

Introduction to Social Justice and Equity

Introduction to Social Justice and Equity
Key concepts, principles, and practical implications

1. Foundational Definitions

Term	Core Meaning	Typical Context
Social Justice	The fair and just distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society.	Public policy, community development, human rights law
Equity	The process of ensuring that individuals receive what they need to achieve comparable outcomes, acknowledging that “one size fits all” (equality) is insufficient.	Education, healthcare, workplace accommodations
Equality	Treating everyone the same, regardless of differing needs or circumstances.	Legal rights, formal anti-discrimination statutes
Inclusion	Actively involving diverse people in decision-making, culture, and practice so they feel valued and respected.	Organizational culture, classroom environments

2. Historical Roots

Era	Milestones	Relevance to Today
19th?C. – Early 20th?C.	Early labor movements, abolitionism, women’s suffrage.	Set precedent for collective action against systemic oppression.
1960s–1970s	Civil Rights Movement, feminist theory, decolonization.	Introduced “structural inequality” and the idea that law alone cannot achieve justice.
1990s–2000s	Development of critical race theory, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989).	Provides analytical tools to examine overlapping identities (race, gender, class, ability, etc.).
2010s–Present	Global movements (#MeToo, Black Lives Matter, climate justice).	Demonstrates how social?justice framing expands to new domains (digital rights, environmental equity).

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3. Core Principles

1. **Human Dignity** – Every person deserves respect and the right to self-determination.
2. **Redistributive Justice** – Resources should be allocated to correct historical and systemic imbalances.
3. **Procedural Fairness** – Decision-making processes must be transparent, participatory, and accountable.
4. **Recognition** – Acknowledge and value diverse cultural identities, experiences, and knowledge systems.
5. **Intersectionality** – Analyze how multiple forms of oppression intersect and compound disadvantage.

4. The Equity vs. Equality Distinction

Scenario	Equality Approach	Equity Approach
School funding	Every school receives the same budget per student.	Schools in low-income areas receive additional funds for remedial programs, counseling, and infrastructure upgrades.
Workplace accommodations	All employees get the same ergonomic chair.	Employees with disabilities receive customized equipment or flexible schedules based on individual needs.
Healthcare access	Same number of clinics per region.	Additional mobile clinics and telehealth services in rural or underserved communities.

Takeaway: Equality assumes identical starting points; equity adjusts inputs to achieve comparable outcomes.

5. Analytical Frameworks

Framework	What It Examines	Typical Use
Structural Inequality	Institutional policies, economic systems, and cultural norms that produce disparate outcomes.	Policy analysis, impact assessments.

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Framework

What It Examines

Typical Use

Power Mapping

Who holds decision-making authority, resources, and influence.

Community organizing, advocacy planning.

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

Conditions (housing, education, employment) shaping health outcomes.

Public health interventions, equity audits.

Capability Approach (Sen & Nussbaum)

What