



UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

TERMINOLOGY GUIDE ON HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLIANT COMMUNICATIONS

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH AND ABOUT
GROUPS VULNERABLE TO DISCRIMINATION

December, 2023





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Introduction

The United Nations Human Rights Office in Moldova (OHCHR in Moldova)¹ aims to promote human rights, equality and diversity. In pursuit of this goal, OHCHR emphasizes the importance of using language that fosters acceptance, while avoiding negative stereotypes, as one of the means to ensure an inclusive society.

The Republic of Moldova is a diverse and multi-ethnic country. While over three-quarters of the population identifies as Moldovans, the country is also home to other ethnic groups based on self-identification, including Romanians (7 per cent), Ukrainians (6.6 per cent), Gagauz (4.6 per cent), Russians (4.1 per cent), Bulgarians (1.9 per cent), Roma (0.3 per cent) and various other ethnic, religious or linguistic groups (0.5 per cent), including Belarusians, Poles, Armenians, Jews, and Muslims. There are at least six languages spoken in the Republic of Moldova, including Romanian, Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian and Romani.

Moreover, the Republic of Moldova is home to 168,000 persons with disabilities, accounting for 6.8 % of the total population. Additionally, it is home to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and inter-sex persons (LGBTQI+), people living with HIV, older persons, refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, and other marginalized communities. However, the social distance between the general population and the minority groups and groups vulnerable to discrimination and human rights violations is large. Being systematically excluded from the social, economic, cultural, civil, and political life in the country, people belonging to ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities, people with intellectual and psycho-social disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, people living with HIV, former detainees, and other vulnerable groups are underrepresented in public and private sectors. Stereotypes, prejudices, and reluctance to accept these individuals as family members, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and, in some cases, even as visitors to the country, contribute to this situation.

Words have the power to unite, but they can also divide society. In light of this, OHCHR believes that using language that promotes inclusivity is a valuable tool in fostering social tolerance. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the incidents and types of speeches that contribute to the perpetuation of hatred and incitement to discrimination. Furthermore, it is important to utilise language that is rights based and inclusive, in communicating both with and about groups which are vulnerable to discrimination and human rights violations.

A language and communication approach that is human rights-compliant, promotes inclusivity, and avoids prejudice and stereotypes, can significantly contribute to the dismantling of stereotypes and prejudices related to gender, persons with disabilities, ethnic, linguistic, or religious minorities, and other vulnerable of society. The utilization of inclusive language is instrumental in fostering an environment wherein individuals, irrespective of their affiliation with a particular group, do not experience exclusion or discrimination.

The Terminology Guide on Human Rights-Compliant Communications has been developed by OHCHR Moldova for the benefit of staff and volunteers working within public and private institutions. This includes professionals in media, public relations specialists, and communicators. The guide was developed using an inclusive and participatory approach, which involved extensive consultations with specialized Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), including Genderdoc-M Information Center, Help-Age International in Moldova, Center for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Alliance of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities and relevant UN Agencies.

We hope that this publication will inspire and guide specialists in various sectors, including public and private institutions, authorities, National Human Rights Institutions, Civil Society Organizations, mass-media, academia and businesses, to apply terminology that is compliant with human rights standards in their communication.



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CHAPTER 1

Human Rights Compliant Communication about National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers



1.1 General notions regarding national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities

There is no state that is homogeneous from a national, ethnic, religious, or linguistic perspective. In every country, there exists at least one minority group that possesses distinct characteristics, such as language, ethnicity, or religion, which differ from the majority population. Persons belonging to minority groups often face multiple forms of discrimination,² including intersectional discrimination.³ These discriminatory practices contribute to their marginalization, social exclusion, and exposure to violence. One significant consequence of discrimination and exclusion faced by minority groups is the occurrence of statelessness. Minority groups comprise over 75% of the world's documented stateless populations.⁴ Studies and reports indicate that minority communities are disproportionately affected by hate speech on social media and targeted by hate crimes.⁵

In the context of the 2030 Agenda, the achievement of universal, equitable and inclusive development is contingent upon upholding human rights and embracing the core principle of Leaving No One Behind. Consequently, particular emphasis must be placed on addressing the needs of vulnerable groups, including minorities, indigenous peoples, stateless people, refugees, internally displaced people, migrants, and all those who encounter various forms of discrimination.⁶

Who are minorities?

Although a universally agreed-upon definition of "minority" does not exist, there are commonly accepted characteristics associated with this term.⁷ In the UN human rights system, the term "minority" refers to groups that share a common national or ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity.⁸

Two elements are considered as most important to define a minority based on objective and subjective criteria:

- ▶ shared ethnic, cultural, national, religious and/or linguistic characteristics of the group that are different to other groups;
- ▶ and identification of members (self-identification) that see themselves as belonging to a group that is distinct from other groups⁹ and want to preserve those differences.¹⁰

2 See more: OHCHR and Equal Rights Trust. *Protecting Minority Rights: A Practical Guide to Developing Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Legislation*. New York and Geneva, 2023.

3 See more on intersectionality perspective of racial discrimination and protection of minorities at: UN Network on Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. *Guidance Note on Intersectionality, Racial Discrimination & Protection of Minorities, 2022*: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/minorities/30th-anniversary/2022-09-22/GuidanceNoteonIntersectionality.pdf>.

4 UNHCR *Statelessness Report, 2017*. <https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/stateless-minorities/>.

5 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Human Rights Council, Forty-Sixth session, 22 February–19 March 2021, A/HRC/46/57.

6 *Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development*. The United Nations System Shared Framework for Action. United Nations, New York, 2017.

7 OHCHR. *About minorities and human rights*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/minorities/about-minorities-and-human-rights>.

8 Article 2, Para 1 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 1992.

9 For example, the concept of ethnic minority is broad that brings also together individuals on the basis of ancestry, descent, origin or lineage, can include individuals recognized because of shared physical characteristics such as Afrodescendants, as well as nomadic and caste-based groups. See: Special Rapporteur on minority issues. *Study on the significance and scope of the four categories of national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities in the United Nations*, A/75/211.

10 *Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation*, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2010, p. 2-6.

The existence of a minority is a question of fact, independent of whether minority status is recognized by the state or the general population. It encompasses the aforementioned elements. Moreover, minority status can be multifaceted, involving the combination of various affiliations.¹¹ Additionally, identity is subject to change and must be recognised by the state.¹² It is not necessary for minorities to be citizens of the state or permanent residents.¹³

The concept of minority has undergone continuous development. **In this context, it is essential to include users of sign languages as members of linguistic minorities.**¹⁴ These individuals possess unique identities and cultures that are closely associated with their respective languages. They require recognition and reasonable accommodation to ensure equal access to education, health care, and other public services without discrimination.

Regarding religious affiliation, it is recommended to use the expression “**religious or belief minorities**”.¹⁵ This term encompasses a wide range of theistic, non-theistic, and atheistic beliefs, as well as unrecognized and non-traditional religions or beliefs, such as animists, atheists, agnostics, humanists, “new religions”, and more.¹⁶

Minorities and indigenous peoples

Minority and indigenous identities exist on a continuum and, in certain cases, overlap. Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those that, while retaining historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that thrived on their territories, consider themselves as distinct from the prevailing sectors of society currently prevailing those territories, or parts thereof. Presently, they constitute non-dominant sectors of society and are committed to safeguarding, developing, and passing down to future generations their ancestral territories, and ethnic identity.

There are numerous communities where the distinction between minority and indigenous status is ambiguous. These communities frequently identify themselves as ‘indigenous minorities’ or adopt various identity labels depending on the specific context. Additionally, indigenous peoples possess specific rights in international law¹⁷ that are separate from minority rights, including collective land rights and other entitlements.

11 Economic Commission for Europe, Conference of European Statisticians: Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing (New York and Geneva, 2006), paras. 425–426.

12 See: The European Court of Human Rights judgement related to ethnic identity: Ciubotaru v. Moldova, Application No. 27138/04, Judgment, 27 April 2010.

13 Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 23 (1994), paras. 5.1–5.2. See also: A/74/160, para. 59; Working Group on Minorities to the UN Declaration on the rights of minorities, E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2005/2, Para. 9. See also: The Perspective Of Regional Law and Standards on Citizenship of Minorities: Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 1995; Recommendations by the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities about the Latvian Draft Citizenship Law, CSCE Communication No. 8, Vienna, 31 January 1994; EU Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights, Thematic Comment No 3 on “The Protection of Minorities in the EU”, 25 April 2005, p. 10.

14 OHCHR. UN human rights expert calls for recognition of rights of users of sign languages as minorities, 22 September 2020. www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26278&LangID=E.

15 Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, A/75/211, paras 51-59.

16 Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 22 (48) (art. 18)*, Addendum. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, para 2.

17 See: Convention No. 169 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Stereotypes and prejudice

Negative stereotypes and prejudice against minorities are widely prevalent, particularly on media and social media platforms that amplify intolerance, xenophobia, racism and chauvinism,¹⁸ thereby demonizing and dehumanizing entire religious, ethnic, or linguistic communities. Stereotypes shape our perception of the world even before we experience it. They represent a generalized view or preconception regarding certain characteristics or roles attributed to members of different groups. Prejudices play a pivotal role in majority-minority relations, which, if fuelled by hate speech and the propagation of hatred, result in exclusion, discrimination, and the perpetuation of inequalities, hostility, and hate crimes against minorities. These actions often pose threats to societal peace and can even lead to acts of genocide.¹⁹

Forms of stereotypical portrayal of minorities are constructed by:

- ▶ Emphasizing ethnicity or religious affiliation.
- ▶ Constantly referencing derogatory or threatening characteristics of a particular group.
- ▶ Using words and expressions with accusatory, intimidating, pejorative, or derogatory connotations.
- ▶ Engaging in vehement attacks on individuals from minority groups, typically highlighting perceived differences between “them” and “us”.
- ▶ Propagating false ethnic myths.
- ▶ Presenting one-sided and biased portrayals of conflicts along ethnic, racial, or religious lines.
- ▶ Directly or indirectly inciting violence.

Mechanisms that contribute to the creation of stereotypes include:

- ▶ The application of labels.
- ▶ Selective use of data.
- ▶ Making unwarranted generalizations and employing negative stereotypes, leading to biased judgments.
- ▶ Utilizing pejorative language.
- ▶ Mixing factual information with subjective viewpoints.
- ▶ Failure to fact-check information.
- ▶ Employing misleading titles for media articles, videos, and audio recordings that do not accurately reflect the content.

¹⁸ Unreasonable belief in the superiority or dominance of one's own group or people, who are seen as strong and virtuous, while others are considered weak, unworthy, or inferior.

¹⁹ United Nations, Durban Declaration and Plan of Action, Adopted at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Violence, 8 September 2001, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3db573314.html>.

For example, reporting on Roma in media relates most often either to Roma dances and festivals, or to Roma engaged in criminal acts. Rarely are Roma mentioned in the context of successful members of society. (Negative) stereotyping creates prejudice and can result in discrimination.



