

## CHAPTER 4

# Themes related to gender and gender-based violence



# Themes related to gender and gender-based violence

This chapter provides users and readers of Gender Matters with additional useful information on a few topics which are likely to be raised in the discussion, especially in the debriefing, of the activities in chapter 2. They serve thus to prepare facilitators by presenting some essential information on five themes:

- Feminism and Women's Rights Movements
- Intersectionality and Multiple Discrimination
- LGBT+
- Masculinities
- Sexuality

The choice of these themes was determined by their connection with the activities and by the fact that many of them are subject to controversy, often resulting from misunderstanding, if not outright misinformation. Each of them is indeed complex and the object of intense debate and opposing views among experts, scholars, activists and young people. It is not the intention of this manual to either limit or "fix" the debates to what is in this chapter. Instead, these pages should be seen as starting points or anchors for non-experts. We hope that they will inspire readers to seek more information, expand their knowledge and develop their own opinion and points of view. The authors have endeavoured to be as neutral and factual as possible, an almost impossible aim as we all have our own experiences, views and preferences. The text should therefore be interpreted as a non-prescriptive proposal to learn more or to recall essentials.

## **Feminism and women's rights movements**

There are people who believe that we do not need feminism today, but nothing could be further from the truth. Women have struggled for equality and against oppression for centuries, and although some battles have been partly won - such as the right to vote and equal access to education - women are still disproportionately affected by all forms of violence and by discrimination in every aspect of life.

It is true that in some areas and on certain issues, there have been improvements: for example, in Saudi Arabia women were allowed, for the first time, to vote and run for office in 2015(!). However, on other issues there has been little or no progress: for example, there have been insignificant reductions in cases of violence against women. Women continue to receive lower pay for the same work as men in all parts of the world; there are still countries that do not have laws against marital rape, and still allow child brides; and practices such as "honour" killings and female genital mutilation still exist.

Jokes about feminism and stereotypes about feminists persist, and many of these are also homophobic and assume that being lesbian is something 'bad'. In fact, being a feminist is not something particular to any sex or gender: there are women and men who consider themselves feminists, some are gay or lesbian, some heterosexual, bisexual or transgender - and some may identify differently.

The concept of feminism reflects a history of different struggles, and the term has been interpreted in fuller and more complex ways as understanding has developed. In general, feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice.

### **Women's movements and the history of feminism**

There have been many extraordinary women who have played an important role in local or world history, but not all of these have necessarily been advocates of women's issues. The women's movement is made up of women and men who work and fight to achieve gender equality and to improve the lives of women as a social group. In most societies, women were traditionally confined to the home as daughters, wives and mothers, and we are often only aware of women in history because of their relation to famous men. Of course many women throughout history did in fact play an important role in cultural and political life, but they tend to be invisible. An organised women's movement only really started in the 19th century, even though women activists and the struggle for equality have always been part of all human societies.

One of the early pioneers, who thought and wrote about women as a group, is the Italian writer Christine de Pizan, who published a book about women's position

in society as early as 1495. Christine de Pizan wrote about books she had read by famous men, who wrote books about the sins and weaknesses of girls and women, and questioned whether women were really human beings at all, or whether they were more similar to animals. Christine de Pizan's work offers a good example of the early stages of the struggle for women's equality. However, she was very unusual in being able to read and write, which was not at all common for women of that time.

In later history, women took part in the French revolution from the very beginning: the demonstrations that led to the revolution started with a large group of working women marching to Versailles to demand not only food to feed their families, but also political change. However, the French Revolution did not lead to proper recognition of women's rights. For that reason, in September 1791, Olympe de Gouges wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen, in response to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and with the intention of exposing the failure of the French Revolution to recognise gender equality. As a result of her writings de Gouges was accused, tried and convicted of treason, resulting in her immediate execution.

The women's movement began to develop in North America, mainly because women there were allowed to go to school earlier than in Europe - and women who can read and write, and who are encouraged to think for themselves, usually start to question how society works. The first activists travelled around North America and fought for the end of both slavery and women's oppression. They organised the 'First Women's Rights Convention' in 1848, and continued to campaign to improve the social position of all women. The movement also began in Europe with the same broad aims: activists collected signatures demanding that working women should receive their own wages and not their husbands'; that women should be able to own a house and have custody of their children.

The fight for women's right to vote in elections is known as the 'suffragette movement'. By the end of the 19th century, this had become a worldwide movement, and the words 'feminism' and 'feminist movement' started to be used from that point on. This **first wave of feminism** activism included mass demonstrations, the publishing of newspapers, organised debates, and the establishment of international women's organisations. By the 1920s, women had won the right to vote in most European countries and in North America. At around the same time, women became more active in communist, socialist and social democratic parties because increasing numbers of women began to work outside the home in factories and offices. Women were first allowed to go to university in the early 20th century, having both a career and a family. In certain countries, when fascist parties gained power the feminist movement was banned. Women started organising again after the end of the Second World War, and they soon gained equal political rights in most European countries, with women's emancipation becoming an important aim and most women being allowed to take on full-time jobs, divorce their husbands and go to university.

In Western Europe and the USA, the feminist movement was resurgent by the 1970s. Although this **second wave of feminism** aimed to achieve 'women's liberation', different groups had different ideas about how this should be done. Liberal feminists wanted better equality laws and reform of institutions such as schools, churches and the media. Radical feminists argued that the root cause of women's inequality is patriarchy: men, as a group, oppress women. They also focused on violence against women by men, and started to talk about violence in the family, and rape. Socialist feminists argued that it is a combination of patriarchy and capitalism that causes women's oppression. The second wave of feminism also resulted in new areas of science: women's studies became a discipline to be studied at university, and books began to be published about women's achievements in literature, music and science, and recording women's previously unwritten history. Finally, the women's movement played an important role in the drafting of international documents about women's rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979).

The **third wave of feminism** mainly refers to the American movement in the 1990s, and was a reaction to the **backlash** of conservative media and politicians announcing the end of feminism or referring to 'post-feminism'. The term 'backlash' was popularised by Susan Faludi in her book "Backlash. The Undeclared War against Women", published in 1991, and describing the negative reaction of the patriarchal system towards women's liberation. This was hardly a new phenomenon: women's movements had always been met with antagonism. However, in the 1980s, institutionalised forms of attacks on women's rights grew stronger. The third wave of feminism can be characterised by an increased awareness of overlapping categories, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation. More emphasis was also placed on racial issues, including the status of women in other parts of the world (global feminism). This was also a moment when a number of feminist non-governmental organisations were established, but focusing on specific feminist issues, rather than claiming to represent general feminist ideas. Third wave feminism actively uses media and pop culture to promote its ideas and to run activities, for example by publishing blogs or e-zines. It focuses on bringing feminism closer to the people's daily lives. The main issues that third wave feminists are concerned about include: sexual harassment, domestic violence, the pay gap between men and women, eating disorders and body image, sexual and reproductive rights, honour crimes and female genital mutilation.

