

# ACT Alliance

## Gender Justice Policy

*Approved by the ACT Alliance Governing Board, May 2025*

The first ACT Gender Equality Policy Principles were approved by ACT International Emergency Committee, on 18 April 2008. On 6 September 2010 a revised policy was adopted by ACT Alliance Governing Board, considering the broader mandate of ACT Alliance. Another revision was done in 2017 to make it congruent with existing standards and commitments adhered to by ACT Alliance. The 2025 revised policy includes a reference to the theological foundations, developed the policy's mandatory nature and aligned this with the overall Quality and Accountability Framework of the Alliance. This policy applies to the ACT Secretariat, all ACT Alliance members, and affiliated staff/volunteers, to improve the quality and accountability to our commitments to gender justice.

### Introduction

ACT Alliance is committed to respect, empower, and protect the dignity, uniqueness, intrinsic worth and human rights of every human being. ACT Alliance is committed to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls as stated in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 5 and the Istanbul Principles. At a time of increasing polarisation and pushback on gender equality, we will continue to collaborate with members and partners to strategically advance gender justice. This includes mainstreaming gender in programmes and institutionally; and investing in gender specific work in the Alliance.

ACT Alliance is committed to ensuring gender equality as a common value and an inalienable human right. The human rights principles of universality and non-discrimination apply to all people with whom ACT Alliance works. We believe all people should have the same power and agency to shape societies, faith communities and their own lives. ACT Alliance is committed to an intersectional analysis and does not accept any discrimination on age, disability, ethnicity, gender, nationality, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender identity or expression, class, or political opinion. This calls for us to speak up for justice and mobilise transformative faith voices for change to ensure gender-equal laws, power relations and social norms.

### Theological grounding

Gender justice serves as an embodiment of God's divine will for humanity. The New Testament offers a powerful testimony to transformed relationships, portrayed in the teachings, healings, and life of Jesus Christ. Jesus' ministry empowered women in the public sphere and opposed any form of injustice, leading to a new community, for example, as seen in Galatians 3.28.

The biblical narrative of creation (Genesis 1) underscores the equal empowerment of all human beings, who are created in the image of God, recognising our responsibility for prophetic and transformative diakonia to oppose all forms of power imbalances that perpetuate injustice.

ACT Alliance acknowledges the historical use of sacred texts and traditions to perpetuate harmful stereotypes and injustices, ranging from discrimination to violence. This recognition underscores the importance of developing gender-just principles rooted in the principle of “Do No Harm”. Members and partners are encouraged to prayerfully engage with scripture and tradition, ensuring they promote life-affirming, liberating values that embrace all individuals regardless of race, gender, language, religion, or any other distinction, promoting anti-racist and decolonial practices. ACT Alliance affirms the transformative role of faith actors and organizations to articulate faith and rights, promoting an inclusive and sustainable society for all.

**This policy relates and reinforces:**

- ACT Code of Good Practice
- ACT Safeguarding Policy
- ACT Employment Regulations
- ACT Communications Policy
- ACT Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Exploitation and Abuse
- Fraud and Corruption and Abuse of Power
- ACT Humanitarian Protection Policy
- Core Humanitarian Standard
- Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
- IASC Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action
- The Principles of the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.

It has been developed in line with global best practices, drawing on the Core Humanitarian Standard, SPHERE Standards, and the IASC Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action.

The ACT Alliance is committed to mainstreaming gender in all ACT policies to ensure policy coherence and greater accountability, recognising that gender justice cannot be siloed.

**ACT Alliance is committed to the following United Nations Security Council Resolutions, Conventions and UN documents:**

- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) (2015),
- The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995),
- United Nations’ Conference on Population and Development, Cairo (1994),
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979),
- Security Council Resolution 1325,
- Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993),
- UN General Assembly Resolution A/Res/67/146 Intensifying global efforts for the elimination of female genital mutilations (2012),
- ACT Alliance considers gender mainstreaming as an appropriate strategy to achieve gender equality.

