

# Understanding intersectionality: a guide



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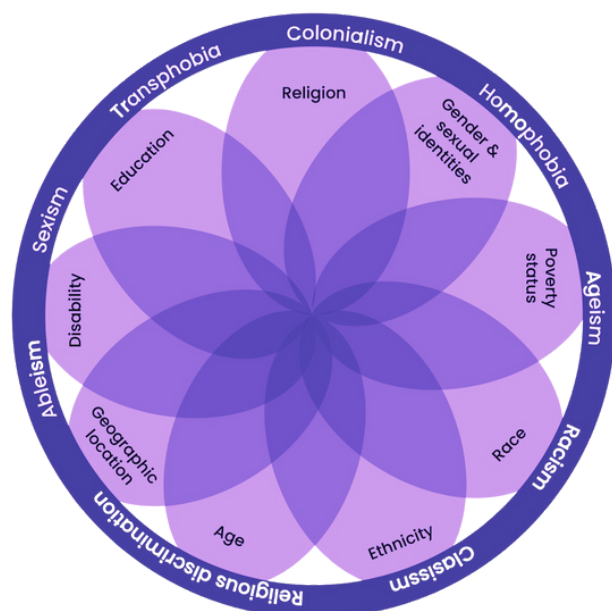
by Julius Baer Foundation

## What is intersectionality?

Discussing categories that have historically generated exclusion among human groups is urgent and necessary, as is reflecting on the multiplicity of identities and their role in generating overlapping systems of exclusion and marginalisation. This is why numerous studies have been developed since the late 1980s and early 1990s, promoted mostly by Black feminists, to place intersectionality in the discussion as a framework of analysis to understand this phenomenon.

The term, coined and initially defined by the African American lawyer **Kimberlé Crenshaw**, invites us to take a broader look at the categories of diversity and identity. This involves not only recognising multiple identities, but also examining the role that these identities play in the different experiences of oppression, based on an initial approach that considers race and gender as interconnected and leading to different experiences for different women.

Intersectionality is often confused with the sole recognition of multiple identities in a person or group of people. However, we can look at intersectionality from two perspectives: from the perspective of identities, which allows us to recognise the multiplicity of identities in a person or group of people; and from the perspective of oppression, which enables us to recognise that the multiplicity of identities can generate differentiated experiences of oppression, even in groups that already consider themselves marginalised.



Based on Crenshaw's work, many others followed that broaden the view of the axes of inequality and decentre the analysis originally based on race and gender to propose the inclusion of axes such as disability, nationality, educational level and other identity characteristics that are prevalent in society. From this viewpoint, intersectionality allows us to analyse the interrelation between the different types of discrimination in force in a society, based on the premise that people can experience oppression and privilege simultaneously

analysing phenomena such as racism, patriarchy, class inequalities and other systems of discrimination.

## How do we apply it?



As a first step, it is important to **question inequalities from a multiple perspective** and put these topics out for discussion. Being able to question inequalities and put forward arguments that would help to reveal that these are issues that are built and reproduced beneath the surface makes a difference in how people perceive an unequal society.

The other thing we can do is to **understand that inequalities are also about privileges**, and in some way many of us have greater privileges than others. Acknowledging privilege will allow us to realise that there is so much more we can do with our privilege and that we need to take accountability for the things that we might not have created, but put us in a position of advantage in relation to other people.

Finally, **there are some questions that we can ask ourselves** to ensure that we are incorporating the intersectional approach in our actions and policies to address discrimination and advocate for equality.

- *Am I creating spaces where there are people who are different from me?*
- *Am I including people who represent diversity beyond gender in my initiatives?*
- *Am I using my privileges to make other people's situation visible and help bridge the gaps?*
- *Am I taking into account diversity within diversity?*
- *Am I including perspectives, voices and opinions different from my own in my initiatives?*
- *Am I taking into account how context and other factors have an influence on people's life trajectory?*



*Intersectionality provides us with a broader view of diversity and proposes a framework of analysis that allows us to understand how inequalities and gaps are impacted by more than one identity factor. However, in order for intersectionality to maintain its purpose as a framework of analysis, it is important to look beyond the multiplicity of identities and **to work on the underlying problems and raise discussions on systemic issues.***

*Finally, it is important to understand that intersectionality is part of equity action: much more than simply recognising diversity, it requires us to identify and address the underlying inequalities and gaps.*