



TRANSGENDER PEOPLE

What Does Transgender Mean?

Everyone has a deep-rooted sense of who they are. For most people, their gender identity will match the sex recorded on their birth certificate when they were born. But for some, the sex they were assigned at birth isn't true to who they really are. Being trans or transgender describes people with a gender identity that does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. This would include, for example, a person who was assigned the male sex at birth, but who identifies as a woman or as another gender outside the man-woman binary. Like everyone else, trans people have the right to be recognized as a person before the law, including recognition of their self-defined gender identity. Many trans people transition to align socially, legally or physically with their gender identity. For many trans people, transitioning significantly improves their well-being and quality of life.

Gender diverse people is an umbrella term used to describe transgender people, as well as other people whose gender identity and/or expression are perceived not to align with gender norms and stereotypes

in a given context. Trans and gender diverse people have existed throughout history and have played an honoured part in many cultural traditions. Examples of gender diverse identities include two-spirit, hijra, travesti, fa'afafine, transpinoy, muxe, waria and meti.

Trans people may have any gender expression, [sexual orientation](#) or [sex characteristics](#).

What Exactly Are Gender Identity and Gender Expression?

Gender identity is generally defined as a deeply felt internal and experienced sense of one's own gender. It may or may not be aligned with the sex assigned at birth. The majority of people identify as a woman or as a man, but in all cultures, throughout history, there have been people who identify somewhere in between or beyond the two binary genders.

Gender expression, on the other hand, refers to the way people externally show their gender, such as their clothing, hairstyle or make-up, as well as their chosen name or

personal pronouns. Forms of gender expression are often described as masculine, feminine or androgynous, based on varying social, cultural, political and personal interpretations which may change between contexts and over time. For example, in some contexts, high heels were once primarily worn by men to signal high social status. Today, however, they are seen as an almost exclusively feminine form of gender expression. Some people always express their gender in the same way (e.g. always masculine), while others may express it differently over time or based on circumstances or feeling (e.g. sometimes masculine and other times feminine). For a lot of people, their gender expression goes along with the ideas that our societies deem to be appropriate for their gender. For other people it does not.

When do Trans People Realize They are Trans?

People can realize that they are transgender at any age. Some people are aware of their gender identity from childhood, while others may come to hold a different understanding and experience of their gender as adults.





TRANSITION

SOCIAL:

coming out as trans, using a new name and pronouns, changing one's gender expression such as clothes and hairstyle

LEGAL:

changing one's name and/or sex or gender marker in official documents

PHYSICAL:

hormone therapy, surgeries

What Does Transitioning Mean?

Some trans people choose to transition, a process during which they change certain aspects of their lives to align with their gender identity. Each person has individual needs, which is why there is no single or "correct" way to transition. Each trans person decides freely and independently which changes they want to make to their lives, and the timing of these changes, according to their own needs.

Is Being Trans an Illness?

No, being transgender is not an illness; it is a natural part of human diversity. United Nations human

rights experts have highlighted that classifying trans people as ill (also called "pathologization") is one of the root causes of the human rights violations that they face. The World Health Organization has emphasized that "trans-related and gender diverse identities are not conditions of mental ill-health, and that classifying them as such can cause enormous stigma" and took an important step towards depathologising trans identities by deleting trans-related diagnoses from the chapter on mental disorders in the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11) and moving them to another section to facilitate trans people's access to transition-related healthcare.

What is Transphobia?

Transphobia describes any form of prejudice or hostile attitude towards transgender people based on their gender identity or expression. Transphobia may be targeted at people who are trans or who are perceived to be trans, and may manifest as criminalization, violence, discrimination, pathologization, harassment, exclusion, stigma, or denying someone's identity. Transphobia contributes to a widespread culture of violence and discrimination against trans people.





THE CHALLENGES

Criminalization

Some countries specifically criminalize trans and gender diverse people through laws on so-called “cross-dressing” or “imitating members of the opposite sex”. Many more countries target, harass and arbitrarily arrest and prosecute trans people under laws that criminalize consensual same-sex relations, laws criminalizing sex work, or vaguely worded laws on loitering or vagrancy.

Lack of Legal Recognition

Everyone has the right to be recognized as a person before the law. Many United Nations human rights experts have affirmed the rights of trans people to legal recognition of their gender identity and to change their name and gender marker in official documents, including birth certificates, based on self-identification and without being subject to abusive requirements.

However, these rights are violated in all regions of the world. Many countries deny trans people any possibility of having their gender identity legally recognized. Many of those that do provide for legal gender recognition require trans people to meet various abusive conditions – including sterilization, surgeries or other medical procedures, divorce or a psychiatric diagnosis. In most countries, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and non-binary people have no route to recognition of their gender identity.

