

# INTRODUCTION

Communication is a powerful tool. It is a vehicle for moulding our attitudes, perceptions and behaviour, and reflects the world in which we aspire to live and work.

Words and pictures therefore matter, because communication can become discriminatory if we fail to consider the assumptions which influence the language and visuals we use.

Language is always changing: words evolve and how we use them should evolve in tandem. Using gender-neutral and bias-free language is a way of moving away from outdated perceptions about men, women, persons with disabilities and other groups of people in society.

The purpose of this document is to provide some guidance on language use and visuals, and give examples, based on the use of English, which are relevant to the GSC working environment.

The document is designed to help speakers of English, especially non-native speakers, avoid using discriminatory language unintentionally. It takes account of the political nature of our institution and the multilingual environment in which we operate, and is intended to help us frame a coherent inclusive communication policy across all departments when drafting and illustrating documents and preparing audiovisual material for internal and external use. There is also a short section on informal language in the workplace.

The guidance, which was produced under the aegis of the Equal Opportunities Office, covers:

- internal notes, including staff notes and annexed decisions of the Secretary-General
- vacancy notices
- publications produced by the GSC
- articles and images on Domus
- everyday language
- social media and Council websites
- material used in training sessions and presentations
- posters displayed in the GSC.

It does **not** cover EU legislation.

The guidance builds upon current GSC practices, interinstitutional standards such as the [Interinstitutional Style Guide](#) and guidelines drawn up by other EU institutions and international organisations, as well as long-standing language practices in English-speaking countries.

This brochure is published in all official languages of the European Union. The content is language-specific, as each language has its own grammar, syntax and style. The general message, however, is the same: promoting inclusion and diversity through the language and visuals we use.

# RECOMMENDATIONS ON ADMINISTRATIVE LANGUAGE

Inclusive, bias-free language avoids stereotypes and references to irrelevant details. It acknowledges positive qualities in people of all genders and sexual orientations, persons with disabilities, people of all ages, from all backgrounds and of any or no religion or belief.

Here you will find guidelines on how to refer to different groups in a non-discriminatory way.

## GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Gender-neutral language treats women and men equally and does not perpetuate stereotypical perceptions of gender roles.

When weighing up gender-neutral alternatives, always be aware of any possible ambiguity or shift in meaning and choose accordingly.



### Avoiding the generic masculine pronoun

Rather than using masculine pronouns 'he/his/him' to refer to people of all genders, it is preferable to have a more gender-inclusive approach. There are many simple ways to avoid the generic use of masculine pronouns when drafting. Depending on the type of document, as well as its register, style and length, you have a choice between the following options:

- Use '**he or she**' (as opposed to the wording 'he/she'):

*An official shall be retired automatically on the last day of the month in which **he or she** reaches the age of 66.*

However, this approach can be cumbersome in a lengthy document and does not include non-binary people. Using this option at least once in the text, in combination with the other options described below, signals that your intention is to be gender-neutral.

he or she  
his or her  
they

- Turn the noun into a plural form followed by **'they'** whenever possible:  
*Employees may apply only if **they** ....*
- Use **'they'** in relation to a singular noun:  
*An applicant may submit **their** complaint...*
- **Omit the pronoun:**  
*An official's leave entitlement depends on ~~his~~ age.*
- Change the possessive pronoun 'his' to 'a' or 'the':  
*The candidate must submit **the** application (instead of the candidate must submit his application).*
- Use the relative pronoun **'who'** instead of 'if he':  
*Priority will be given to an applicant **who** fulfils (instead of priority will be given to an applicant if he fulfils..)*
- **Repeat the noun:**  
*A **manager** may apply for a transfer, provided that permission has been granted by that **manager's** institution.*
- **Use the imperative** if appropriate:  
*Please **complete** the form by Friday.*
- Use the **second person:**  
***You** must complete the form by Friday.*  
**'You'** is useful also for addressing readers in Domus articles:  
*Would **you** like to join in?*  
*If **you** are interested, **please send an email** ...*

### Using gender-neutral terms

- Use **gender-neutral nouns** that make no assumption about whether it is a man or woman who does a particular job or plays a particular role, e.g. 'official', 'chair' and 'spokesperson'.

Decision No 70/2015 appointing the members  
and the chairman of the Audit Committee



**chair**

spokesman  
spokeswoman



**spokesperson**

Be careful not to make assumptions about a gender-neutral noun, e.g. by automatically referring to the director as 'he' and the secretary as 'she'.

- **Job titles** in English are generally gender-neutral. Feminine forms do exist for a few job titles, but these have fallen out of use (e.g. 'manageress' or 'authoress').

As there is generally no need to identify the gender of the jobholder, you can avoid reinforcing stereotypes of traditional roles of men and women. If it is really necessary to specify the gender, it is better to use '**female**' rather than 'lady', which some consider to be patronising (e.g. 'lady doctor'). 'Female' should be used as an adjective only and never as a noun.

lady manager	▶	female manager
females	▶	women

- An inclusive **vacancy notice** includes all genders. To appeal to people of all genders, advertise jobs using gender-neutral generic terms such as 'administrator', 'nurse' or 'director', 'he or she' and 'they':

*He or she will be responsible for managing public procurement procedures...*

*They will be responsible for managing public procurement procedures...*

Inclusive language encourages a diverse pool of applicants, which potentially increases the competence of the workforce.

- **Courtesy titles** used in the GSC are '**Ms**' and '**Mr**' as they do not make reference to the person's marital status unlike the titles 'Miss' and 'Mrs'. Using the title 'Ms' is therefore preferable unless otherwise indicated.
- Instead of using the generic term 'man', it is preferable to use gender-neutral options:

man-made	▶	synthetic; artificial
manpower	▶	staff; staffing
the common man	▶	ordinary people
man's job	▶	demanding task; big job
to man the mailbox	▶	to cover the mailbox
mankind	▶	humankind; humanity

## LANGUAGE USED TO REFER TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



*Visual material on persons with disabilities needs to be used in a sensitive way so as not to reinforce negative stereotypes.*

Words reflect our attitudes and beliefs, which is why using the right words matters. Nobody wants to be identified by their disability. The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) calls for measures to combat stereotypes related to disability<sup>1</sup>, so it is important to be aware of and avoid negative stereotypes or stigmatising language.

Here are some simple pointers for when you write or speak about persons with disabilities:

- Use person-first language: a **person** with a disability.
- Emphasise each person's individuality and capabilities rather than defining them by a condition.
- Avoid phrases like 'suffers from' and passive 'victim' words.
- Avoid terms that define the disability as a limitation.
- Do not use collective nouns such as 'the deaf' as these groups are not homogeneous.
- You should also remember that 80 % of disabilities are invisible.

the handicapped; the disabled

the blind

afflicted by; suffer from; victim of

an autist

a person suffering from a mental disorder

wheelchair-bound; confined to a wheelchair

▶ **persons with disabilities**; disabled persons

▶ persons **who are** blind

▶ **to have**; e.g. a person who has epilepsy

▶ a person **with** autism; an autistic person

▶ a person **with** a mental health condition

▶ **a wheelchair user**

<sup>1</sup> The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) applies to the EU institutions.

Article 8(1)(b): *States Parties undertake to adopt immediate, effective and appropriate measures (...) to combat stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to persons with disabilities, including those based on sex and age, in all areas of life.*