaining 300 days can be divided flexibly. To date, 76 percent of fathers take parental leave, most taking between six and nine months off work.

Another way to make people see the possibility of a different system and then put it into practice is to work on education: for example, to not reinforce the idea that it is a vocation of all girls of be the main family care giver and to teach children that doing housework is a responsibility for everyone in a household. However, this is not easy and requires time and a lot of attention. A study by Eurac Research (KiDiLi) found that educators in German-speaking preschools repeatedly lean toward traditional gender roles despite active efforts to break down stereotypes.

All these initiatives have one thing in common: the importance of informing and breaking gender stereotypes. By moving away from the entrenched ideal of masculinity, men would benefit in feeling more comfortable in being able to spend more time with their families.



What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language represents all genders, and generally all diversity in an equal and unbiased way. On the one hand, words make concepts that do not exist unless named, real; on the other, the use of certain words instead of others influences the representation we have of gender roles. Two examples. 636 male and female students at Italian-speaking high schools in South Tyrol were asked to define their parent's professions. In Italian, words expressing professions tend to end in either an 'a' or an 'o' or 'e' depending on whether they refer to a woman (the former) or a man (the latter). In some cases, when students displayed linguistic doubts for expressing professions not frequently undertaken by women, interesting combinations such as "medicO chirurgA" for a medical surgeon were employed. In 75 cases, the profession of both parents was described using masculine terminology (one parent is an "imprenditorE/entrepreneur" and the other is a "avvocatO/lawyer"): could the couples both be men, or has the female terminological counterpart been obscured by the masculine word for that profession being employed more? In Innsbruck, a university research team analyzed five million radiology reports compiled between 2007 and 2019. On the surface, they were similar and standardized, but a deeper analysis revealed, for example, that diminutive terms to describe the images appeared more often in women's reports, which may have led to these patients receiving less investigation. This linguistic aspect goes hand in hand with the fact that descriptions of pain are also often more loosely noted in detail, almost supporting the stereotype of the "complaining" woman. Several international studies have found that stereotypical gender representations can have detrimental health consequences: men too rarely receive care for psychological problems, while women's physical suffering is often psychologized and minimized.

Many institutions, organizations and companies in South Tyrol have guidelines for ensuring inclusive language. There are several strategies which can be employed for languages which differentiate between feminine and masculine forms such as German and Italian.

English doesn't employ a grammatical gender, except for nouns that refer to biological sex.

However there are certain phrases and grammatical structures that should be avoided or encouraged to ensure that those reading them do not feel discriminated against, gendered or stereotyped.

Ask

Never assume a person's gender, if you are not sure, ask them which pronouns they use to identify themselves with. Based on that, ensure you employ the correct possessive forms.

They/them pronouns, as well as neo-pronouns like **ze/zir** and **ey/em**, are pronouns that are not gendered. This means that when you hear them, there are no assumptions to make about a person's gender identity. They/them/theirs pronouns typically refer to a singular person who doesn't use gendered pronouns like she/her/hers or he/him/his for themselves. Anyone may use they/them pronouns, regardless of appearance or gender identity.

She/they pronouns are pronouns that are often used by non-binary people who are assigned female at birth as well as transfeminine people. Usually, people use she/they pronouns to signify their connection with femininity while affirming their non-binary identity.

He/they pronouns are pronouns that are often used by non-binary people who are assigned male at birth as well as transmasculine people. Usually, people use he/they pronouns to signify their connection with femininity while affirming their non-binary identity.

Words to use and avoid

There are various words that the English language has tended to use which most might not realize are gendered. Many words that incorporate the word ‘man’, such as ‘man-made’, ‘mankind’, ‘manpower’, have gender-neutral alternatives: ‘artificial’ or ‘synthetic’, ‘humankind’, and ‘workforce’. Be mindful of these alternative options too.

Use gender-neutral terms: Instead of ‘boys and girls’ or ‘ladies and gentlemen,’ say ‘everyone.’

Use inclusive job titles: For example, use ‘firefighter’ or ‘police officer’ instead ‘fire or police man’.

Use homemaker instead of housewife and use words like attendant, cleaner.

Violent men instrumentalize moral and religious codes to justify their behavior.

What is the difference between femicide and homicide?