## ***Cyberfeminism and networked feminism (fourth-wave feminism)***

The term cyberfeminism is used to describe the work of feminists interested in theorising, critiquing, and making use of the Internet, cyberspace, and new-media technologies in general. The term and movement grew out of “third-wave” feminism. However, the exact meaning is still unclear to some: even at the first meeting of cyberfeminists “The First Cyberfeminist International (FCI)” in Kassel (Germany), participants found it hard to provide a definition, and as a result of discussions, they proposed 100 anti-theses<sup>1</sup> (with reference to Martin Luther’s theses) on what cyberfeminism is not. These included, for example, it is not an institution, it is not an ideology, it is not an –ism. Cyberfeminism is considered to be a predecessor of ‘networked feminism’, which refers generally to feminism on the Internet: for example, mobilising people to take action against sexism, misogyny or gender-based violence against women. One example is the online movement #metoo in 2017, which was a response on social networks from women all over the world to the case of Harvey Weinstein, a Hollywood producer who was accused of sexually harassing female staff in the movie industry.

## **Sexism**

This term is very often present in feminist literature as well as in the media and everyday life, and it is an important concept in understanding feminism. Sexism means perceiving and judging people only on the basis of their belonging to a particular sex or gender. It also covers discrimination of a person on the same basis. It is important to note that sexism applies to both men and women, however, women are more affected by sexism than men in all areas of life. Everyday sexism takes different forms, sometimes not easily recognisable – for example, telling jokes about girls, commenting on the female body (objectifying women), reacting to the way women are dressed, assigning women easier tasks in Internet games or objectifying women in advertising.

The literature mentions three types of sexism<sup>2</sup>:

- **Traditional sexism:** supporting traditional gender roles, treating women as worse than men, employing traditional stereotypes which portray women as less competent than men.
- **Modern sexism:** denying gender discrimination (‘it is not a problem anymore’), having a negative attitude towards women’s rights, denying the validity of claims made by women
- **Neosexism:** This notion refers to ideologies that justify discrimination towards women on the basis of competences – “men are effectively better competent for some things” – for example in managerial or leadership positions, and not on a direct discrimination of women. Defenders of these ideas tend to ignore or deny the difficulties faced by women in society as having an influence on “competences”.

If it is true that the situation of women's human rights has improved in recent years, this does not mean that sexism has ended.

In March 2019, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combating sexism. The Recommendation defines sexism as

any act, gesture, visual representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether online or offline, with the purpose or effect of:

- Violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons;
- Resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons;
- Creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment;
- Constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or a group of persons;
- Maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes.

The Recommendation stresses that sexism is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which leads to discrimination and prevents the full advancement of women in society. The Committee of Ministers asks Governments of member states to take measures to prevent and combat sexism and its manifestations in the public and private spheres, and encourage relevant stakeholders to implement appropriate legislation, policies and programmes.

## **Women's rights are human rights**

Why do we need women's rights, when these are simply human rights? Why do we need human rights treaties about women's rights, when we have already general human rights instruments? Almost everywhere in the world, women are denied their human rights just because of their sex or gender. Women's rights should not be seen as special rights: they are human rights enshrined in international human rights treaties and other documents, and include such rights as freedom from discrimination, right to life, freedom from torture, right to privacy, access to health, right to decent living conditions, right to safety, and many others. However, there are also human rights instruments that take into account the specific situation of women in society with regards to accessing or exercising their human rights, or which aim to protect them from violence.

**The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** – was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, and is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The document calls on all member states of the UN to adopt measures against discrimination of women in all spheres of life and protect them from any kind of violence. The Convention establishes the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which is the body that monitors States parties' compliance with the Convention. The Committee receives and considers complaints from individuals or groups within its jurisdiction.

**The UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (2000)** recognises the fact that armed conflicts or wars affect women differently than men, and highlights the specific role of women in peace building processes. This resolution was followed by 7 other resolutions subsequently adopted in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, and 2015.

At the level of the Council of Europe, **the European Convention on Human Rights** obliges member states to respect and promote all human rights in the Convention without discrimination on any grounds, including sex (Article 14 of the Convention). A further treaty, **the Revised European Social Charter** (1996), provides for equality between women and men in education, work and family life, and calls for positive measures in order to ensure equal opportunities and the right to equal remuneration.

**The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings** (2005) aims at preventing and combating trafficking in women, men and children for the purpose of sexual, labour or other types of exploitation. It is also designed to offer protection to victims and to ensure that traffickers face prosecution. This Convention includes a non-discrimination provision in Article 3, and obliges state signatories to promote gender equality and to use gender mainstreaming in the development, implementation and assessment of measures for implementing the Convention.

**The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence** (Istanbul Convention, 2011) is the most far-reaching international treaty to tackle violence against women in all its forms. You can read more about this treaty in the first chapter of this manual and in the appendices.

**Recommendation No. R (79)10 of the Committee of Ministers concerning women migrants**, calls on member states to ensure that national legislation and regulations concerning women migrants are fully adapted to meet international standards. It also recommends that measures should be taken to provide relevant information to women migrants, to prevent discrimination in their working conditions, to promote their socio-cultural integration and to improve their access to vocational guidance and training. The Council of Europe Gender Equality



Strategy for 2018 – 2023 foresees the review and update of this Recommendation.

**Recommendation No. R (90)4 of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, on the elimination of sexism from language**, calls on member states to promote the use of language reflecting the principle of equality between women and men, and to take appropriate measures to encourage the use of non-sexist language, taking account of the presence, status and role of women in society. The Recommendation also calls on member states to bring terminology used in legal documents, public administration and education into line with the principle of equality, and to encourage the use of non-sexist language in the media.

**Recommendation No (2012)6 of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on the protection and promotion of the rights of women and girls with disabilities** asks member states to adopt appropriate legislative measures and to undertake other positive actions likely to encourage the participation of women and girls with disabilities in all areas of life. Noting that women and girls with disabilities may suffer multiple discrimination, the proposed measures cover areas such as education and training, employment and economic status, health care, access to social protection, sexual and reproductive rights, motherhood and family life, access to justice and protection from violence and abuse, participation in culture, sport, leisure and tourism, and raising awareness and changing attitudes.

**Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on preventing and combating sexism** asks member states to take measures to prevent and combat sexism and its manifestations in the public and private spheres, and encourage relevant stakeholders to implement appropriate legislation, policies and programmes. It also proposes specific measures to member states, including changes in legislation, education and awareness raising campaigns, programmes for children and young people on media literacy, development of online resources, research and integration of a gender equality perspective in all policies, programmes and research in relation to artificial intelligence.

## Intersectionality and multiple discrimination

### Discrimination

Discrimination is one of the most common human rights violations and is prohibited under human rights law. The principles of equality in rights and dignity, and freedom from discrimination were outlined in the first two articles of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights:

- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (Article 1)
- Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind.(Article 2)

Protection against discrimination in Europe can be found both within European Union law and within the Council of Europe treaty system, notably in the work of the European Court of Human Rights<sup>3</sup>.

Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms states that the rights and freedoms set out in the Convention should be secured “without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.” Protocol 12 to the Convention (2005) expanded the scope of the prohibition on discrimination, to cover all rights guaranteed at national level, regardless of whether or not they are rights within the Convention.

For countries in the European Union, the Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination (Article 21) and is legally binding for all EU member states. EU institutions are legally bound to observe the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, including the provisions on non-discrimination. EU Member States must observe the Charter in relation to EU laws. In addition to the Charter, two EU Directives – the Employment Equality Directive and the Racial Equality Directive – prohibit discrimination in certain contexts, such as employment. It is complemented by a communication in 2009 stepping up the efforts of the EU to fight discrimination.

Discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than other people in a comparable situation, only because they belong to or are perceived to belong to a particular group, and where such treatment cannot be objectively and reasonably justified. Several types of discrimination can be identified:

*Direct discrimination* is characterised by the intent to treat less favourably a person or a group. Indirect discrimination refers to cases where apparently neutral provisions or practices affect members (or perceived members) of a particular group in less favourable ways.

*Structural discrimination* is woven into the ways our societies function, and operates through norms, routines, patterns of attitudes and behaviour that create obstacles in achieving equal opportunities and real equality.

## **Multiple discrimination**

People might be discriminated against because of one or more characteristics that are part of, or are perceived as part of their identity. People have multiple layers to their identity and may define themselves, or be defined by others, according to various criteria, including gender, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, social status, disability, religion and so on.

The concept of multiple discrimination recognises that discrimination can occur on the basis of more than one perceived characteristic. For example, a person who is discriminated on the grounds of their ethnicity may be also discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, age, and so on. Such discrimination can, and often does, create *cumulative disadvantage*.

In 1995, the World Conference for Women, held in Beijing, drew attention to the fact that age, disability, social and economic status, ethnicity and race can create particular barriers for women. This led to the development of a framework for recognising multiple and coexisting forms of discrimination, which became part of the Beijing Platform for Action<sup>4</sup>.

In her study on intersectionality in the European Union, Sandra Fredman proposes three main ways in which discrimination on more grounds than one can be conceptualised:

- 1) Sequential multiple discrimination – when a person suffers discrimination on different grounds on separate occasions. For example, a woman with a disability might suffer discrimination once because of her gender and on another occasion because of her disability. This type of discrimination is the easiest to deal with, because each incident can be assessed individually, and judged accordingly.
- 2) Additive multiple discrimination – when a person suffers discrimination on the same occasion but on two grounds, for example a gay woman is harassed because she is woman and gay. This type of discrimination is additive, because each of the grounds can be identified independently.
- 3) Intersectional discrimination – happens when two or multiple grounds operate simultaneously and interact in an inseparable manner, producing distinct and specific forms of discrimination. For example, a young Roma woman is discriminated in the labour market because she is Roma and is perceived to be ‘dangerous’, because she is a woman, and is therefore ‘bound to have children soon’, and because she is young and therefore unexperienced. In particular circumstances, the combination of these factors creates a negative synergy, so that the discrimination cannot be fully understood as the addition of criteria alone. In being considered

unexperienced and incompetent, the woman shares certain experiences of discrimination with young people; in being assumed to fit into a traditional role, she shares experiences with other women; and in being perceived as dangerous, she shares experiences with all Roma, including men. However, it is the particular intersection of all these factors that makes her case individual<sup>5</sup>.

Multiple discrimination, including intersectional discrimination, are relatively recent concepts, which although now widely accepted, have not yet been fully reflected within the law and legal practice. Anti-discrimination law and its associated practice has traditionally taken a single-axis perspective, identifying and addressing single grounds in cases of discrimination.

Studies have shown an absence of data and legal mechanisms capable of dealing with intersectional discrimination at European level. Research into certain areas, for example women from disadvantaged communities, has produced some evidence that intersectional experiences of discrimination exist, and that policy and practice need to address all dimensions.

## **An intersectional approach to discrimination**

Since the emergence of the term in 1989, intersectionality has been engaged in three main ways:

- applying an intersectional framework of analysis within research and teaching, particularly as applied to specific issues - for example, the interaction of disability and gender within the labour market;
- developing intersectionality as a theory and methodology;
- employing an intersectional lens to inform political interventions and advocacy work from NGOs and other campaigning organisations<sup>6</sup>.

An intersectional analysis can be a useful tool for challenging the way that discrimination is perceived by society and at a legal level. It is primarily an analysis of the structures of power operating in context specific situations, and serves the purpose of making visible experiences of discrimination that would otherwise be lost within a single grounds analysis. An intersectional analysis can help to make the experiences of Muslim LGBT+ visible and the particular vulnerabilities they may face as Muslims exposed to islamophobia, as women exposed to sexism, as LGBT+ exposed to homo or transphobia.

What intersectional studies have revealed is that:

- Using a single grounds approach, victims are presented in essentialist terms, which can render minorities within a minority invisible in the public sphere - both in broader society and within the minority group. They are also likely to suffer from discrimination within the minority group;

- Victims are more likely to experience more instances of discrimination than shown by single grounds approaches;
- Victims are more likely to suffer from aggravated forms of discrimination, which are often more intense and make the person more vulnerable in society;
- Victims are more likely to suffer from structural inequalities in society, to be at risk of poverty, social exclusion and marginalisation.

Substantive equality ((also in the margin: substantive equality)) is understood as furthering equality of opportunity through four main functions:

- 1) Redressing disadvantage (the redistributive dimension)
- 2) Addressing stigma, prejudice, stereotyping and violence (the recognition dimension)
- 3) Enabling participation and giving a voice to those disadvantaged (the participative dimension)
- 4) Accommodating difference through structural change (the transformative dimension)<sup>7</sup>

## **Gender- based violence and intersectionality**

Intersectional lenses can be very effective in dealing with gender-based violence, both in understanding the pervasiveness of the phenomenon, and in informing measures to address it. The personal and social resources used to cope with gender-based violence by survivors are influenced not only by gender, but also by the way that gender interacts with other aspects of identity and social position, such as ethnicity or disability or class. An intersectional approach to working with people who have experienced gender-based violence can provide for a more nuanced approach, by taking into account multiple forms of oppression and structural violence. Different forms of oppression accumulate over time and shape the sense of power, resilience and well-being of survivors, as well as affecting their capacity to deal with the trauma.

An intersectional approach can also better inform strategies for the prevention of gender-based violence by looking at the myriad of factors that lead to certain groups becoming more vulnerable and which limit their access to services and support.

An intersectional approach is also useful when understanding the causes of gender-based violence in relation to men, and in recognising that there are more ways of 'being a man' than traditional notions of masculinity allow - and that these should be acknowledged. You can read more about this in the sub-chapter on masculinities.

## **Working with young people on gender-based violence**

The functions of substantive equality can also support measures in the field of youth work and youth policy, which is traditionally concerned with the recognition and participation of young people in society.

Discrimination on the grounds of age is a commonly acknowledged problem and a recurring factor in cases of gender-based discrimination and violence. Youth policies need to be analysed from an intersectional point of view, to see if they acknowledge those young people who may be particularly vulnerable both in their communities, and in youth policy generally. Giving such young people a voice and including them in the development of youth policy and in decision-making processes helps to respond to their need for participation and a voice, while also recognising the aggravated form of discrimination they are subjected to.

Youth work interventions which champion a human rights approach can also help to support and empower young people to learn about and act to defend their human rights.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states, on Research on Young People's Access to Rights, calls on the member states of the Council of Europe to address the discriminatory practices faced by young people, on the grounds laid out in Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights or in any other form identified in case law of the European Court of Human Rights, with special attention to multifaceted identities and intersectionality of discrimination.