Words matter: recommended terminology

- ▶ **Avoid using terms that denigrate, exclude or superficially characterize individuals** or groups based on race, ethnicity, and/or religion.
- ▶ **Refrain from making unnecessary references to a person’s or group’s ethnic background.** For example, instead of stating “some young Ukrainians were injured in an accident,” focus on the event itself without emphasizing their ethnicity.
- ▶ **Do not use the term “gypsy”,** as it carries negative connotations due to deep-seated societal prejudices. Instead, **use the term “Roma” or “Roma community”, and “Romani”** when discussing the language and culture of Roma.
- ▶ The Republic of Moldova is a secular state with no state religion. Therefore, terms like **“official religion” or “official Church” should be avoided.** Instead, refer to the specific church as, for example, **the “Orthodox Church of Moldova” or the “Metropolis of Chişinău and All Moldova”, as appropriate.**
- ▶ **Do not use terms such as “cult”, “sect”, or “sectarian movement”** when referring to religious minorities, including neo-Christian ones. These phrases tend to highlight alleged schismatic movements within different beliefs. Instead, **use the term “church” for Christian organizations, and “faith” or “belief” for other groups.** Additionally, **use phrases like “religious organization”, or “religious or belief minorities”.**
- ▶ **When discussing Islam or Muslims,** refrain from using terms like “Islamists”, “Islamism”, or “Islamification.” These terms are derivatives of Islam, and can imply that individuals from the Muslim religion seek to conquer the majority population, which may promote negative perceptions. Instead, **use words like “Islam”, “Muslim religion,” or “Muslim” when referring to individuals, and “Muslim faith”** rather than “Islamic faith”.
- ▶ **Use inclusive terminology such as “African women/men”, “individuals/ persons/people of African descent”, “Afro-descendants”.** Individuals of African descent are those who are recognized as such by the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action,²⁰ and those who self-identify as people of African descent.²¹ Avoid using the term “coloured,” as it defines race from a white perspective.

20 The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Durban_text_en.pdf.

21 You may also find one of the definitions developed by P.L. Kasanda https://www2.ohchr.org/english/events/iypad2011/documents/Working_Group_on_African_Descent/2003_WGPAD_Session/Definition_of_People_of_African_Descent-PL_Kasanda.pdf.

- ▶ Use the term “Asian women/men,” “individuals/persons of Asian descent,” or “people belonging to Asian community/ies,” to refer to individuals or groups of Asian heritage.

1.2. General notions regarding migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers

A growing number of movements involving refugees and migrants have emerged due to various factors, including the consequences of political, economic, social, developmental, humanitarian, and human rights issues. This phenomenon has become a global issue. Persons in vulnerable situations who are part of these large movements include “women at risk, children, particularly those who are unaccompanied or separated from their families, members of ethnic or religious minorities, survivors of violence, older persons, persons with disabilities, individuals facing discrimination on any basis, indigenous peoples, victims of human trafficking, and victims of exploitation and abuse in the context of migrant smuggling.” These individuals often face limited access to their human rights.²²

Simultaneously, it has been widely acknowledged that acts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance against refugees and migrants have been on the rise in many countries. This includes hate crimes, hate speech and racial violence.²³

The terms “refugee” and “migrant” are frequently interchanged in public discourse, leading to confusion. Nevertheless, from a legal standpoint, these terms bear substantial differences.

In the specific context of **refugees**, individuals are compelled to seek sanctuary in another country due to factors such as armed conflict, persecution, generalized violence, or other adverse conditions in their country of nationality. Denial of asylum to these individuals can have life-threatening consequences.²⁴

The status of refugee is both defined and safeguarded by international law. **When individuals are facing circumstances where their life and freedom are at risk, they are in need of international protection.** The primary responsibility for providing a secure environment, preventing their forced return to the dangers they have fled, and ensuring access to fair and efficient asylum procedures rests with the respective states. It is imperative that measures are implemented to ensure respect, protection and fulfilment for their human rights, enabling them to live lives of dignity and safety while also facilitating the exploration of viable long-term solutions.

²² Ibid., para 23.

²³ New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants: draft resolution referred to the High-Level Plenary Meeting on Addressing Large Movements of Refugees and Migrants by the General Assembly at its 70th session, A/71/L.1*, para 7.

²⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html>.

The comprehensive definition of a refugee can be found in the 1951 Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees²⁵ and regional refugee instruments, as well as the UNHCR's Statute.²⁶

An **asylum seeker** is an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an "asylum seeker" refers to someone whose claim has not yet reached a final decision by the country in which it has been submitted. It is important to note that not all asylum seekers will ultimately be granted refugee status; however, every individual recognized as a refugee was first an asylum seeker.²⁷

Internally displaced persons can be defined as persons or groups of persons who have been forced or compelled to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, specifically due to the impact of armed conflicts, widespread violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-induced disasters. Notably, the definition stipulates that these persons have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.²⁸

Migrant conversely, the term "**migrant**" lacks a specific definition under international law. However, there exists a shared understanding that an international migrant is someone who moves away from their usual place of residence, whether within a country or across an international border, either temporarily or permanently, driven by a range of motivations. To facilitate data collection on migration, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) employs the following definition: an "international migrant" is "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence".²⁹ The term encompasses various legal categories of people, including "migrant workers," "irregular migrants," and "smuggled migrants".³⁰

Migrants in vulnerable situations are thus persons who are unable effectively to enjoy their human rights, are at increased risk of violations and abuse and who, accordingly, are entitled to call on a duty bearer's heightened duty of care.³¹

Factors that give rise to vulnerability may cause a migrant to leave their country of origin in the first place, may occur during transit or at destination, regardless of whether the original movement was freely chosen, or may be related to a migrant's identity or circumstances. Vulnerability in this context should therefore be understood as both situational and personal, as the result of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, inequality and structural and societal dynamics that lead to diminished and unequal levels of power and enjoyment of rights.³²

25 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-relating-status-refugees>.

26 <https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html>.

27 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Master Glossary of Terms, 2006. <https://www.refworld.org/es/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain/opendocpdf.pdf?reldoc=y&docid=5d82b8fa4>.

28 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, annexed to United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr Francis M. Deng, Submitted Pursuant to Commission Resolution 1997/39, Addendum (11 February 1998) UN Doc E/CN.4/1998/53/Add.2, 6.

29 UN DESA, Recommendations on Statistics of International Migration, Revision 1, 1998, para. 32.

30 <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>.

31 High Commissioner for Human Rights, Principles and Practical Guidance on the Protection of the Human Rights of Migrants in Vulnerable Situations, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council (3 January 2018) UN Doc A/HRC/37/34, para. 12.

32 Ibid, para 13.



Words matter: recommended terminology

- ▶ It is crucial to use respectful and inclusive language that upholds the human rights of migrants. To avoid dehumanization and the perpetuation of negative stereotypes it is important to **refrain from using terms such as “illegal migrant,”** which carries a criminal connotation. Instead **use the terms “migrant in an irregular situation”³³ or “irregular migrant.”**
- ▶ The term **“undocumented migrant”** can be used when migrants lack documentation required for them to be “authorized to enter, to stay or to engage in a remunerated activity in the State of employment pursuant to the law of that State and to international agreements to which that State is a party.”³⁴ It underscores the absence of official documentation without attaching a criminal label to the person.
- ▶ When discussing about persons who are not recognized as nationals (citizens) by any state under its domestic laws, the term **“stateless person”** should be used.³⁵ This status can be due to reasons such as a lack of birth registration, the loss of citizenship due to territory transfer, arbitrary deprivation of nationality, renunciation of nationality, or long-term residence abroad.

33 The United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3449 (Measures to Ensure the Human Rights and Dignity of All Migrant Workers, 9 December 1975).

34 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families ((adopted 18 December 1990, entered into force 1 July 2003) 2220 UNTS 3, Art. 5(a,b)).

35 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons ((adopted 28 September 1954, entered into force 6 June 1960) 360 UNTS 117), Art. 1.

Table 1. Appropriate and pejorative language

Recommended language	Language to avoid
<p>Roma Roma woman/man/children Romani language Roma community Roma community mediator/ Community mediator</p>	<p>Gypsy Gypsy woman/man/children Gypsy language Gypsy village Mediator for gypsies</p>
<p>Individual of African descent People of African descent Afro-descendants African women/men</p>	<p>Black, colored</p>
<p>Faith/belief/confession/religion/ religious or belief minorities (e.g., religious, non-religious, non- theistic and other beliefs, such as unrecognized and non-traditional religions or beliefs, including animists, atheists, agnostics, humanists, new religions, etc.)</p>	<p>Sect, sectarian movement, cult</p>
<p>Christian religion/belief/confession “Orthodox Church from Moldova” or “Metropolis of Chişinău and All Moldova”</p>	<p>Official religion, official Church</p>
<p>Islam, Muslim religion, Muslim</p>	<p>Islamic faith, Islamists, Islamism, Islamification</p>
<p>Users of sign language</p>	
<p>Migrant in an irregular situation/ irregular migrant/ undocumented migrant</p>	<p>Illegal migrant</p>

CHAPTER 2

Gender Equality: Gender Inclusive Communication



Gender and gender equality

Gender equality refers to having equal rights, responsibilities, treatment/conditions, and opportunities for all people, regardless of their gender, including women, men, girls, boys, and non-binary persons. It is important to note that equality does not mean that women, men, and people with diverse gender identities will become the same but rather that their rights, responsibilities, treatment/conditions, and opportunities do not depend on their sex or gender. Gender equality is both a human rights issue and a prerequisite for sustainable, people-centered, and human right-oriented development.

The **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, which Moldova ratified on 1 July 1994, explicitly states that, “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices, and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women”.

Gender pertains to the socially constructed identities, attributes, behaviours, and roles of persons in relation to their sex, as well as the social and cultural significance attached to biological differences based on sex. These identities, attributes, behaviours, and roles are socially constructed and learned through socialization processes. These depend on the context, are time-specific, and can be subject to change. Gender determines what is expected, allowed, and valued in women, men or persons with diverse gender identities, in a given context. **In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women, men, and persons of diverse gender identities in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. These disparities often result in hierarchical relationships between women and men and unequal distribution of power and rights.** Men are often favoured while women are disadvantaged, and the consequences of these inequalities affect all members of society. The social positioning of women and men is influenced by various factors, including political, economic, cultural, social, religious, ideological and environmental conditions.

Gender stereotyping

A gender stereotype is a generalized view or preconception about the attributes or characteristics that are, or ought to be possessed, or the roles that are, or should be performed, by men, women, boys, girls and persons with diverse gender identities.³⁶

³⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/women/gender-stereotyping>

Gender stereotyping poses a formidable, yet largely unaddressed, obstacle to the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of women’s human rights. At its essence, a gender stereotype constitutes a belief that can lead individuals to make assumptions about women, men, or people with diverse gender identities. Conversely, gender stereotyping refers to the application of such beliefs to an individual.

