Gender-sensitive Communication

Policy context

This section aims to give you a sense of the **policy context** behind this toolkit, and in particular the actions European organisations have taken to encourage greater use of gender-sensitive language. It is designed to help you understand the **wider picture** into which your work fits.

Gender equality policies in the EU

The European Union (EU) aims to **combat stereotypes** and to promote gender equality through **equal treatment legislation, gender mainstreaming,** and **measures for the advancement of women**.

- In 1996 the European Commission committed itself to promoting gender equality in all its policies and activities.

- In 2006 the first 'Pact for Gender Equality' was published and in 2008 the European Commission published its Communication 'Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment' that includes different activities to fight discrimination.

- The most recent 'Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016 – 2019' identifies five priority areas for action, focusing on equal economic independence and equal pay, equality in decision-making, an end to gender-based violence, and greater gender equality beyond the EU.

A number of policies provide guidelines on gender-sensitive communication and the portrayal of women in the media. For example the 'Audio-visual Media Services Directive (2010/13/EU)' bans incitement to hatred on the grounds of race, sex, religion and nationality in the media and urges EU Member States to ensure that media services within their jurisdiction do not include any of the above. The opinion of the European Commission's Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men on breaking gender stereotypes in the media recommends that students of journalism and media staff receive training on how to use gender-sensitive language.

Existing EU language guidelines

EU Interinstitutional Style Guide

The Publications Office of the EU has released instructions on gender-neutral language in its style guide. The focus is on gender-neutral drafting of texts and it includes useful writing tips. It is currently only available in English language.

Source: EU Interinstitutional Style Guide ⧉

English Style Guide by the Directorate - General for Translation

The English style guide is a handbook for authors and translators in the European Commission and includes a section on gender-neutral language. It includes the same guidelines as the EU Inter-institutional style guide.

Source: Style Guide by the Directorate - General ⧉

Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) Style Guide for Authors

The style guide includes a section on avoiding discriminatory and offensive language and using gender-neutral language.

Source: Style guide for authors ⧉

Steps at the national level

There are **some national policies and initiatives** that aim to combat gender stereotypes in different areas of public work.

Many **institutions (such as universities or ministries)** in EU Member States issue guidelines regarding the use of nondiscriminatory and gender-neutral language.

Examples

The Portuguese public broadcasting corporation delivered training in gender equality and non-sexist language for its workers.

The Austrian Ministry of Science, Research and Economy has issued [guidelines on non-discriminatory language use with regard to gender, age, sexual orientation, and ethnicity](#).

The High Council for Gender Equality in France published [guidelines for how to avoid gender stereotypes in public communication](#).