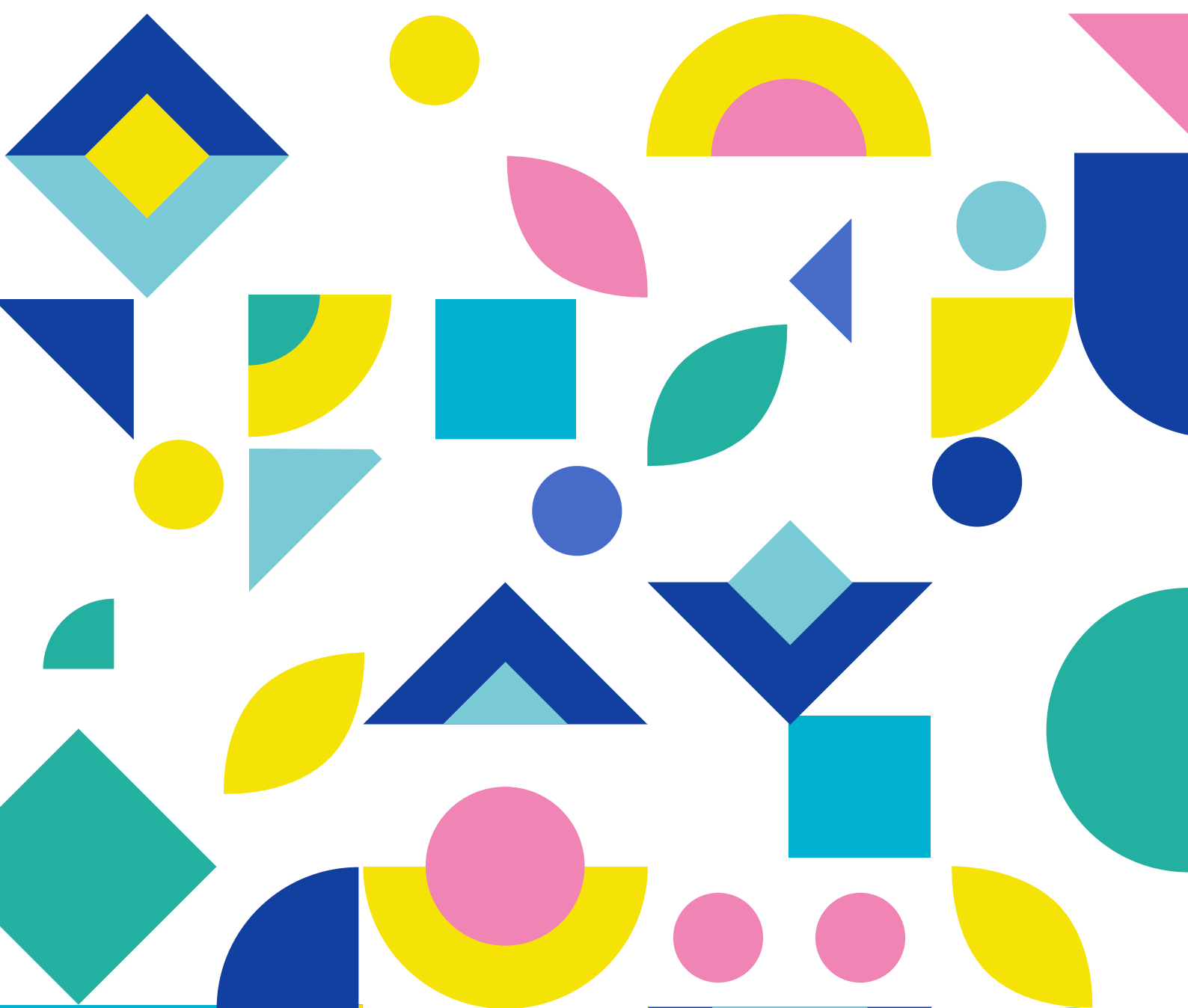


NEURODIVERSITY

GLOSSARY





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Glossary

DISABILITY, NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY – OVERVIEW, REFERRING TO THE UNITED NATIONS

An overview of disability is necessary for understanding neurodiversity. There are medical and social models of disabilities, which the document will outline, and neurodiversity is grounded in the social model of disability.

Various definitions of disability are used across contexts. In Ireland, for instance, as stated by the National Disability Authority, one definition of disability is described as such:

The Census 2011, and other official surveys, used the following definition of disability:
A person with one or more of the following long-lasting conditions or difficulties:

- 01.** **Blindness or a severe vision impairment**
- 02.** **Deafness or a severe hearing impairment**
- 03.** **An intellectual disability**
- 04.** **A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating**
- 05.** **A difficulty with basic physical activities**
- 06.** **A psychological or emotional condition**
- 07.** **A difficulty with pain, breathing, or any other chronic illness or condition**

<https://nda.ie/disability-overview/definitions/>

Internationally, the '**Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**' is a human rights treaty adopted by the United Nations in 2006.¹ The CRPD is essential for understanding employment rights for people with disabilities, and it uses a social model of disability.