Gender stereotyping is considered wrongful when it results in a violation or violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, when it limits a person’s capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional aspirations and make choices regarding their lives and future. Gender stereotypes can manifest in both positive and negative forms. For instance, the notion that “women are nurturing” or “women are weak” represents two ends of the spectrum. Both hostile/negative or seemingly benign stereotypes can have negative effects. For instance, the stereotype that women are more nurturing often leads to child rearing responsibilities falling exclusively often fall exclusively on them. Recognizing the significance of this issue, the **Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has emphasised that States Parties are obligated to modify or transform “harmful gender stereotypes” and “eliminate wrongful gender stereotyping”.**

Here are some examples of how gender stereotyping impacts women:

- ▶ Stereotypes about women’s role within the family often lead to a division of labor that results in lower levels of education, limited employment opportunities (especially for women with small children), and lower salaries. This contributes to women’s impoverishment.
- ▶ Traditional attitudes that view women as subordinate to men perpetuate widespread practices of violence and coercion against women.
- ▶ Investigations of violence cases and the sanctioning of perpetrators are influenced by patriarchal norms and stereotypes, which can negatively affect the objectivity and impartiality of legal/judicial procedures.
- ▶ In some countries, the justice system fails to hold perpetrators of sexual violence accountable due to stereotypical views about women’s appropriate sexual behavior.
- ▶ Offenses such as so-called “corrective rape” specifically target lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women, with the perpetrator aiming to change or punish the person based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This is rooted in the stereotype that women should be heterosexual and only attracted to men.³⁷ For example, in 2021, a lesbian woman in Moldova experienced such violence at her workplace.³⁸

37 Council Of The European Union, Guidelines To Promote And Protect The Enjoyment Of All Human Rights By Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender And Intersex (LGBTI) Persons, 2013. Point 26, Page 12, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11492-2013-INIT/en/pdf>

38 Report on the situation of LGBT people’s rights in the Republic of Moldova 2021 https://gdm.md/files/untitled%20folder/Report-GENDERDOC-M-2021_English.pdf

Gender-inclusive communication

Given the significant influence language has on shaping cultural and social attitudes, adopting gender-inclusive language is a potent tool for promoting gender equality and countering gender bias. The United Nations recognizes the vital role of languages in addressing gender biases and actively encourages the use of gender-inclusive language across all contexts and at all times. **Gender-inclusive language refers to language usage that treats women, men, and gender-diverse people equally, avoiding any privileging of one gender over others and refraining from perpetuating prejudices against any gender.** To enhance gender inclusivity in language, several strategies can be employed:

2.1. Use of non-discriminatory language

- ▶ **Use non-discriminatory titles:** when addressing women, it is recommended to use the title “Ms.” rather than “Miss” or “Mrs.”, to avoid implying differentiation based on marital status. Focusing on personal life aspects such as marital status is unnecessary and can perpetuate biases.
- ▶ **Consistent and inclusive addressing:** when addressing an audience or individuals of unknown gender and diverse gender identities, use titles and modes of addressing consistently or equally for all people. Use inclusive language by using the pronoun “they” for non-binary individuals or “He/She/They” when unsure of the gender. It is important to ask people how they would like to be referred to (for example, in a document/report), respecting their self-identified pronouns, names, and genders. Use “Ms.” in parallel with “Sir”, he/she or they, boy/girl/child (rather than boy), man/woman/person (rather than man). For example, use “Dear Sir(s)/Ms.(es)”; “Each participant, is responsible for his/her/their own travel arrangements” (rather than “his”); “Dear guests” instead of “ladies and gentlemen”³⁹ to include everyone.
- ▶ **Use plural forms:** Instead of using single forms, opt for plural forms for both nouns and reference words. For instance, use “All participants must present **their** ID badges” instead of “Each participant must present **his** ID badge.” Similarly, it is recommended to use “Representatives must listen to **their** supporters” instead of “A representative must listen to **his** supporters.” This helps avoid assuming gender and ensures inclusivity.
- ▶ **Consistency in references:** maintain consistency when referring to people of all genders. If one person is addressed using their name, last name, courtesy title, or profession, extend the same treatment to others, regardless of gender.⁴⁰ For example, use “Professor Smith and Professor Jones will attend the luncheon” instead of “Professor Smith [surname and title for a man] and Madeline [first name for a woman] will attend the luncheon.”

³⁹ UN Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English. <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>

⁴⁰ UN Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English. <https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>

2.2. Avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes

- ▶ **Avoid unnecessary reference to the relationship and/or family/parental/civil status of a person or group.** For instance, use “Jack Smith and Jane Smith” instead of “Jack Smith and his wife Jane Smith”, and “Ms. Ionachii was appointed as the Minister of Education” instead of “Ms. Ionachii, mother of five children, was appointed as the Minister of Education.” Use “women and children” instead of “mothers with children.” Avoid assuming the family situation of a person or group. For example, use “employees with their spouses/partners” instead of “employees with their wives/husbands.”
- ▶ **Avoid using terms or phrases that undermine a person’s role or reinforce gender stereotypes.** For example, use “assistant” instead of “Miss assistant” and “the secretary of the director,” instead of “the secretary of Mister Director”. It is strongly recommended to steer clear of phrases like “men – the strong sex,” “woman – the weak sex/the beautiful sex”, and “women – flowers of life,” that objectify or romanticize women based on their gender. When referring to occupations, avoid using masculine generic occupational titles such as “fireman,” “mailman,” “chairman,” “ombudsman,” or “policeman.” **Instead use “firefighter,” “mail carrier,” “chairperson,” “ombudsperson,” “police officer,”** etc. **As a general rule, use gender neutral terms for professions including for professions that are still typically male- or female-dominated.** Avoid unnecessary references to gender, such as adding “female”, “women” or “male” to generic neutral terms. For example, use “doctor” instead of “female doctor” and “cleaner” instead of “cleaning lady”.
- ▶ **Avoid sexist assumptions and discriminatory examples,** such as “hysterical women,” “naive blondes,” “he/she throws/runs/fights like a girl,” “in a manly way,” “oh, that’s women’s work”, “these are male colours”, “thank you to the ladies for making the room more beautiful”, and “men just don’t understand.”
- ▶ **Avoid using expressions that could have a negative connotation.** For example, “investing” is a verb usually used in finance for money/trading. Therefore, it is recommended to avoid “investing in woman” and use “investing in women’s potential”. Avoid using “girls” to refer to grown women, as it infantilizes and disrespects them.

3.3. Empower and do not victimize

When discussing about women and persons of diverse gender identities, it is important to avoid defining them by their victimhood. The phrase “women and other vulnerable groups” should be avoided, as it implies that women are inherently vulnerable. However, when referring to women from specific vulnerable groups, such as those experiencing domestic violence, it is recommended to use the phrase “survivors of domestic violence” rather than “victims of domestic violence”, unless a woman who experience domestic violence self-identifies as a “victim of domestic violence”.

Checklist for gender-related revisions

When reviewing a text, writers should consider the following questions:

1. Are there any gender-specific expressions in the text that could be replaced with gender-neutral alternatives? For example, does the text use the words “man” or “men” (as single words or in compound words) to refer to people who may not identify as men?
2. Does the text use masculine forms when referring to a general or unspecified group of people?
3. Does the text reinforce occupational or other gender stereotypes?
4. Does the text include unnecessary references to sex or gender?
5. Does the text provide equal information and representation when referring to people of different genders?
6. If there is uncertainty about whether the language used is discriminatory, a helpful rule is to reverse the gender. Would changing the designation or term from masculine to feminine, or vice versa, alter the meaning or emphasis of the sentence? Would it make the sentence sound unusual? If so, it indicates discriminatory language that should be replaced with inclusive alternatives.

Table 2. Appropriate and pejorative language

Recommended language	Language to avoid
Ms.	Miss, Mrs.
Jack Smith and Jane Smith	Jack Smith and his wife
Partners, spouses	Husbands/wives
Distinguished/honoured persons/ guests/colleagues/delegates	Gentleman/ladies
Man, woman or person with diverse gender identity Boy/girl or child	Man Boy
His/her/their	His/her
Artificial; human-caused	Man-made
Chairperson Ombudsperson Police officer Business people/ business community	Chairman Ombudsman Policeman Businessmen
Doctor Politician Nurse Cleaner Assistant	Woman doctor Female politician Male nurse Cleaning lady Miss assistant
All participants must present their ID badge	Each participant must present his ID badge

CHAPTER 3

Human Rights Compliant Communication about LGBTQI+ people



What does LGBTQI+ mean?

LGBTQI+ people stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people. The use of the ‘+’ at the end of the acronym represents individuals who identify with other terms to describe their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and/or sex characteristics.

This acronym is commonly used to refer to people who are attracted to people of the same gender, those with gender identities that differ from the sex assigned to them at birth, people with non-binary identities, and people whose sex characteristics do not fit typical definitions of female or male.⁴¹ When discussing LGBTQI+ people, it is crucial not to treat them as a homogenous group, as different subpopulations within this umbrella acronym may encounter different issues and human rights violations.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and related identities have existed in various forms throughout history. In all cultures, sex, sexuality, and gender hold immense significance for both individuals and societies. Throughout history, cultures have included individuals who engage in same-sex relations and those with diverse gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics to varying degrees of acceptance. Many contemporary cultures continue to embrace such diversity.



Terminology used when talking with and about LGBTQI+ people

It is very important to understand and know how to use current language and terminology when talking with and about LGBTQI+ people. Language that describes diversity in relation to gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics is changing particularly quickly. In order to be up-to-date, it is important to notice and pay attention to how this language is evolving. It is also critical to know what may be perceived as offensive, and to be open to correction if offence is caused. Depending on the context, it may be more inclusive to refer to “people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics” as a more inclusive formulation that also accounts for the fact that there is a wide variety of terms used by people in different regions and languages to refer to their identities.

Below is a glossary of terms related to sexuality and gender. Remember that this list will continue to evolve so it is always important to keep up with any changes and the most up-to-date usage.

⁴¹ OHCHR and the human rights of LGBTI people: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity>

Sex and sexuality

- ▶ **“Gay”** is a term used to describe a man who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men. Occasionally, the term “gay” may also be used to refer to a woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women, although the term lesbian is usually preferred for women.
- ▶ A **“lesbian”** is a woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to other women.
- ▶ The term **“Homosexual”** is used to describe a sexual orientation based on sexual and emotional attraction to people of the same gender/sex, but it is becoming increasingly outdated. Alternatively, the terms “men who have sex with men” (MSM) and “women who have sex with women” (WSW) are sometimes used to encompass people attracted to the same gender/sex who do not identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.
- ▶ **“Sexual behaviour”** refers to the actions and behaviours that people engage in sexually, and with whom they engage in such activities. It is important to note that an individual’s sexual behaviour may not always align with their sexual orientation.
- ▶ **“Sexual orientation”** refers to an individual’s physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction toward other people. **Gay men and lesbian women** are attracted to individuals of the same gender/sex as themselves. **Heterosexual people** are attracted to individuals of a different gender/sex from themselves. **Bisexual** (sometimes shortened to **“bi”**) **people** may experience attraction to individuals of the same or different gender/sex. **Asexual people** may feel romantic and/or emotional attraction, but do not experience sexual attraction towards others.

