

Tackling Inequality Terminology Guidance

Who this guidance is for:

This guidance is for everyone working in policy and other professions in the Scottish Government. Tackling Inequality is one of the two key pillars outlined in [Scotland's Economic Strategy \(2015\)](#) and a recurring theme in the current [Programme for Government](#). In achieving this goal, it is crucial that the language we use is accurate, specific, so that we can design fit for purpose policy and practice, and communicate what it is we are working to achieve and the progress we are making. This guidance aims to support this by clarifying the meanings of key terms in the Scottish Government context, and offering advice on how to select the right word for your circumstance. It will therefore be of particular use to those formulating policy or drafting strategies and other official documents, where outcomes and activities are outlined.

Summary of advice:

You will find in this document information on selected terms, including a short definition, a description of common usage, and advice for use. Overall, the key message is this:

Be reflective in your practice:

Think carefully before selecting the right words for your context.

Ask yourself what you really mean and whether it will stand up to scrutiny.

Be as specific as you can be and avoid using general terms as euphemisms.

Quick Reference Table:

Key Term	Short Definition	Summary of Advice
Inequality	The systematic differences that we observe between groups in society, which result in a gap in terms of autonomy, process or outcomes between groups of people.	Be specific about what is unequal, and for whom. Think through the implications of a desire to close the 'gap'.
Equality	The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, opportunities or outcomes.	Be clear whether your focus is on equality of status, rights, opportunities or outcomes, bearing in mind that achieving the first three may not result in equality of outcomes.
Equity	The quality of being fair and impartial; provision proportionate to need. Please note that there are also technical uses of the term in law and finance.	Be aware that this is not a straightforward synonym for equality. Use when discussing distribution of services, resources etc. according to need.
Equalities	Used as shorthand for the groups that need to be borne in mind when thinking about compliance with the Equality Act (see protected characteristics below).	Avoid unless you need to discuss all protected characteristics at once (note that different groups are unlikely to be impacted identically by individual policies).

Protected characteristic/Equality Group	The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to anticipate and remove disadvantage which may affect people on the basis of nine protected characteristics.	'Protected characteristics' is preferred to 'equality group', as it is the term used in legislation. Advice for each characteristic provided.
Intersectionality	The combination of protected characteristics - for example older disabled men, younger Muslim women, or disabled transgender people.	Be specific about the combinations of protected characteristics pertinent to the policy or evidence being discussed. Rather than say 'we will consider intersectionality impacts' say, for example, 'we will consider the impact of this policy on Sikh men'.
Deprivation	The lack or denial of something considered to be a necessity, for example a right, experience, skill, resource or service.	Usually used in a technical sense, e.g. in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), so best to limit use to specific technical contexts. SIMD use advice provided.
Poverty	Living on a low income, below a particular income threshold.	Ensure you are referring to the appropriate level of poverty, and are specific about whether it is before or after housing costs.
Wealth	The value of all the assets of worth owned by a person, household, community, company or country.	Be aware of the different components of wealth and be explicit about whether it is individual, household or company wealth being considered.
Disadvantage	An unfavourable circumstance or condition that reduces the chances of positive outcomes.	Ensure you are being specific about the kind of disadvantage you are referring to, which will usually be economic disadvantage.
Inclusive Growth	Growth that combines increased prosperity with tackling inequality; that creates opportunities for all and distributes the dividends of increased prosperity fairly.	Ensure that both 'growth' and 'inclusion' are considered when discussing inclusive growth.
Exclusion	The process by which people are excluded from a particular opportunity or outcome. An inability to access a right, opportunity or service to which others have easy access.	Use when exploring the mechanisms of exclusion in a specific context, be aware of risk of stigmatising groups, and consider using inequality instead.
Inclusion	This term refers to support provided to allow access to specific opportunities.	Be clear what the specific context is.
Social Justice	An umbrella term for a concern with all of the issues listed in this guidance - tackling poverty, disadvantage and inequality and promoting equality.	Appropriate only at a high level, reflecting that it is an umbrella term. Be aware it can be used for different political purposes.
Human Rights	The basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person, from birth until death, protected by the Human Rights Act 1998. The SG is committed to promoting and protecting human rights.	Ensure that you remember the breadth of rights that come under the human rights umbrella. Bear in mind that some groups of people in Scotland are unable to enjoy their human rights and sometimes their ability to enjoy their human rights is affected by our policies and services.
Vulnerable Groups	Meaning 1 (Legal definition): As per the PVG Act 2007 Meaning 2 (Policy definition): Used to identify specific groups of people who are 'vulnerable to' a particular risk.	Be aware of the two definitions, and be clear which one you are using. If you are using the policy definition, refer to people who are 'vulnerable to...' a specified risk, and be aware of the stigmatising potential.
At Risk Groups	Exposed to harm or danger, considered to have a higher probability of negative outcomes.	Risk of connotation of blame, and euphemistic use, so avoid if possible and instead specify who is at risk from what.
Hard to Reach	Groups of people with whom policy and practice cannot easily interact.	The term is problematic as it suggests that the 'fault' lies with the people, not with those