## **LGBT+**

LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/transsexual people. However, it is recognised that those four letters do not necessarily include all those whose sexuality is not heterosexual, or whose gender identity is not based on a traditional gender binary. The '+' symbol that is therefore used to include people whose identities do not fit typical binary notions of male and female, or who decide to identify themselves using other categories to describe their gender identity or their own understanding of their sexuality. This will include, for example, people who identify themselves as queer (a general term describing people not fitting into existing norms), questioning (people who explore their sexual orientation or/and gender identity), or pansexual (people who are attracted to all sexes and genders). It should be remembered, however, that some people may not want to identify themselves with any existing category.

### **Sexual orientations and gender identities**

There is often confusion about what sexual orientation is, and how it is linked to gender identity.

*Sexual orientation* describes patterns of emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to other people. Traditionally, there are three sexual orientations: heterosexual (attraction to people of the opposite sex), bisexual (attraction to people of both sexes) and homosexual (attraction to people of the same sex). These three categories are by no means the only labels that describe the variety of sexual identifications. Sexual orientation should be seen on a continuum from heterosexual to homosexual, with many options in between. Furthermore, some people may decide not to identify themselves with a particular sexual orientation. There are men who have sex with men, or women who have sex with other women, but who do not see themselves as homosexual. They may, at the same time, engage in sexual relationships with people of the opposite sex, but do not want to be identified as bisexual. There is no agreement as to what determines sexual orientation: current research takes into account biological factors, such as genes, brain structure or hormones, as well as other factors, such as environment. Sexual orientation is not a matter of choice or preference and it cannot be altered at will. There are also other terms describing sexual orientation: monosexual (people who feel attracted to people of one gender) or plurisexual (people who are attracted to people of multiple genders).

### **Coming out**

LGBT+ people may decide to make their sexual orientation and/or gender identity public. This process is called 'coming out' or 'coming out of the closet'. It usually starts with friends, acquaintances and family members. However, it is not obligatory to

come out, and should always be a matter of personal choice whether to tell others, or not: no-one should be forced or pressured to do so. Coming out usually starts with acknowledging one's own sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and accepting it. LGBT+ people often live in environments that are hostile to people who do not conform to traditional norms. The coming out process can therefore be very painful, and is often associated with risks and fears of being rejected, ridiculed, bullied or even physically attacked. Hiding one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity and not being able to express one's own needs for a long time may be a very stressful and frustrating experience. Coming out allows people to overcome these negative feelings, and may lead to an experience of relief for many, especially when the response is positive and accepting. However, it may also be connected with a real risk of rejection or violence.

There are controversies related to the process of coming out. Some LGBT+ movements emphasise the affirmative and positive role that coming out can play: they believe that coming out, especially when done publicly by well-known people, leads to greater acceptance of LGBT+ people in the society. However, many queer theorists believe that this equates to a self-labelling process, whereby someone places themselves within a system of oppression in which sexual orientations other than heterosexual are associated with negative characteristics and meanings.

This reinforces the point that the decision about whether to come out should be a personal one and should follow a process of consideration. The process of coming out is different for everyone, and it can take some time for people to feel comfortable and confident enough to talk about it with other people.

Youth work has an important role to play in supporting young people in their coming out process. If a young person decides to come out to a youth worker close to them, the youth worker should be prepared to listen, to demonstrate empathy and understanding, and to keep an open mind. The young person is sharing something very personal and very important. If a youth worker is uncertain of what to say, or thinks that the young person needs further advice, they should point them to services that provide specific support and counselling to LGBT+ people.

## **LGBT+ movements**

The roots of organised LGBT+ movements can be traced back to the 1920s and 1930s, with the development of an urban gay and lesbian culture<sup>8</sup>. Homosexual organisations themselves only really began to develop after the Second World War. In the Netherlands, in 1946, gay men - and later lesbian women - got together under the nickname 'The Shakespeare Club', and then as an organisation called C.O.C. This stood for the 'Centre for Culture and Leisure', a cover name initially adopted after its foundation. C.O.C. is known as the oldest Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender organisation in the world.



In the USA, the first attempts to set up a lesbian and gay organisation can be traced back to 1950 in Los Angeles, when a small group of men set up the Mattachine Society. Mostly male in membership, the Society was joined in 1955 by a lesbian organisation based in San Francisco, called the Daughters of Bilitis. In the 1950s, these organisations remained small, but they established chapters in several cities and published magazines that became a beacon of hope for readers.

The beginning of a gay political movement is today often traced back to 27 June 1969, and a raid by the New York City police on a Greenwich Village gay bar, The Stonewall Inn. Contrary to expectations, the patrons of the bar fought back, provoking three nights of rioting in the area, accompanied by the appearance of 'gay power' slogans on the buildings. Almost overnight, a massive grassroots gay liberation movement was born. Owing much to the radical protest of African-Americans, women, and anti-war protesters of the 1960s, gays challenged all forms of hostility and punishment which had been meted out by society. Choosing to 'come out of the closet' and publicly proclaim their identity, they gave substantial impetus to a wider movement for social change.

In general, the same developments can be seen in Western European countries, where the lesbian and gay world is no longer an underground subculture, but a well-organised community, particularly in larger cities. This often involves gay businesses, political clubs, social service agencies, community centres and religious congregations bringing people together. In a number of places, openly gay candidates run for elections.

In the course of these struggles, homosexual men and lesbian women came to realise that they did not and would not conform to dominant social gender roles. Homosexual people not only challenged the heterosexual norm, but also challenged the images of how men and women should behave, what they should look like and what roles they should fulfil in society. These confrontations with repressive social norms have been carried out in spectacular ways that have increased the visibility of the struggles, such as a 'kiss-in' of lesbian women on a German town square. They have also often used traditional political approaches, such as lobbying and advocacy. The presence of publicly 'out' lesbians and gays in politics, and organisations as the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) or the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth and Students Organisation (IGLYO) have contributed substantially to the inclusion of LGBT issues in discussions on equal opportunities, human rights and general social policy.

Because of the Stonewall riots in June, the month was chosen as LGBT Pride month, when a number of LGBT Pride marches and festivals are organised across the globe (although in some regions, they take place at other times as well). Such festivals and marches are organised not only to promote self-affirmation, dignity, and equality, but have also become an important way to increase the visibility of LGBT+ people and to mainstream the movement.

## **Gender-based violence towards LGBT+ people**

Violence against LGBT+ people is often neglected when gender-based violence is discussed. It is not unusual, for example, for perpetrators of violence against LGBT+ people to 'justify' their actions by expressing disgust at gay sexuality or gay masculinities. Neglect of gender-based violence against LGBT+ people partly reflects a lack of awareness of such violence, but it is also a consequence of inadequate legal and institutional protections for LGBT+ people in many countries of Europe and in the rest of the world.

Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are terms that describe a fear, dislike or hatred of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Such hatred is usually deeply rooted in stereotypes and prejudices, and supported by a hostile social and political climate towards LGBT+ people. It can take many forms, for example:

- Telling offensive jokes, using banter or words that make fun of LGBT+ people. Sometimes these are told with no malicious intention, but they may still have a negative impact on LGBT+ people.
- Bullying at school, which can take many forms, such as exclusion, violent incidents targeting young LGBT+ people, or threats. Such behaviour often results in young people being frightened, hurt or left out. Furthermore, in some schools the climate may be very hostile towards people who do not conform to traditional gender norms, and may therefore intentionally or unintentionally promote homo-, bi- or transphobia.
- Hate speech and hate crimes: LGBT+ young people frequently experience hate speech, especially on the Internet. This may not necessarily be as a result of personal targeting: they may still be affected when LGBT+ people in general are targeted. Such behaviour can have a devastating impact on the lives of young LGBT+ people: it lowers their self-confidence and sense of self-worth, it hinders their coming out process, it makes them feel alone. There are examples of hate speech targeting LGBT+ people that lead to suicidal attempts. Hate crimes are crimes motivated by prejudice and intolerance, where an offender hurts another person, because of the victim's actual or perceived ethnicity, national origin, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religious beliefs, or disability, etc. Hate crimes include assault, harassment, insults, rape, torture, damage to property, or murder.
- Discrimination, such as the exclusion of young LGBT+ people from education or the job market; the absence of gender-neutral toilets for people who do not identify with assigned sex or specific gender; a lack of, or limited access to, medical services; inadequate legislation to allow non-heterosexual couples to enter into legally recognised form of union or partnership, etc.
- Other types of violence, such as forcing gays and lesbians to undergo therapy altering their sexual orientation - procedures which are now banned in many countries
- In some countries, sexual orientation other than heterosexual is illegal and punished, even with death penalty.

## ***Domestic violence in LGBT relationships***

Domestic violence in LGBT+ relationships is harder to identify, both for the victims and for the services offering support, because 'mainstream' services for domestic violence do not always recognise domestic violence in same sex relationships, and there are few people who are experienced in dealing with its specific aspects. However, statistics show that violence in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian relationships occurs at approximately the same rate (one in four).

The main similarities and differences between same-gender and opposite-gender domestic violence are summarised below<sup>9</sup>.

Similarities include the form of abuse, the control the perpetrator has over the victim, the isolation the abused may experience, and the dynamics of the 'cycle of violence'.

Differences include:

**Isolation.** The isolation that accompanies domestic violence can be compounded by being LGBT+ in a homophobic society. Silence about domestic violence within the LGBT+ community further isolates the victim, giving more power to the abuser. Added to this, is the problem of limited community space within LGBT+ networks: privacy may be difficult to maintain and leaving a relationship may be more difficult.

**Heterosexist manipulation.** An abuser may threaten to 'speak out about' a person's sexual orientation or gender identity to friends, family, co-workers, or a landlord. In addition to this, existing support services may require an individual to 'come out' against his or her will.

**Fear of further oppression.** As an oppressed and defamed group, the LGBT+ community is often hesitant to address issues that many fear will further 'stain' the community.

**Gender myths.** People assume that two men in a fight must be equals. Similarly, gay, bi- sexual and transgendered (GBT) men often reject the idea that they can be victims. Given social assumptions about 'deviance', it might also be assumed that the violence is part of a sadomasochistic relationship.

**The context of historical oppression.** LGBT+ people often approach shelters, social service agencies, domestic violence service-providers, the police, and the courts with great caution. LGBT+ victims may fear re-victimisation through homophobia, disbelief, rejection and degradation from institutions that have a history of exclusion, hostility and violence toward LGBT people.

## The Human rights framework

It is often claimed that LGBT+ people want 'special' rights, such as the right for gay and lesbian people to marry and adopt children. LGBT+ rights are not special rights: they are the same universal human rights that apply to all human beings, regardless of sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity.

On 30 March 2010, the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers adopted Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)<sup>10</sup>, on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. This Recommendation sets out the principles deriving from existing European and international instruments, with particular emphasis on the European Convention of Human Rights and case law from the European Court of Human Rights.

The Recommendation identifies specific measures to be adopted and effectively endorsed by member states to combat discrimination, ensure respect for LGBT persons, promote tolerance towards them, and ensure that victims have access to legal remedies. Such measures include, among others:

- Ensuring effective, prompt and impartial investigations into alleged crimes and other incidents, where the sexual orientation or gender identity of the victim is reasonably suspected to have constituted a motive for the perpetrator
- Taking action in cases of hate speech targeting LGBT+ people
- Guaranteeing freedom of association for LGBT+ people and providing support to LGBT+ organisations
- Repealing any discriminatory legislation criminalising same-sex sexual acts between consenting adults, including any differences with respect to the age of consent for same-sex sexual acts and heterosexual acts
- Implementing mechanisms protecting people from discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity in employment and occupation in the public as well as in the private sector.
- Promoting mutual tolerance and respect in schools, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity
- Encouraging dialogue with, and supporting sports associations and fan clubs, in developing awareness-raising activities regarding discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in sport, and in condemning manifestations of intolerance towards them
- Protecting asylum seekers from discriminatory policies or practices on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted in 2015 a Resolution on discrimination against transgender people in Europe (Resolution 2048/2015)<sup>11</sup>, which calls on member States to adopt measures in the areas of anti-discrimination legislation and policies, legal gender recognition, gender reassignment treatment and health care, information, awareness raising and

training. It is worth mentioning that in 2015, Malta became the first country in Europe to introduce legislation recognising the right to gender identity. This gave every individual the right to recognition of their gender identity and the right to be treated and identified according to this identity.

### ***The Yogyakarta Principles***

The Principles and State Obligations on the Application of International Human Rights Law in Relation to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics, known as the Yogyakarta principles, were developed in Yogyakarta (Indonesia) in 2006 by a group of human rights experts from diverse regions and backgrounds. The document includes recommendations to all countries, as well as to UN bodies, national human rights institutions, the media, non-governmental organisations, and others, to implement human rights standards in relation to LGBT+ people. The Principles were revised in 2017 to include 10 new principles and are now known as The Yogyakarta Principles+10. These new principles include the right to state protection, the right to legal recognition, or the right to freedom from criminalisation and sanction on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. Although it is not a legally binding document, the Principles have a very important role as they represent “an affirmation of existing international legal standards as they apply to all persons on grounds of their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics. States must comply with these principles both as a legal obligation and as an aspect of their commitment to universal human rights.”<sup>12</sup>

## Masculinities

Gender is present in every aspect of our lives and affects everyone without exception. This includes men. Gender-based violence is rooted in, and reinforces, gender-based inequalities and cannot be understood outside social structures, gender norms and supporting or reinforcing roles.

A patriarchal perspective sees men as the centre of rationality and normality. It is no surprise that it has taken a long time for masculinity to be understood as part of gender construction, and to see men as gendered. The idea of masculinities refers to the position of men in the gender order. Whitehead and Barrett explain that:

Masculinities are those behaviours, languages and practices, existing in specific cultural and organisational locations, which are commonly associated with men, thus culturally defined as not feminine<sup>13</sup>.

There is no universal set of expectations around masculinity: within societies, there are dominant codes that exert pressure on, and create expectations around men - with consequences for women, children and society as a whole. The understanding of masculinity varies across time and socio-cultural contexts, and within groups and networks; and men also “perform” their masculinity differently and inconsistently. Just as masculinity is defined by its relationship with femininity, women too have an important role to play in the interpretation and understanding of masculinity, particularly in their interaction with men and boys.

### Masculine identities

Masculine identities are constructed through difference and association: being a man involves both *not* being something other than a man, *and* being like certain other men. Masculinity involves displaying attitudes and behaviours that signify and validate maleness, and involves being recognised in particular ways by other men and women.