It is important to note that sexual orientation is distinct from gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.

- ▶ **“Sex characteristics”** refer to each person’s physical characteristics relating to sex, including genitalia and other reproductive anatomy, chromosomes and hormones, and secondary physical characteristics emerging from puberty.
- ▶ **“Intersex”** refers to people who are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit definitions of male or female bodies. While some intersex people, these are apparent at birth, for others they emerge later in life, often during puberty. It is important to note that intersex persons can have any sexual orientation and gender identity. Intersex is not synonymous with gender identity or sexual orientation. For instance, an intersex person, with their unique sex characteristics, may identify as a man in terms of their gender identity, and as heterosexual in their sexual orientation.

It is crucial to acknowledge that sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics are separate facets of a person. Each aspect is distinct and independent.⁴² Respecting individual's choices regarding terms, names, and pronouns to refer to themselves is of utmost importance.

Gender and gender-related terminology

- ▶ **Gender:** Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a particular society deems appropriate for individuals in relation to masculinity and femininity. It is shaped by social factors and defines the expectations, permissions and values associated with being masculine or feminine within a given context. Gender is not fixed and can change over time, and it exhibits variations within and between different cultures.
- ▶ **Gender identity:** Gender identity encompasses an individual's deeply felt and experienced sense of their own gender. It is an integral part of a person's overall identity. A person's gender identity may or may not align with the sex assigned to them at birth.
- ▶ **Gender expression:** Gender expression refers to the diverse ways in which individuals express their gender through a range of actions and appearances. This includes aspects such as clothing choices, speech patterns, behavioural patterns, self-selected names, personal references, and mannerisms. It is crucial to note that a person's gender expression is not inherently tied to their biological sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation.
- ▶ **Transphobia** refers to the prejudice, hatred, and/or aversion towards transgender and other gender non-conforming people.
- ▶ **Non-binary** is a gender identity that extends beyond binary concepts of being exclusively a man or a woman. It encompasses individuals whose gender expression is not confined to the notions of masculinity or femininity. Additionally, it's also important to note that some non-binary people may also identify as transgender.
- ▶ **“Trans” and “Transgender”** are umbrella terms used to encompass a describe people with a diverse range of identities. This includes transsexual, cross-dressers, non-binary people, people who identify as third gender, and others whose appearance and characteristics are perceived as gender atypical and whose sense of their own gender is different to the sex that they were assigned at birth. It is important to note that while some transgender individuals pursue medical interventions such as surgery or hormone therapy to align their bodies with their gender identity, others may not.

⁴² United Nations, Living free and equal, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/LivingFree-AndEqual.pdf>

- ▶ **Cisgender**, sometimes shortened to “cis,” refers to people whose gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth.
- ▶ **Queer** is a term used within some communities to explain people’s relationships to gender and sexuality. It encompasses a broader scope than sexual orientation and gender identity, often including various gender non-conforming identities, behaviours, and expressions. Self-identification with this term aims to reclaim its previously derogatory usage.

LGBTQI+ inclusive language: affirming and empowering communication

Governments, judges, schools, religious leaders, police officials, medical practitioners, the media, artists, families, local community leaders, and others in positions of power and authority play a crucial role in shaping cultural and societal norms surrounding sexuality, gender, and bodily diversity. This includes aspects such as sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.

Negative judgments made by those in power about certain sexualities, genders, or bodies contribute to the are linked to certain acts and identities being criminalised, stigmatised and/or treated as illnesses, and to certain bodies being seen as disordered or socially unacceptable, resulting in human rights risks and violations. Due to such stigma and stereotypes, people with diverse gender identities, gender expressions, sexual orientations and sex characteristics are particularly vulnerable to violence, discrimination and stigma.⁴³ The enduring prejudice in society against LGBTQI+ people is a root cause of these human rights violations. It leads to the marginalisation and invisibility of LGBTQI+ people, who are often treated as inferior. They frequently experience direct or indirect discrimination through the use of insensitive language by others.⁴⁴

Inclusive language, in the current context, represents a means of acknowledging and respecting the diversity of bodies, genders, and relationships. It applies to direct communication, descriptions of individuals who are not physically present, as well as policies, services, and virtual communications. The use of inclusive language is a vital step in creating a welcoming and trusting environment and in addressing the prejudice and discrimination faced by LGBTQI+ people.

It is crucial to reject words and expressions that discriminate against people based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, as such language is unacceptable.

⁴³ Plan International, LGBTQI+ Inclusion, available at: <https://plan-international.org/srhr/lgbtqi-inclusion/>

⁴⁴ Edge Hill University, LGBTQI + Inclusive Language Guide, Available At: <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/Wp-Content/Uploads/Documents/Lgbtqi-Inclusive-Language-Guide.Pdf>

Tips for LGBTQI+ inclusive communication:

- ▶ **Increase visibility:** LGBTQI+ people are often made to feel invisible in conversations, public discourse, and cultural and media representation. Make an effort to include LGBTQI+ voices and references to LGBTQI+ people in reports, media stories, statements, etc. This helps increase visibility and representation. Avoid language that assumes everyone is heterosexual, as it denies the reality of the diversity of sexual orientations and relationships between persons of the same gender. When being inclusive and referring to people with diverse gender identities, do not mix and confuse gender identities and sexual orientation. **Use the phrase “women, men and people of diverse gender identities”** instead of the phrase “men, women and LGBTI people” as the latter is inaccurate, since many LGBTI people identify as men or women, and “LGBTI people” is **not** a gender identity.⁴⁵
- ▶ **Avoid stereotyping LGBTQI+ people.** Placing limitations or expectations on individuals **because they belong to a certain group is damaging, hurtful and discriminatory. Challenge derogatory comments and jokes:** speak up when you hear jokes or derogatory comments about LGBTQI+ people. By naming these comments as discriminatory and expressing your disagreement, you contribute to creating an inclusive environment that embraces gender, bodily, and sexual diversity.
- ▶ **Avoid making generalizations,** even if they are seemingly “positive” stereotypes, as that could impose unfair expectations and limitations on individuals. For instance, refrain from assuming that all gay men are inherently creative or that all lesbian women are physically tough. These broad generalizations can create unfair expectations and place unnecessary constraints on people.
- ▶ **Avoid expressions that disparage or trivialize** the diverse sexual experiences, desires, identities, and bodies of LGBTQI+ people.
- ▶ **Only use the acronym “LGBTI” when it is accurate** to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. To ensure accuracy, a good practice is to spell out the acronym and verify if the sentence remains applicable to each population within it.
- ▶ **Refrain from making assumptions** about someone’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics. It is important to remember that unless individuals explicitly disclose this information to you, it should not be assumed or speculated about.
- ▶ **Respect individual’s self-identification:** It is important to treat a person’s self-identification with respect, without fear, ridicule, or questioning. Self-identification is not a negative attribute and should not be up for discussion. There is no right or wrong answer. Allow individuals to inform you about their preferred pronouns and title, rather than presenting a closed list.⁴⁶ If you are an author of a text that will be translated, and it refers to a specific person, please inform translators of that person’s gender so they can use appropriate language in their translations.

45 OHCHR, Integrating A Gender Perspective Into Human Rights Investigations. Guidance And Practice, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/IntegratingGenderPerspective_EN.pdf

46 LSE, Five Tips For LGBT+ Inclusive Communications At Work, available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/equityDiversityInclusion/2016/05/five-tips-for-lgbt-inclusive-communications-at-work/>

Table 3. Appropriate and pejorative language⁴⁷

Recommended language	Language To avoid
<p>Gay, lesbian</p>	<p>Homosexual, homosexuals</p>
<p>Explanation: The term “homosexual” has historical context in which it was used negatively to diagnose, stigmatize or demonize gay and lesbian people. Because of the clinical history of the word “homosexual”, it has been used by those seeking to restrict the human rights of gay and lesbian people to suggest that gay and lesbian people are mentally ill or unhealthy.</p>	
<p>Transgender people, a transgender person</p>	<p>Transgenders, a transgender, transgendered, deviant/disordered/dysfunctional/diseased/perverted/destructive</p>
<p>Explanation: It is important to use the term “transgender” as an adjective, not as a noun. Avoid phrases like, “Max is a transgender,” or “The pride parade included many transgenders.” Instead, use constructions like, “Max is a transgender man” or “The pride parade included many transgender people.” Additionally, the adjective transgender should never be modified with an extraneous “-ed” suffix. The addition of “-ed” implies that transgender is a verb and therefore an action, rather than an adjective that describes someone’s gender identity. Using “transgender” as an adjective signifies respect and affirms individuals’ identities.</p>	
<p>Transition, gender affirming healthcare</p>	<p>Sex change, pre-operative, post-operative, sex-change operation</p>
<p>Explanation: It is important to avoid using the term “sex change,” as it implies that individuals change their sex/gender, rather than affirming their own gender through health-care options. Referring to transgender people as pre- or post-operative inaccurately suggests that surgery is a requirement for their transition and affirmation of their gender. It is crucial to avoid overemphasizing surgery when discussing transgender people.</p>	
<p>Openly lesbian, openly gay, openly bisexual, or simply “out”</p>	<p>Admitted homosexual or avowed homosexual, admitted he was gay or lesbian</p>
<p>Explanation: The term “admitted” carries connotations of prior deception or suggests that being gay is something shameful.</p>	

47 BRAVO Glossary, available at: https://oaesv.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/bravo_glossary.pdf

Recommended language	Language To avoid
<p>Accurate descriptions of the issues: For example, “equality and non-discrimination for all,” “protection from violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics,” “inclusion in existing non-discrimination and hate crimes laws,” and “ending the ban on transgender service members.”</p>	<p>Gay agenda or homosexual agenda</p>
<p>Explanation: LGBTQI+ people are driven by the same aspirations, concerns, and desires as any other person. They strive for the ability to earn a living, feel safe in their communities, and be treated with equality. The concept of a supposed “homosexual agenda” is a rhetorical construct fabricated by groups or individuals aiming to instil fear by portraying the pursuit of equal rights and opportunities for LGBTQI+ people as something sinister.</p>	
<p>Being gay, being lesbian, being bisexual, marriage, marriage equality</p>	<p>Gay lifestyle, gay marriage, homosexual lifestyle</p>
<p>Explanation: There is no singular lesbian, gay, or bisexual lifestyle. Persons who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual lead diverse lives in various ways. The term “gay lifestyle” is often used to demean lesbians and gay men, implying that their sexual orientation is a choice that can and should be “cured.” It is important to avoid labelling any activity, emotion, or relationship as “gay,” “lesbian,” or “bisexual” unless you would apply the same label of “straight” to such activities, emotions, or relationships when engaged in by persons of a different sexual orientation.</p>	
<p>Intersex⁴⁸</p>	<p>Hermaphrodite⁴⁹</p>
<p>Explanation: The term ‘hermaphrodite’ is widely considered to be outdated, inaccurate, and offensive.</p>	
<p>Sexual orientation or orientation</p>	<p>Sexual preference</p>
<p>Explanation: The term “sexual preference” is commonly used to insinuate that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a voluntary decision that can and should be “cured.” “Sexual orientation” is the accurate description of an individual’s enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to others.</p>	

48 OHCHR, Human rights violations against intersex people, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Discrimination/LGBT/BackgroundNoteHumanRightsViolationsagainstIntersexPeople.pdf>

49 Nipissing University, All-Gender Washroom Initiative, Helpful Terms and Concepts, available at: <https://www.nipissingu.ca/sites/default/files/2018-06/Helpful-Terms-and-Concepts.pdf>

Recommended language	Language To avoid
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Equal rights, fairness and equality, equal protection

Special rights, gay rights

Explanation: People seeking to restrict the human rights of LGBTQI+ people frequently attempt to depict equal legal protection for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people as granting special rights. This portrayal is intended to incite opposition to measures such as legal recognition for relationships and implementing inclusive non-discrimination laws.

