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NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL

NRC Inclusion and Gender Policy

Level 1 – Policy

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**“Considering
gender and
diversity is not
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Introduction

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) recognises that gender and diversity play a crucial role in understanding both the causes and effects of humanitarian crises.

Why inclusion and gender matter to NRC

When a person is affected by displacement, their gender, age, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic and legal status, sexual orientation, religion, disability, neurodivergence and other characteristics can greatly shape their needs and capacities as well as the risks they are exposed to. Preexisting inequalities and structural disadvantages are frequently amplified during humanitarian crises. Conversely, crises can also provide opportunities for positive change, empowerment and greater equality.

- > We ensure that gender and diversity are reflected in our teams and integrated across all our interventions, which improves the quality and effectiveness of our humanitarian services.
- > We take steps to make sure that those most in need are not excluded from our programmes, tailoring our responses to meet different needs and priorities.

Promoting safety, dignity and inclusion mitigates the risk of causing unintended harm and helps protect individuals, particularly girls and women. It enables us to better engage and serve the communities we work with. This goes hand in hand with ensuring that our workforce and workplace culture reflect the gender and diversity of the populations we work with. Considering gender and diversity is therefore not only the right thing to do, but the effective thing to do.

This policy sets out NRC’s commitment to promote inclusion and gender equality into every aspect of our work.

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this policy is to set out NRC’s commitments to mainstream inclusion and gender across our governance, policies, programmes, partnerships, operational processes and workplace culture.

This policy explains:

- > the guiding principles related to our commitment to inclusion and gender
- > our commitments to inclusion and gender in what we do and who we are

NRC INCLUSION AND GENDER POLICY

For definitions of key terms, refer to the glossary in annex. For guidance on how to implement the policy, see the [Inclusion and Gender Minimum Requirements](#).

This policy builds on NRC's ongoing efforts towards quality and accountability across our responses¹ and aligns to internationally accepted standards and principles on equality, women's rights and non-discrimination for humanitarian actors². It consolidates and replaces NRC's 2007 Gender policy.

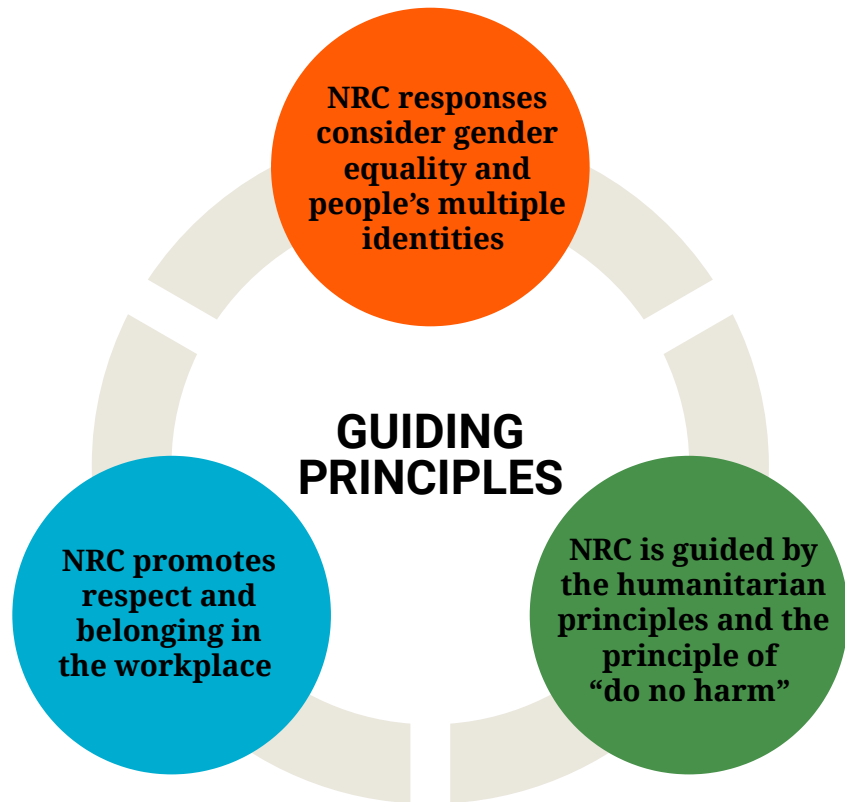
This policy is a level 1 governing document. This means that it is a mandatory document. It applies globally to NRC and its entities, including legal entities and non-legal entities, such as NORCAP. It cannot be deviated from or adapted unless its application goes against national law in a country where NRC operates.³

