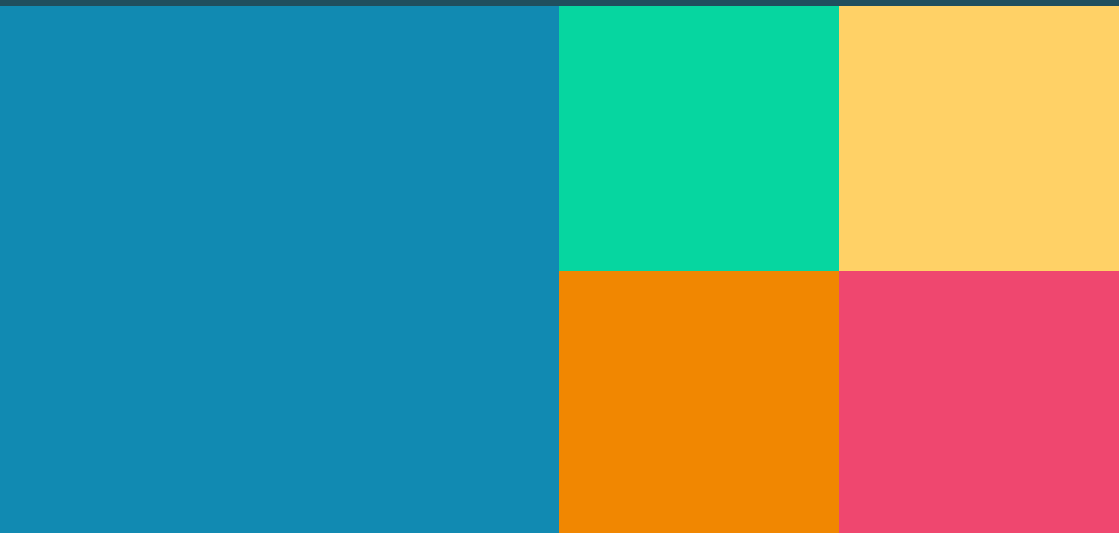


# Guidelines for the use of language as a driver of inclusivity



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

# Guidelines for the use of language as a driver of inclusivity

French edition:

*Lignes directrices pour l'utilisation  
d'un langage vecteur d'inclusivité*

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# Background and purpose

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**T**hese guidelines on the use of language as a driver of inclusivity are aimed at helping Council of Europe staff to communicate in a gender-inclusive way in the two official languages of the Organisation.<sup>1</sup>

Using gender-inclusive language means speaking and writing in a way that does not exclude or discriminate against a particular sex, gender or gender identity, and does not perpetuate sexism or gender stereotypes. This includes better acknowledging those who identify outside of the gender binary.

Given the key role of language in shaping cultural and social attitudes, using gender-inclusive language is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate stereotypes.

The principles of gender equality and non-discrimination based on sex and gender are part of our core values and firmly rooted in the European Convention on Human Rights, and many standards in this area have been adopted by the Committee of Ministers. The language used in the Council of Europe must therefore reflect this.

The Council of Europe was a forerunner in recognising the link between gender equality and language, when it adopted the first recommendation to member states in 1990,<sup>2</sup> and internally in 1994, through [Instruction No. 33 on the use of non-sexist language in the Council of Europe](#). As a result of a growing awareness of the importance of language and communication as carriers of gender stereotypes, and as a result of changing practices in the member states and at international level, the Council of Europe formally dealt with the issue in [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2019\)1 on preventing and combating sexism](#). The recommendation specifically requests that member states “undertake a systematic review of all laws, regulations, policies, etc., for sexist language and reliance on gendered assumptions and stereotypes with a view to replacing them with gender-sensitive terminology. Good practice includes the preparation of practical guides for language and communication that are non-sexist and without gender stereotypes for use in public administration documents.”

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1. For the French version of the guidelines, see: “Lignes directrices pour l’utilisation d’un langage vecteur d’inclusivité”, Council of Europe, 2024.
  2. [Recommendation R \(90\) 4](#) on the elimination of sexism from language.

In this context, it is important for the Organisation to apply its own values and standards internally. At political level, the Committee of Ministers noted, in 2020,<sup>3</sup> that Instruction No. 33 of 1 June 1994 on the use of non-sexist language in the Council of Europe now seems to lag behind the practices that apply in many countries where the Organisation's official languages are spoken. It therefore seems advisable to consider updating the relevant texts and encouraging the use of inclusive terminology and language, and to ensure that any text updating Instruction No. 33 is adequately promoted and taken into account. This indicates the need for the Organisation to advance in this area, by going further than Instruction No. 33.