		trying to reach them. Avoid if possible, consider using ‘seldom heard’ instead and focus on methods for addressing the barriers.
Asset based approaches	Approaches which enable people and communities to develop resilience and improve wellbeing, by recognising and utilising their strengths and capabilities. Key to this is enabling people and communities to make choices and have control over decisions that affect their lives.	Please use with a full understanding of what taking such an approach would entail in a practical sense. For example, refer to assets-based approaches in policy making where you draw on the skills, expertise or lived experience of people to help make better policy or develop more effective solutions which better meet their needs.

Key Term: Inequality

Short Definition:

The systematic differences that we observe between groups in society, which result in a gap in terms of autonomy, process or outcomes between groups of people.

Common Usage:

Inequality affects people according to their social and economic status and/or protected characteristics (see [below](#)). Inequality is also evident between geographical areas and communities. Some groups are particularly at risk of experiencing inequality in a specific domain due to a combination of these factors.

Inequality exists in a range of domains (health, education, income, wealth etc.), though it is sometimes used as a shorthand for income inequality. It may be seen in the form of unequal life-chances, conditions, power, opportunities, rewards or outcomes. In contrast to equality, which focuses on the desired positive state, inequality diagnoses the problem, or gap, at the level of the population as a whole. For example, the ‘attainment gap’ is the inequality in school exam attainment between those from the most and least deprived areas.

In theory at least, the method for tackling inequality – i.e. reducing the gap – could as much be about reining in advantage as reducing disadvantage. In practice however, the focus is often on improving outcomes for those experiencing the ill effects of inequality, for example, with the attainment gap, policy focuses on improving attainment among those from the most deprived areas, while maintaining or improving attainment across the board (and not reducing it for the least deprived areas).

Advice for use:

When talking about inequality, be specific about what is unequal, and for whom. If the inequality in question is inequality of income, make this explicit.

Think about the gap you are referring to – why does it matter? Is your aim to close the gap, or to raise the lower end? Are you aiming to disrupt the mechanisms that cause inequality, or mitigate it by providing support to specific groups suffering the ill effects of inequality? If the latter, you could consider using equality instead, concentrating on the desired positive

outcomes for those you are focusing on. Bear in mind that if you improve outcomes for all, the gap will not be reduced and the inequality will stand.

For the sake of consistency, please use 'inequality', and avoid 'inequalities' unless you are explicitly referring to experiences of inequality across multiple domains.

See also:

Tackling Inequality is one of the [National Outcomes](#) as well as one of the two key pillars outlined in [Scotland's Economic Strategy](#) (alongside Increasing Competitiveness), and this focus is evident across a range of policy priorities, for example tackling the attainment gap, addressing health inequality and inclusive growth.

Key Term: Equality

Short Definition:

The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, opportunities or outcomes.