Femicide is murder that arises in a specific patriarchal sociocultural context: a context where the idea that a man has the right to control a woman’s space of action, even to the extreme of deciding whether she should live or die, dominates. Femicide is only the tip of the iceberg of gender-based violence most often expressed in the form of sexual violence, psychological violence, e.g., control of outings, contacts and the mobile phone, or economic violence, e.g., control of money in the home, prohibition from working, etc. Data released by ASTAT revealed that during 2022, South Tyrol’s four anti-violence centers took in 600 women (up 2.3 percent from the previous year) and provided 5,350 services, mainly in response to requests for information and counseling. According to center workers, the phenomenon is reportedly on the rise: in 2023, South Tyrol not only saw a large number of police interventions, but also two femicides.

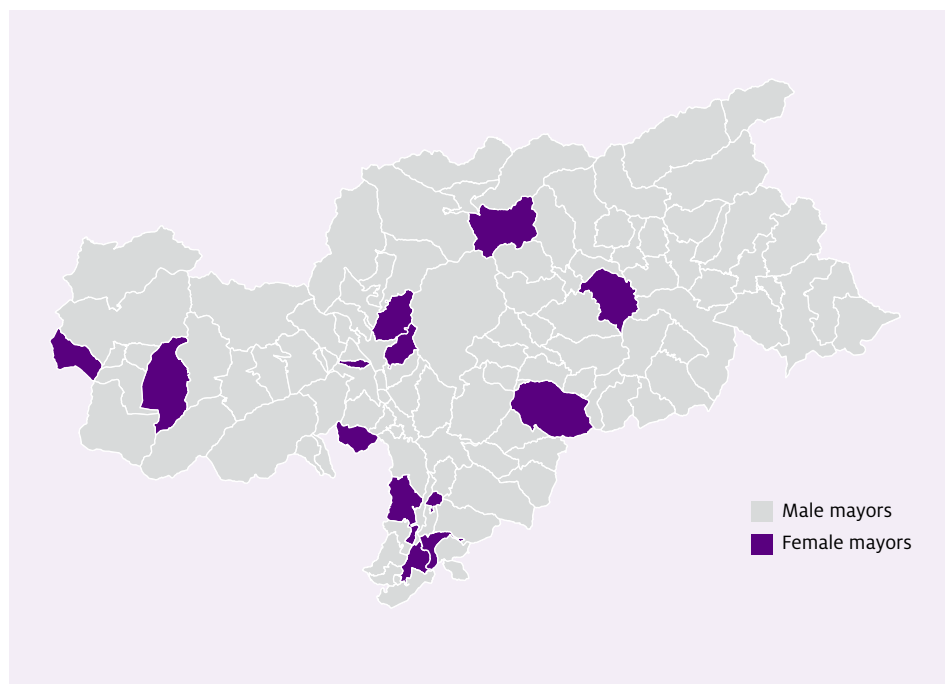
The Istanbul Convention is the most important legal instrument to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence: however, it has only been ratified by 39 states, including Italy.

In 2006, the Italian Prime Minister’s Office Department for Equal Opportunities activated 1522, a free 24-hour public service phone number. The service, which is available in several languages, guarantees anonymity to victims of violence, can provide advice on how to get assistance in getting out of violent situations, and can also activate forms of rapid intervention in emergency cases through collaboration with law enforcement agencies.

Women make up about half of the world's population. However, in politics the numbers don't add up...

Women are markedly underrepresented, despite certain measures to counter this phenomenon: globally, women occupy **less than a third of parliamentary seats**. Rwanda has the highest percentage of women in its lower house of parliament (61.3 percent), followed by Cuba (53.4 percent) and Nicaragua (51.7 percent). Italy ranks 56th with 32.3 percent of women in its lower house of parliament, but even this still exceeds the world average of 26.5 percent.

In South Tyrol, women make up a good half of the population, yet only about one in ten municipalities is headed by a female mayor, and in the provincial council, councilwomen do not amount to even 30 percent of the total council.



A breakdown of male and female mayors in 2024.