Moreover, there are differences in the use of inclusive language across the different bodies and sectors of the Organisation. An important purpose of these guidelines is to ensure greater consistency in the application of strategies for inclusive language.

While some strategies can be applied to all texts, including political and communication documents of the Organisation, a differentiated approach may be applied depending on the context, the type of document and the audience. It is also important to note that, although consistency is desirable, a combination of the strategies presented in these guidelines may be applied in one document.

The purpose of these guidelines is not to constrain authors in the Council of Europe to follow a mandatory set of rules, nor to abolish certain words or to alter historically established texts. They aim to encourage writers and speakers to move towards the practical implementation of the principle of equality and to give due consideration to the issue of inclusive language whenever writing or communicating. In so doing, it is important to make sure that communication or texts remain clear, readable and accessible to the audience they target. In this context, it should be borne in mind that the majority of European people do not have English or French as their first language.

Gender-inclusive language must be used at the drafting stage of any text. The Editorial Unit will not be able to adapt the text at the editing stage.

As far as translating and interpreting are concerned, the Council of Europe's departments are fully committed to using inclusive language and embracing the

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3. [Committee of Ministers reply of 15 January 2020](#) to Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 2157 (2019) "Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality"; paragraph 6.

associated principles of non-discrimination and gender equality. Consequently, these guidelines will be conveyed to translators and interpreters and will form part of their preparation.

It must however be underlined that translators are required to render texts faithfully and accurately in their own language. If an author intentionally uses gender-specific language, the translation will respect that intention. This makes it all the more important for authors of texts in the Council of Europe to be fully aware of the principles of inclusive language.

As far as interpreting is concerned, while interpreters are familiar with inclusive language strategies in their working languages, there are certain constraints, such as the high speed at which speeches are delivered, the need to respect the speaker's authorship and intentions, avoiding editorial interference, as well as the specific features of the spoken as opposed to the written language, which can make it occasionally difficult to incorporate inclusive language in simultaneous interpreting, an instantaneous and highly intensive activity.

The guidelines include strategies to ensure the use of gender-inclusive language in both official languages of the Organisation, in compliance with the rules of syntax and grammar. The guidelines should also be applied to the Organisation's other working languages.

These guidelines have been drawn up by a working group including all sectors of the Organisation. They form part of an endeavour to be more inclusive through the language we use. The strategies provided will therefore be revised and updated regularly to reflect changes in the use of language and the adoption of new standards.



# Strategies for inclusive language in English

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**T**he English language has fewer gender-based markers than so-called grammatical gender languages, such as French. The principal gender-based markers in English are pronouns (he/she) and possessive pronouns (his/her) and a few nouns which have masculine and feminine forms (e.g. waiter/waitress). The main challenges in English are the use of the masculine form by default as representing the “inclusive” or “generic” form, the use of expressions that are sexist or reinforce gender stereotypes and the strict adherence to the gender binary.

The strategies that we propose, to help use inclusive language in English, stem either directly or implicitly from Council of Europe standards.

The strategies are presented in no particular order. When deciding what strategies to use, we recommend that you:

- ▶ take into account the type of text/oral communication, the context, the audience and the purpose of the communication;
- ▶ ensure that the text is readable and the text/oral communication is clear, flowing and concise;
- ▶ seek to combine different strategies throughout the text/oral communication.

## ■ **Avoid discriminatory, sexist and stereotyped language**

*This strategy stems directly from Instruction No. 33 (1994) and from the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism (2019).*

This is done by using the following strategies.

- **Avoid discriminatory, sexist expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes**

Some expressions are overtly discriminatory, sexist or convey gender stereotypes by relegating men and women to traditional roles. They exist in all languages. Here are some examples: “it is a man’s work”, “she throws/runs/fights like a girl”, “Thank you to the ladies for making the room more beautiful”, “Men just don’t understand”. Discriminatory or sexist expressions should be removed and those that reinforce gender stereotypes should be replaced by more neutral formulations.

It is also recommended not to use titles which refer to women’s marital status, such as “Mrs” or “Miss”. If the person concerned is known to prefer “Mrs” or “Miss”, this may be used. If the person’s preference is not known and it is considered necessary to use a title, that of “Ms” is recommended, as it is more inclusive and can refer to any woman, regardless of marital status.