Common Usage:

Most often used alongside 'diversity' (explicitly or implicitly), and with reference to people with the specific protected characteristics and/or those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage (see below). The focus is usually on improving the lives (and outcomes) of specific groups of people experiencing disadvantage in one or more policy or service domains.

Sometimes equality of outcomes and equality of opportunity are confused and conflated, though they have distinct meanings. In the context of the SGs outcome focus, equality of outcomes tends to be more relevant, in that no one should have poorer life chances because of who they are, where they were born, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. This focus on outcomes is a result of recognition that a focus solely on equality of status, rights or opportunities may not result in equality of outcomes where some people face more barriers than others to realising positive outcomes.

Advice for use:

Think about whether equality is truly something you are aiming towards in your specific context – what would this look like if fully achieved? Can you articulate why it is desirable?

Be clear where it is equality of outcome you are intending, and bear in mind that equality of process, status, rights or opportunity means everyone receiving the same (equal distribution) which may lead to different outcomes for different people. If you are interested in targeting or prioritising specific groups, this is an equitable process, not equality of process (see [equity](#) below for more).

Bear in mind that equality is a destination. In grammatical terms, it is something you can work towards, or promote, but is not something you can 'improve'.

Key Term: Equity

Short Definition:

The quality of being fair and impartial; provision proportionate to need. Please note that there are also technical uses of the term in law and finance.

Common Usage:

In the context of inequality and equality, equity is sometimes (wrongly) used as a synonym for equality. While equality of outcomes is when everyone experiences the same positive future state, equity is used when talking about how to get to those outcomes – fairness in allocating resources or interventions proportionate to the need or starting point of different groups. Therefore a concern with equity can lead to targeted rather than universal approaches, in order to achieve equality of outcomes for all. It is most often used in this sense in education policy.

In terms of process, equality would be equal distribution (i.e. universal approaches), and equity about proportionate (in some way) distribution (i.e. targeted approaches or [proportionate universalism](#)), see diagram below.



It should be noted that neither of the interventions offered in the diagram (the boxes) address the cause of the inequality, which is the systemic barrier (the wall).

In terms of outcome, equity has a different meaning - where outcomes for individuals reflect their level of input (e.g. profit proportionate to investment). This is unlikely to be relevant in the context of tackling inequality and promoting equality.

Advice for use:

This is a particularly tricky term, so take extra care to ensure you are using it correctly. Be aware that it is not a straightforward synonym for equality. Use when discussing distribution of services, resources etc. according to need, and not in relation to outcomes.

See also:

Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland (2016):
<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00502222.pdf>

Key Term: Equalities

Common Usage:

This term tends to be used as shorthand for the groups that need to be borne in mind when thinking about compliance with the Equality Act (see [Protected Characteristics/Equality Groups](#) below).

Advice for use:

It isn't very often that all people with equality characteristics will be similarly affected by a policy or decision. Unless you are using the term in high level context to denote an interest in the experiences of those with protected characteristics, it is better to be specific about which groups and individuals you are referring to, so where possible, refer instead to inequality or equality in relation to specific groups of people.

Key Term: Protected Characteristics/Equality Groups

Short Definition:

The Equality Act 2010 requires public bodies to anticipate and remove disadvantage which may affect people on the basis of nine protected characteristics. These are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marital or civil partnership status
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Common Usage:

Considerations of equality and equalities are usually framed through a consideration of the diverse experiences of people who have one or more of these protected characteristics. For example, the [Equality Budget Statement](#) considers the impact of budget changes on each of these characteristics, such as if there are differential impacts on people of a specific age, or on people with a disability.

For fuller definitions of each protected characteristic, please see [here](#) (external link).

Advice for use:

The protected characteristics are sometimes referred to as the equality groups. The former term, however, is preferable as it reflects the terminology of the legislation.