**Key Definitions**

**Gender** first and foremost refers to unequal power relations based on socially constructed norms and practices that are derived from a person’s real or perceived sex. Gender is learned through socialisation and is often expressed in terms of masculinity or femininity. Gender inequality affects the equal right of people of

all genders to enjoy their rights. Since gender is socially constructed, and thus context and time specific, stereotypical notions of men and women's roles can be challenged and are changeable. In all societies, these roles have evolved and changed. The term gender is often used as if it is synonymous and interchangeable with the word women. This is not the case. The reason why gender approaches often focus on women and girls is because of the acknowledged discrimination and exclusion which most women and girls still face globally.

**Gender equality** is the equal enjoyment of human rights, opportunities, responsibilities, resources and rewards irrespective of gender or sex, including fundamental freedoms in the political, civil, economic, social and cultural fields of life. Gender equality is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.

**Gender identity** is a personal perception of one's own gender which may or may not match-with their sex assigned at birth. It includes all the attributes and characteristics different cultures attach to the belonging of one or the other sexes.

**Gender mainstreaming** is a strategy for attaining gender equality. A process of assessing the gender implications of any planned action. It is a strategy for making the concerns and the experiences of all people an integral part of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all economic, political and social spheres, so that all benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

**Gender justice** implies the protection and promotion of the dignity of women and men who, being created in the image of God, are co-responsible stewards of creation. Gender justice is expressed through equality and balanced power relations between women and men and the elimination of the institutional, cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination. (LWF Gender Justice Policy.)

**Intersectionality** is a theory and an approach that seeks to examine how various socially and culturally constructed categories, such as gender, religion, class, disability and other axes of identity, interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic social inequality and oppression. Intersectionality holds that the classical conceptualizations of oppression within society, such as racism, sexism, homophobia, and religion-based bigotry, do not act independently of one another. Instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination.

**Patriarchy:** 'Patriarchy can be defined as the systematic organization of power of the male/masculine over the female/feminine. In practice, it is a system that grants men greater economic, political, and social power than women and renders largely invisible those people who do not conform to the rules of the two-gender system'. (MenEngage Africa Training Initiative Training Manual.)

**Feminism(s)** is understood as working for all genders to have equal rights and opportunities.

**Sex** is a medical term that relates to the biological determination of the individual and the physical distinction and categorization as either male, female or intersex and their different biological functions.

**Sexual and Gender-based violence (SGBV)** is any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Sexual and Gender-based violence is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) differences, like power inequalities, between females and males. The acts of SGBV violate several universal human rights. The nature and extent of specific types of SGBV vary across cultures, countries and regions. SGBV includes e.g. sexual gender-based violence (SGBV), sexual exploitation and abuse, rape, forced prostitution, human trafficking, harmful traditional practices, intimidation, psychological violence and gender-based violence in close relationships, such as 'honour-related' violence.

**Sexual Harassment:** ‘Where an unwanted conduct related to the sex of a person occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment’. (The Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe.)

**Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)** are fundamental to people’s health, economic development, gender justice/equality and to the wellbeing and survival of humanity. In 2018, the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission presented a new and comprehensive definition of SRHR: “Sexual and reproductive health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity (...) All individuals have a right to make decisions governing their bodies and to access services that support that right”. This definition includes the full range of people’s needs and services including sexual wellbeing, personal autonomy and bodily integrity and also encompasses the recommended access to services that ensures these rights are upheld.

**Sexual Orientation or Gender identity or Expression (SOGIE)** is an inclusive term that applies to everyone.

**Women’s Rights** are human rights, yet many women and girls continue to face discrimination based on gender and sex. Gender injustice disproportionately impacts women and girls, and impacts human rights, including economic, sexual and reproductive rights.

### **Operationalisation of the Gender Justice Policy**

It is mandatory for ACT Alliance members to have a board-approved gender justice policy, which is specific and relevant to their local cultural and programmatic context. The Gender Justice principles cover the minimum standards that ACT Alliance expects all members to comply with when developing, implementing, and monitoring a Gender Justice Policy.