Persons advocating for restrictions on the human rights of LGBTQI+ people, people inciting hate/violence against LGBTQI+ people in the name of religion

Religious extremists/extremism, anti-gay Christians⁵⁰

Explanation: When addressing the intersection of sexual orientation and religious beliefs, it is crucial to avoid language that unfairly characterizes an entire religious tradition or denomination as being anti-gay or extremist.

Heterosexual sexual orientation

Normal orientation

Explanation: When discussing relationships, it is important to use language that avoids implying that heterosexual relationships are the default or normative, while treating other forms of relationships as deviations from this norm.

Being lesbian

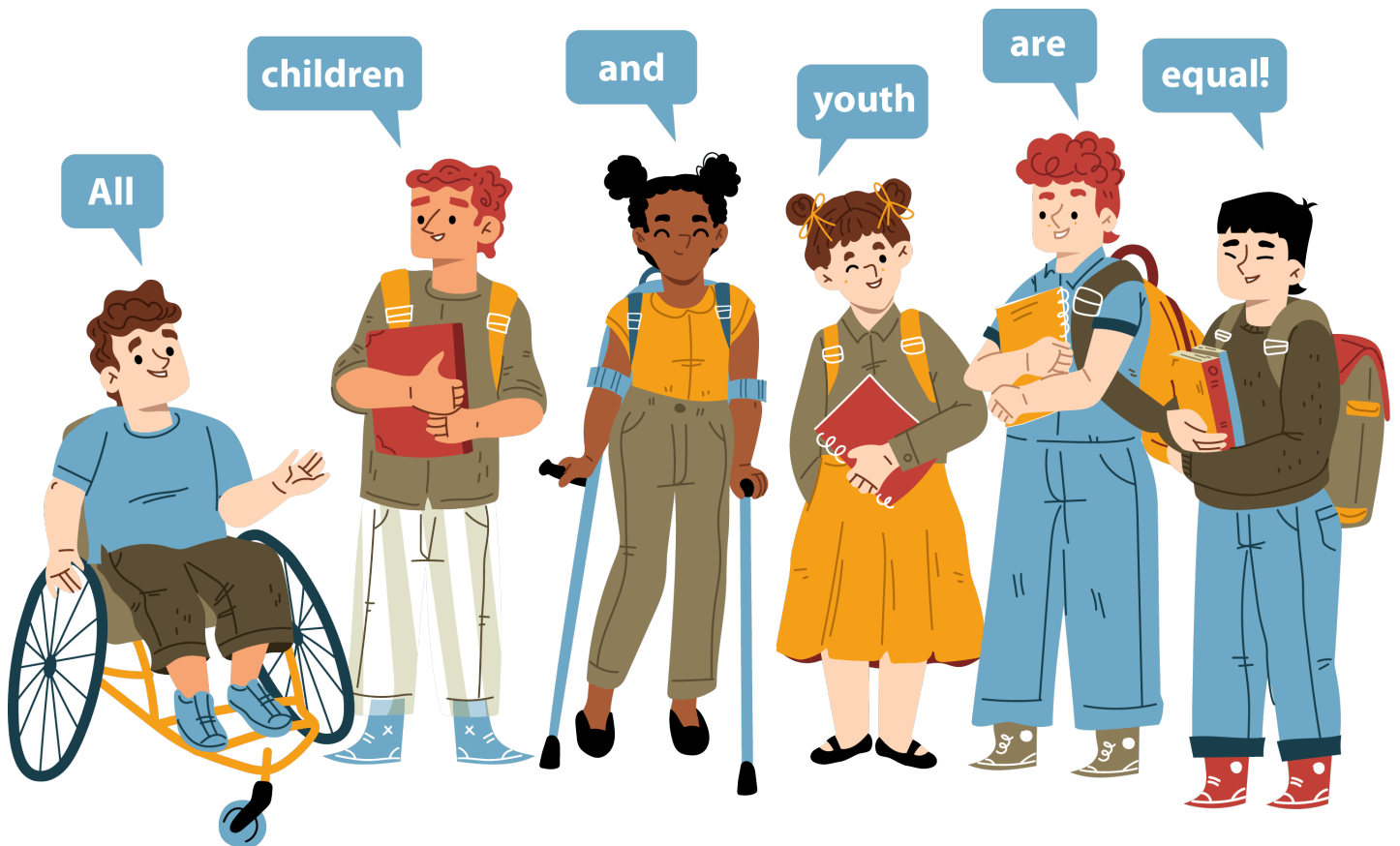
Lesbianism

Explanation: In certain instances, referring to someone’s sexual orientation may inadvertently narrow their identity to purely sexual aspects. It is preferable to discuss an individual’s experience of being gay, lesbian, or bisexual instead.

⁵⁰ <https://freedomforallamericans.org/messaging-terms-avoid/>

CHAPTER 4

Inclusive communication with and about children and young people



Reporting on children and young people has its special challenges. In some instances, the act of reporting on children places them or other children at risk of retribution or stigmatization.

Principles to guide the reporting on and representation of children and young people

UNICEF has developed guiding principles⁵¹ to ensure the responsible reporting and representation of children and young people. These principles are designed to assist journalists and communication professionals in covering children's issues in a manner that is age-appropriate and sensitive. By following these principles, reporting can serve the public interest without compromising the rights of children.

The recommended guiding principles are as follows:

- ▶ **Respect for dignity and rights:** The dignity and rights of every child should be respected in all circumstances.
- ▶ **Privacy and confidentiality:** Special attention should be given to protecting each child's right to privacy and confidentiality when interviewing and reporting on them. Children have the right to have their opinions heard, participate in decisions affecting them, and be protected from harm and retribution.
- ▶ **Best interests of the child:** The best interests of each child should be prioritized over any other consideration.
- ▶ **Child participation:** When determining the best interests of a child, their right to have their views taken into account must be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
- ▶ **Risk and harm prevention:** Stories and images that might put the child, their siblings, or peers at risk should not be published, even if identities are changed, obscured, or not used.
- ▶ **Diversity and inclusion:** Embrace diversity and inclusion in representations of children, featuring children from all backgrounds, including children with disabilities. Maintain a balance of gender and cultural identifications.
- ▶ **Avoiding stereotypes:** The use of stereotypes in imagery, whether negative or positive, should be avoided.
- ▶ **Respect for identity:** All children should have their identity, including their name and nationality, respected in visual representations.
- ▶ **Dignified and respectful representation:** Children must be represented in a dignified and respectful manner.

⁵¹ UNICEF, Ethical reporting guidelines. Key principles for responsible reporting on children and young people, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/reporting-guidelines>

Guidelines for interviewing children:

- ▶ **Do no harm to any child:** Avoid asking questions, expressing attitudes, or making comments that are judgmental, insensitive to cultural values, place a child in danger, expose a child to humiliation, or reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events.
- ▶ **Non-discrimination:** Do not discriminate when selecting children to interview based on their sex, race, age, religion, status, educational background, or physical abilities.
- ▶ **No staging:** Avoid asking children to fabricate stories or perform actions that are not part of their own experiences or history. Respect the authenticity of their accounts.
- ▶ **Inform the child or guardian:** Ensure that the child and their guardian are aware that they are speaking with a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and how the information will be used.
- ▶ **Obtain permission:** Obtain permission from both the child and their guardian for all interviews, videotaping, and whenever possible, for documentary photographs. Written consent is preferable when appropriate. Ensure that the child and their guardian provide consent voluntarily and without coercion. When the child is a part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally, convey this clearly to the child and their guardian. It is advisable to conduct the consent-seeking process in the child's language and involve a trusted adult during the decision-making process.
- ▶ **Pay attention to the interview environment:** Consider the location and setting where the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviewers and photographers present. Create a comfortable environment that allows children to share their stories without external pressures, including from the interviewer. When conducting interviews for film, video, or radio, consider the implications of the visual or audio background on the child's portrayal. Ensure that showing their home, community, or general whereabouts does not endanger or negatively impact the child.

Guidelines for reporting on children:

- ▶ **Avoid stigmatization:** Refrain from using categorizations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals which may lead to additional physical or psychological harm, lifelong abuse, discrimination, or rejection by their local communities.
- ▶ **Provide accurate context:** Always ensure that the child's story or image is presented within an accurate and appropriate context. Avoid sensationalizing or distorting the facts to generate more interest.

- ▶ **Include comprehensive information:** When children are identified in multimedia content, provide complete captions and accompanying information that provides relevant details of the child’s background, experiences, and any necessary context to understand the story fully.
- ▶ **Protect the identity of children in vulnerable situation:**
 - **Victims of sexual abuse or exploitation:** Change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation.
 - **Perpetrators of abuse:** Similarly, change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is a perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse.
 - **Persons living with HIV:** Unless the child, a parent, or a guardian gives fully informed consent, protect the identity of any child living with HIV including by obscuring the visual identity.
 - **Charged or convicted of a crime:** Change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who has been charged or convicted of a crime.
 - **Child soldier:** Change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child soldier or former child soldier who is shown holding a weapon or weapons.
- ▶ **In situations where there is a risk or potential of harm or retribution,** it is important to protect the privacy and safety of any child – **by changing their name and obscuring their visual identity and other identifiers** – falling under the following categories:
 - A former child soldier who is not holding a weapon but may be at risk.
 - An asylum seeker, a refugee, or an internally displaced person.

These measures can protect their anonymity and security and are essential for safeguarding their well-being:

- ▶ **Revealing a child’s identity:** In certain exceptional cases, there may be instances when using a child’s identity, including their name and recognizable image, is deemed to be in their best interest. However, even when their identity is utilized, it is crucial to ensure their adequate protection against harm and provision of necessary support to address potential stigmatization or reprisals. Here are some examples of these special cases:
 - When a child initiates contact with the reporter, expressing their desire to exercise their right to freedom of expression and to have their opinion heard.
 - When a child actively participates in a sustained program of activism or social mobilization and wishes to be identified as such.
 - When a child is engaged in a psychosocial program where claiming their identity and name is an integral part of their healthy development.