1 These include the work on Safe and Inclusive Programming (SIP), the Safeguarding policy, the Response policy, the Core Competency Strategies 2022–2026, and other initiatives on gender and inclusion conducted within our core competencies. SIP is the term used by NRC to refer to integrating protection, gender, age, and diversity considerations into humanitarian work. NRC has created SIP Minimum Standards, including a dedicated Standard 2A focused specifically on inclusion.

2 Human rights principles include universality and inalienability, indivisibility, participation and inclusion, accountability and rule of law, transparency, and equality and non-discrimination. Internationally accepted standards include the Core Humanitarian Standards, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action (2018), the IASC Guidelines on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (2019) and others. NRC aligns with human rights frameworks and universally accepted principles, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), the IASC Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

3 NRC complies with all relevant laws, regulations and international standards related to diversity, equity and inclusion, including but not limited to anti-discrimination laws and human rights principles. The cultural context, national laws and the sensitivity of diversity issues may place limitations upon NRC. For instance, in some countries, NRC may not be able to hire particular nationalities due to the operational and security context. However, NRC will always work to promote gender equality and inclusion to the greatest extent possible.

Guiding principles



01 *NRC responses consider gender equality and people's multiple identities*

Gender inequality and exclusion take different forms. In all countries where we operate, we observe various manifestations of gender-based discrimination and the unequal allocation of power and resources among displaced women, men, girls, boys, and non-binary individuals.

Issues of gender inequality intersect with other forms of discrimination. Gender, age and other layers of people's characteristics and identity influence what role they play in society and how they are affected by displacement, whether they be a young boy with a disability, a refugee adolescent girl, a man from an ethnic minority or an elderly woman from the poorest social class.

While NRC's mission and response policy do not position the organisation as specialised in gender or inclusion specific humanitarian programming, we have the responsibility to ensure that these considerations are central to our work. People from diverse backgrounds should all benefit from the same rights, opportunities and protection during humanitarian crises.

We believe that, whilst being respectful and mindful of cultural and context-specific understandings of gender and diversity, there is always a way to integrate gender and inclusion in our programming and structure and thus take a step towards longer-term positive change. Providing girls with equal education opportunities and including people with disabilities in decisions about our programmes all contribute to empower them and promotes greater equality.

02 *NRC is guided by the humanitarian principles and the principle of “do no harm”*

Women, girls, minorities and other typically marginalised groups tend to have limited access to and control over resources. Women and girls are at a higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) and other forms of abuse. Men and boys can be rendered vulnerable too, including by being particularly exposed to violence or being unable to live up to what they understand as being their economic and social roles as men.

We are mindful of power imbalances and aim to avoid reinforcing inequality or marginalising diverse groups.

We work to ensure our actions do not cause unintended harm or exacerbate risks. We include safeguarding considerations in all activities and proactively adapt our programmes to make certain they are safe.

We apply the humanitarian principles of humanity and impartiality to all our approaches, systems and processes, including our work on inclusion and gender, and our focus on providing equitable access to services.

03 *NRC promotes respect and belonging in the workplace*

Physical, social and cultural barriers can prevent NRC from attracting a diverse pool of candidates. They can obstruct staff from participating equally in the organisation and being represented equitably at all levels. This is why NRC ensures that all our human resources practices and policies adopt a gender equality and inclusion lens.

NRC embraces inclusion and gender equality through our code of conduct and our core values of dedication, innovation, inclusivity and accountability. These guide how every employee is expected to behave and work.

We value diverse perspectives, experiences and backgrounds and actively seek to incorporate these factors into our decision-making processes, creating policies and practices that promote fairness and equal opportunities.

NRC builds a positive, inclusive work culture where all staff feel valued, empowered, supported, safe and has a sense of belonging. Inclusivity fosters an environment where diverse perspectives, experiences and identities are embraced.