Lack of legal recognition can contribute to stigma, increase vulnerability to sexual and other forms of violence and hate crimes, harassment, humiliation and abuse. It also makes it harder for trans people to report violence they experience and puts them at greater risk of being arrested or mistreated in medical and detention settings. Without accurate identification, everyday activities such as attending school, renting an apartment, getting a job, seeing a doctor, opening a bank account or using a payment card can lead to discrimination, harassment, exclusion and even violence, as trans people are forced to disclose their trans status to complete strangers.

Violence and Discrimination

Trans people in all parts of the world are at heightened risk of violence and discrimination. This includes bullying and verbal abuse, discrimination in healthcare, education, employment and housing, so-called “conversion therapy”, [criminalization](#), arbitrary arrests and detention, [violence](#) including sexual violence, torture and murder.

USA:

48%

of trans people surveyed reported being denied equal treatment, verbally harassed, and/or physically attacked in the past year because of being transgender.

EU:

29%

of trans women surveyed reported experiencing physical or sexual attacks due to being trans in the five years prior.

The Trans Murder Monitoring project has documented more than 5,040 murders globally between 2008 and 2024, equivalent to a killing almost every day. This is based on limited media monitoring and civil society reporting and is very likely to be an underestimate. United Nations human rights experts have documented particularly brutal attacks against trans women, including in detention.

A survey in the European Union revealed that almost two thirds of trans respondents felt personally discriminated against in the year prior because they were perceived as trans. Studies indicate that trans and gender diverse people were more likely to be [bullied at school](#) and be excluded from the education system. This early discrimination contributes to lifelong socio-economic exclusion, including from formal employment. For example, forty-three per cent of trans women and thirty per cent of trans men surveyed in the European Union reported experiencing discrimination when looking for work. A hundred per cent of trans people surveyed in Costa Rica reported suffering workplace





discrimination. Trans people are also disproportionately impacted by [homelessness](#) due to family rejection, poverty and unemployment.

Lack of Access to Healthcare

Trans people report facing direct discrimination from health care professionals, or being outright denied access to healthcare, because they are trans. Many healthcare professionals do not receive training on non-discrimination and the specific healthcare needs of trans people. Due to prior experiences of discrimination, trans people often delay accessing the healthcare they need.

East Africa:

68%

of trans women surveyed reported being denied healthcare because of their gender identity.

Furthermore, gender-affirming care such as access to hormones or surgeries are not available in many countries. Where they are offered, they are often unaffordable and not covered through public or private health insurance. Evidence from Brazil, Canada, Russian Federation, Thailand and other countries shows that many trans people who use hormones do so without medical advice or supervision, due to lack of access to qualified healthcare providers, affordability barriers and

fear of experiencing discrimination. This in turn increases the risk of adverse health consequences.

Ecuador:

62%

of trans people surveyed experienced discrimination in healthcare.

Compounded with the high rates of violence, stigma and discrimination trans people face in general, this leads many to suffer from disproportionately negative physical and mental health outcomes. This is illustrated by studies revealing that trans and gender diverse people, including youth, face an elevated risk of contemplating or attempting suicide, as a result of the stigma, discrimination and violence they face. According to UNAIDS, transgender people bear some of the highest measured burdens of HIV, but many programmes fail to address their existence and their prevention and care needs. In 2022, the relative risk of HIV infection was twenty times higher for transgender women than for people in the general population globally, due to stigma, discrimination, exclusion and violence.

Nepal:

37%

of trans people surveyed delayed accessing healthcare services due to fear of discrimination.

Trans Youth and Children

Studies indicate that trans and gender diverse children and youth are more likely to be [bullied at school](#) and excluded from the education system, which negatively impacts their future opportunities. Eighty-four per cent of young trans people surveyed in the United States of America reported not always feeling safe in the classroom. Eighty-five per cent of trans girls surveyed in Viet Nam reported dropping out of secondary school because of bullying and assault.

Young trans people are also over-represented among [homeless youth](#), most commonly due to being rejected by their families and forced to leave home. They are also more likely to attempt suicide than their cisgender peers due to the stigma, discrimination and violence they face. Fifty-six per cent of transgender respondents surveyed in Chile had attempted to commit suicide – almost half of those had their first attempt between the ages of 11 and 15, and almost all before the age of 24.

