



# Queer Dictionary

Terminology & Definitions



GOVERNMENT OF MALTA  
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIAT  
FOR REFORMS AND EQUALITY



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**HUMAN  
RiGHTS**  
DIRECTORATE

Many of us refrain from speaking about sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics out of fear of using the wrong terminology to express themselves or identify others. This obstacle is often heightened in interactions in Maltese, with terminology often substituted with its English counterpart.

We hope that this glossary will give you a better understanding of the words that you are using, while making your conversations with others easier and more comfortable. Terminology changes across cultures and time, and while all efforts were made to make this tool as comprehensive as possible, you might still encounter words that are not listed here. As a general rule, always listen for and respect the terminology a person uses to define themselves.





## A

**Ally** A term which is used to refer to people who actively support the LGBTIQ+ community. This includes cisgender and heterosexual allies, but also those within the LGBTIQ+ community who support each other (e.g. a gay man who supports the intersex community).

**Allosexual** A term used to describe anyone who experiences sexual attraction to someone who can be of the same or a different gender. This term normalises the experience of people on the asexual spectrum and provides a more specific term to describe those who are not.

**Allosexism** It is a set of discriminatory attitudes, bias, norms, stereotypes and behaviour relying on the assumption that everyone experiences, or should experience sexual attraction.

**Androgynous** Someone who is androgynous is a person whose gender expression defies gender norms and is influenced by both what is typically considered as male and female gender traits.

**Androsexual** Sexual or romantic attraction to men, males or masculinity regardless of biology, anatomy or the sex assigned at birth.

**Aromantic** The lack of romantic attraction to others, or low or completely absent desire to engage in a romantic relationship.

**Asexual** The lack of sexual attraction to others, or low or completely absent desire to engage in sexual activity with others.

## B

**Bicurious** A term that refers to persons who are questioning or exploring their sexual orientation, often as a result of curiosity about romantic and sexual attraction to people of the same or different genders.

**Biological female** A term assigned to a person at birth whose sex produces ova and has traditionally defined anatomy (e.g. vagina, uterus) and chromosomal makeup (XX) of a girl/woman.

**Biological male** A term assigned to a person at birth whose sex produces spermatozoa and refers to traditionally defined anatomy (e.g. penis, scrotum) and chromosomal makeup (XY) of a boy/man.

**Biphobia** Discrimination, bias and prejudice towards bisexual persons, often based on misconceptions and stereotypes including inaccurate associations with infidelity, indecisiveness and transmission of STIs.

**Bisexual/Bi** A person who is romantically, emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people of more than one gender. A person may experience this attraction in differing ways and degrees over a lifetime.

**Bisexual erasure/invisibility** Refers to the tendency to ignore, remove, falsify and/or re-explain evidence of bisexuality in history, academia and media. In extreme cases it can also include the denial of the existence of bisexuality.

**Butch** Usually refers to people who identify as female and who have a more masculine expression of their gender, whether it be physically, psychologically or emotionally.

# C

**Cisgender** A term referring to those people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Cisnormativity** Cisnormativity is the assumption that all, or almost all, individuals are cisgender. It is a combination of the prefix cis-, as in cisgender, and the suffix -normativity, as a complement to heteronormativity.

**Cissexism** It is a set of discriminatory attitudes, bias and behaviour relying on the positioning that cisgender identities are superior to and more valid than transgender identities.

**Civil union** An official form of partnership recognised in Malta which is available to all couples.

**Closeted** People who are not out about their LGBTIQ+ identity. Some people may decide to be out to some while closeted to others.

**Coming out** LGBTIQ+ persons first form a sense of identity for themselves which they then might reveal to others. Coming out is a life-long process in which one discloses one's LGBTIQ+ identity.

**Conversion practices** "Any treatment, practice or sustained effort that aims to change, repress and, or eliminate a person's sexual orientation, gender identity and, or gender expression; such practices do not include (a) any services and, or interventions related to the exploration and/or free development of a person and/or affirmation of one's identity with regard to sexual orientation gender identity and/or gender expression, through counselling, psychotherapeutic services and/or similar services; or (b) any healthcare service related to the free development and/or affirmation of one's gender identity and/or gender expression of a person; and, or (c) any healthcare service related to the treatment of a mental disorder" (CAP 567 of the Laws of Malta).

**Cross dresser** A person who is generally cisgender, but may opt to wear clothing and use mannerisms which are often more associated with a different gender. This is a form of gender-expression and not done for entertainment purposes.