Our commitments

Commitment 1

NRC grounds all its programmes in a solid understanding of gender and diversity issues

Commitment 2

NRC delivers humanitarian programmes that promote gender equality and support inclusion

Commitment 3

NRC commits to building a diverse workforce and an inclusive, safe, and equitable organisational culture that reflects and respects the communities we serve

Commitment 4

NRC mainstreams inclusion and gender across all its work, partnerships, policies and strategies

Commitment 1: NRC grounds all its programmes in a solid understanding of gender and diversity issues



Illustration: Valeria Guarnizo Pulido/NRC

NRC programmes are informed by the people we serve, with attention to the voices of those who are more at risk of being excluded. Identifying and considering gender differences and how power dynamics and unique risks are experienced by different persons, based on age, disability or other diversity factors, allows us to alleviate the barriers people face to access humanitarian aid.

We place individuals' distinct and multifaceted needs at the centre of our response. To do so, NRC collects and uses information and data disaggregated by sex and displacement status, and where possible by age and other diversity factors. This allows to target assistance to those in greatest need and to monitor access, participation, and safety.

Commitment 2: NRC delivers humanitarian programmes that promote gender equality and support inclusion

All our programmes are gender- and inclusion-sensitive and aim at being gender responsive⁴, addressing barriers to equal participation and avoiding harm. They consider inequities within the family and the community and strive to meet the distinct needs, capabilities and priorities of all genders in their full diversity. We make sure that the people we work with participate in the decisions that affect their lives, and we support them in finding longer-term solutions.



Illustration: Valeria Guarnizo Pulido/NRC

Through the implementation of our Safe and Inclusive Programming Minimum Standards, we guarantee safety, support dignity and ensure meaningful and equitable access to services, adapting our programmes to cater for different gender and age needs and providing, where appropriate, reasonable accommodation⁵ for persons with disabilities.

We make sure that protection risks are mitigated and addressed through a survivor centred approach, placing the survivor's rights, needs and dignity at the centre of our actions.

In addition, we seek to address the root causes of inequitable gender norms and practices in distinct areas of expertise. We also support child protection and GBV prevention initiatives, when this is part of a broader civilian self-protection effort.

Through the assignment of NORCAP experts⁶, we support both highly specialised work on gender and GBV, and capacity strengthening of the humanitarian community. We ensure that gender equality and protection from GBV in emergencies stay high on the agenda in humanitarian crises.

We invest in building capacity and learning on gender, age and disability inclusion, ensuring all staff understand and apply these commitments.

⁴ NRC uses CARE International's Gender Equality Continuum to assess the level of gender integration in programmes and policies. The continuum ranges from neglecting gender inequalities and potentially reinforcing negative gender stereotypes (gender-unequal and gender-blind interventions), to activities that acknowledge (gender-sensitive) and consider gender differences (gender-responsive). Gender-transformative interventions actively address the root causes of gender-based inequalities. Some NRC interventions, such as those supporting housing, land and property rights for displaced women or that promote education for girls are gender transformative.

⁵ Reasonable accommodation means individuals or institutions must adjust their procedures or services when needed to prevent unfair burdens on people with disabilities and to ensure they can fully exercise their rights on an equal basis with others. [IASC, Guidelines on inclusion of persons with disabilities in humanitarian action.](#)

⁶ NORCAP provides targeted expertise to strengthen partners' responses. It has specialised pools of experts with the specific aim of addressing gender and protection issues, with attention to diversity, at programming or organisational levels. These include GenCap, PSEACap and ProCap

Commitment 3: NRC commits to building a diverse workforce and an inclusive, safe, and equitable organisational culture that reflects and respects the communities we serve

