

GENDER EQUALITY

RESOURCE FOR TEACHERS AND FACILITATORS



As language evolves, so do the meanings and impacts of the words we use. This resource encourages critical reflection on terminology and promotes the use of inclusive language that tries not to perpetuate harmful stereotypes, nor disguise or reinforce unequal power relations shaped by historical systems of oppression. Where possible, the language in this document has been updated to align with these principles.

CONCERN
worldwide

Concern Global Citizenship, 2026

Gender Equality

Gender inequality remains a deep-rooted issue globally. From sports fields to the highest levels of government, it exists in all nations in the world. The United Nations have set 17 Sustainable Development Goals for all countries - from Ireland to South Sudan. These are to be achieved by 2030 and one of these targets is gender equality. Currently, no country in the world is set to meet this target. Use this resource to explore what gender inequality is, how it impacts on whole communities and what your students can do to take action.



Note: Gender is a sensitive and complex issue. The material in this resource is intended to begin the discussion with students specifically about gender inequalities related to the work of Concern overseas primarily focusing on women as they are often amongst the most vulnerable. For more information about the gender spectrum visit <https://spunout.ie/life/article-amp/a-z-of-gender-identity>

Definitions

What's your gender? What's your sex? Two questions that most people have been asked before. But what are you really being asked?



Gender

Gender is **“the socially constructed characteristics of women, men, girls and boys”**. This is what is widely or traditionally considered ‘normal behaviour/attitudes’ in a society or community for males and females (clothing, professions, attitudes, etc.). These vary in different society’s communities and time periods over history. These norms can be changed and challenged. E.g. in China blue is considered a feminine colour and in western countries it is considered masculine



Sex

The different biological and physiological characteristics of males and females, such as reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormones, etc.*

*Definitions taken from the World Health Organisation

Gender inequality by numbers:



640 million women and girls in the world were child brides, with more child marriages taking place every day ([UNICEF, 2025](#)). Every year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18 - roughly 23 every minute. ([Girls Not Brides, 2026](#))



On average, women in the labor market still earn 20 percent less than men globally and women spend about three times as many hours in unpaid domestic and care work as men. ([International Labour Organisation, 2026](#))



On average, women live 5 years longer than men. This is because of higher rates of newborn deaths among boys, and higher death rates among boys and men due to violence, accidents and chronic health conditions (partly due to higher rates of smoking, alcohol, and drug use). ([Our World in Data 2025](#))



As a global average, girls are now outperforming boys in reading across all education levels and country income groups. Yet, certain regions remain unequal; Afghanistan is the only country in the world where secondary and higher education are strictly forbidden to girls and women. ([UNESCO, 2025](#))



In nearly 80% of households lacking direct water access, women and girls bear the primary responsibility for water collection. ([World Bank, 2024](#))



Due to existing economic and social inequalities, women are more vulnerable during natural disasters. For example, in Kenya, fetching water may use up to 85% of a woman’s daily energy intake. During droughts, greater work load is placed on women’s shoulders, some spend up to eight hours a day in search of water.

ACTIVITY ONE: Moving debate

 10 minutes



This activity can be used to begin the discussion about the terms 'gender' and 'sex'. Before you start this activity, it is important to emphasize to students to be respectful of other people in the room.

Instructions:

1. Designate one side of the room 'AGREE' and the opposite side 'DISAGREE'. The space inbetween is a scale (students can strongly agree, be undecided, not too sure but verging more towards disagree...etc.)
2. Ask the students to gather in the middle of the room and show/read out the first statement. Ask them to move to a point on the scale which fits their opinion
3. Ask students to share their opinions and encourage discussion of each point
4. Repeat this for each statement

Discussion:

- If you are using this activity before sharing the definitions above, explain that the statements are mixed up and talking about different things (gender and sex). Discuss as class and then share the definitions.
- If you are using these after sharing the definitions, ask students to discuss which statements refer to gender norms and which refer to sex differences.
- How might gender stereotypes (such as those here) impact on a person's opportunities, choices and rights? You may wish to share some of the statistics from the first page for this task.

Statements

- Boys prefer the colour blue
False. This is a gender norm which differs between cultures
- Women and men have the same types of hormones
True (they have different amounts of the same hormones). This refers to sex
- Girls are more emotional than boys
False. This is a gender norm. Consider what emotional means: happy, sad, angry? Do girls feel all of these more than boys?
- Women are better at caring for young children
False. Men and women both care for children, but sometimes society expects women to do this more.
- Males are natural leaders
False. This is a gender norm.



Concern and gender equality

Gender equality refers to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of men and women. All of Concern's programmes overseas include tackling gender equality as women are often the most at risk of extreme poverty, hunger and violence. Below are just a few examples of our gender programmes in one of our programme countries, Malawi.