More inclusive	To be avoided
Guests are cordially invited to attend with their <b>partners</b> .	Guests are cordially invited to attend with their <b>wives</b> .
Colleagues, friends, participants	Ladies and gentlemen
Fathers <b>care for</b> their children	Fathers <b>babysit</b> their children
Ms or no courtesy title	Miss, Mrs



Tip: to know whether the language used is discriminatory or sexist, reverse the gender: would reversing the designation or the term from masculine to feminine or vice versa change the meaning or emphasis of the sentence? Would it make the sentence sound odd?

**Women** should not seek out leadership positions.

**Men** cannot do two things at once.

**Men** should be educated about their rights.

But also, e.g.: “woman president” or “woman lawyer”: such expressions should, in principle, be avoided as we would never say “man president” or “man lawyer”. We do not do so because men in positions of power are the norm. However, by emphasising the peculiarity of women in such positions we reinforce that norm. Such expressions may, however, be used if the emphasis is needed to raise awareness of entrenched disparity (see section below: “Specifically mention genders”).

### Context and application

All texts and types of communication of the Organisation.

- Use forms of address that respect the gender of known individuals

When referring to or addressing specific individuals, use forms of address and pronouns that are consistent with their gender identity.

If the situation permits, you may ask the persons you are addressing or writing about what pronoun and form of address should be used for them.

There should also be consistency in the way different persons are referred to: if one of them is addressed by their name, last name, courtesy title or profession, others should be as well.

More inclusive	To be avoided
Professor Smith and <b>Professor Jones</b> will attend the luncheon.	Professor Smith and <b>Madeline</b> will attend the luncheon.

If it is not considered necessary to use a courtesy title, it is preferable to avoid them altogether (for lists of participants, for instance).

### Context and application

All texts and types of communication of the Organisation.

If a text is to be translated and refers to a specific person, the author is asked to indicate to translators the gender of that person so they can use appropriate language in their translations.

## Do not make gender visible, where the context allows

This can be done by using the following strategies.

- Use gender-neutral words

Words that are not gender specific but are intended to include people in general should be replaced by gender-neutral terms. Chief among these are forms of expression that include the word “man”, which should be replaced by more inclusive terms depending on the context.

More inclusive	Less inclusive
Humanity/humankind	<b>Mankind</b>
Workforce/staffing	<b>Manpower</b>
Artificial/fabricated	<b>Man-made</b>
Dear participants	<b>Ladies and Gentlemen</b>

When describing professions and functions, a term which is equally appropriate to both genders and which is not gender specific (“lawyer”, “doctor”, “nurse”, “ambassador”) is to be preferred to one which uses an exclusively male or female form or which adds the word “male” or “female” to define the gender.

More inclusive	To be avoided
Police <b>officer</b>	Policeman or policewoman
Chair, President	Chairman or chairwoman
Presidency	Chairmanship
Ombud, ombudsperson	Ombudsman

- Use plural pronouns/adjectives

The plural form may be used to ensure gender inclusiveness. Plural pronouns may be used with a singular antecedent as a shortcut to ensure gender inclusiveness.

More inclusive	Less inclusive
Before submitting your document, send it to the focal point for their review; they will return it to you with comments.	Before submitting your document, send it to the focal point for his review; he will return it to you with comments.
Substitute <b>judges</b> must certify that <b>they</b> have familiarised themselves with the record of the proceedings.	A substitute judge must certify that he has familiarised himself with the record of the proceedings.
When an employee attends a meeting, <b>they</b> should prepare a detailed report.	When an employee attends a meeting, he should prepare a detailed report.

- Use the impersonal pronoun one

The pronoun “one” can be used to avoid the repetition of “he or she” and the use of the masculine form as a generic personal (he) or possessive pronoun (his), while also being inclusive of non-binary gender identities.

More inclusive	Less inclusive
A staff member in Antarctica earns less than <b>one</b> in New York.	A staff member in Antarctica earns less than <b>he</b> would in New York.

- Use the relative pronoun who

More inclusive	Less inclusive
An applicant <b>who</b> is not satisfied with the Court's decision may lodge an appeal.	If an applicant is not satisfied with the Court's decision, <b>he</b> may lodge an appeal.

- Omit the gendered word

More inclusive	Less inclusive
An official's salary is dependent on length of service.	An official's salary is dependent on <b>his</b> length of service.

- Use the passive voice

The use of the passive voice may not always be appropriate since it may change the intended emphasis of the sentence. However, it may offer an opportunity to avoid a gendered construction.