R.W Connell, in her book *Masculinities* (1995), argues that what is important to a meaningful analysis of gender and masculinity is the “...processes and relationships through which men and women conduct gendered lives. ‘Masculinity’, to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture”<sup>14</sup>.

Connell argues that it is important to consider the power relationships between different masculinities as well as their relationships with femininities in order to analyse how these relationships act to reproduce, support or challenge the

distribution of power in society. She identifies five categories of masculinities, which have been criticised, and should be regarded as fluid rather than rigid:

- **Hegemonic masculinities** are masculinities that are highly visible, respected, and occupy a position of authority in relation to other masculinities, within a particular setting. Such masculinities may not be the most widespread form, but they are likely to be those most admired, and they represent standards for others. Examples might include decisive business leaders, popular boys in a peer group, and certain sportsmen. Hegemonic masculinities can be seen as dominant in the entire gender order. A successful claim to authority is the mark of hegemony, rather than acts of direct violence, although violence underpins and supports this authority. Hegemony is supported by the production of exemplars - symbols with recognised authority - even though most men cannot live up to the ideal.
- **Complicit masculinities.** To be complicit means to condone or support something, without being actively engaged in it. Complicit masculinities are those that benefit in general from the social dominance of men, while not actively seeking to oppress women. A complicit action would be to deny the existence of inequality or other problems, or merely not to question the way in which gender relations are generally ordered.
- **Subordinate masculinities.** Within the overall framework, there are gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men. The most common example is the dominance of heterosexual men and the subordination of homosexual men. From the point of view of hegemonic masculinities, homosexuality is easily assimilated to femininity, and is therefore seen to be inferior. Other examples include men who have made a conscious effort to contest and 'exit' from hegemonic and complicit positions, or those whose physical appearance does not conform to standards set by hegemonic exemplars.
- **Marginalised masculinities** are those that are categorised as different, on the basis of class, ethnicity or status. They may display and enjoy masculine power in certain contexts but are always ultimately compared to the hegemonic norms and images<sup>15</sup>.
- **Protest masculinities** represent a pattern of masculinity constructed in local working-class settings, sometimes among ethnically marginalised men, which embody the same claims to power of typical hegemonic masculinities, but which lack the economic resources and institutional authority which underpin regional and global patterns.<sup>16</sup>

## The crisis of masculinity and men's rights movements

Ever since the early 1990s, men and masculinities have been an issue of concern in relation to unemployment, changing family patterns, school failure, and violent crime. Some researchers argue that young men feel disoriented, and experience conflicting societal demands, which make it difficult to build their (gender) identities as young men. On the one hand, traditional expectations of masculinity

demand toughness, strength and rationality, while on the other hand, 'modern men' are expected to possess soft skills, such as empathy and sensitivity. These seemingly conflicting requests can have a negative impact on the development and behaviour of boys and young men, leading to aggression, low self-esteem and drug abuse. In their study of young masculinities and femininities, Nayak and Kehily claim that "Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and insecurity"<sup>17</sup>.

'The work of Ken Harland with young men and boys in Northern Ireland has shown that young men experience ambivalence about their 'public' and 'private' personas. In public, there is great pressure to appear confident, and to display their masculinity in a forceful way; and there is a fear of being humiliated as a result of appearing weak or feminine. In 'private', young men face their anxieties, and try to address their fears and inner emotions, but they tend to have little support and few available mechanisms at their disposal to help them to become more skilled at expressing their emotions and reflecting on their identity and behaviour. For most young males, their daily experience tends to contradict societal perceptions of masculinity: they often feel powerless, fear the threat of daily violence, may be labelled 'stupid' at school, pay little attention to their health needs - particularly mental health - have not been in a sexual relationship or have little sexual experience, and feel that adults see them as 'immature.' Such conflicting experiences need appreciating in order to understand the internal pressures that many young males experience in constructing their masculine identity and in knowing what it means to be a man.

In the first half of the XX century, men's rights movements have increasingly begun to emerge as a way of opposing the claims of women's movements for emancipation and equal rights. From the men's liberation movement in the 1970s, two main branches evolved: pro-feminist men's movements and anti-feminist men's movements. The second of these are mostly branded as "men's rights movements". Some of the men's rights movements claim that men are in fact the oppressed and discriminated, arguing that men and society have been 'feminised' by the success of the women's movement. Most of the men's rights movements oppose feminism and argue for the maintenance or re-establishment of a patriarchal gender order. The emergence of the Internet has allowed such movements to reach wider audiences. Men's rights groups and father's rights groups are generally associated with a shift towards a more conservative approach to the family and gender relations, and such movements have become increasingly vocal in Europe. However, research also shows that in certain countries, policies encouraging men to take a more active fathering role have facilitated women's entry into the labour market. There are also indications of an increasing interest in feminist ideas even while men's rights movements have gained in popularity.<sup>18</sup>



## Risk taking behaviours and young men

Young men often willingly jeopardise their health by engaging in high-risk activities, as a result of clinging to stereotypical images of men and masculinity. The notion of risk is a recurring theme in young men's health statistics. This can be seen by observing male risk-taking behaviours, such as driving without a seat belt, eating snack foods, fighting, street violence, not visiting doctors, alcohol abuse, car theft, and increased suicide rates. While the young men may have been aware of the dangers, they perceived risk-taking as a necessary aspect of male youth culture, and as an important way in which males demonstrate their masculinity to others.<sup>19</sup>

Research shows that violence plays an integral and complex role in male identity, and that it is an accepted and normal part of many boys' lives and experiences. Young men tend to refer to violence primarily in relation to men's violence towards other men. Violence has been seen as a way to assert one's masculinity in front of other men, or a way of dealing with things that might challenge aspects of masculinity and cause a feeling of shame.<sup>20</sup>

Violence fulfils a function in relation to stereotypical gender roles. Violence, as an integral and complex aspect of male identity also 'serves to maintain group solidarity, reinforce kinship ties, affirm allegiances and enhance status within the group'<sup>21</sup>. For other young men, the function is related to self-protection, where an attempt to use violence or aggression or threat is seen as a means of warding off a threat from another.

While it is certainly the case that gender-based violence affects women disproportionately, and while men are the main aggressors, they too experience violent consequences as a result of the assumptions and beliefs which underlie gender-based violence. Perhaps nothing shows this better than the history of conflict and genocide.

Gender and genocide studies have long focused on the under-reported stories of women, especially stories about rape and abuse within conflict, which have tended to be excluded from early accounts of the Holocaust and genocide up to the 1980s. A closer look shows that men too are gendered in genocidal processes. They are often the first group to be separated and massacred, allowing for the killing and exploitation of women and children. For example, on 12 July 1995, more than 8000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were murdered in and around the town of Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb forces<sup>22</sup>. Adam Jones identified two types of genocides: gender selective slaughter of males, and "root-and-branch" genocides which target all sectors of the target population indiscriminately. Genocides targeting battle-age males are more frequent than the second type, portraying a brutal logic and understanding of masculinity: males are those who can serve in the military, and are therefore legitimate targets. However, this does not imply that women are saved from the worst types of genocidal violence. While the

violence that they are exposed to is often less deadly, it is no less shocking: it may involve verbal humiliation, sexual slavery, individual and gang rape, or rape-murder on a large scale.<sup>23</sup>

## **Youth work and masculinities**

Any youth work addressing gender-based violence needs to address the concepts and constructions of masculinity and femininity that young people are exposed to, and needs to support them to reflect critically on these concepts and on their own relationship to, and performance of gender. Traditionally, work against discrimination has focused on the empowerment of girls and women, and this needs to remain an important focus. However, working with boys and young men is also needed - partly in order to support them in exploring their identity and reflecting on their understanding of masculinity and on the social pressures surrounding this concept; but also in order to encourage them to engage actively against gender-based violence and for gender equality.