**Cruising area** Refers to a particular area or public space, usually in a secluded location that is frequented by men who are looking for sexual encounters with other men.

## D

**Demisexual** Usually considered to be on the asexual spectrum, this term refers to people who experience sexual attraction only under specific circumstances such as after establishing a romantic or emotional connection with a partner.

**Direct discrimination** When a person is treated less favourably than another person in a comparable situation.

**Discrimination** Unequal or unfair treatment which can be based on a range of grounds, such as age, religion or belief, race or ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity among others.

**Domestic violence (DV)** "All acts or omissions including verbal, physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence causing physical and, or moral harm or suffering, including threats of such acts or omissions, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, that occur within the family or domestic unit, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim, and shall include children who are witnesses of violence within the family or domestic unit" (CAP 581 of the Laws of Malta).

**Drag king/queen** A person who wears the clothing of another gender, often involving presentation of exaggerated, stereotypical gender characteristics. Individuals may identify as drag kings or drag queens when performing gender as parody, art or entertainment.

## E

**Endosex** Someone whose sex characteristics fit the normative medical or social ideals for female and male bodies. See also intersex.

**Endosex female** A term assigned to a person at birth whose sex produces ova and has traditionally defined anatomy (e.g. vagina, uterus) and chromosomal makeup (XX) of a girl/woman.

**Endosex male** A term assigned to a person at birth whose sex produces spermatozoa and refers to traditionally defined anatomy (e.g. penis, scrotum) and chromosomal makeup (XY) of a boy/man.

## F

**Femininity/Feminine** A set of attributes, behaviours and/or roles typically associated with girls and women. Femininity is often considered to be a social construct based on socially created factors, and anyone of any gender identity or sex characteristic can exhibit feminine traits.



# G

**Gay** A person who is romantically, emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people of the same gender. Traditionally, it refers to men, but other people who are attracted to the same gender or multiple genders may also define themselves as gay.

*Avoid the term homosexual. Because of the clinical history of the word, it is aggressively used by extremists to suggest that gay people are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered.*

**Gender** “The socially constructed roles, expectations, activities, behaviours and attributes that society at any given time associates with a person of any sex, assuming any form of gender identity or gender expression” (CAP 581 of the Laws of Malta). It has deep historical, social and cultural dimensions and may or may not be aligned with the sex assigned at birth.

**Gender affirmation** Refers to the process through which people re-define the gender in which they live in order to better express their gender identity. This process may, but does not have to, involve medical assistance including hormone therapies and any surgical procedures that trans people undergo to align their body with their gender.

**Gender affirmation surgery** Surgical interventions a person may opt to undergo. Not all persons choose to or can afford to undergo surgery, and this does not make a person less of a man or woman. Avoid the term sex reassignment surgery or sex change.

## **Gender affirming hormonal therapy**

The administration of hormone therapy in order to match a person’s physical characteristics to their gender identity.

**Gender based violence (GBV)** “All acts or omissions that are directed against a person because of their gender, that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (CAP 581 of the Laws of Malta).

**Gender dysphoria** Distress experienced by some individuals whose gender identity does not correspond with their assigned sex at birth. It manifests itself as clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) includes gender dysphoria as a diagnosis.

**Gender expression** “Refers to each person’s manifestation of their gender identity, and/or the one that is perceived by others” (CAP 540/567 of the Laws of Malta).

**Gender fluid** Describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more one gender some days, and another gender on other days.

**Gender identity** “Refers to each person’s 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 and/or functions by medical, surgical or other means) and other expressions of gender, including name, dress, speech and mannerisms” (CAP 540/567 of the Laws of Malta).

**Gender inclusive/neutral** Refers to an inclusive space that is available to all people of any gender and to language that does not exclude persons with different gender identities and expressions.

**Gender marker** “Refers to the identifier on official documentation which classifies persons within a particular sex category” (CAP 540 of the Laws of Malta).

**Gender non-conforming** Describes gender expression that differs from a given society’s norms for males and females.

**Gender variant** Can refer to someone whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from normative gender identity and/or the gender roles/norms assigned at birth.

**Genderism/Gender binary** The idea that there are only two genders, male and female, and that a person must strictly fit into one category or the other. Gender identity is expected to align with the sex assigned at birth and gender expressions and roles to fit the traditional expectations.

**Genderqueer** Describes a person who would typically reject the notions of static categories of gender and embrace fluidity within gender identity. Genderqueer people see their gender identity to fall outside the traditional gender binary.

**Gynesexual** Sexual or romantic attraction to women, females or femininity regardless of biology, anatomy or the sex assigned at birth.