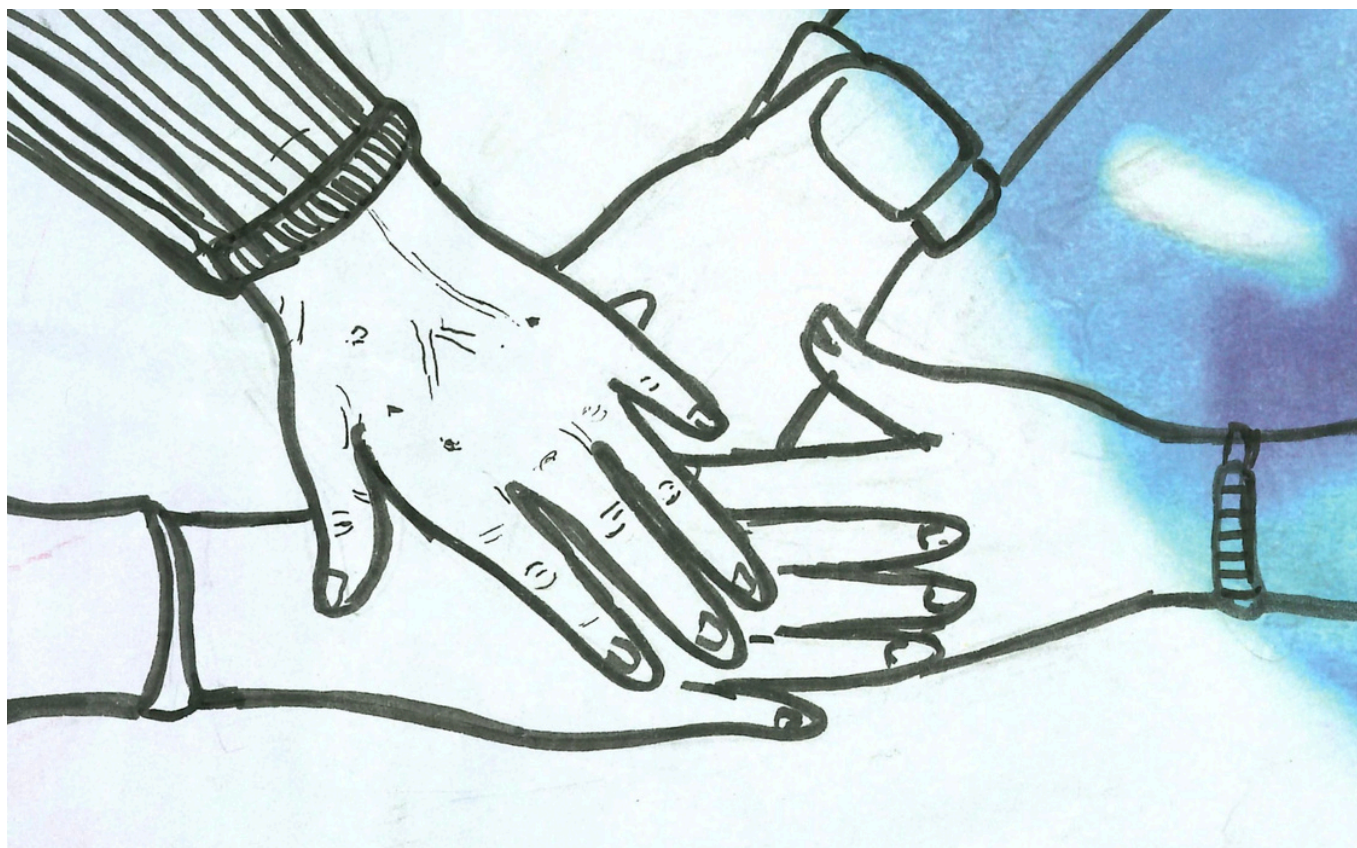


Illustration: Valeria Guarnizo Pulido/NRC

We are committed to building a diverse and inclusive workforce that reflects the communities we serve and fosters a culture where all individuals feel respected, valued, and empowered. We promote equitable employment opportunities, support staff mobility, and continuously monitor our workforce composition to enhance representation at all levels.

Our inclusive culture is grounded in dignity, safety, and belonging—where discrimination of any kind is not tolerated⁷ and diverse perspectives are actively embraced. Our workplace is one where every individual—regardless of gender identity, background, or lived experience—feels safe, respected, and empowered to contribute.

Through accountable leadership, inclusive practices, and a shared responsibility across all staff, we strive to dismantle systemic inequities, support wellbeing, and ensure everyone can fully contribute to NRC’s mission.

We are committed to valuing diverse perspectives, actively addressing systemic inequities and elevating the knowledge, lived experience, and practices of individuals and communities historically excluded from shaping and leading global aid systems.

7 NRC commits to ensuring that no employee, NORCAP expert, consultant, contingency worker, intern or applicant is discriminated against – either directly or indirectly – because of their sex, race (including colour, nationality, ethnicity and tribal origin), disability, age, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, social class, gender identity or expression, religion, spirituality or belief, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, neurodivergence, or any other abilities, identities or characteristics.