- ▶ **Corroboration and verification:** To ensure accuracy and reliability, it is crucial to confirm and cross-check the accuracy of a child's statements by seeking corroboration with other children or, an adult guardian. It is preferable to involve both children and adults in the verification process.
- ▶ **Lack of clarity on potential risks to the child:** In situations where there is doubt about a child's safety and potential risks, it is recommended to report on the general situation for children, instead of highlighting an individual child, regardless of how newsworthy the story may be. This approach ensures a responsible and cautious approach to reporting, while prioritizing the protection and privacy of individual children.

CHAPTER 5

Inclusive Communication with and about Persons with Disabilities



Who are persons with disabilities?

Persons with disabilities include people who have long-term impairments that can be sensory, physical, psychosocial, intellectual, or others. These impairments, when combined with a range of barriers, can restrict their full and effective participation in society, preventing them from enjoying opportunities on an equal basis with others.⁵²

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)**, which the Republic of Moldova ratified in July 2010,⁵³ recognizes that disability is a dynamic and evolving concept. It emphasizes that disability arises from the interaction between persons with impairments and external barriers that impede their societal participation. This perspective shifts the focus towards the social and environmental barriers that hinder individuals' participation in society, rather than solely on their impairments. This approach is commonly referred to as the "human rights model of disability."⁵⁴

What are the most common stereotypes and prejudices⁵⁵ related to persons with disabilities?

- ▶ **"Persons with disabilities are dangerous"**: This wrong stereotype is often associated with persons who have intellectual disabilities or psychosocial disabilities.
- ▶ **"Persons with disabilities need protection"**: Historically, persons with disabilities have been seen as vulnerable, leading to an overprotective response. This attitude can result in infantilization, where individuals are treated as children, and their decision-making abilities and autonomy are disregarded. Legal consequences vary, although most commonly, persons with disabilities are denied the right to exercise legal capacity, that is, legal agency to make their own decisions, such as accepting or rejecting treatment and executing contract/
- ▶ **"Persons with disabilities are incapable"**: This stereotype manifests in various areas such as education and employment. It is rooted in the charity model of disability, which views persons with disabilities as objects of pity and charity. Consequently, it often leads to low expectations and exclusion from mainstream opportunities, including the open labour market.

⁵² Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (English), available at: <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>

⁵³ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Romanian), available at: https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=117839&lang=ro

⁵⁴ UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), Policy Guidelines for Sustainable Development Goals, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Disability/SDG-CRPD-Resource/Foundations/policy-guideline-foundations-final.pdf>

⁵⁵ OHCHR Report, Awareness-raising under Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/346/48/PDF/G1934648.pdf?OpenElement>

- ▶ **“The lives of persons with disabilities have less value”:** This prejudice assumes that individuals with disabilities have a lower quality of life solely because of their impairments. It implies that their lives are not worth living,⁵⁶ disregarding the diverse experiences and contributions of persons with disabilities. This prejudice assumes that people with disabilities cannot contribute equally to society and the state, as people without disabilities do. Society does not see them as full-fledged users of human rights and freedoms.

Stereotypes contribute to attitudinal barriers and create conditions that encourage discrimination against persons with disabilities, perpetuating their social exclusion. This leads to several negative impacts, including:

- ▶ **Limited access to sexual and reproductive health information:** Stereotypes often result in a lack of accessible formats for sexual and reproductive health information, preventing youth with disabilities from accessing vital resources. This exclusion denies them their right to comprehensive sexual education and reproductive health services.
- ▶ **Hiring bias and employment discrimination:** Prejudiced attitudes and stereotypes lead to employers having biases against persons with disabilities. This bias can result in discriminatory practices during the hiring process, leading to limited employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and hindering their economic independence and participation in the workforce.
- ▶ **Higher rates of violence:** Persons with disabilities are at a heightened risk of experiencing violence due to social prejudice. This can manifest in various forms, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Harmful practices such as forced sterilization and institutionalization, which disregard the autonomy and human rights of persons with disabilities, may persist,⁵⁷ further exacerbating their vulnerability to mistreatment.

Therefore, it is important to avoid portraying persons with disabilities as:

- ▶ Vulnerable or a burden on others
- ▶ Living a life of less value or quality
- ▶ Less than human
- ▶ Dangerous
- ▶ Extraordinary or super-heroic

⁵⁶ United Nations, Disability Inclusive Communication, available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_disability-inclusive_communication_guidelines.pdf

⁵⁷ Ibid

Why is disability-inclusive communication important?

Disability inclusive communication is essential for several reasons:

- ▶ **Accurate portrayal:** Disability-inclusive communication ensures that persons with disabilities are portrayed in a fair, accurate, and respectful manner. It helps to combat stereotypes and misconceptions, promoting a more inclusive and equitable representation of persons with disabilities.
- ▶ **Access to information:** By adopting disability-inclusive communication practices, information and communications become accessible to persons with disabilities. This includes providing information in formats that cater to diverse sensory, cognitive, and physical abilities, such as braille, audio descriptions, captioning, and sign language interpretation. Accessible communication enables persons with disabilities to access and comprehend information on an equal basis with others.
- ▶ **Awareness raising:** Disability-inclusive communication plays a crucial role in increasing awareness about rights of persons with disabilities and promoting a better understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by persons with disabilities. By raising awareness, it fosters empathy, reduces stigma, and encourages social inclusion.
- ▶ **Freedom of expression and opinion:** Disability-inclusive communication upholds the right to freedom of expression and opinion for individuals with disabilities. It ensures that they have equal opportunities to express themselves, share their perspectives, and actively participate in discussions and decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Articles 8 Awareness raising, 9 Accessibility and 21 Freedom of expression and opinion and access to information of the **CRPD** emphasize the importance of taking appropriate measures to increase awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities, ensure accessibility,⁵⁸ and protect the right to freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information for persons with disabilities.

⁵⁸ Infrastructural and informational accessibility

General principles⁵⁹ related to communication about persons with disabilities:

USE PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE

People-first language emphasizes the person rather than their disability. Refer to individuals as “persons with disabilities” and use expressions like “children with albinism”, “students with dyslexia,” and “women with intellectual disabilities.”

AVOID LABELS AND STEREOTYPES

Disability is a natural part of human diversity, and individuals with disabilities should not be sensationalized, dramatized or portrayed as extraordinary. **Avoid using language that portrays them as inspirational or “super-human.”** Such language carries the underlying implication that it is unusual for persons with disabilities to be successful, productive, live happily, and have fulfilling lives. Describing persons with disabilities as “courageous,” “brave,” or having “overcome” their disability are patronizing. Recognize that persons with disabilities have the same range of talents and abilities as anyone else.

AVOID PEJORATIVE WORDS OR CONDESCENDING EUPHEMISMS

Some expressions have gained popularity over time as alternatives to inappropriate terms. However, some of them reflect the misguided idea that disability needs to be softened. Terms such as “differently abled,” “people of all abilities,” or “disAbility”, are considered euphemistic and can be perceived as patronizing or offensive. Avoid using the term “special” in relation to persons with disabilities, as it is often seen as patronizing, condescending and stigmatizing.

DISABILITY IS NOT AN ILLNESS

The medical model of disability⁶⁰ incorrectly views disability as a health condition that needs to be fixed or cured. **Persons with disabilities should not be referred to as patients unless they are under medical care, and only in that context.** Refrain from using terms like, “suffers from,” “afflicted with,” or “stricken with” when referring to persons with disabilities. Instead, use phrases like “child/person with autism” rather than “child/persons who suffers from autism.”

59 United Nations, Disability-Inclusive Language Guidelines, available at: <https://www.ungeneva.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Disability-Inclusive-Language-Guidelines.pdf>

60 The medical approach to disability primarily focusses on a person’s impairment. It views persons with disabilities as individuals who need to be cured, considering them as abnormal, and incapable of living independently. According to this perspective, extensive rehabilitation is necessary to achieve the highest degree of normality, enabling them to access their rights and participate fully in society. In this model, disability is seen as residing within the individual, and medical professionals are believed to possess the knowledge to correct and manage any impairments, often disregarding the consent, will, and preferences of the individual.

**DIFFERENTIATE
AMONG DIVERSE
TYPES OF
DISABILITIES**

Recognize and differentiate between diverse types of disabilities and the specific needs they entail. Differentiate between “person with physical disability,” “person with psycho-social disability,” “person with intellectual disability,” and so on.

**RESPECT
PRIVACY AND
CONSENT**

Do not disclose a person’s impairment or disability. Never disclose a person’s impairment/disability unless they have given their consent and it is relevant to the content and purpose of the communication.

**AVOID UNNECESSARY REFERENCE
TO PHYSICAL OR
INTELLECTUAL
CAPACITY**

Refrain from making unnecessary references to a person or group’s physical or intellectual capacity unless it is directly relevant to the context. For example, avoid stating that a blind musician played the violin during a concert unless it is necessary for understanding the story.

When in doubt, **while communicating with and about persons with disabilities, it is recommended to respect individual preferences and ask how individuals or groups choose to identify themselves.** This is because persons with disabilities are not a homogeneous group and they have various ways of self-identification.

**Other important terminology
connected to persons with disabilities:**

- ▶ **“Ableism”** is rooted in the belief that “certain typical characteristics of body and mind are necessary for leading a valuable life.”⁶¹ It encompasses social standards of appearance, behavior, and functioning that devalue the lives and experiences of persons with disabilities. Ableism contributes to prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion faced by persons with disabilities. Negative perceptions and stereotypes about persons with disabilities often stem from ableism. Similar to unconscious biases related to gender or race, ableism can lead to unconscious bias.⁶²

61 Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, A/HRC/43/41, Para. 9, available at: <https://www.undocs.org/A/HRC/43/41>

62 UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), Policy guidelines for Sustainable Development Goals, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Disability/SDG-CRPD-Resource/Foundations/policy-guideline-foundations-final.pdf>

- ▶ **“Discrimination on the basis of disability”** means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including the denial of reasonable accommodation.
- ▶ **“Reasonable accommodation”** means necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case. These modifications and adjustments are needed to ensure that persons with disabilities can enjoy or exercise on an equal basis with others all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- ▶ **“Universal design”** refers to the design of products, environments, programs, and services in a manner that maximizes usability for all individuals, to the greatest extent possible, without requiring adaptation or specialized design. The aim of universal design is to create inclusive and accessible solutions that can be used by people of diverse abilities. However, it is important to note that universal design does not preclude the use of assistive devices for specific groups of persons with disabilities where this is needed.

Disability etiquette: interacting respectfully

Considering the diversity of our societies, we may occasionally encounter situations where we are uncertain about the appropriate course of action or communication with persons with disabilities, while striving to avoid making mistakes which could be disrespectful or insensitive.