## H

**Harassment** Refers to subjecting another person to “any unwelcome act, request or conduct, including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of written words, pictures or other material” (CAP 452 of the Laws of Malta), which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

**Heteronormativity** Refers to the set of beliefs heterosexuality is natural and privileged over other sexual orientations and as such reinforces heterosexuality as a norm. It implies that people’s sexual orientation is by nature, and therefore heterosexuality is the only conceivable sexuality and the only way of being ‘normal’.

**Heterosexism** It is a set of discriminatory attitudes, bias and behaviour relying on gender as a binary to favour heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships.

**Heterosexual** A person who is romantically, emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people of a different gender. Colloquially referred to as *straight*.



**Homophobia** Discrimination, bias and/or prejudice towards people who are attracted to people of the same gender. It may sometimes refer to fear of LGBTIQ+ people in general.

**Homosexual** A term used to describe someone who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards someone of the same gender. The term 'gay' is now more generally used and preferred.

**Hormone therapy** The medical administration to boost certain hormones which will have an affect on one's secondary sex characteristics. Some, but not all transgender persons may decide to undergo a medical transition and may opt to use hormone therapy as part of their transition.

**Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)** A virus that compromises the immune system, making the body more susceptible to infections and illnesses. The virus attaches to CD4 cells (cells that provide immunity against diseases), thus rendering them ineffective in fighting infections and making the body susceptible to disease. Furthermore, the virus is replicated each time a CD4 cell multiplies, thus increasing in numbers. If not kept under control, it may cause AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome).

**Indirect discrimination** When an apparently neutral provision would put a person at a particular disadvantage when compared with other persons.

**Institutional oppression** Arrangement of a society used to benefit one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media education, religion, economics, etc.

**Internalised oppression** The process by which an oppressed person comes to believe, accept, or live out the inaccurate stereotypes and misinformation about their group

**Intersectionality** The interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, sexual orientation, disability and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

**Intersex** An umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. Intersex individuals are born with sex characteristics that are either both female and male at the same time, not quite female nor male, or neither female nor male. In the vast majority of cases, intersex people's sex characteristics and bodies are healthy variations of the human sexes. For some intersex people, their intersex body becomes visible at birth, for some during childhood while for others, their body shows itself to be intersex during adolescence or even adulthood. For some, the differences will be so small they may never realise they are intersex at all.

*Avoid defamatory and outdated terms such as hermaphrodite.*

## L

**Legal gender recognition** A process whereby a trans person's gender is recognised in law, or the achievement of the process.

**Lesbian** A woman who is romantically, emotionally, and/or sexually attracted to other women.

*Avoid derogatory terms such as dyke, fag, and similar slang.*

**Lived gender** "Refers to each person's gender identity and its public expression over a sustained period of time" (CAP 540 of the Laws of Malta). This may or may not reflect the gender marker on their official documentation.

## M

**Manosexual** A broad term that includes within it anyone that only experiences romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of one sex and/or gender. This typically includes those who identify as exclusively heterosexual, gay or lesbian.

**Marginalised** The exclusion and ignoring of a particular person or social group from the wider community.

**Marriage** An official form of partnership recognised in Malta which is available to all couples. In any case, it is preferred to simply use the term 'marriage' or 'marriage equality'.

*Avoid terms such as 'gay marriage' and 'same-sex marriage'.*

**Masculinity/Masculine** A set of attributes, behaviours and/or roles typically associated with boys and men. Masculinity is often considered to be a social construct based on socially created factors, and anyone of any gender identity or sex characteristic can exhibit masculine traits.

**Men who have sex with men (MSM)** MSM is a clinical term used to refer to men who have sex with other men but do not necessarily identify as gay or bisexual.

**Misogyny** Hatred or dislike of women and girls, solely based on their gender. It can be manifested in numerous ways, including but not limited to sexual discrimination, gender-based violence and objectification.

## N

**Non-binary** A person whose gender identity falls outside the traditional gender binary. Other terms for people whose gender identity falls outside the gender binary include gender variant, gender expansive, gender fluid gender queer, etc. Gender expression may or may not differ from a society's norms for males and females.

## O

**Omnisexual** A person whose sexuality is not limited to those of a particular gender, sex or sexual orientation.

**Oppression** The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

**Out** People who self-identify as LGBTQ+ in their personal, public and/or professional lives. A person who is out in one environment, might not be out in another.

**Outing** The act of publicly declaring another person's sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics without the person's consent. Sometimes this is simply based on rumours or assumptions.