In terms of preferred language within the protected characteristics themselves, here are some general guidelines. Please note that individuals with any one of the protected

characteristics may have different views on the terminology they use to describe themselves:

- **Age:** If possible use specific age ranges. For example, ‘young people’ can mean 16-24, but often refers to a different specific range. ‘Older people’ is preferable to ‘pensioners’ or ‘the elderly’.
- **Disability:** The term disabled people should be used rather than ‘people with disabilities’. See also <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability> .
- **Race:** When discussing discrimination or equality in race, use ‘minority ethnic’ + noun (for example minority ethnic community) or ‘ethnic minorities’. Please avoid using BME or BAME as the term ‘black’ is controversial with many stakeholders, particularly in the African community. Also, in the last census out of 210,000 minority ethnic people in Scotland less than 3,000 identified as ‘black’. If an acronym must be used it should be ME. This refers to: Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups, Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British groups, African, African Scottish or African British groups; Caribbean or Black, Caribbean or Black Scottish, or Caribbean or Black British; and ‘Other’ ethnic groups (including Arab groups), as categorised by the SG and National Records of Scotland’s (NRS) harmonised output categories for Scotland. White ethnic groups include: White Scottish, white other British, white Irish, white Gypsy or Traveller, white Polish and any other white background. Please note that this NRS definition of ‘White’ groups includes some that you may wish to consider as ethnic minorities in specific contexts, such as Irish, Polish and Gypsy/ Travellers. See also this (external) [toolkit](#).
- **Religion or belief:** The Equality Act refers to the right to hold religious beliefs or other philosophical beliefs similar to a religion (such as humanism), as well as the right to have no religion or belief. Therefore the phrase ‘religion or belief’ is used, rather than solely ‘religion’ or ‘faith’.
- **Sex:** Often the words ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ can be used interchangeably, but they convey subtly different meanings, so think about which works best for a particular context. ‘Sex’ refers to the biological difference between men and women, while the term ‘gender’ refers to a person’s self-perception and role in society which is socially constructed by environment and experiences.
- **Gender reassignment:** This is the term used in the legislation, but the word transgender has quite a broad meaning and is an inclusive term, and therefore more suited to general use. See also the LGBTI terminology guide below.
- **Sexual orientation:** See LGBTI terminology guide: <https://erdm.scotland.gov.uk/id:A16087949/document/versions/latest>

Relevant publications, outcomes or measures:

Guide to the Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality and Human Rights Commission):
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/essential-guide-public-sector-equality-duty>

Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report (Scottish Government):

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/04/7781/0>

Equality evidence finder:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/Equality/Equalities/DataGrid>

Key Term: Intersectionality

Short Definition:

The combination of protected characteristics - for example older disabled men, younger Muslim women, or disabled transgender people.

Common Usage:

Intersectionality is used to make clear that society is complex; and that we all as human beings reflect multiple combinations of the protected characteristics. These combinations can shape how we access and experience services, as well as how we experience society.

Advice for use:

In most cases you should try to be specific about the combinations of protected characteristics pertinent to the policy or evidence being discussed. Rather than say 'we will consider intersectionality impacts' say 'we will consider the impact of this policy on Sikh men', for example, or 'we will consider the impact on disabled young women' (which takes in three protected characteristics).

See also:

The Scottish Government recently funded the Equality Network to produce guidance on including intersectional LGBTI people in services (<http://www.equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/III-booklet.pdf>). This booklet provides useful self-assessment questions which policy makers and service providers can use to support the development of person-centred approaches.

Key Term: Deprivation

Short Definition:

The lack or denial of something considered to be a necessity, for example a right, experience, skill, resource or service.

Common Usage:

This term is usually used in Scotland in the context of a technical definition, such as in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) or the Child Poverty Bill target based on a low income and material deprivation measure. The SIMD, for example, uses indicators across multiple domains - income, employment, education, health, access to services, crime and housing – to rank the relative deprivation of datazones across Scotland. The definition of deprivation for the SIMD therefore encompasses all of these domains.

Advice for use:

Given the specific uses outlined above, in a Scottish Government context it is best to limit use of the term deprivation to references to these measures. Over and above this, be conscious of the potential for stigma associated with the term. Especially in the context of asset based approaches (see [below](#)), proponents of which have objected to the perceived deficit approach of the SIMD.

