INCLUSION

For Equitas, inclusion is a universal human right.

Inclusion working definition:

The goal is to ensure that all individuals, groups and communities can participate meaningfully in society. **"Underlying this goal is an understanding that individuals and groups are shaped by elements of identity such as race, gender, class, ability, sexuality, etc. and that these factors affect one's experience".** These elements of identity are influenced by complex histories of social, cultural, colonial, economic, political and spatial factors that have constructed a society based on the power and privilege of some at the expense of the dignity and humanity of others.

As a result, inclusion necessitates a recognition of our individual and collective intersecting identities and privileges – and a preparedness to deconstruct and give up those privileges and the systemic powers they uphold.

Inclusion is proactive, not reactive. It is the responsibility of individuals, communities, and governments. **It means removing barriers before anyone has to ask for them to be removed — it means that you do not need to make space for yourself because there is already space for you.** It allows everyone to reach their full potential to live authentically within their intersecting identities to participate meaningfully in society.

Inclusion is grounded in the idea of equitable access to resources and social justice. It cannot be achieved by maintaining the status quo but requires a radical shift and transformation to centering the voices and experiences of the most marginalized persons in our communities. Inclusion requires continuous work, learning and most importantly, unlearning of our inherited societal systems. **This transformative work of (un)learning necessitates discomfort, and it is important that this discomfort is not mistaken for exclusion or oppression, particularly for those who hold a lot of privilege in current systems.**

Inclusion can also be considered as the starting point for belonging. Belonging, in this case, can be considered as a concept to guide inclusion efforts, as it goes beyond inclusion to refer to a feeling that is known by the person experiencing it. It implies that organizations create spaces where people feel they can fully be themselves and it creates the condition for people to exercise their agency.

There is no one size fits all approach to inclusion, what is inclusive to some can create barriers for others. However, inclusion relies on relationship building. In lieu of the transactional nature of societies, inclusion can only exist when you have put in the work and energy of building meaningful relationships with the people around you.