Guide: gender-inclusive communication

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) recognizes the importance of language in fighting gender bias and promotes the use of gender-inclusive language and communication in all contexts and at all times. As part of the United Nations system, the Office has the obligation to produce communications materials that are inclusive, diverse and balanced. This will ensure that the United Nations is seen as a leader in the global conversation on gender equality and addresses the needs of women and men equally, while also taking into account contextual factors[1] and different expressions of people's genders.

➢ **THE GOAL**: Balanced and inclusive portrayal of women and men, taking into account contextual factors and different expressions of people´s genders, in communications materials in terms of quantity and quality.

➢ **THE DEFINITION**: Gender-inclusive language and communication are linguistic and visual assets that portray women and men as equal, taking into account contextual factors and different expressions of people´s genders, and do not convey gender stereotypes. Using such language and communication means avoiding word or imagery choices that may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm.

➢ **THE WHY**: Being sensitive to gender when communicating and using gender-inclusive language are more than a matter of political correctness. Language and images powerfully reflect and influence attitudes, behaviours and perceptions – they shape people's reality. Gender-inclusive communication can help reduce gender stereotyping, promote social change and contribute to achieving gender equality and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Putting the guidelines into practice

I. LANGUAGE

In many languages, the generic masculine still tends to be the norm when writing or speaking (that is, the male is the default in plurals, even if it's just one man in a group of women). This often renders women, especially those in non-stereotypical roles (such as doctors, judges or police officers), invisible. Nevertheless, all languages have some means and flexibility to fulfil all the requirements to be gender-inclusive. Using gender-inclusive language requires, above all, willingness to change habits, and can be achieved by following a few best practices, as set out below.

1. Avoid gender-biased language

(a) Use gender-neutral words

Less inclusive	More inclusive
Mankind	Humankind; humanity; human race
Man-made	Artificial; human-caused
Congressman	Congressperson, legislator, representative
Policeman	Police officer
Chairman	Chair, chairperson, coordinator

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[1] For example, age, nationality and social status.

(b) Avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce stereotypes, both negative and benign

The fairer sex.
A woman like a thousand men.
She throws/runs/fights like a girl.
In a manly way.
Oh, that's women's work.
Thank you to the ladies for making the room more beautiful.
Men just don't understand.

(c) Be consistent in the way that women and men are referred to: if one of them is addressed by their name, last name, courtesy title or profession, the other one should be as well

Less inclusive	More inclusive
Mr. Samir Karim and his wife	Mrs. Najwa Karim and Mr. Samir Karim
Professor Karim (title and surname for a man) and Hamida (first name for a woman) will attend the luncheon.	Professor Karim and Professor Abdullah will attend the luncheon (title and surname for both).

2. Make gender visible when it's relevant for communication

(a) Use the strategy of pairing (using feminine and masculine forms to make both genders visible)

Gender-neutral language can sometimes "hide" women as it reinforces stereotypes. For instance, when "soldiers" are referred to neutrally, the fact that there are also female soldiers is omitted. Therefore, in such cases, "female" and "male" soldiers should be explicitly referred to.

Less inclusive	More inclusive
All of the soldiers responded negatively to question 5 in the survey on gender inclusivity	All female and male soldiers responded negatively to question 5 in the survey on gender inclusivity
There are equal opportunities for the employees in the ministries.	Female and male employees in the ministries have equal opportunities.
If it came down to one person's vote, he would decide the future of the country.	If it came down to one person's vote, he or she would decide the future of the country.
businessmen	businessmen and businesswomen

3. Do not make gender visible when it's not relevant for communication.

(a) Use a plural or the pronoun "one" to avoid gendered pronouns.

Less inclusive	More inclusive
A staff member in Antarctica earns less than he would in New York.	A staff member in Antarctica earns less than one in New York
A substitute judge must certify that he has familiarized himself with the record of the proceedings.	Substitute judges must certify that they have familiarized themselves with the record of the proceedings.
Each participant must present his ID badge.	All participants must present their ID badge.

(b) Omit the gendered word and use impersonal constructions.

Less inclusive	More inclusive
Discussion is fruitful when everyone contributes his ideas.	Discussion is fruitful when everyone contributes ideas.
A child must grow up in a family environment for the full and harmonious development of his personality.	Growing up in a family environment is a basic requirement for the full and harmonious development of the personality of a child.
Requests the Emergency Relief Coordinator to continue his/her efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance.	Requests the Emergency Relief Coordinator to continue efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance.

Gender-inclusive language checklist for English-language communications

- Is "man" or "men" used, or compound words containing one of them, such as "chairman", to refer to people who may be female? If so, consider substituting with, for example, "chairperson".
- When someone's gender is mentioned, is it necessary to do so? If you identify someone as a "female architect", for example, is someone else referenced as a "male architect"?
- Are occupational stereotypes used? Watch for the use of female pronouns, for example for nurses, and male ones, for example for scientists, as this would promote stereotypes. Instead, try to counter stereotypes by, for example, highlighting male nurses or female scientists.
- Use the strategies described above to avoid the use of gendered pronouns where they are not necessary.

II. IMAGERY

Communication is crucial as it brings awareness and enables change at the grass-roots level, while promoting transparency and accountability at the global level. Pictures, graphics, videos and audio materials are powerful communications tools that influence perceptions, attitudes and eventually social change. These tools play a critical role in how the world is interpreted, including how people think and behave. The partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries of UNODC are both women and men, while also taking into account contextual factors and different expressions of people´s genders; thus, both should be seen, heard and treated equally. When choosing imagery for publications, social media posts, etc., make sure to take into account the questions set out below.

1. Are both men and women visible and prominent?

Include women and men in an equal manner as experts, speakers, etc.

Panel Parity Pledge: event coverage and communications, such as on websites and social media channels, will always include gender-diverse visual media; all-male events will not be promoted.

2. Are the images inclusive and diverse (in terms of different abilities, age, religion, etc.)?

3. Are women empowered or do the images reinforce stereotypical gender roles?

Stereotypical images:

Non-stereotypical images:

Portray both women and men in non-stereotypical ways, such as women in science, women wearing uniform, men taking care of children and men doing housework.

III. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Gender parity resources

- United Nations System-Wide Strategy on Gender Parity HERE

- Gender-Responsive Assemblies: An Agenda for Concrete Action HERE

- Supplementary Guidance on the Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations System HERE

Gender-inclusive language resources

- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) gender-inclusive language guidelines HERE

- Gender checklist for content creators HERE

- Guidelines for gender-inclusive language ARABIC CHINESE ENGLISH FRENCH RUSSIAN SPANISH