Remember that as a general rule, if you are unsure about what to do or how to approach a situation, it is acceptable to directly ask the person with a disability for guidance.

Table 4. Do's and don'ts for interacting respectfully with persons with disabilities

Do	Don't
<p>Do ask persons with disabilities directly what their accessibility and reasonable accommodation needs are.</p> <p>Do speak directly to the person, not to their sign interpreter, personal assistant, etc.</p> <p>Do ask questions when you are unsure of what to do.</p> <p>Do wait for persons with disabilities to ask for assistance. If they ask, follow their instructions.</p> <p>Do verbally greet and identify yourself before extending your hand to greet a person with visual disability/impairment. Use the same courtesy when entering or leaving a room or saying goodbye when ending a conversation.</p> <p>Do ask persons who are blind or have low vision if they would like to take your arm or elbow. Do not simply take their arm. In general, do not forcibly help persons with disabilities</p>	<p>Don't ask questions about a person's impairment unless the person raises it.</p> <p>Don't make assumptions about what persons with disabilities can and cannot do.</p> <p>Don't touch or remove a person's cane or guide dog, or lean on someone's wheelchair, or move a person's mobility device. Treat wheelchairs and mobility aids as extensions of the owner's personal space.</p>



Words matter: recommended terminology

When it comes to language and terminology, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) establishes the standard to be followed. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has issued general comments that provide valuable guidance for better understanding the Convention and its language. It is important to be mindful of certain words and phrases that can be offensive, undermining, or superficial. It is essential to recognize that individuals should not be defined solely by their impairment or disability.

Table 5. Appropriate and pejorative language ⁶³

Recommended language	Language to avoid
<p>Person(s) with disability</p> <p>Person with physical disability [other type of impairment]</p> <p>People with disabilities (only in easy-to-read documents, informal text, and oral speech)</p>	<p>Handicapped, person with special needs, atypical, person living with a disability, differently abled, people of all abilities, invalid</p> <p>PwD – avoid in written</p>
<p>Person(s) without disability</p> <p>The rest of the population</p> <p>Broader population</p>	<p>Normal, healthy, typical, of sound body/mind</p>
<p>Have/has [disability/impairment]</p>	<p>Suffer from, afflicted by, stricken by, troubled with</p>
<p>Person with an intellectual disability</p>	<p>Retarded, afflicted, brain damaged, intellectually challenged, subnormal, mentally handicapped</p>
<p>Person with a psychosocial disability</p>	<p>Insane, crazy, maniac, psycho, hypersensitive, lunatic, demented, panicked, agitated, mentally ill</p>
<p>Person with a hearing disability</p> <p>Person with a hearing impairment</p> <p>Person who is deaf</p> <p>Person with hearing loss</p> <p>Person who is hard-of-hearing</p> <p>Person who is deafblind</p>	<p>The deaf, hearing impaired, deaf and dumb, deaf and mute</p>
<p>Person with a vision/visual disability</p> <p>Person with a vision/visual impairment</p> <p>Person who is blind</p> <p>Person with low vision</p>	<p>The blind, partially-sighted</p>

⁶³ United Nations Disability-Inclusive Communications Guidelines, available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_disability-inclusive_communication_guidelines.pdf, March 2022

Recommended language	Language to avoid
<p>Person with a physical disability Person with a physical impairment</p>	<p>Crippled, invalid, deformed, lame, handicapped, person with physical limitations, limp</p>
<p>Wheelchair user Person who uses a wheelchair Person with a mobility disability Person with a mobility impairment Person using a mobility device</p>	<p>Confined/restricted to a wheelchair, Wheelchair-bound</p>
<p>Person of short stature Little person</p>	<p>Midget, dwarf, stunted</p>
<p>Person with Down syndrome Person with trisomy-21</p>	<p>Mongoloid, special person, Down</p>
<p>Person with albinism</p>	<p>Albino</p>
<p>Person who uses a communication device Person who uses an alternative method of communication</p>	<p>Non-verbal, can't talk</p>
<p>Accessible parking Parking reserved for persons with disabilities Accessible bathroom</p>	<p>Disabled/handicapped parking Handicapped bathroom</p>
<p>Personal assistant</p>	<p>Caretaker</p>

CHAPTER 6

Inclusive Communication about Older Persons



Older persons have the same entitlement to human rights as any other individuals. Nevertheless, they encounter numerous challenges in the full realization and enjoyment of their human rights. Multiple forums of discrimination and inequalities persist for older people, particularly within healthcare and care settings, employment and when accessing services.⁶⁴ Stereotypes, stigmatization, and marginalization are prevalent, often grounded in assumptions about the declining abilities, frailty and perceived need for protection as individuals grow older.



What is ageism and how does it impact the rights of older persons?

Ageism encompasses stereotypes, prejudice, and discriminatory actions or practices directed towards older persons solely based on their chronological age or the perception of being “old.” It is often internalized during childhood and reinforced over time, through negative portrayals of older age in society and the media. As a consequence of pervasive age-related stigma, older persons may develop distorted perceptions of self-worth or respect, and some may even avoid self-identifying themselves as old. Such emotions can lead older persons to accept mistreatment or behaviour they would not tolerate for others, including isolation, neglect, abuse, abandonment, and a lack of choice and control over their lives.⁶⁵

At the broader societal level, **ageism consciously or unconsciously influences the way policies and laws integrate the rights and equal treatment of older persons, thereby perpetuating and institutionalizing stereotypes and assumptions.** Despite older persons being a highly diverse and heterogeneous segment of the global population, ageism results in perceiving them in a generalized manner, built upon assumptions and stereotypes. Consequently, ageism fosters age discrimination and hinders older persons from fully enjoying their human rights. Moreover, ageism has negative impacts on all generations and contributes to an intergenerational divide.

Ageism is a pervasive and prejudicial attitude that rests on the assumption that neglect and discrimination against older persons are permissible. It serves as a common source and justification for age discrimination. Ageism is often associated with stereotypes, prejudice, and/or discriminatory actions or practices, which may include hate speech, directed at older persons due to their chronological age or the perception of being “old.” Ageism can be either implicit or explicit and can manifest at different levels.

⁶⁴ UN Human Rights Office, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-older-persons#:~:text=Ms.,older%20persons%20in%20May%202020>.

⁶⁵ Report of the Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons, Claudia Mahler, 2021, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G21/215/63/PDF/G2121563.pdf?OpenElement>

The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons⁶⁶ defines ageism as the stereotypes, prejudice and/or discriminatory actions or practices against older persons that are based on their chronological age or on a perception that the person is “old.”⁶⁷ These ageist attitudes have far-reaching consequences, resulting in discrimination, exclusion, and imposing limitations on the legal capacity, autonomy, and independent living of older persons. Furthermore, ageism exacerbates existing inequalities and disparities faced.

The Human Rights Council, in its resolution 48/3/2021, emphasizes the widespread prevalence of ageism, which constitutes a prejudicial attitude rooted in the notion that neglect and discrimination against older persons are acceptable. It recognizes that ageism serves as a common source, justification, and driving force behind age discrimination.

What can be done to combat ageism?

The recognition of the remarkable diversity and invaluable contributions of older persons is crucial in combating ageism and age-discrimination. Adopting an intersectional approach becomes essential to address ageism in conjunction with other complex forms of discrimination experienced in older age. To effectively counter ageism, strategies should be integrated as a fundamental component of initiatives promoting “healthy ageing”, “active ageing” or “ageing well.”

The Human Rights Council, in Resolution 48/3/2021, has underscored the significance of promoting inclusive and age-friendly communities and environments. It has emphasised the need for providing a wide range of support services that promote the dignity, autonomy, and independence of older persons, enabling them to remain in their own homes as they age, while respecting their individual preferences. Additionally, the resolution has called upon all States to take measures to combat ageism, eliminate age discrimination, and safeguard the human rights of older persons in various domains such as employment, social protection, housing, education and training, access to new technologies, and the provision of financial, social, healthcare, long-term support, and palliative care services. Furthermore, it has urged the promotion of comprehensive care systems.

What is the recommended terminology in communication about older persons?

The terminology used to refer to older persons varies considerably, even across international documents. It encompasses various terms, including “older persons,” “the aged,” “the elderly,” “the third age,” “the ageing,” and, specifically, for individuals over 80 years of age, “the fourth age.”

66 UN Human Rights Office, Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-older-persons#:~:text=Ms.,older%20persons%20in%20May%202020>.

67 Ibid

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights opted for “older persons”, which is also used in General Assembly resolutions 47/5 and 48/98.⁶⁸

The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons has highlighted that the term “elderly” is frequently employed to refer to an older person, or older persons as a whole. However, the use of this term perpetuates ageist stereotypes that portray older individuals as frail, vulnerable, and lacking capacity.

General recommendations regarding communication about older persons:

- ▶ **Avoid describing all older persons as a “vulnerable” or “at-risk” population.** When discussing risks, it is important to specify the risk factors that may put individuals in a situation of vulnerability.
- ▶ **Avoid stereotyping** or reinforcing incorrect perceptions about older persons. Portray them as active participants who utilize a full range of abilities in various roles and activities.
- ▶ **Recognize the diversity** among older persons and avoid making generalisations. Understand that they are not all the same, and each individual has unique characteristics and experiences.
- ▶ **Refrain from making unjustified assumptions** based on age. For example, instead of using terms like “house of old persons” or “geriatric persons,” use more respectful and inclusive language such as “Placement Centre for older persons.”

Recommendations for developing written materials with the usage of pictures:⁶⁹

- ▶ **Use pictures that show people’s faces** rather than focusing on their back or specific body parts like wrinkled hands. This helps to represent older people as individuals with emotions and thoughts, emphasizing their agency and humanity.
- ▶ **Ensure representation of diversity in older age** by including pictures of individuals from various genders, races/ethnicities, and abilities. This promotes inclusivity and acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the older population.

⁶⁸ CESCR General Comment No. 6: The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Older Persons, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838f11.pdf>

⁶⁹ Age Platform Europe, Short Guide to Avoid Stereotypical Communication when Talking about Ageing and Older People <https://www.age-platform.eu/publications/short-guide-avoid-stereotypical-communication-when-talking-about-ageing-and-older>

- ▶ **Prefer group pictures over pictures of solitary older persons.** If possible, include intergenerational groups to highlight the importance of intergenerational connections and relationships in the context of the specific topic.
- ▶ **Prefer active representations of older persons.** Avoid portraying them solely as passive recipients of care or guidance. Instead, depict them engaged in various activities, demonstrating their active involvement in daily life, pursuing their interests, and sharing knowledge and experiences.
- ▶ **Highlight the strengths, resourcefulness, and capacities of older individuals,** rather than focusing solely on their vulnerabilities. Showcase their resilience, wisdom, accomplishments, and contributions to challenge stereotypes and promote a more balanced perception of ageing.
- ▶ **Prefer using colored pictures rather than black and white or sepia.** Colored images tend to be more engaging and vibrant, enhancing visual appeal and capturing attention.

