INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION
IN THE GSC
We are fortunate to work in a multicultural and multilingual environment where we all can promote equality and respect for diversity in different ways. Individuals can flourish only in an inclusive environment where diversity is accepted, respected and valued. A healthy, inclusive work environment begins with the use of inclusive language and visuals which recognise and reflect diversity and which avoid unconscious bias.

Through the language and visuals we produce, we can help to make sure that no groups of people feel excluded, unwelcome or discriminated against.

The Action Plan for a more dynamic, flexible and collaborative GSC sets out to foster an environment in which individual staff members are empowered, motivated and equipped to flourish in terms of their personal development and their contribution to achieving the GSC’s objectives. Ultimately, it is you, the staff, who make the GSC.

William Shapcott
Director-General for Administration
We need to renew our commitment to the values enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union: ‘The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.’

President Donald Tusk, October 2017
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 Using gender-neutral and bias-free language is a way of moving away from outdated perceptions about men, women, persons with disabilities and other groups of people in society.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.
• 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
- spokesperson
- spokeswoman
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.

- **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:
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, 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.

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

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1 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.
FURTHER TIPS ON BIAS-FREE LANGUAGE

If you — even unintentionally — use inappropriate expressions or biased language, you exclude people and thereby create barriers to communication. To make the language you use bias-free, avoid expressions that demean or exclude people because of age, gender\(^2\), sexual orientation, race, religious or other beliefs, ethnicity, social class, or physical or mental traits.

Try to include your entire audience in what you write. It is useful to remember that your readers are likely to have different sensitivities. Keep abreast of accepted usage, and if you are not sure whether or not an expression is appropriate, seek advice.

Some examples

- When referring to relationships, the term ‘spouse’ or, better, ‘partner’ is more inclusive and reflects the variety of relationships that exist in society (e.g. unmarried or same-sex couples, registered partnerships).

- Avoid outdated terminology, e.g. use ‘Roma’ instead of ‘gypsies’\(^3\) and ‘gay people’ instead of ‘homosexuals’. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people’ are often referred to as ‘LGBTI people’ or ‘LGBTI persons’. Instead of referring to a person as ‘a transgender’, use expressions such as ‘a transgender person’ and ‘transgender people’\(^4\).

- Avoid general assumptions about different nationalities and cultures as they give an oversimplified image of a person or group (e.g. ‘romantic French people’, ‘hard-working Germans’). If you need to refer to a person’s ethnic background or nationality, be as specific as you can. For example, instead of a general term such as ‘Asian’ which covers a broad range of people, use more specific terms such as ‘Indian’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘Japanese’ or ‘Chinese’, etc. if you can.

- Do not make assumptions about a person’s religious or other beliefs\(^5\). Use terms such as ‘first name’, ‘forename’ or ‘given name’ rather than ‘Christian name’. Also, it is important to remember that ‘Arab’ refers to a member of an Arabic-speaking people and is not synonymous with ‘Muslim’, which designates a follower of the Islamic faith.

- Be careful not to perpetuate age-related stereotypes when you communicate. Convey respect by using expressions such as ‘older colleagues’ and ‘older people’, and avoid language which suggests that being older is an undesirable state.

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\(^2\) See e.g. Council conclusions on gender equality (2016).

\(^3\) See e.g. Council conclusions on accelerating the process of Roma integration (2016).

\(^4\) See e.g. Council conclusions on LGBTI equality (2016); Promoting the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Transgender People (2010).

\(^5\) EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief (2013).
EVERYDAY LANGUAGE AT WORK

Gender-neutral and bias-free language should also prevail in spoken or informal communication. We all share responsibility for creating an inclusive work environment, so it makes sense to think twice before we communicate our thoughts, beliefs and opinions. That way we can avoid unintentionally stereotyping, demeaning, patronising or belittling others.

Here are some expressions to avoid:

- Man up!
- He was having a senior moment!
- Don’t be such a woman!
- One of the lovely ladies (=administrative assistants) in the office will answer your call.

Behaviour or the use of language which could be perceived as being discriminatory (e.g. sexist or racist jokes) are not acceptable.

Similarly, so as not to offend people because of their gender, age, disability, ethnic background, religious or other beliefs, gender identity or sexual orientation, terms and language that give offence are to be avoided.

If you are afraid of saying the wrong thing when referring to or speaking to someone, for example from a different ethnic background, ask how they prefer to refer to themselves.

Humour used to trivialise gender issues often reinforces stereotypes and can be sexist:

*How does a blonde kill a fish? - She drowns it.*

Some ‘compliments’ risk being received as put-downs.

- You think just like a man.
- You are very feminine for a career woman.
- She’s done a great job for a person her age.
- Despite his age, he has a grip on these technological advances.

Keep in mind that language is always evolving: words may change their meaning over time, and what is acceptable today can become unacceptable or less appropriate. To avoid potentially offensive terms, make sure that you use widely accepted terminology.

The editing service of the English Language Unit and the Equal Opportunities Office are there to help with any doubts you may have.
VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Inclusive language needs to be reinforced with inclusive visuals, as it is often the visual message that resonates with an audience. By portraying different aspects of diversity (gender, age, ethnic origin, disability, religious or other beliefs, sexual orientation, nationality) we ensure that everyone feels involved.

When you communicate, think about diversity and inclusiveness:

• How does the picture make you feel? What are your initial impressions?
• Do you like it? Why? Why not?
• What do you see in the picture? Can you identify with people in it?
• Is there diversity? Is there inclusiveness?
• What is the message? Does it correspond to the message you want to get across?

The following recommendations, which apply to posters, leaflets, images on Domus and any audiovisual material used in information or training sessions, should help make communication more effective and allow the target audience to identify with the visual message.

1. Choose an image that shows the diversity of our working environment at the GSC

Do not choose an image showing only one gender if the group of people referred to is mixed. People interviewed or featuring in films should also represent the population of the GSC in all its variety.

To promote diversity in publications such as leaflets, use pictures and images that reflect all aspects of our working environment: consider the balance of women and men, show persons with disabilities in everyday situations, include people of diverse ages and different racial and ethnic groups, where appropriate.

This photo reflects the existing diversity of our officials, and therefore serves as a good example of inclusive communication.

The visual and textual content should correspond. Also make sure that the visual you choose corresponds to the message you are trying to send, e.g. an image showing only men would not be effective to illustrate an article where both women and men have been interviewed.

Be sure that you show the GSC working environment to be accepting and welcoming of all types of people.
2. If possible, choose an image that reflects the diversity of European populations
It is recommended that diversity considerations be factored in systematically whenever possible.

![Positive example of an image which reflects ethnic diversity](image)

3. Show people of different genders in roles and functions of equal value

![Positive example of a photo that captures female politicians being active and listened to, instead of being passive and objectified](image)

4. Choose an image that shows our institution to be open and free of preconceptions
Do not choose an image or slogan that gives the impression we have age, ethnic, aesthetic or any other type of bias.

![Not all visitors are welcome!](image)

FOR OUR COMMON SECURITY
ALWAYS WEAR YOUR BADGE VISIBLY

What is your initial reaction when seeing this poster?
For further information
Equal Opportunities Office
Mailbox: egalite-des-chances@consilium.europa.eu
English Language Unit / UNITE EN Editing
Mailbox: unite.en-editing@consilium.europa.eu