because words matter

Glossary on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression and Sex Characteristics

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
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Words can inspire.
And words can destroy.
Choose yours well.
Robin Sharma

Proper use of terminology in the field of human rights, particularly those related to sexual orientation, gender identity, expression or characteristics, is of paramount importance. The careful choice of word is a prime consideration as it can make the difference between respecting human rights and the perception of abusing them. A little time spent studying this vocabulary as it is currently used will pay dividends; it makes a meaningful difference to the communities we seek to serve.

This new version of the Council of Europe SOGI glossary replaces the original, which was first drafted in 2009. The changes it includes take into account both social and linguistic evolutions in the field of human rights applied to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC) in the intervening period.

Language has evolved as understanding of the issues has deepened to reflect the human lives and social realities we encounter. This document covers the key current terminology in the field of SOGIESC human rights at the time of publication. Some older, discriminatory or even stigmatizing terminology from the original glossary has been removed and new words have been added. This glossary does not cover every term you will encounter, but it does detail the specific language currently employed in the field. We hope that this new SOGI glossary will encourage clear, respectful communication by all who use it.

Eleni Tsetsekou
Head of Unit
LGBT!
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex persons.

SOGIESC
Acronym for Sexual orientation, Gender Identity or Expression and Sex Characteristics.

SOGIESC-based violence
Violence that targets specifically persons perceived as LGBTI or their allies.
In some penal codes, this form of violence may constitute hate crime.

LGBTI
Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex persons.
Sexual orientation
The “LGB” component of the acronym LGBTI. Sexual orientation is understood to refer to each person’s capacity for profound attraction (emotional, physical, sexual, psychological and/or other) to, and intimate and sexual relations with, another person. It can be towards a same-sex person (homosexual), different-sex person (heterosexual), either female or male persons (bisexual) or irrespective of sex and/or gender (pansexual).

In cases where a person experiences low or no sexual attraction to other persons, but who can still experience other forms of attraction we use the term asexual.

Homophobia
Irrational fear of, and aversion to, persons perceived as homosexual, based on prejudice, or unfamiliarity/lack of information.

Biphobia
Irrational fear of, and aversion to, persons perceived as bisexual, based on prejudice or unfamiliarity/lack of information.
Sexual orientation

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**Lesbian**
Refers to a homosexual woman.

**Gay**
Refers to a homosexual man.

**Homophobia**
Irrational fear of, and aversion to, persons perceived as homosexual, based on prejudice, or unfamiliarity/lack of information.

**Biphobia**
Irrational fear of, and aversion to, persons perceived as bisexual, based on prejudice or unfamiliarity/lack of information.
**Gender Identity** The “T” component of the LGBTQI acronym. Gender identity is understood to refer to each person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth, including the personal sense of the body (which may involve, if freely chosen, modification of bodily appearance or function by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including dress, speech and mannerisms.

**Gender Expression** Social expression of an individual’s gender identity, including the use of name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice or body characteristics.

**Sex** Refers to the biological characteristics used to define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive.

**Sex marker** Legal sex appearing on documents (birth certificates, identification documents, etc.).

**AFAB/AMAB** Assigned Female at Birth/Assigned Male at Birth.

**Transgender** Transgender is an umbrella expression referring to persons who have a gender identity different from predominant social expectations based on the person’s sex assigned at birth.

**Cis-gender** A person whose gender identity and expression corresponds to predominant social expectations based on the person’s sex assigned at birth.

**Transphobia** Irrational fear of, and aversion to, persons perceived as transgender based on prejudice.
Interphobia

Irrational fear of, and aversion to, persons perceived as intersex, based on prejudice.
Sex Characteristics
The “I” component of the acronym LGBTI. Refers to the chromosomal, gonadal and anatomical features of a person, which include primary sex characteristics such as reproductive organs and genitalia and/or in chromosomal structures and hormones; and secondary sex characteristics such as muscle mass, hair distribution, breasts and/or structure.

Intersex
Persons born with biological sex characteristics that do not fit societal norms or medical definitions of what makes a person male or female. Sometimes a person's intersex status is detected at birth; sometimes it only becomes apparent later in life, notably during puberty. There are many forms of intersex; it is an umbrella spectrum or term, rather than a single category.

Interphobia
Irrational fear of, and aversion to, persons perceived as intersex, based on prejudice.