### **Gender Justice Policy Principles**

To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (SDG 5) ACT members will:

#### **Principle 1: Ensure gender balance in participation, decision-making, representation and staffing**

Participation and empowerment are part of the process and definition of development. Therefore, people have a right to take part in decisions that affect their lives. ACT Alliance works with a gender-inclusive rights-based approach which addresses the context and always includes consultations with and participation of people irrespective of gender, building upon their own capacities. This includes addressing barriers, for example patriarchal power structures and social norms, to people’s participation during all phases of the programme cycle. Women and girls in all their diversity have full participation, including women being empowered in decision-making, in all areas of ACT’s work from planning through to final programme evaluation.

ACT Alliance promotes gender balance at all levels and in all human resources requirements. This means that in the composition of the ACT Secretariat, members of ACT Alliance offices, a field team, an evaluation team, the governance bodies, the advisory groups, and the forums, we seek to achieve a gender balance. Anything less than 40% of any one gender should require corrective action, this includes in terms of seniority and roles in the context of gender balance.

Gender balance is a human resource issue that concerns equal participation of genders in all areas of work. It is conducive to a diverse workforce, enhances the agencies’ capacity to serve the entire population and improves the effectiveness of programmes. All staff are treated equally. Performance indicators and leadership will strive to be gender-transformative, and at minimum gender-responsive, to ensure equal opportunities for promotion, benefits and pay.

#### **Principle 2: Ensure gender mainstreaming in all strategic areas to achieve gender justice**

Gender analysis is crucial to examine power relations, structures and social norms, and how they influence access to human rights, control over resources and benefits, and gender roles. ACT Alliance commits to gender mainstreaming institutionally and programmatically, in all areas and at all levels, including advisory groups. This includes assessing the implication of gender using an intersectional gender and power analysis and integrated in design, analysis, planning, implementation, performance, personnel policy, monitoring, assessment, reporting, budgeting, and evaluation thereby changing the content and direction of these practices at project and programmes and institutional level to achieve gender justice and women's empowerment.

Gender justice will continue to be mainstreamed in advocacy, development, and humanitarian programmes, and through practical application of the ACT Alliance Gender Justice Policy in gender-focused/standalone advocacy, development, and humanitarian initiatives at national, regional and international levels. ACT Alliance is committed to collect, use and analyse gender-disaggregated data to better track and respond to gender inequalities in all areas of our work.

Humanitarian actors from the early stages in a crisis and in the continuum towards long-term development cooperation and advocacy, must be equipped to mainstream gender and address gender-based barriers to ensure the provision of equitable services. In ACT Alliance Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans it is a commitment to integrate gender and power analysis, and prevention measures are factored in preparedness planning based on context.

### **Principle 3: Adopt, Implement and Monitor a board-approved gender justice policy**

The Gender Justice Policy principles make up the framework that explains the basic principles on which an organization's gender justice policy is based and thus gives direction to achieve gender equality.

To strengthen quality, accountability and commitment across the alliance, each ACT member must have a board-approved Gender Justice Policy that meets or exceeds the provisions set-out in the outline of a Gender Justice Policy within 3 years of the adoption of this revised ACT Alliance Gender Justice Policy.

ACT Alliance members must ensure that their Gender Justice Policy applies to their entire staff, volunteers and all those who are given access to projects and communities. All Gender Justice Policies must be accompanied by implementation plans of action, training, and have an in-built monitoring and reporting mechanism for accountability. This should include coherence with other institutional policies, for example Safeguarding, and ensure action plans address the interrelated action required for robust implementation.

### **Principle 4: Ensure training and capacity development provided for all staff**

ACT Alliance is committed to supporting its members in developing, implementing and monitoring their contextualized Gender Justice Policies through training and capacity development initiatives that promote gender-transformative methodologies. Training and resources should explore key concepts, introduce practical analytical tools, and facilitate reflection on strategies for integrating gender equality and human rights principles and standards. As a faith-based alliance, capacity development should include religious literacy to effectively address the intersections of gender, faith, and rights.

ACT Alliance members are expected to provide training to their staff and others in their newly developed policies and action plans. This includes induction of new staff and periodic refresher training for existing staff, recognizing the contexts where we work are ever evolving.