More inclusive	Less inclusive
The relevant documents should be sent to one's supervisor.	The staff member should send the relevant documents to <b>his</b> supervisor.

## Make gender visible, where the context allows

*This strategy stems directly from Instruction No. 33 (1994) and from the Committee of Ministers Recommendation on preventing and combating sexism (2019).*

This can be done by using the following strategies.

- Use feminine and masculine pronouns

The use of the feminine and masculine forms ("he or she", "his or her") is appropriate when the author or speaker wishes explicitly to include women and men. This can be particularly useful in the context of nominations or human resources. When using both pronouns repeatedly in the same text, it is good practice to alternate their order.

- ▶ The Secretary General is responsible to the Committee of Ministers. **He or she** shall provide such secretariat and other assistance as the Committee of Ministers may require.
- ▶ The Head of Unit oversees financial management. She or he shall produce annual financial reports.

### Context and application

All texts depending on the context, especially those relating to human resources, including texts relating to external experts.

Studies, guidelines, leaflets, speeches.

For standard-setting texts, to be used with caution.

- **Specifically mention genders**

In cases where gender stereotypes prevail and in which highlighting gender would make the sentence more inclusive, genders can be specifically mentioned. This strategy should be used only when popular beliefs or preconceptions may obscure the presence or action of either gender.

- ▶ **Women and men staff members** are entitled to carers' leave.
- ▶ All the soldiers, **both men and women**, responded negatively to Question 5 in the survey.
- ▶ Women journalists are confronted with a lot of hate speech.

# Appendix – Examples of texts that have been rewritten using inclusive language

## Exercise 1

Original text	More inclusive text
<p>Precarious employment is man's greatest challenge in the modern age. This development is wreaking havoc on workers from all occupations – from builders and policemen through to teachers and even waitresses.</p> <p>On 1 November 2000, Judith Smith, the spokeswoman for the minister stated:</p> <p>“Ladies and gentlemen, the failures of the last government have left many families struggling. Our social inclusion strategy embodies the virile action needed to overcome the spectre of precarious employment and give everyone a decent chance in life.”</p> <p>This strategy aims to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ every employee has sufficient income and social protection to protect himself from poverty;</li><li>▶ there are adequate measures to support the work–life balance of women;</li><li>▶ everyone has access to paid parental leave;</li><li>▶ boys and girls everywhere have access to a decent education.</li></ul>	<p>Precarious employment is <b>humanity's</b> greatest challenge in the modern age. This development is wreaking havoc on workers from all occupations – from builders and <b>police officers</b> through to teachers and even <b>waiting staff</b>.</p> <p>On 1 November 2000, Judith Smith the <b>spokesperson</b> for the minister stated:</p> <p>“<b>Dear colleagues</b>, the failures of the last government have left many families struggling. Our social inclusion strategy embodies the <b>strong</b> action needed to overcome the spectre of precarious employment and give everyone a decent chance in life.”</p> <p>This strategy aims to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▶ <b>all employees</b> have sufficient income and social protection to protect <b>themselves</b> from poverty;</li><li>▶ there are adequate measures to support the work–life balance of <b>parents</b>;</li><li>▶ <b>both men and women</b> have access to paid parental leave;</li><li>▶ <b>girls and boys</b> everywhere have access to a decent education.</li></ul>

## Exercise 2

Original text	More inclusive text
<p>The committee is looking for a new Chairman to take the helm and provide strategic vision. He will be expected to participate actively in defining the organisational priorities of the coming year, drawing from his extensive business insights and quickly mastering all the necessary details of the committee's functioning.</p> <p>Diversity is important to us as an organisation. Everyone who meets the assessment criteria in the Application Pack is encouraged to apply for this position.</p> <p><b>Application procedure</b></p> <p>Each candidate must submit his application by Monday 12 December.</p>	<p>The committee is looking for a new <b>Chair</b> to take the helm and provide strategic vision. <b>She or he</b> will be expected to participate actively in defining the organisational priorities of the coming year, drawing from <b>his or her</b> extensive business insights and quickly <b>getting to grips with</b> all the necessary details of the committee's functioning.</p> <p>Diversity is important to us as an organisation. Everyone who meets the assessment criteria in the Application Pack is encouraged to apply for this position. <b>Applications from women, who are currently underrepresented, are particularly welcome.</b></p> <p><b>Application procedure</b></p> <p>Each candidate must submit their application by Monday 12 December.</p>

Examples adapted from the [Guide of the European Institute for Gender Equality \(EIGE\) on gender-sensitive communication](#).



[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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