Commitment 4: NRC mainstreams inclusion and gender across all its work, partnerships, policies and strategies

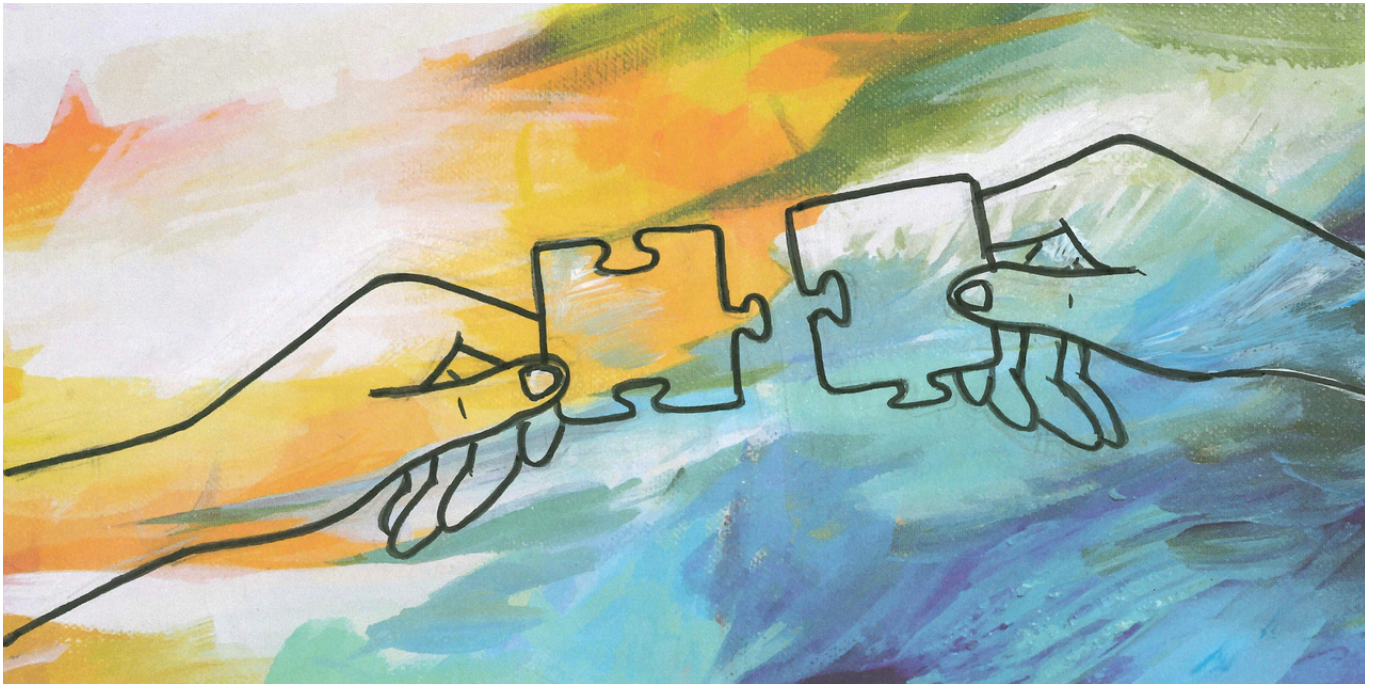


Illustration: Valeria Guarnizo Pulido/NRC

Across every area of its work, NRC considers gender and inclusion. This includes our operational processes – for example, by integrating gender and inclusion in our safety and security, risk management and safeguarding approaches.

Using our position as a leading displacement organisation, we ensure that the voices of marginalised communities are heard. These voices inform our approaches throughout our fundraising and advocacy efforts. We strive for all our strategies, policies and communications to be gender and diversity inclusive, avoiding bias, stereotypes and harmful norms.

Where relevant, NRC seeks to establish equitable and collaborative partnerships, that are grounded in local priorities, with rights-based organisations, particularly women’s rights associations.

Gender and inclusion are considered across all our programmes, and in the delivery of our work with partners. We seek out capacity exchange with our partners about the importance and relevance of gender equality and inclusion, tackling issues such as unconscious bias, cultural competence, inclusive leadership and the “do no harm” principle. We support humanitarian actors’ ability to take gender and inclusion into account in their response through the assignment of NORCAP experts.

