

## Gender Terminology Caucus Brief

The NGO CSW Geneva Committee is dedicated to fair and equitable access to human rights for all, focusing in particular on women and girls. Only when women and girls achieve their full potential can humanity realize peace and prosperity for all.

The remit of the Committee is to work for the full emancipation and equality of women and girls and this project is part of that endeavour. As the gender terminology has gained in popularity and its meaning and object have been expanded, which is a good thing in itself, we ask ourselves: are its present use and meaning still serving the purpose of protecting and promoting equal access to human rights of the female sex?

In recent times, the sex and gender terminology used to highlight the challenges and opportunities of women and girls, as compared to those of men and boys, has come to be used in ways divergent from their original intent.

Language is a powerful tool, that can be used or misused depending on who is using it.

Interpretation must ensure that at the time of translation the correct meaning issued. Over time terminology can change from the original meaning through usage and interpretation, culture, traditions, ...

The bias of organisations influences the way terminology is used in both internal and external communication.

This terminology has been translated with nuances that undermine the original meaning due to the syntax and vocabulary of a given language.

The usage of sex and gender is by no means settled and the need of a clear definition to be used in international and national laws is urgent.

It's common for people to confuse sex, gender, and gender identity. Gender has also been misused as a synonym for "women" or "female". But keep in mind that they're actually all different things.

In English, there is a difference between "grammatical gender", "gender as a social construct" (which refers to the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society at a certain time considers appropriate for men or women) and "sex" as a biological characteristic of living beings.

NGO CSW Geneva Executive Bureau [secretary@ngocsw-geneva.ch](mailto:secretary@ngocsw-geneva.ch)

President: **Graduate Women International/** Stacy Dry Lara

Vice President: **Women's Federation for World Peace, Intl /** Carolyn Handschin

Treasurer: **FAWCO/** Anne Riz

Secretary: **Graduate Women International/** Clémence Mathiaud

The originally grammatical use of the word gender in the English language is that a masculine or feminine characteristic nouns or adjectives is assigned. This in contrary to sex which is defined by biological characteristics that make someone female or male by birth.

Gender refers to the socio-cultural construction of roles and relationships between men and women. In describing socio-cultural construction, gender analysis considers other social structures such as race, ethnicity and class. Sex can't be changed; gender roles are learned and can change over time.

The Project of the Task Force of the Committee of NGO CSW Geneva can be outlined as follows:

- identifying the terms that need clarification
- redefining these terms in English, where possible using existing UN language
- analysing the used language in the different UN entities, treaties and conventions.
- providing the definitions in all six UN languages, and where possible other languages too.

The project is ongoing and will be open to potential definitions from diverse sources, primarily from those using UN language. (anticipate disagreement )

Whilst recognizing the challenges of the UN process in deciding on language, the project developers take the view that it is necessary to use existing agreed UN language.

It is noted that there are some groups within the women's movement wishing to use different language in a response to changing circumstances. If this is left unchecked, the new language will become de facto definitions, without the checks and balances of the UN system.

The project developers are determined to provide concrete definitions, correctly translated so they can be effectively used by all stakeholders including States Parties.

The document will serve to:

- produce a glossary for policy writers, UN translators and interpreters.
- defend the best interests of women and girls, promoting policy making and implementation strategies.
- provide sample sentences that will give context for the definitions.

The document is a work in progress and will be amended as necessary.