Right to Learn:

Supporting girls to achieve their right to education and freedom from Gender Based Violence (GBV)

School related gender based violence (SRGBV) is a big obstacle to girls' education in Malawi.

Concern are working with communities and Theatre for Change to empower students in primary schools to identify, report and address violence against girls with the aim of ensuring a safe place to learn for all!

In this photo (right), Miss Malawi is visiting primary school students as part of the programme (Mervis Nyirenda, Concern Worldwide)



Umodzi

Umodzi – engages couples to reflect upon and discuss issues such as gender norms, power, decision-making, budgeting, violence, positive parenting and healthy relationships, both together and in single-sex groups, in monthly gender transformative dialogue sessions. Participants set a family vision together creating a fair division of labour in the household.

In some districts: Over 39% of women were found to rarely or never spend small amounts of money on their own. However, Umodzi participants widely reported post-programme an increased sharing of responsibilities, positive psychosocial wellbeing and collaboration between couples, and a reduction in household arguments.

Watch this video to hear about Chrissy and Fortie's experience of the Umodzi programme



'Now we share chores and he even helps me with the children all thanks to the gender equality training.'

Female Umodzi participant - Malawi

Graduation programmes

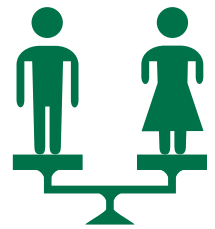
Female headed households are among the poorest in Malawi. In the communities we work in Malawi, many women are taking part in our 'Graduation programme'.

This supports the poorest households in a community to 'graduate' out of extreme poverty and to sustain this. The programme gives monthly cash support to families, support to save for difficult times, and provides training in business skills.

ACTIVITY TWO: Gender Equality Video

 Five minutes

Use this video to introduce students to inequalities that women are facing around the world. The video can be found on Concern's **YouTube** channel titled 'What is Gender Equality'.



Video Questions:

1. Where do Malawi rank on the UN's Gender Inequality Index (as of 2018)?
2. What is the link between hunger and gender inequality for women and their communities?
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.....
3. Why do you think that women often have limited control over finances (economic resources)? Do you think this ever happens in Ireland?
.....
.....
4. What are two things that you can do to take action in your community on gender inequality?
•
•
5. In your opinion, do you think that Ireland is doing enough to tackle gender inequality?
.....
.....

Extension and research activities:

1. Find out what the bottom ten countries are on the *UN's Gender Inequality Index*. Choose one of these and research it to find out about what life is like there as a girl or woman.
2. All of Concern's programmes overseas are all **gender sensitive**. This means they identify and take into account the different needs, abilities, and opportunities of girls, boys, women and men. Find out more about Concern's gender programmes and the communities that we work with: <https://www.concern.net/what-we-do/gender-equality>

ACTIVITY THREE: Gender Equality Big Steps

 25 minutes



Use this activity to explore how gender inequality holds people back from accessing their rights and opportunities all over the world.

Preparation: Give students their role play card in advance and ask them to find out more about the country that the person on their card lives in. Visit *Concern's blogs* online to find information and and find out about the lives of people that we work with.

Need:

- Role play cards (below) printed out with one for each group/ pair/individual students
- A clear space so that students can move with ease
- The statements displayed on a board for all to see

Instructions:

1. Ask students or a representative from each group to line up as if they are in a race and explain that for every statement that they believe to be true for the person on their card, they will move forward one step
2. Read each statement aloud, giving students a chance to decide if they should move or not
3. At the end, ask students to look around the room. What have they noticed? What do they think this represents? Ask them to take turns reading aloud their role play card to the class.
4. Explain that the statements are examples of gender inequalities and ask students to reflect on the following:
 - What does a step forward represent? And the finish line? [They represent opportunity, human rights access and the finish line, equality]
 - Where did you end up? How does it feel to be there looking around the room?
 - What were the things that specifically were holding you back? How can these be overcome?

Statements

- I can choose to continue my studies or take up any profession I would like
- I am safe from harm
- I can marry or be in a relationship with whoever I choose
- My opinions are respected
- I have enough food, water and access to sanitation facilities

Top Tip: Use the role play cards in our [SDG 11: Reduced Inequalities](#) resource (pages four and five) which contain more detail and different examples in addition to these!



ROLE PLAY CARDS

Asmaa, 15, from Malawi

A few years ago my friends all started getting boyfriends. I didn't want to be left out, so I did too. After a few months, I fell pregnant. My boy is 18 months old now. I love him but it has changed my future. Since I now have responsibilities, I can no longer attend school. I earn very little and sometimes there is not enough to buy the food we need.