## Sexuality

Sexuality is everywhere we look: in the books we read, the movies we watch, on television, in online videos, music video clips, online games, in advertisements, in the websites we visit, the way we dress or talk with other people, in our way of thinking about and imagining things. Sexuality is a part of us. It is probably difficult to find another domain of human life that is as loaded with controversial issues, stereotypes, prejudices, norms, and taboos.

Human sexuality is a complex issue. In different attempts to define this term, two aspects are usually taken into account: biological (essentialist approach) and socio-cultural (constructivist approach). Although sexuality has an important biological component - usually related to the imperative of reproduction - other components, such as personal needs and desires, emotions, practices and identities, are of equal, and sometimes greater, importance. The World Health Organisation defines sexuality as:

(...) a central aspect of being human throughout life (that encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors."<sup>24</sup>

One of the first pieces of sociological research to undermine the understanding of human sexuality as something invariable was done in the United States by Alfred Kinsey and his team, in the late forties and early fifties of the XX century. The results of this large-scale research were shocking, as they showed large discrepancies between social norms and expectations and actual human sexual behaviours and practices. Masturbation and sex between people of the same sex turned out to be common and treated as natural. The study contributed to a wider understanding of human sexuality beyond biology and physiology.

The idea of fixed categories of sexuality, as with the idea of unchanging, essential gender identities, is undermined by histories of sexuality that show changing practices and values attached to forms of sexual behaviour between people. One of the most famous of these is the work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault, in his three volume *History of Sexuality*. In volume 1, for instance, he shows that before 'homosexuality' became categorised as a form of sexual

identity in the nineteenth century, sexual relations between men were regarded, in different contexts, as an act that may be celebrated or punished, but that did not define the identities of those involved. In his book, Foucault also showed how sexuality was determined throughout history and how it became a tool of power. His theories influenced both queer and feminist ideas and movements.

Views on human sexuality have changed throughout history, and sexuality is today increasingly seen as a dimension of life that everyone can define and shape according to their own particular needs. However, every society establishes certain norms in relation to sexual behaviours, and these are learnt in the process of socialisation. These norms are often built into laws that prohibit or restrict certain sexual behaviours. For example, in every society there is a legal 'age of consent': the age that people need to reach, in order to be considered capable of making a conscious decision to engage in sexual relationships. In most countries, this can be found in the criminal code, which makes it a crime to engage in any sexual act with a person below the age of consent. This age varies from country to country, but is usually between 14 to 18 years of age. Sexual violence is another example of a social norm built into legislation: sex is only legal if it is consensual. Practices which force a partner or partners to engage in sexual practices or behaviours, or which cause harm (psychological or physical) are punishable by law.

There are many issues related to human sexuality, such as sex work, pornography or abortion, that lead to heated debate. Such issues will always be subject to dispute, as they touch upon values and established social norms, which can never be neutral: for certain people, they will seem natural and important for preserving the social order, while for others, they will seem unfair, and a restriction of their autonomy and right to self-determination.

## **Diverse sexualities**

There are many different types and forms of expression of sexuality and it can take a while for people to figure out what is "right" for them. Although there are many aspects of sexuality, such as gender identity, sexual identity or sexual orientation, issues of sexual diversity primarily centre about the later.

In terms of sexual orientation, people may identify themselves as straight (attracted to people of the opposite gender), gay or lesbian (attracted to people of the same gender), or bisexual (attracted to people of both genders). However, it is often not simply a choice between three alternatives that applies for the whole life. Sexual orientation should be rather seen on a spectrum from straight (heterosexual) to gay (homosexual) with many options in between. Yet, some people may not want to be identified with any sexual orientation. You can read more about sexual orientation in the section on LGBT+.

However, sexual diversity is much more than only sexual orientation, it also includes asexual, transsexual (transgender) or intersex people.

## ***Asexuality***

Not everyone needs sex to express themselves and to feel happy. An asexual person is someone who does not feel sexual attraction, and has no, or very little, sexual drive. This is not the same as celibacy, which people choose. Asexuality is an intrinsic part of a person, a part of their identity. Although the absence of sexual attraction or sexual drive may, in particular cases, be the result of health concerns, asexuality is not today considered to be a pathological condition. People who identify themselves as asexual have the same emotional needs as everyone else, and they may decide to live life on their own, and even to date and establish romantic relationships. However, they do not feel the need to be involved in sexual practices and behaviours. Asexual people may feel attracted to a particular gender, and may therefore self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight.

## ***Transsexuality***

“Being born in a wrong body” is how many transsexual people would describe themselves. For example, their body may be female, but their gender identity male. Or the opposite may be the case: they have been born with a male body, but feel they are female. This phenomenon is called transsexuality (or gender dysphoria, in the medical literature). It is described as the case when someone has the typical physical anatomy belonging to one sex, but the gender identity of the opposite one. Some transsexual people prefer to be called transgender (transsexual is generally considered to be a subset of transgender), but some refuse this identification. Being born in the wrong body is a very painful experience. A transsexual person’s life is a constant fight – against one’s own body, against deteriorating mental health, against discrimination and violence. In general, the only way to relieve these symptoms is through sex reassignment surgery, during which a person obtains the body that corresponds with their gender identity. This normally demands a series of psychological tests, hormone therapy - usually until the end of their life – and a name and legal gender change, if the law permits this. There are still 22 countries in Europe (2017) that require mandatory sterilisation of transsexual people before sex reassignment surgery is allowed. This was ruled to be a human rights violation by the European Court of Human Rights (*A. P., E. Garçon and S. Nicot against France*)<sup>25</sup>.

## ***Intersex***

A person’s sex is assigned at birth: the doctors or others who assist women at labour usually decide if the new-born baby is male or female, on the basis of sex characteristics, such as the type of sex organs. Intersex people are born with sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads and chromosomes) that do not fit the typical binary classification of male or female bodies. In some cases, intersex traits may be visible at birth, but often they do not become clear until puberty. Some chromosomal intersex characteristics may never be visible at all.

Being intersex is related to biological sex characteristics and is distinct from a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Unfortunately, in many places, the sex of someone who is intersex is decided by the medical staff, sometimes after consultation with the parents, and the child is forced to undergo a surgical procedure to make the genitals correspond to the assigned sex. Later on, in puberty, it may turn out that a person's sex was wrongly assigned. A 2013 statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture condemns the non-consensual use of normalisation surgery on intersex people as they "(...) can cause scarring, loss of sexual sensation, pain, incontinence and lifelong depression and have also been criticized as being unscientific, potentially harmful and contributing to stigma."<sup>26</sup>

## **Sexuality education and youth work**

Sexuality education covers a number of issues that are relevant for children and young people, relating to biological, emotional and social aspects of sexuality. The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) defines a rights-based approach to comprehensive sexuality education as something that "seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality – physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships. It views 'sexuality' holistically and within the context of emotional and social development. It recognizes that information alone is not enough. Young people need to be given the opportunity to acquire essential life skills and develop positive attitudes and values."<sup>27</sup> The IPPF defines seven essential components of sexuality education: gender, sexual and reproductive health and HIV, sexual rights and sexual citizenship, pleasure, violence, diversity and relationships.