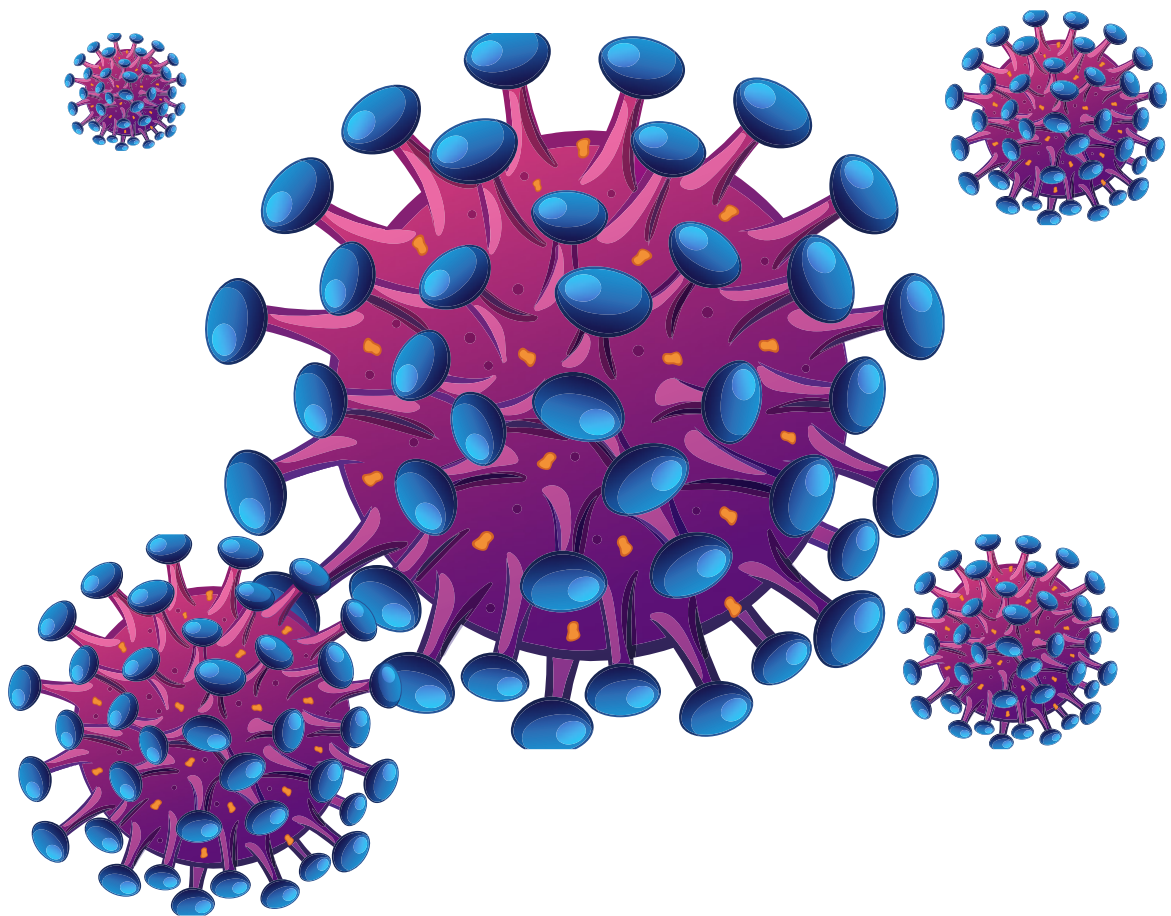
Table 6. Appropriate and pejorative language

Recommended language	Language to avoid
Older persons	The aged, the elder/elderly, senior
People who are retired ⁷⁰	Retiree
Placement Centre for older persons	House of old persons

⁷⁰ ICAAs Guidelines for Effective Communication with Older Adults available at: <https://www.icaa.cc/business/whitepapers/communicationguidelines.pdf>

CHAPTER 7

Human Rights Compliant Communication about Persons Living with HIV



Persons living with HIV continue to face ongoing stigma and discrimination. This can be attributed, in large part, to the lack of knowledge among the general public regarding HIV and AIDS. It is important to clarify that HIV stands for “human immunodeficiency virus” while AIDS stands for “acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.”

It is essential to recognize that not all persons who acquire HIV develop AIDS simultaneously. With the advancements in medical treatment, such as antiretroviral medicines, HIV can be effectively managed, preventing the progression to AIDS. Unfortunately, the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS persists within society, often fuelled by misconceptions and sensationalized portrayals in the media. It is worth noting that there are other infectious diseases, such as Hepatitis C and tuberculosis (TB), that are more widespread than HIV and AIDS. However, they are not subject to the same level of stigmatization. This discrepancy in attitudes highlights the need to address the demonization of HIV and AIDS specifically.

HIV is a communicable infection, and it is important to use precise terminology when referring to it. HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus, which is the virus that causes the infection. On the other hand, AIDS, which stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, is a syndrome that occurs as a result of the progression of HIV infection. Therefore, HIV is the infection and not AIDS.

When discussing testing, it is correct to say that individuals are tested for HIV, rather than HIV/AIDS. HIV testing is crucial in determining the presence of the virus.

It is important to avoid labelling AIDS as “deadly” or “incurable” as such language can create fear and contribute to stigma and discrimination. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that AIDS remains a serious health condition. AIDS is not simply a case of someone suffering from immune deficiency; it is an epidemiological definition based on clinical signs and symptoms. AIDS is caused by HIV, which destroys the body’s immune system and impairs its ability to fight off infection and disease. If left untreated, AIDS can lead to severe health complications and death.

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) plays a crucial role in managing HIV infection and can greatly extend life expectancy and enhance the quality of life for individuals living with HIV. While ART slows down the replication of the virus, it does not eliminate the HIV infection completely.

It is not recommended to use the term “AIDS orphans” when referring to children who have lost one or both parents to HIV. This term not only stigmatizes the children, but it also wrongly labels them as HIV-positive, which may not be the case. It is important to avoid identifying individuals by their social condition, just as it is inappropriate to identify someone solely by their medical condition. It is crucial to treat individuals with respect and dignity, focussing on their individuality rather than categorizing them based on their circumstances.

Instead, **when discussing children who have lost parents to HIV**, it is more appropriate to **use terms such as “orphans made vulnerable by AIDS” or “children made vulnerable by AIDS.”** These terms – which are also preferred by UNAIDS – acknowledge the impact of HIV on their lives without stigmatizing or making assumptions about their HIV status.

Furthermore, it is important to avoid using the term ‘HIV/AIDS’ whenever possible, as it can lead to confusion. It is important to note that most people living with HIV do not have AIDS. The term ‘HIV/AIDS’ prevention is also problematic as it may create a misconception. HIV prevention primarily involves measures such as correct and consistent condom use, the use of sterile injecting equipment, and changes in social norms. On the other hand, AIDS prevention focusses on treatment options like antiretroviral therapy, cotrimoxazole, good nutrition, isoniazid prophylaxis (INH). It is best to use specific and appropriate terms based on the context being discussed.

Table 7. Appropriate and pejorative language

Recommended language	Language to avoid
HIV (there is no need to define, nor add the word “virus” after it)	AIDS virus HIV virus
HIV-positive/HIV-negative Person/people living with HIV (if serostatus is known/disclosed) Unknown HIV status (if serostatus is unknown)	AIDS infected HIV-infected Transmitters
HIV test HIV antibody test	AIDS test
Orphans and other children made vulnerable by AIDS	AIDS orphans
Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS)	Deadly, incurable disease Manageable, chronic illness Immune deficiency
Risk of acquiring HIV, risk of exposure to HIV	Risk of AIDS
Safer sex	Safe sex
Intimate partner transmission	Spousal transmission
People/persons living with HIV, HIV prevalence, HIV prevention, HIV response, HIV testing, HIV-related disease. AIDS diagnosis, children made vulnerable by AIDS, national AIDS programme, AIDS service organization. HIV epidemic and AIDS epidemic are acceptable, but HIV epidemic is a more inclusive term.	HIV/AIDS HIV and AIDS

CHAPTER 8

Human Rights Compliant Communication about Persons under any Forms of Detention or Imprisonment



The terminology used to describe persons in custody should strictly reflect their legal status, avoiding any social stereotypes associated with being detained.

The Commission on Human Rights, in its Resolution 1997/50, has recommended the use of the term “deprivation of liberty.” This term helps to eliminate differences in interpretation between various terminologies such as “arrest,” “apprehension,” “detention,” “incarceration,” “prison,” “reclusion,” “custody,” “remand,” and others.⁷¹

The Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment, approved by the General Assembly Resolution 43/173 on 9 December 1988, outlines specific terms to be used when discussing individuals in custody. These terms help ensure clarity and consistency in communication:

- ▶ **“Arrest”** – the act of apprehending a person for the alleged commission of an offence or by the action of an authority.
- ▶ **“Detained person”** – any person who is deprived of personal liberty, except as a result of a conviction for an offence.
- ▶ **“Imprisoned person”** – any person who is deprived of personal liberty as a result of a conviction for an offence.
- ▶ **“Detention”** – the condition experienced by detained persons, as defined above.
- ▶ **“Imprisonment”** – the condition experienced by imprisoned persons, as defined above.

Additionally, the term “a judicial or other authority” mean a judicial or other authority under the law whose status and tenure should afford the strongest possible guarantees of competence, impartiality and independence.



Words matter: recommended terminology

Use “**detainee**” or “**ex-detainee**” instead of “inmate,” “convicted,” or “criminal.”

When referring to the institution, use “**penitentiary**” instead of “prison” or “jail.”

This avoids perpetuating the stereotype that these institutions exist solely for punishment and highlights the importance of their role in re-education.

Table 8. Appropriate and pejorative language

Recommended language	Language to avoid
<p>Detainee Ex-detainee</p>	<p>Inmate Convicted Criminal</p>
<p>Penitentiary</p>	<p>Prison Jail</p>

⁷¹ See Fact Sheet No. 26, The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet26en.pdf>

CHAPTER 9

Human Rights Compliant Communication about Persons who Use Drugs



The terms drug addicts and drug abusers are considered derogatory and do not promote the trust and respect necessary when engaging with people who use drugs. This viewpoint is supported by the fact that drug use can involve various routes of administration, including subcutaneous and intramuscular methods.

It is more preferable to use terms like “person/people who inject(s) drugs” as it places the emphasis on the individuals themselves. In certain contexts, the broader term “person who uses drugs” may also be applicable and inclusive.

It is important to avoid referring to individuals using abbreviated terms such as “IDU” (injecting drug users), as this can be dehumanizing. Instead, it is recommended to write out the full name or identity of the group. However, in charts or graphs where brevity is required, abbreviations for population groups can be used.

Table 9. Appropriate and pejorative language

Recommended language	Language to avoid
<p>Person/people who use(s)/ inject(s) drugs.</p>	<p>Drug addicts Drug abusers Intravenous drug users</p>