Trans and gender diverse children have the same rights as all other children – including being safe from violence and discrimination, to freedom of expression and recognition of their identity. Social recognition, acceptance and support in exploration of gender identity and expression in family, educational, community and sports settings is critical in mitigating the discrimination and violence faced by transgender





and gender diverse children and youth. United Nations human rights experts have called on States to ensure that young trans and gender-diverse people can use their own names and pronouns and dress according to their self-defined gender identity and expression, regardless of their legal gender markers. Legal recognition of gender identity may be sought by some, particularly older children – and any safeguards in such processes must align with the rights of the child as recognised under international human rights law.

Multiple and Intersecting Forms of Discrimination

Many trans people face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination due to their socio-economic status, occupation, age, migration status, disabilities, HIV status, sex, gender, religion, ethnicity, skin colour and other factors.

For example, a survey of trans people in the United States of America found that trans people of African descent are disproportionately represented in prisons/jails, with nearly half of those surveyed reporting having been incarcerated at some point in their life.

A third of those who had been incarcerated had experienced sexual assault in detention.

Research in Ecuador found that gender diverse refugees and asylum seekers experienced higher levels of exclusion and discrimination due to the compounding factors of transphobia and xenophobia.

A review in Australia found that trans and gender diverse people with disabilities faced high rates of discrimination when accessing healthcare and were deterred from accessing services for older people due to fear of discrimination.

TAKE ACTION!

- 1 Educate yourself on the experiences of trans people, their issues and concerns. Demonstrate understanding and compassion.
- 2 Listen to people when they tell you how they identify and respect the inherent dignity of trans people by using the terms, pronouns, genders and names they use to refer to themselves.
- 3 Practice zero tolerance for transphobic language and negative myths and stereotypes about trans people. Encourage those around you to do the same.
- 4 Speak out when you see stigma, discrimination or violence against trans people.
- 5 Respect the privacy of others and do not make assumptions about anyone's gender identity.
- 6 Share online and social media content from the UN Free & Equal campaign and local trans organisations to spread awareness among your friends and social networks.
- 7 Celebrate and support trans people if and when they choose to come out, for instance through marking Transgender Day of Visibility on 31 March and supporting local trans organizations.





GOVERNMENTS SHOULD:

- 1 Repeal laws used to arrest, detain or harass trans people based on their gender identity or expression.
- 2 Combat violence and ill-treatment against trans people. Ensure effective recording, reporting, investigation and prosecution of acts of violence and torture/ill-treatment against trans people, and remedy for victims.
- 3 Provide police, judicial officials and shelter providers with guidance and training to respond to the needs of trans survivors of sexual and other forms of violence.
- 4 Include gender identity and expression as protected characteristics in hate crime and hate speech laws.
- 5 Adopt comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and policies that prohibit and combat discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression, including in employment, education, healthcare, housing, access to toilets and public services, and that ensure remedy for victims.
- 6 Provide for legal recognition of the gender identity of trans people in official documents through a simple administrative process based on self-identification and without abusive requirements such as medical diagnosis, sterilization, medical procedures or divorce.
- 7 Respect the rights of trans and gender diverse children. Ensure that safeguards around recognition of gender identity in relation to children are neither discriminatory nor disproportionate and are aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 8 Ensure that laws and policies relating to trans people, including those on violence, discrimination, recognition of gender identity, are inclusive of all trans and gender diverse people including youth, non-binary persons, older persons, people in detention, migrants and refugees, people of African descent, people with disabilities, people living with HIV, and other trans people who face discrimination on multiple and intersecting grounds.
- 9 Reform international and national medical norms that classify being transgender as an illness.
- 10 Ensure that trans people and organizations are meaningfully consulted and participate in the development of all research, laws and policies that impact on their lives.
- 11 Ensure affordable access to healthcare services and health insurance for trans people without stigma, discrimination or abuse, including gender affirming treatment.
- 12 Train healthcare workers, teachers, law enforcement, judges, prison officials, immigration officers and other officials on ensuring inclusion, equal treatment and respect for the rights and inherent dignity of trans people.
- 13 Take specific measures to respect and protect the rights of trans people deprived of liberty, including in relation to protection from violence and discrimination, allocation, search and monitoring.
- 14 Research, evaluate, monitor and systematically collect disaggregated data on the human rights situation of transgender people, including on experiences of violence and discrimination, using a human rights-based approach to data that respects safety, privacy, confidentiality and autonomy.





MEDIA SHOULD:

- 1 Include the voices of trans people in newspapers, TV and radio.
- 2 Feature trans people and their rights and concerns in an objective, balanced and non-discriminatory manner.
- 3 Not propagate negative and harmful stereotypes about trans people.
- 4 Refer to people using the terms, pronouns, genders and names they use and identify with.
- 5 Not refer to or reveal that a person is trans without their consent.
- 6 Train journalists on respect for trans people and their rights.

