

Gender-sensitive Communication

Overview of the toolkit

Language is a reflection of the attitudes, behaviours and norms within a society. It also shapes people's attitudes as to what is 'normal' and acceptable.

Women play an active role in society, yet – all too often – we use language that ignores or minimises their contribution. Words matter in shaping our worldview. For example, the dominance of masculine words for general references can reflect assumptions about gender roles and influence readers [[source](#)].

This toolkit is an easy-to-use guide on how to use more gender-sensitive language.

This toolkit is one of a series of documents produced by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) to raise awareness of gender-sensitive language. Other useful documents include a glossary to explain the meaning of key terms linked to gender equality and a thesaurus exploring the relationship between different terms, both accessible at [EIGE's Gender Equality Glossary and Thesaurus](#).

Why use gender-sensitive language

In order to tackle gender inequality, we must look at the way we communicate. Using gender-sensitive language can:

- Make it easier to see important differences between the needs of women and men;
- Challenge unconscious assumptions people have about gender roles in society;
- Lay the foundation for greater gender equality throughout society;
- Raise awareness of how language affects our behaviour;

- Make people more comfortable with expressing themselves and behaving in ways that were once not considered 'typical' of their gender.

Purpose of the toolkit and the intended audience

This toolkit provides guidelines for the use of gender-sensitive language in writing. Although it provides tips and examples for the English language, the underlying principles for gender-sensitive writing are universal and remain relevant when using other languages.

Key objectives of the toolkit

- raise awareness about the importance of gender-sensitive language;
- provide practical examples of what gender-biased and gender-discriminatory communication is and how to avoid it;
- provide practical tools and advice for policymakers and all those involved in the drafting of documents for the public so that these texts are gender-sensitive and inclusive for all members of the society;
- provide useful checklists and examples for users.

The toolkit can support a broad audience of international English speakers; however, it focusses on policymakers, policy advisors, legislators, media, writers and editors involved in the process of drafting policy.

While we acknowledge that language should aim to be inclusive and reflect all members of society by acknowledging concepts such as age, ethnicity or nationality, this particular toolkit focusses on the gender dimension of language.