Historically, disability has been approached predominantly in a medicalised fashion. The medical theory views disability mainly in terms of symptoms instead of considering the social/work/physical environment. The United Nations informs us of the cultural specificity of disabilities:

1 Consult 'CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (CRPD), ARTICLE 27 – WORK AND EMPLOYMENT'

for further information:

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-27-work-and-employment.html>

'The term persons with disabilities is used to apply to all persons with disabilities including those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'

However, this minimum list of persons who may claim protection under the Convention does not exhaust the categories of the disabilities which fall within the it nor intend to undermine or stand in the way of wider definition of disabilities under national law (such as persons with short-term disabilities). It is also important to note that a person with disabilities may be regarded as a person with a disability in one society or setting, but not in another, depending on the role that the person is assumed to take in his or her community. The perception and reality of disability also depend on the technologies, assistance and services available, as well as on cultural considerations.

https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/faqs.htm#:~:text=The%20term%20persons%20with%20disabilities,in%20society%20on%20an%20equal_

Such intercultural awareness is important for framing NEW. To varying degrees, people with disabilities and neurodivergent people are affected by their national and cultural contexts.

DISABILITY – MEDICAL MODEL

- **People with disabilities are fundamentally impaired by their medical conditions**
- **Deficits and abnormalities should be corrected or cured**
- **Leads to exclusion from the mainstream, e.g., mainstream education and workplaces**
- **Other people, such as carers, make the majority of decisions for people with disabilities for them**
- **Expects people with disabilities to integrate into existing systems and minimise their characteristics to fit in**
- **Assumption that disability is rare**

DISABILITY – SOCIAL MODEL (INCLUSIVE AND COMPLEMENTS NEURODIVERSITY)

- **People with disabilities are impaired by the contexts in which they live**
- **Scrutinises the external environment, including the workplace, rather than placing undue responsibility on the person with the disability to adapt to a pre-set standard**
- **Universal Design minimises the need for people with disabilities to declare their impairments since the built and online environments enable fuller inclusion**
- **Doesn't limit potential – encourages career progression instead of merely aiming for employment as an endpoint**
- **Empowers people with disabilities to speak for themselves rather than being spoken for, e.g., in everyday life and in influencing policy**
- **Recognises that disability is common albeit not often visible**

SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFERENCES (SPLD)

Specific Learning Differences (SpLD) – Refers to conditions affecting difficulties and differences in particular aspects of learning as opposed to IQ. The term commonly encompasses such conditions as dyslexia, developmental coordination disorder (dyspraxia), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyscalculia and dysgraphia

You can read more about the terms ‘learning disabilities’ versus ‘learning differences’ here:

<https://smarts-ef.org/blog/learning-disabilities-learning-differences/>

NEURODIVERGENT, NEUROTYPICAL, AND NEURODIVERSITY

Judy Singer, an Australian sociologist who is autistic, publicly coined the term neurodiversity in 1998 when presenting her academic research

<https://www.autismawareness.com.au/aupdate/in-conversation-with-judy-singer#:~:text=She%20is%20noted%20for%20the,of%20early%20online%20Autistic%20egroups>

Singer initially used the term to refer to autism. Harvey Blume popularised the term in 1998 in ‘The Atlantic’

<https://specialisternefoundation.com/autism-neurodiversity/>

The definition of neurodiversity has expanded since the late 1990s. The concept accepts such neurological conditions as ADHD, autism, dyslexia, and developmental coordination disorder (dyspraxia) as natural rather than something to be cured by medical or other institutions.

'Neuro', in this context, refers to neurology, i.e., the nervous system and the brain's functioning

- **Neurodivergent means a person's thought processes and behaviour diverge (moves away from or differs) significantly from what is defined medically and in mainstream society as 'normal'**
- **Neurotypical refers to the absence of atypical thought or behavioural patterns, i.e., not 'neurodivergent'! It involves socially acceptable neurocognitive functioning**
- **Neurodiversity refers to the variance of the human brain through the lens of differences instead of deficits or problems**

Read more about autism here, in the article 'How to Differentiate Autism from a Learning Disability':

<https://www.additudemag.com/autism-learning-disability-symptoms/>

A person can be born with a neurodivergent condition or conditions or acquire them later in life, e.g. through a head injury or trauma.

We can enhance our understanding of neurodiversity by relating it to the more familiar concept of biodiversity; variation is natural within environments. You can read more about

Singer's updated reflections about neurodiversity here:

<https://neurodiversity2.blogspot.com/p/what.html>