Ciara, 17, from Kilkenny

My dreams one day are to be a civil engineer as I love knowing how things work and problem solving – my family just keep telling me it is a man's job and I'll struggle to get jobs. But I don't care – I'm still going to try. People at school can be mean about it too and I've had some issues with bullying in the past.

Maryaam, 16, from Syria

Before the war, life was good. But a few years ago because of the violence at home we had to move to a refugee camp in Turkey. I had to leave school and I can see no way that I can go onto university. I had planned to study maths. Especially now as I just got married. My parents think it was the best way to keep me safe... maybe it is, but I had hoped for other things before marriage. Life here is hard and there is never enough food and water. I hate the toilets as there are not enough of them and they are far away from our dwelling.

Gloria, 13, from Democratic Republic of Congo but living in Galway

We had to leave home because of the violence. It was very frightening and sometimes I still dream about it. My family and I are asylum seekers and live in a direct provision centre. I don't like it here – there are rules about when and what we eat (even for the grownups!) and there are lots of people here – I don't always feel safe. I'd love to be a social worker one day to help children like me but I'm not sure if my family can afford it.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is one of the biggest human rights violations in existence today. It is violence directed towards a person because of their sex or gender identity – it is mostly directed towards women and girls, but can affect anyone.

Violence is not just physical – it is any force with the intention of causing harm, hurt or death. It takes many different forms and is often related to unequal power dynamics (e.g. showing that you have power over someone else).

Psychological Violence	Sexual Violence	Physical Violence	Economic Violence
Actions that cause psychological harm to someone. This may include isolation from others, verbal aggression, threats, intimidation, humiliation, stalking and insults.	Any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act by violence, coercion and without consent	Any action that causes physical harm as the result of unlawful physical force	This is actions which control and monitor a person's use of money, threats of denying access to money and denying access to money



Globally, an estimated 83,000 women and girls were intentionally killed in 2024. Around 60% (approximately 50,000) were killed by an intimate partner or another family member, meaning an average of 137 women and girls lost their lives every day—almost one every 10 minutes. These figures highlight that the home remains the most dangerous place for many women and girls worldwide. ([UN Women 2024](#))



Men remain the primary victims and perpetrators of homicide globally, accounting for around 80 per cent of intentional homicide victims in 2023. Men also represent close to 90 per cent of suspects brought into formal contact with police for homicide. ([UNODC, 2025](#))



Almost one in three women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life [UN \(2024\)](#). An Garda Síochána responded to over 65,000 domestic abuse incidents in 2024, which translates to an average of 1,250 incidents every week. ([An Garda Síochána, 2025](#))



A 2021 study by EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) has estimated that the cost of gender-based violence across the EU is €366 billion a year. Violence against women makes up 79 % of this cost, amounting to €289 billion. ([EIGE, 2026](#))

Discussion Points

1. Look at the statistics above and the different forms of violence. How might each of these types of violence impact on a person's life? Does it impact on all people the same way?
2. GBV affects women and girls disproportionately, but it is also experienced by men and boys to a lesser degree too. It is very hard to find statistics about this though. Why do you think that is? How does that link to gender inequality?
3. How does gender based violence prevent the global community from reaching the global goals?

Take Action



Gender inequality is a **BIG ISSUE** that plays a big part in:

- Keeping people trapped in poverty due to lack of opportunities
- Forcing people into doing things they do not want to do
- Reducing literacy levels globally
- Negatively impacting on people's health

... And as a consequence these limit people's dreams, ambitions and rights.

By taking action on gender inequality, you are taking a stand against the issues above and showing solidarity with all those impacted by this crisis.



SPEAK ACT DO

Speak, Act, Do is a programme to support students and teachers in taking action on important global issues which impact our world!

Choose a topic, do your research, organise two actions (a solidarity action and a community action) to address a global justice issue and then share this with other schools at our Agents of Change event!

Visit our website to find our simple guide to Speak Act Do or email schools@concern.net to find out more.

Below are a few ideas about how you can get involved!



Concern Actions

- Hold a moment of silence or ask your school community to wear a certain colour as a visible show of solidarity with those experiencing gender inequality
- Organise a stunt for International Women's Day on March 8th to raise awareness of gender inequality globally
- Design a poster, a postcard or make a short film to raise awareness of gender inequality in Concern's partner countries and share these in your local community

Local Actions

- Survey your school community about their attitudes, experiences and understanding of gender equality in your school community. Is there an area in particular that you can try and make change in?
- Run a peer to peer workshop or world café in your school. A great idea is to make this intergenerational so that people of all ages can learn from one another
- Organise a debate on a gender related motion! One example recently from Concern Debates is "For Women to Access Leadership Positions Gender Quotas Must be Implemented"



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