SIMD specific advice:

When referring to the SIMD, be conscious that this is an area based measure, not a person based one. So be careful to refer to 'people from the most/least deprived areas' as appropriate, and NOT the most/least deprived people. This is because not everyone from a deprived area is deprived, and vice versa.

Be conscious of which proportion of the SIMD you are using. Most policy areas use 20% when referring to the most and least deprived areas, though some focus on the 15% most deprived, and some focus further on the 10% most deprived. Ensure that your usage aligns with your purpose.

Remember the SIMD is a ranked list, meaning it is a relative measure, and there is not a standardised distance between areas in the index. It therefore cannot be used to compare exactly how much more or less deprived two areas are, and comparing ranks of an area over time does not tell you whether life within that area has changed, it just tells you how its' deprivation relative to other areas has changed.

Finally, be aware that using SIMD to examine topics that feature in the domains used to calculate the SIMD may result in circular arguments. For example, the attainment of 4th year school pupils is used in the education domain, so it stands to reason that this attainment will be worse in the most deprived areas than the least. While it is legitimate to be interested in the size of the gap, and trend of the gap over time, the existence of a gap is a feature of the methodology. It is possible to exclude one of the domains from analysis to eliminate this circularity, please contact the SIMD team for this. Otherwise, when discussing indicators that are included in the SIMD analysis, be careful to focus on the scale of the gap and whether it is narrowing or growing, rather than simply stating the existence of a gap.

See also:

SIMD 2016 booklet:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00504809.pdf>

Child Poverty Bill SPICe briefing :

http://www.parliament.scot/ResearchBriefingsAndFactsheets/S5/SB_17-10_Child_Poverty_Scotland_Bill.pdf

Key Term: Poverty

Short Definition:

Living on a low income, below a particular income threshold.

Common Usage:

There are four common measures of poverty:

- **Relative poverty:** shows how an individual's income compares to the rest of society.
- **Absolute poverty:** shows how poverty has changed over time.
- **Low income and material deprivation:** shows whether children and pensioners have essential items and can be used to show depth of poverty.
- **Persistent poverty:** which shows whether households have been in poverty in 3 of the last 4 years.

Poverty can be measured before or after housing costs and is equalised to account for different household size.

Relative poverty is the most commonly used measure and equates to a household income which is less than 60% of the UK average (median income). Poverty measures are usually expressed after housing costs.

In Scotland, living in relative poverty in 2015/16 if you are a single person means a household income of £7,500 per year or less after housing costs; for a couple with two children, you have a household income of £20,900 or less.

Advice for use:

Be aware of the specifics outlined above, and ensure you are referring to the appropriate type and level of poverty, and are specific about whether it is before or after housing costs.

See also:

Scottish poverty and income statistics:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/IncomePoverty>

For more on writing about poverty, see here:

<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Built-Environment/regeneration/pir/learningnetworks/cr/publications/writingaboutpoverty>

Key Term: Wealth

Short Definition:

The value of all the assets of worth owned by a person, household, community, company or country.

Common Usage:

In the [Wealth and Assets Survey](#), household wealth is split into four main components: property, financial, physical, and private pension wealth.

Advice for use:

Be aware of the different components of wealth outlined above and think about whether it is individual, household or company wealth being considered. Be aware that Wealth and

Assets surveys around the world systematically understate the level of wealth inequality due to problems capturing returns at the very top of the distribution.

Key Term: Disadvantage

Short Definition:

An unfavourable circumstance or condition that reduces the chances of positive outcomes.

Common Usage:

This term is sometimes used in a similar way to deprivation, with references to ‘deprived’ or ‘disadvantaged’ people used in similar contexts. But unlike deprivation, disadvantage is almost always used as a shorthand for economic disadvantage, i.e. referring to those in poverty.

Advice for use:

Ensure you are being specific about the kind of disadvantage you are referring to, which will usually be economic disadvantage.

Key Term: Inclusive Growth

Short Definition:

Growth that combines increased prosperity with tackling inequality; that creates opportunities for all and distributes the dividends of increased prosperity fairly.