## P

**Pangender** A gender identity that is not limited to just one gender and may encompass multiple genders at once.

**Pansexual** A person who expresses sexuality in all its forms, or is romantically, emotionally and/or sexually attracted to people regardless of their gender. A person may experience this attraction in differing ways and degrees over a lifetime.

**Partner** A gender inclusive term often used by the LGBTQ+ community to refer to someone's significant other.

**Passing** This term refers to society's perceptions, expectations and assumptions on someone's sexuality or gender. Specifically this term is often used to discuss and debate the extent to which an LGBTQ+ person is perceived or assumed to be heterosexual or cisgender.

**Polyamorous** The simultaneous participation in more than one romantic, emotional and/or sexual relationship with the knowledge and consent of all involved partners.

**Pomosexual** A term used to describe persons who reject the idea of labelling their sexuality, or do not identify with any label. Pomosexual itself is not necessarily seen as an identity but rather a rejection of one.

**Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** PEP is medicine taken to prevent HIV after a possible exposure. PEP should be used only in emergency situations and must be taken within 72 hours after a recent possible exposure to HIV.

**Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)** PrEP is medicine people at a greater risk of acquiring HIV take to prevent from doing so. When taken as prescribed, PrEP is highly effective for preventing the transmission of HIV.

**Pride** Refers to the promotion of self-affirmation, dignity, equality and increased visibility of the LGBTIQ+ community. By adopting this term the LGBTQ community is asserting their right to exist freely without shame and stigma.

**Pronouns** This is an expression used to describe the third-person personal pronouns that people want others to use when talking about them. You may have come across preferred pronouns on name tags or on social media. Typically, pronouns are written as follows:

- he/him
- she/her
- they/them

**Protected characteristic** Includes, but is not limited to, an individual's race, colour, religion, sex, family responsibilities, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics or any other characteristic protected by law.

## Q

**Queer** Previously used as a derogatory term to refer to LGBTIQ+ individuals in the English language, queer has been reclaimed by some people who identify beyond traditional gender categories and heteronormative social norms. However, depending on the context, some people may still find it offensive. Queer also refers to queer theory, an academic field that challenges heteronormative social norms concerning gender and sexuality.

**Questioning** Refers to people who are still in the process of exploring their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

## S

**Sapiosexual** A term used to refer to persons who experience romantic and/or sexual attraction based on a partner's intelligence together with, or rather than sex and/or gender.

**Secondary sex characteristics** Features that appear at sexual maturity and during puberty in humans, but unlike the sex organs, are not directly part of the reproductive system. This could include: growth of facial and body hair, deepening of the voice, body fat distribution, breasts, widening of hips, etc.

**Sex** Sex is assigned at birth and written on the birth certificate, usually based on the appearance of a person's external anatomy and a binary view of sex that excludes people who are intersex. A person's

sex, however, is a combination of body characteristics including chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. Sex assigned at birth usually becomes the legal sex after it is written on the birth certificate and transposed to other identification documents.

**Sex assigned at birth** Usually based on the external anatomy and sex characteristics at birth, this refers to the sex (usually male, female or intersex) used by a midwife or doctor to describe a child.

**Sex characteristics** “The chromosomal, gonadal and anatomical features of a person, which include primary characteristics such as reproductive organs and genitalia and/or in chromosomal structures and hormones; and secondary characteristics such as muscle mass, hair distribution, breasts and/or structure” (CAP 540 of the Laws of Malta).

**Sexual harassment** It is “unlawful for any person to sexually harass other persons, that is to say: (a) to subject other persons to an act of physical intimacy; or (b) to request sexual favours from other persons; or (c) to subject other persons to any act or conduct with sexual connotations, including spoken words, gestures or the production, display or circulation of any written words, pictures or other material, where the act, words or conduct is unwelcome to the persons to whom they are directed and could reasonably be regarded as offensive, humiliating or intimidating to the persons to whom they are directed; or (d) the persons so subjected or requested are treated less favourably by reason of such persons’ rejection of or submission

to such subjection or request, it could reasonably be anticipated that such persons would be so treated” (CAP 456 of the Laws of Malta).

**Sexual orientation** “Each person’s capacity for profound emotional, affectional and sexual attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with, persons of a different gender, the same gender or more than one gender” (CAP 567 of the Laws of Malta).

*Avoid the offensive term sexual preference. Sexual orientation is not a choice or preference.*

**Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)** These are infections which are acquired through sexual contact. The bacteria, viruses and parasites involved in the transmission of STIs may pass from one person to the other in direct contact with blood, semen and/or vaginal/bodily fluids.