Sexuality education is, most of all, about creating self-awareness about the human body, learning how to create and sustain healthy relationships, improving self-confidence, learning acceptance, and developing attitudes of tolerance and non-discrimination. However, there are many places where sexual education is either not provided to young people or it is purely informative, focusing on the biological aspects of human sexuality, while issues such as gender identity, sexual orientation, and even gender-based violence may be treated as taboo, and not talked about or labelled as "bad" or "immoral". Such an approach to sexuality education does not contribute to young people's well-being and may even lead to dramatic consequences for those who do not accept or identify with norms that have been imposed on them. In cases where the formal education system does not provide young people with sexuality education, they tend to look for information on the Internet or from their peers. However, this can lead to misleading information, as online sources often reduce the question of sexuality to sex practices only, and sexual partners are often objectified.

There are differing opinions as to whether sexual education should be done by youth workers, or whether it should rather be left to professionals in the field of human sexuality. However, youth workers are often in a position to provide important assistance to young people in talking through issues related to sexuality and answering their concerns. This can be done through informal discussions or in organised workshops that deal with such topics as negotiation and communication skills, antidiscrimination and human rights education.

The Council of Europe has produced educational resources related to sexuality education that can be used in working with children and young people. These can be found at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/pestalozzi/sexed>

## Sexual and reproductive health and rights

The World Health Organisation defines sexual health as:

“(...) a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence...”<sup>28</sup>

The definition of reproductive health developed by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which is similar to the World Health Organisation's, includes an additional paragraph explaining that: “Reproductive health implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capacity to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so.”<sup>29</sup>

In order for the conditions for sexual and reproductive health to be met, the sexual and reproductive rights of a person must be respected and protected. Sexual and reproductive rights are human rights that are recognised in existing international and regional human rights documents – for example:

- the right to equality and non-discrimination;
- the right to be free from torture or cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment;
- the right to privacy;
- the right to the highest attainable standard of health ;
- the right to marry and to found a family and enter into marriage with free and full consent of the intending spouses, and to equality in and at the dissolution of marriage;

- the right to decide the number and spacing of one's children;
- the right to information and education;
- the right to freedom of opinion and expression; and
- the right to an effective remedy for violations of fundamental rights.

The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights in an Issue Paper on Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Europe (2017)<sup>30</sup> identified several obstacles to the fulfilment and protection of those rights, including:

- lack of or limited access to contraception and legal and safe abortion,
- existing harmful gender stereotypes, social norms and stigma regarding women's sexuality and reproductive capacities,
- violence, threats, hate speech and smear campaigns against people and organisations defending women's rights,
- sexuality education programmes throughout Europe that fall short of international human rights requirements and the World Health Organization's standards regarding comprehensive sexuality education
- inadequate access to effective remedies and reparation for victims of sexual and reproductive coercion, including past human rights abuse such as forced sterilisation of Roma women in some countries.

The European Court of Human Rights has dealt with many complaints against member states concerning issues of reproductive rights, for example: access to lawful abortion, embryo donation and scientific research, home birth, medically-assisted procreation, sterilisation operations and surrogacy.<sup>31</sup>



## Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.obn.org/cfundef/100antitheses.html>
- 2 Based on: Todd. D. Nelson, *Psychology of Prejudice*, Pearson Education, Inc. publishing as Allyn and Bacon, 2002
- 3 Read more about case law of the European Court of Human Rights related to gender equality at: [https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS\\_Gender\\_Equality\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Gender_Equality_ENG.pdf)
- 4 Beijing Declaration, United Nations, 1995, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm>. (accessed 20 December 2017).
- 5 Sandra Fredman, *Intersectional Discrimination in EU gender equality and non-discrimination role*, Directorate Justice and Consumers, May 2016.
- 6 Sumi Cho, Kimberle Crenshaw, Leslie McCall, *Towards a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis*, in *Signs*, vol 38, no 4, 2013, pp. 785-810.
- 7 Fredman, *op.cit.*, p. 37
- 8 Lentin, A. (2004). 'The problem of culture and human rights in the response to racism', in Tittley, G. (Ed.) *Resituating Culture*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing. For a full discussion see Lentin, A. (2004). *Racism and Anti-Racism in Europe*. London: Pluto Press.
- 9 Excerpted from [www.gmdvp.org](http://www.gmdvp.org) and LAMBDA Gay and Lesbian Anti Violence Project (El Paso).
- 10 [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cf40a](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805cf40a)
- 11 <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-EN.asp?fileid=21736&lang=en>
- 12 Read more at: [http://yogyakartaprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5\\_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf](http://yogyakartaprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf)
- 13 Whitehead, S.M., Barret, F.J., *The Masculinities Reader*, Polity Press, 2004
- 14 R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd edition, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005
- 15 Connell, *ibid* p. 76-81.
- 16 R.W. Connell, James Messerschmidt, *Rethinking hegemonic masculinities*, in *GENDER & SOCIETY*, Vol. 19 No. 6, December 2005, p. 829-859.
- 17 Nayak, Anoop; Kehily, Mary Jane, *Gender, Youth and Culture: Young Masculinities and Femininities*, 2nd edition, Palgrave Macmillan, Kindle Edition, 2013, p. 56
- 18 Sandy Ruxton, Nikki van der Gaag, *Men's involvement in gender equality – European perspectives*, *Gender and Development*, 21:1, 2013, p. 161-175.
- 19 Ken Harland, *Young Men Talking – Voices from Belfast (1997)* YouthAction Northern Ireland and Working with Men Publications, London
- 20 Ken Harland, Sam McCready, *Boys, young men and violence : masculinities, education and practice*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 134
- 21 *Ibidem*, p.171.
- 22 The International Criminal Tribunal for the Crimes in the Former Yugoslavia ruled in 2004 that the crime constituted genocide. The ruling was upheld in 2007 by the International Court of Justice.
- 23 Adam Jones, *Genocide. A Comprehensive Introduction*, Routledge, 2006, p.328-329.
- 24 [http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual\\_health/sh\\_definitions/en/](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/)
- 25 [https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{"itemid":\["001:172556"\]](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{)
- 26 [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A.HRC.22.53\\_English.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A.HRC.22.53_English.pdf)
- 27 IPPF Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), International Planned Parenthood Federation, London 2010, p. 6,

28 [http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual\\_health/sh\\_definitions/en/](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/)

29 Reproductive Rights are Human Rights. A Handbook for National Human Rights Institutions, United Nations 2014, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/NHRIHandbook.pdf>

30 Women's sexual and reproductive health and rights in Europe, Issue Paper published by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe, December 2017 <https://rm.coe.int/women-s-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-in-europe-issue-pape/168076dead>

31 Reproductive rights, Factsheet, European Court of Human Rights, July 2017 [http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS\\_Reproductive\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Reproductive_ENG.pdf)



Poster created by the No Hate Ninjas (Portugal) for the No Hate Speech Movement youth campaign.