Common Usage:

Inclusive growth is one of the four key priorities in [Scotland’s Economic Strategy](#). The Scottish Government approach to inclusive growth is framed by five inclusive growth outcomes (to be finalised):

- **Economic Performance:** Economic Growth is resilient, sustainable, and inclusive
- **Labour Market Access:** Improved access to labour markets and jobs, inequality of opportunity to access work is addressed, and everyone is able to maximise their potential
- **Fair Work:** Fulfilling, secure and well-paid jobs, where employees’ contributions are encouraged, respected and valued
- **People:** Economic benefits and opportunities are spread more widely across Scotland’s population
- **Place:** More equal economic opportunities across Scotland’s cities, towns and regions and rural areas, ensuring economically, socially and physically sustainable communities.

Advice for use:

The key to inclusive growth is the importance of addressing both economic issues and inequality at the same time. You cannot contribute to achieving inclusive growth by focusing

solely on inclusion, or on growth, so ensure when you are discussing inclusive growth that you are considering the two together. More resources for aligning policy with inclusive growth will be made available in the coming months.

Key Term: Exclusion

Short Definition:

The process by which people are excluded from a particular opportunity or outcome. It results in an inability to access a right, opportunity or service to which others have easy access.

Common Usage:

This term is used to refer to specific groups of people who are experiencing inequality in a specific domain. For example, groups who experience relatively high and persistent levels of unemployment could be described as being excluded from the economy.

Advice for use:

There is a risk of stigma associated with labelling people or groups as excluded. However, if you are exploring the nature and mechanisms of exclusion from a specific experience, resource or outcome, with a view to addressing these issues, you are likely to be using the term as more than an unhelpful label. Given the centrality of 'tackling inequality' to the Scottish Government's work however, please consider using the lens of inequality rather than exclusion if this fits your purposes.

Key Term: Inclusion

Short Definition:

This term refers to support provided to allow access to specific opportunities.

Common Usage:

This term is used in a range of contexts, for example digital inclusion and financial inclusion. It has a particular usage in the context of disability, where it refers to measures to allow people with disabilities to access locations and opportunities.

Advice for use:

Be clear what the specific context is. For example, the SG is taking an inclusive approach to the travelling cabinets by ensuring that venues are accessible and that communication support (such as hearing loops, BSL interpreters) are available for those who need them.

Key Term: Social Justice

Short Definition:

This is an umbrella term for a concern with all of the issues listed in this guidance, referring to a commitment to tackling poverty, disadvantage and inequality - and to promoting and furthering equality. It is concerned with the distribution of power, wealth and opportunities in society, and involves working to create the conditions for everyone to succeed in life.

Common Usage:

The concept of 'social justice' was developed by philosopher John Rawls. It is commonly appropriated by change advocates on many parts of the political spectrum. There is a Housing and Social Justice Directorate and a number of social justice teams in the Scottish Government.

Advice for use:

As it is a high level umbrella term, only use it when you need to discuss the issues at a high level. If you can be more specific, be so. If you come across the term in external contexts, be aware that it has been co-opted for a range of opposing political views, and be conscious of who is using it and how.

Key Term: Human Rights

Short Definition:

The basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply regardless of where you are from, what you believe or how you choose to live your life. In Britain our human rights are protected by the Human Rights Act 1998. The SG is committed to promoting and protecting human rights.

Common Usage:

Human rights are not just about things like privacy or freedom of expression. They also include economic and social rights – like decent housing, an adequate standard of living or the best attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Advice for use:

Ensure that you remember the breadth of rights that come under the human rights umbrella. Bear in mind that some groups of people in Scotland are unable to enjoy their human rights and sometimes their ability to enjoy their human rights is affected by our policies and services.

Relevant publications, outcomes or measures:

Scottish Human Rights Commission website:

<http://www.scottishhumanrights.com/>

Equality and Human Rights Commission page on human rights:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/human-rights>

Key Term: Vulnerable Groups

Short Definition

Meaning 1 (Legal definition): The PVG Act 2007 provides for the protection of two vulnerable groups:

- Children - individuals aged under 18 years.
- Protected adult - defined as an individual aged 16 or over who is provided with (and thus receives) a type of care, support or welfare service.

