



# Gender Sensitive Communication GUIDE

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UNDP Turkmenistan

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## **THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION**

### Introduction:

Language shapes our interpretation of the world and plays an important role in the formation of our thoughts and behaviours, hence the construction of our reality about gender. The words we choose while we communicate reflect our assumptions about the outer world including gender relations. Language is a mechanism that influences thoughts, generates ideas, shapes gender roles, and therefore carries a great potential for establishing gender equality in societies. It is the language, which can promote gender equality and greater perceived equity between men and women or on the opposite, can reinforce and promote gender stereotypes and create barriers for women’s development.

The United Nations information circular, entitled “Guidelines for promoting equal treatment of men and women in the Secretariat” (ST/IC/1992/67) of 29 October 1992, states that, “Bias-free language is important because language reflects the attitude of the user. Expressions or words that suggest the superiority of one gender over the other should be avoided”. In accordance with the Editorial directive: ST/CS/SER.A/41 of 14 August 1998, all those concerned with drafting and editing United Nations documents should pay maximum attention to the need to use gender sensitive language when writing in their official capacity and avoid sex-specific and potentially discriminatory expressions.

Although, women play an active role in society and can drive change towards sustainable future, yet – all too often – we use gender-discriminatory language that ignores or minimises their important contribution. Using gender-inclusive language means speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex or gender and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes. Given the key role of language in shaping cultural and social attitudes, using gender-inclusive language is an excellent way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias.

Gender-sensitive communication requires a comprehensive positioning and use of language and visuals contributing to the equal representation of women and men, equal benefiting from resources and opportunities, equal assumption of roles, protection of balance in decision-making processes, questioning stereotypes and mainstreaming gender equality.

Gender-sensitive language is the realization of gender equality in written and spoken language. Gender equality in language is attained when women and men and those who do not conform to the binary gender system are made visible and addressed in language as persons of equal value, dignity, integrity and respect. A gender stereotype is a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by, or the roles that are or should be performed by women and men. Gender stereotypes limit and trivialize both females and males, presenting an inaccurate view of the world and its possibilities. Such misrepresentations constrain communication.

#### The rationale for gender-sensitive communication:

Avoiding sex- and gender-based discrimination starts with language, as the systematic use of gender-biased terminology influences attitudes and expectations and could, in the mind of the reader or listener, relegate women to the background or help perpetuate a stereotyped view of women's and men's roles. There are number of different strategies that can be used to express gender relationships with accuracy, such as avoiding, to the greatest possible extent, the use of language that refers explicitly or implicitly to only one gender, and ensuring, through inclusionary alternatives and according to each language's characteristics, the use of gender-sensitive and inclusive language.

Gender equality and women's empowerment is at the heart of UNDP's development mandate as a global priority. UNDP recognizes that sustainable human development will not be fully achieved unless women and girls are able to contribute on an equal basis with men and boys to their societies. Therefore, gender-responsive communication is a must-have skill for all development practitioners.

All UNDP-Turkmenistan communications must portray women and girls, men and boys equitably and fairly and respectfully. By doing this, UNDP aims to transform attitudes and behaviors related to gender inequality and the exclusion of women. As UNDP staff and development professionals, it is paramount importance to set an example and examine our messages to reduce or eliminate word choices that silence, stereotype, or constrain others. While some language expressions are intended to cause offense, others do not convey the original meaning or are open to misinterpretation.

This document is intended to be used as a guide and will not account for all situations where gender sensitive communication is needed.

## THE OBJECTIVES OF THE GENDER SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION GUIDE (GSCG)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Turkmenistan developed this “Gender-Sensitive Communication Guide” with the aim to raise awareness on the importance of using gender-sensitive communication, challenge unconscious assumptions people have about gender roles in society, and once again demonstrate UNDP’s commitment to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. To drive change towards accelerating gender equality, as UNDP staff we need to start from ourselves and use non-discriminatory language in approaching public and partners to promote UNDP’s mandate on gender equality and demonstrate everyone its intention to empower women and girls.

This guide aims to provide guidance for inclusive language for written communications as well as visual and audio materials which are produced by the UNDP Turkmenistan. This Guide will help UNDP Turkmenistan staff develop a content for advocacy and other engagement opportunities with the government and international and national stakeholders, as well as media outlets and public to promote and facilitate the necessary steps towards promoting gender equality and achieving 2030 Agenda.

The Gender-Sensitive Communication Guide is both a tool and an indicator of gender equality mainstreaming efforts of UNDP in Turkmenistan in line with its Gender Equality Strategy 2023-2027, which aims to scale up system-level changes by strengthening interconnections among programme priorities, and avoid fragmentation of intervention, as gender equality is among the most important contributions to human and sustainable development that UNDP as an organization can make.

## ENSURING A GENDER SENSITIVE COMMUNICATION IN UNDP-TURKMENISTAN

### 1. Use non-discriminatory language:

- **Forms of address:** When referring to or addressing specific individuals, use forms of address and pronouns that are consistent with their gender identity.