According to those involved in gender studies, this underrepresentation also influences political agendas because, as a reflection, **certain experiences and sensitivities are underrepresented**. For example, numerous international surveys and studies have shown that, on average, women usually have a higher level of environmental awareness, greater openness to sustainable lifestyles, and greater willingness to engage in environmental issues. A survey on sustainability and climate change in South Tyrol, conducted by Eurac Research and ASTAT in 2022, also shows that women argue that there is a greater need for action in the area of **environmental** and climate **protection** than in other areas. For 62.7 percent, too little is being done for nature and ecosystems in South Tyrol compared to 55.6 percent of men. Although it is interesting to note that women more than men often believe that the main responsibility for ensuring greater sustainability lies with individuals (and thus with themselves). Men share the view of individual responsibility but place more responsibility on politics and the economy in general.

Urban planning would also be affected if more different personal experiences were represented politically: for example, a questionnaire carried out in the suburban valley of Mühlwald/Selva dei Molini, found that in their daily lives, 92 percent of the women, compared to eight percent of men, had to accompany others to specific activities – this reveals very different needs with respect to **mobility**.

Promoting women's activism in local and volunteer associations, which are often considered a steppingstone for women's political careers, could be one way to compensate for the difference in political representation.

What is the relationship in South Tyrol to feminism and LGBTQIA+ movements?

As is often the case in the provinces, activism came a bit late, imported by people who had lived elsewhere and were inspired by what they experienced whilst abroad. In 1970 the Kollontaj Group, named after Russian socialist and feminist Aleksandra Kollontaj, was founded and the group helped open the first women's counseling center in the province in 1973, a local branch of AIED (Italian Association for Demographic Education). From the mid-1970s women from the Catholic Workers' Association (Katholischen Verbands der Werktätigen, KVW) was founded and feminist groups developed within the South Tyrolean University Association and the "Südtiroler Volkszeitung" newspaper. In 1979, an internationally active "Women for Peace" group was founded. Mainstream political parties also gradually opened their own feminist groups. The Centaurus Arcigay Alto Adige Südtirol association was established to oppose any discrimination related to sexual orientation or gender identity in 1993. Since 1997, the provincial Commission for Equal Opportunities for Women and Women's Services have published the trilingual magazine "ëres - fraueninfodonne." Today a rather active platform is the SUSI: Südtirol Sisters Facebook group and since 2023, Pride has also been taking place in South Tyrol.



Women for Peace demonstration in Bozen/Bolzano in December 1981

Credits: Frauenarchiv Bozen/Archivio Donne Bolzano

One characteristic of feminism in South Tyrol is that it is able to take advantage of well-established conservative and even religious circles to network and thus promote issues that are anything but conservative. The South Tyrolean Women Farmers' Association (Südtiroler Bäuerinnenorganisation), with about 17,000 members, is the largest women's organization in the region.

There is also a group of women farmers who have established a social cooperative that provides decentralized childcare services on farms to more than 500 children, employing more than 100 women. Through the cooperative, the women farmers have given entrepreneurial value to the time they previously spent providing unpaid care work which has strengthened their ability to negotiate their roles. The local Catholic Women's Movement (Katholische Frauenbewegung) also carries great weight and the youth branch – the Südtirols Katholische Jugend devoted the 2022 edition of its magazine "Hosch a Meinung?" (Do you have an opinion?) to the discussion of women in the priesthood, the Catholic church's stance on homosexuality, and other gender-related issues.



The four waves of the women's movement and intersectionality

The 1st wave took place between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century and was characterized by demands for access to higher education and voting rights.

The 2nd wave happened between the 1960s and 1970s. The right to physical self-determination as well as an active voice in politics, unrestricted access to skilled jobs underpinned the movement. This group employed the slogan: The personal is political.

The 3rd in the 1990s was typified by the internationalization of the movement. And came with the inclusion of demands from the Global South. In 1989, the African American feminist lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw defined the concept of “intersectionality” to mean a combination of different dimensions of diversity such as gender or sexual orientation, skin color, disabilities, different religious affiliations, poverty, etc. These groups can be simultaneously exposed to multiple forms of discrimination.

Since 2012, the 4th wave has sought further internationalization through social media. Bodily integrity and self-determination in sexual orientation, against sexualized violence and abuse of power, against homophobia and transphobia are the tenets of the 4th wave. Slogans: #MeToo, #NotOneLess, #OneOfUs

There is no linear evolution of the feminine condition, it is continuously influenced by the economic and political situation.