Meaning 2 (Policy definition): Used to identify specific groups of people who are 'vulnerable to' a particular risk. For example, those who live near rivers are vulnerable to flooding.

Common Usage:

Meaning 1: used in the context of the PVG scheme, delivered and managed by Disclosure Scotland

Meaning 2: Used in specific policy areas, for example in relation to flooding and fuel poverty. The groups identified as vulnerable to these risks can include those with protected characteristics, but not always. Taking the above example, groups vulnerable to flooding tend to be those living in particular locations, e.g. near a river, or on the ground floor.

Advice for use:

Be aware of the two definitions, and be clear which one you are using. If you are using the policy definition, referring to people who are 'vulnerable to...' a specified risk is preferable, as it avoids confusion with the legal meaning.

There is also a risk of stigma associated with describing people themselves as vulnerable, with its connotations of weakness and passivity, which is less the case when describing them as vulnerable to a specific risk.

Key Term: At Risk Groups

Short Definition:

Exposed to harm or danger, considered to have a higher probability of negative outcomes.

Common Usage:

Used in a similar way to the policy definition of 'vulnerable groups', but often linked to human behaviour – a person's own or someone else's - for example in the context of child protection (in terms of children at risk of harm from adults), drug taking, or teenage pregnancy. Where the risk itself is not specified, and the term is applied to large groups such as ethnic minorities, there is a risk of overgeneralisation and stigmatisation.

Advice for use:

There is a risk of a connotation of blame in this term, especially when it is implied that people are at risk from themselves. The term is therefore best avoided if possible. Instead,

try to be explicit about who is at risk and why. Be careful not to simply use 'at risk groups' as a euphemism.

Key Term: Hard to reach

Short Definition:

Groups of people with whom policy and practice cannot easily interact.

Common Usage:

This term is usually used in the context of service delivery, consultation or research to describe when there are specific barriers to services/researchers etc. gaining access to particular groups of people. This can be for various reasons, such as people not trusting the service/researcher, or not being easily locatable.

Advice for use:

The term is problematic as it suggests that the 'fault' lies with the people, not with the systems, processes or professionals trying to reach them. It is useful to consider whether it is people who is hard to reach, or us as policy makers and professionals. If possible, use 'seldom heard' instead; be specific about which particular groups you are referring to; and focus on methods for addressing the barriers.

Key Term: Asset-Based Approaches

Short Definition:

Approaches which enable people and communities to develop resilience and improve wellbeing, by recognising and utilising their strengths and capabilities. Key to this is enabling people and communities to make choices and have control over decisions that affect their lives.

Common Usage:

Asset-based working is a key facet of the Scottish Approach to Government. These approaches value people's and communities' assets and strengths and use them to help create conditions that build relationships, social capital and capacity to improve outcomes.

Asset-based approaches view people as active agents in their own and their families' lives, recognise opportunities and what people can do to achieve the outcomes they want. This is in contrast to a 'deficit' approach to the design and delivery of public services which focuses on identifying and articulating problems, needs and deficiencies within a community and designing services to fix these problems.

The assets referred to here are not items of property in the same sense as the word is used in the realm of business. They can be found at an individual, community and/or organisational level and might include:

- Individual level assets: resilience, self-esteem, sense of purpose, positive values, commitment to learning.

- Community level assets: family and friendship networks, community cohesion, affinity groups.
- Organisational level assets: employment security, opportunity for voluntary service, political democracy and social justice.

Advice for Use:

Please use with a full understanding of what taking such an approach would entail in a practical sense. For example, refer to assets-based approaches in policy making where you draw on the skills, expertise or lived experience of people to help make better policy or develop more effective solutions which better meet their needs.

See Also:

Asset based approached briefing paper:

<http://intranet/Resource/Doc/NoTopic/0032874.pdf>