Annex: Definitions

Diversity

Refers to the full range of different social backgrounds and identities that make up populations and that are reflected in our organisation. It is about recognising, accepting, celebrating and finding strength in individual differences such as gender, age, nationality, race, ethnicity, ability, neurodiversity, sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions, socioeconomic status, religious or political beliefs, and other ideologies.

Disability

“People with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may make it difficult for them to participate fully and effectively in society on an equal basis with others.”⁸

Equity

Equity is the process of addressing existing inequalities and power imbalances; It aims to rectify past discrimination and eliminate barriers to achieving equal outcomes for everyone, ensuring fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities. For instance, gender equity means that female and male staff enjoy the same career opportunities, or that people of all genders have equitable access to assistance, based on their specific needs. Equitable decision-making is treating everyone fairly while considering and attempting to counteract disparities based on race, gender and other factors.

Gender

A social construct built through cultural, political and social practices that defines the roles of women, girls, men, boys and non-binary people, as well as the social definitions of what it means to be masculine and feminine. Gender roles are taught, learned and absorbed. They vary between and within cultures and can change over time (including over the course of an individual’s lifetime). Gender often defines the duties and responsibilities expected of people at different points in their lives and sets some of the barriers they may face or the opportunities and privileges they may enjoy throughout their lives⁹. Social and structural expectations relating to gender can strongly influence a person’s social role, power, rights, access to and control of resources.

Gender equality

It means that all genders—women, men, girls, boys, and non-binary individuals—have equal rights, opportunities and resources. It does not mean that all individuals are the same, but that their rights and life chances should not be limited by their gender or the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender expression

The way in which people publicly present their gender through such aspects as dress, make-up, hair, body language, and voice.

8 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 1.
9 Action Against Hunger (ACF), Gender Equality Policy, p.15, 2021.

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Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is shorthand for saying that the impact of all policies and programmes on women, men, girls, boys and non-binary people should be considered at every stage of the programme cycle, from planning to implementation and evaluation. In crisis situations, mainstreaming gender from the outset allows for a more accurate understanding of the situation. It enables us to meet the different needs and priorities of the population in a more targeted manner, based on how women, girls, boys, men and non-binary individuals have been affected. It ensures that all affected people are acknowledged. It supports the design of more appropriate and effective responses. Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for achieving gender equality.

Gender-sensitive, responsive and transformative programming

Gender-sensitive programming recognises existing gender differences and inequalities, aiming to prevent harm and ensure that women and girls, men and boys and other genders participate and benefit equally. However, it does not explicitly seek to challenge gendered norms, structures or power differences in programming, processes and outcomes. Being gender-responsive goes beyond just recognising gender differences. It involves actively dismantling barriers that may prevent equal participation or advancement based on gender. Gender transformative programming, meanwhile, aims to address the root causes of inequitable gender norms and relations, to promote equality.

Inclusion and inclusion-sensitive programming

Inclusion-sensitive programming addresses inequalities based on social backgrounds, identities, roles and power relations, focusing on equitable access to services. It considers the barriers different groups may face, and the enabling factors allowing them to receive equal benefits, tailoring and adapting our services to the specific needs of children, young people, older people, and people with disabilities (of all genders and ages).

In the long term, inclusion aims to facilitate access to opportunities and rights for all by addressing, reducing and ending exclusion, stigma and discrimination. Inclusion within our organisation means having a culture that helps and supports our employees, and where everyone feels a sense of belonging despite our differences in cultures, identities and experiences.

LGBTQIA+

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, intersex and asexual (the “+” is used to signify an inclusive approach to all people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity). LGBTQIA+ people may prefer other terms to self-identify. The alternative term SOGIESC (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics) is also increasingly used.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity describes alternative thinking styles such as dyslexia, DCD (dyspraxia), dyscalculia, autism and ADHD. Instead of labelling people with deficits or disorders, this term provides a balanced view of an individual's unique strengths and challenges.

Non-binary

“Refers to a spectrum of gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or exclusively feminine, i.e. identities that are outside the gender binary. It includes, but is not limited to, people who are genderqueer, agender, bigender and gender-fluid.”¹⁰