

Standing up for gender justice

A denial and distortion of the reality of gender is unfolding in the USA that will have huge consequences for health globally. President Donald Trump's actions include erasing the term gender from all documents and recognising only two biological sexes, reinstating the global gag rule that withholds sexual and reproductive health care, rejoining the anti-abortion Geneva Consensus Declaration, and terminating all diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and initiatives. A movement that opposes the very existence of gender has been emboldened, including other leaders like Argentina's President Javier Milei. Hard-won gains towards elimination of female genital mutilation, child marriage, gender-based violence, educational attainment for girls, and political participation and workplace opportunities for women are under threat. Moreover, Trump's orders are a gross violation of human rights and a deliberate attempt to erase the entire trans and gender diverse community. Sadly, contestation and manipulation around gender are not new to global health.

A new *Lancet* Commission on gender and global health aims to identify ways in which health practitioners, policy makers, researchers, and civil society can use more inclusive understandings of gender to improve health policies and programmes. The Commission's vision of a gender justice approach "recognises the diversity of needs and experiences, calls for the inclusion of all people, and aims to achieve both equity and equality for all". Gender is often discussed in global health but, the Commission finds, action on gender justice remains a major challenge. There is no shared understanding of gender and related terms, leading to confusion, disagreement, and misinterpretation. In research and health data systems, gender and sex are often conflated, ignoring the multiple dimensions of gender and its interactions with sex. Gender often becomes a shorthand for women and girls, excluding the needs of trans and gender diverse people, as well as boys and men.

The Commission details how well-funded international networks and far-right populism have aggressively pushed a fixed male–female dichotomy of sex over the past 30 years, leading to disastrous laws against LGBTQ+ people and abortion. Meanwhile, industries exploit gender norms to promote consumption of health-harming products, such as alcohol.

Previous Series and Commissions published by *The Lancet* related to gender and health have shown how gender inequality is intricately linked with health inequity, but focused on specific groups—women or trans and gender diverse people—or specific dimensions, such as gender-based violence, leadership in science and medicine, or peace. The Gender and Health Commission take a broader approach that uncovers the multiple forces that drive interactions between gender and health. Its comprehensive analysis of the historical, political, social, and economic drivers in global health uncovers why the understanding of women's health is still limited to reproductive and maternal health, why boys and men are underappreciated when designing interventions to address gender-based violence, and why there is such a detrimental absence of health data for the trans and gender diverse communities.

How can actions towards achieving gender justice in global health be made more effective? First, the Commission argues that a more holistic understanding and framing of gender is needed, as well as clearer and more transparent definitions for data collection and research. Second, the Commission states that lessons can be learned from policies that have successfully applied a gender justice lens. Third, there is an urgent need for accountability mechanisms that can systematically monitor and take action on the anti-gender movement and the commercial sector, as well as innovative ways to invest in gender justice approaches.

We are at a critical inflection point as the Trump administration imposes prohibitions towards gender justice. *The Lancet* stands by our commitment towards advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in science, medicine, and global health. Recommending the use of inclusive language and encouraging adherence to the Sex and Gender Equity in Research reporting guidelines remain integral to our editorial policies. These times are a test for the global health community, and society more widely, to protect and advance the gains made over recent decades in gender equality and health equity. Collectively, we must mobilise forces for resistance and activism, raising our voices for a world in which everyone can thrive, irrespective of their gender and gender identity. ■ *The Lancet*



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Inseparable, Eric Takikam, Douala, Cameroon (2023)

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For the **Lancet Series on transgender health** see <https://www.thelancet.com/series/transgender-health>

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