Terms of Reference for all positions in the ACT Secretariat and ACT member organizations or with their contracting parties (e.g. evaluation or audit contracts or implementing partners), from the middle to the senior levels, ensure a commitment to gender justice and mainstreaming.

### **Principle 5: Ensure that communities, partners and others are stakeholders in implementing the Gender Justice Policy**

ACT Alliance believes in accountability to the communities we work with, and transparency in all we do. Building the capacity of communities and partners is a significant component of good practice to achieve gender justice. Mainstreaming gender in monitoring and reporting mechanisms should be in place, as well as strong community feed-back pathways.

Each ACT Alliance member should develop plans for awareness-raising on the policy in communities where they or their partners work. ACT Alliance members should work with local partners to develop their understanding of the policy, and work with them to mainstream gender in their own programmes through gender training and capacity strengthening.

ACT Alliance recognizes that social norms can act as a barrier to implementing gender justice policies and is committed to working with change-makers from within communities to transform social norms and masculinities, to promote gender-just societies.

**Principle 6: Promote strategies that guard against human rights violations perpetrated on the grounds of people's Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE)**

All people, irrespective of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, are entitled to enjoy the protections provided for by international human rights law, recognizing their universality, including in respect of rights to life, security of person and privacy, the right to be free from torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, the right to be free from discrimination and the right to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

Human rights apply to all people. Violations based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression, towards people who do not conform to social or cultural conceptions of gender, are human rights violations. ACT Alliance strongly opposes any discrimination, persecution and violence against persons based on SOGIE. ACT Alliance is committed to working with members to ensure a human-rights based approach and ensure we 'do no harm' in the diverse contexts where we work.

**Principle 7: Ensure protection from Sexual and Gender-based violence.**

To save lives and maximize protection for all persons, prevention and responses are needed, this includes addressing the root causes of gender injustice, including social, economic and political inequalities, and patriarchal structures and social norms. ACT Alliance holds a zero-tolerance approach to Sexual and Gender-based violence (SGBV), not only in armed conflicts but also during peacetime.

ACT Alliance recognises that SGBV is a continuing global problem that takes place in all countries, religions, and social classes. SGBV includes harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). SGBV directed at women is one of the most commonly occurring violations of human rights. ACT Alliance holds a zero-tolerance approach to all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of all people it works with. SGBV often occurs in acute emergencies and often affects women, boys, girls, and particularly those expressing a SOGIE different from the norm. Violence has an intersectional element; it also includes people with disabilities. SGBV is a serious and life-threatening protection issue which often goes unreported.

In humanitarian crises the dependency of affected populations on humanitarian agencies for their basic needs creates an additional ethical responsibility and duty of care on the part of all ACT Alliance staff, and staffs have an obligation to report Sexual and Gender Based Violence, taking a survivor-centred approach, according to the Code of Conduct.

**Principle 8: Ensure access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights**

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) are fundamental to people's health, economic development, gender justice/equality and to the wellbeing and survival of humanity. ACT Alliance is committed to increasing access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) for all individuals, so that they can make their own informed decisions concerning their sexual relations, contraceptive use, and

reproductive health care, free from discrimination, coercion, and violence. ACT Alliance believes that access to SRHR is a human right and a prerequisite for ensuring the enjoyment of other rights and poverty reduction.

The inclusion of family planning, age-of-consent minimums, access to sexual and reproductive health care are all essential elements for human rights-based development. ACT Alliance affirms that young people have a right to context and culturally relevant and age-appropriate information and education, including Comprehensive Sexuality Education – a right embodied in several international treaties and conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Limited or no access to essential life-giving services have devastating consequences, for example, increased sexual and gender-based violence, sexually transmitted infections, maternal mortality, and unwanted pregnancies. Lack of resources is one reason, yet access to SRHR is also determined by patriarchal systems, socio-economic status and underlying inequalities.

As a faith-based alliance, we recognise our influence on social norms that intersect with SRHR and commit to identifying programmatic entry points to ensure access to SRHR. As a broad and diverse alliance, we commit to not undermine this principle, and to not actively work against human rights related to SRHR.