**Skoliosexual** A term used to describe persons who are attracted to those with a non-cisgender gender identity, typically including anyone in the trans community (trans men, trans women, non-binary, genderqueer, etc.).

**Trans/Transgender** Trans is an inclusive umbrella term referring to those people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differ from the sex they were assigned at birth. It also includes those persons who identify as gender variant or with any other gender identity and/or expression which is not standard male or female and who express their gender through their choice of clothes, presentation or body modifications, including the undergoing of multiple surgical procedures.

# T

**Transgender and gender diverse (TGD)** Describes members of the many varied communities globally of people with gender identities or expressions that differ from the gender socially attributed to the sex assigned to them at birth. This includes people who have culturally specific and/or language-specific experiences, identities or expressions, and/or that are not based on or encompassed by Western conceptualisations of gender, or the language used to describe it.

**Trans man** A term used to identify a person assigned female at birth and who identifies as a male, lives as a man, or identifies as masculine.

**Trans woman** A term used to identify a person assigned a male at birth and who identifies as a female, lives as a woman, or identifies as feminine.

**Transitioning** Refers to a series of steps a person may choose to take to live in the gender they identify with. Transitioning can be social and/or medical, and steps may include coming out to family, friends and colleagues; dressing and acting according to one's gender; changing one's name and/or sex/gender on legal documents; medical treatments including hormone therapies and possibly one or more types of surgery. There is no one set timeframe or mandatory steps a person has to take to have one's gender recognised or legitimised.

**Transmisogyny** The intersection of transphobia and misogyny. It can be expressed through negative attitudes, expressed through cultural hate, individual and state violence, and discrimination directed toward trans women and trans and gender non-conforming people on the feminine end of the gender spectrum.

**Transphobia** Refers to negative cultural and personal beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behaviours based on prejudice, disgust, fear and/or hatred of trans people or against variations of gender identity and gender expression.

**Transsexual** An older and medicalised term used to refer to people who identify and live in a different gender than the sex they were assigned at birth. The term is still preferred by some people who intend to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone gender affirmation treatment (which may or may not involve hormone therapy or surgery).



## V

**Variations in Sex Development (VSD)** Sometimes also referred to medically as Differences/Disorders in Sex Development (DSD), are congenital conditions in which development of chromosomal, gonadal, or anatomical sex is atypical (often collectively referred to as intersex).

**Victimisation** A specific term describing discrimination that a person suffers because they have made a complaint or been a witness in another person's complaint.

## W

**Women who have sex with women (WSW)** WSW is a term used to refer to women who have sex with other women but do not necessarily identify as lesbian or bisexual.

# Acronyms

**LGBTIQ+** An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer people. The '+' represents those who are part of the community, but for whom LGBTIQ does not accurately capture or reflect their identity. It is an acronym commonly used within the LGBTIQ+ movement itself.

The LGBTIQ+ acronym refers to different groups of people who have been historically marginalised because they do not fit norms around gender and sexuality.

Even though like all acronyms, it both includes and excludes people, it enables to shed light on situations and experiences that are often invisible in society. The acronym has changed over time, and varies across countries, regions and communities. Other popular variants add the letter 'A', where this stands for asexual, aromantic, or agender.

While several acronyms can be used, one should be aware that they are not interchangeable. Each letter represents a specific group. Therefore, when using a specific acronym, we are including/excluding certain people, which should always be justified.

Terms and cultures regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics are constantly evolving and can vary in different countries. The important thing is to listen to people and reflect on the terminology they use to identify themselves.

**SOGIGESC** Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics

**AFAB** Assigned female at birth

**AIDS** Acquired immune deficiency syndrome

**AMAB** Assigned male at birth

**DSD** Differences of sex development

**DV** Domestic violence

**GBV** Gender based violence

**HIV** Human immunodeficiency virus

**IPV** Intimate partner violence

**MSM** Men who have sex with men

**PEP** Post-exposure prophylaxis

**PREP** Pre-exposure prophylaxis


**STIs** Sexually transmitted infections

**TGD** Transgender and gender diverse

**VSD** Variations of sex development

**WSW** Women who have sex with women





**Language is a living thing, it grows and changes and is one of the most effective means of self-expression. It is also a powerful way to promote equality and eliminate bias and discrimination. Using accurate and inclusive language for the LGBTIQ+ community is about respecting their diversity and humanity, not just political correctness.**

**– Hon. Rebecca Buttigieg, Parliamentary Secretary for Reforms and Equality**



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