For United Nations staff members, you may check the intranet or the organizational or staff directory. If the staff member appears as “Ms.”, that is the form of address that should be used for her, and female pronouns are appropriate. Alternatively, and if the situation permits, you may ask the persons you are addressing or writing about what pronoun and form of address should be used for them.

There should also be consistency in the way women and men are referred to: if one of them is addressed by their name, last name, courtesy title, or profession, the other one should be as well;



- **Avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes**

Discriminatory examples:

“She throws/runs/fights like a girl.”

“In a manly way.”

“Oh, that’s women’s work.”

“Thank you to the ladies for making the room more beautiful.”

“Men just don’t understand.”

## **2. Make gender visible when it is relevant for communication:**

- **Using feminine and masculine pronouns:** “Pairing” is the use of both feminine and masculine forms (he or she; her or his). It is a strategy that may be used when the author/speaker wants to explicitly make both women and men visible.

Example: “When a staff member accepts an offer of employment, **he or she** must be able to assume that the offer is duly authorized. To qualify for payment of the mobility incentive, **she or he** must have five years’ prior continuous service on a fixed-term or continuing appointment.”

- **Using two different words:** In cases in which highlighting gender would make the sentence more inclusive, two separate words can be used. This strategy should be used only when popular beliefs or preconceptions may obscure the presence or action of either gender.

Examples: “Boys and girls should attend the first cooking class with their parents.”  
“All of the soldiers, both men and women, responded negatively to question 5 in the survey on gender inclusivity.”

## **3. Do not make gender visible when it is not relevant for communication:**

- **Use gender-neutral words:** Example - “Plans to outsource some 19 services have not proceeded at the anticipated pace, as there are significant **staffing** shortages.”
- **Using plural pronouns/adjectives:** In informal writing, such as emails, plural pronouns may be used as a shortcut to ensure gender inclusiveness. Such strategies are not recommended in formal writing.
- **Use the pronoun one:** Example - “A staff member in Antarctica earns less than **one** in New York.”

- **Use the relative pronoun who: Example** - “A complainant **who** is not satisfied with the board’s decision can ask for a rehearing.
- **Use a plural antecedent: Example** - “Substitute judges must certify that **they** have familiarized **themselves** with the record of the proceedings.”
- **Omit the gendered word: Example** - “Requests the Emergency Relief Coordinator to continue efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian assistance.”
- **Use the passive voice: Example** - “The author of a communication must have direct and reliable evidence of the situation being described.”

## KEY PRINCIPLES OF USING GENDER SENSITIVE LANGUAGE

Recent experiments have shown that speaking a foreign language can make people think and behave differently. But we don’t have to learn new languages to understand the power they exert over our perceptions of identity and reality. Ultimately, we are what we speak.

Here are 10 principles that could serve as the foundation for a culture of gender-responsive communications at UNDP and other development agencies and actors developed by UNDP Office for Europe and Central Asia, which can be used by UNDP Turkmenistan colleagues to promote the principles of inclusiveness and ensure diverse portrayal of women and men and avoiding stereotypes while communicating:

<b>1</b>	<b><i>GO BEYOND FEATURING WOMEN</i></b>	Explore different aspects of gender inequality through the specific experiences of women and men.
<b>2</b>	<b><i>ENSURE FAIR VISIBILITY FOR MEN AND WOMEN</i></b>	Fair visibility means that our communication doesn’t perpetuate gender stereotypes and allows men and women to be on equal footing. Fair visibility can be achieved by presenting a diversity of roles for both women and men. Include perspectives of women in decision-making positions. Include perspectives of women and men who challenge expected gender roles.
<b>3</b>	<b><i>DON'T DIMINISH WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS</i></b>	Be mindful of the ways in which gender relations and stereotypes influence the way in which human activities are portrayed.
<b>4</b>	<b><i>DON'T REINFORCE GENDER STEREOTYPES</i></b>	Avoid portraying certain jobs or roles as more appropriate for one gender. Portray men and women in diverse roles that challenge gender stereotypes.
<b>5</b>	<b><i>PORTRAY DIVERSITY</i></b>	Don't assume all women face the same inequalities. Don't assume all men have the same privileges. Good practice: Look at the variety of experiences and needs of men and women of different backgrounds.

6	<b>USE GENDERRESPONSIVE LANGUAGE</b>	Use 'man' and 'woman', 'boy' and 'girl', even when you need an adjective. Do not use gendered generic terms. Professions and job titles should be gender inclusive.
7	<b>DON'T VICTIMISE</b>	Show women and men as active participants to development instead of passive beneficiaries. In visual content, avoid portraying people in victimizing ways.
8	<b>DON'T PATRONISE</b>	Portray women accomplishing great results in spite of structural gender inequalities, not in spite of their gender.
9	<b>PRESENT FACTS, NOT JUDGEMENTS</b>	Avoid making judgements about gender relations based on personal experience and anecdotal evidence. When writing about traumatic situations, focus on presenting the facts and use quotes to personalize the story.
10	<b>BE OPEN</b>	Be open to listening, learning and improving.

## GENDER-SENSITIVE COMMUNICATIONS

### Dos and Don'ts

<b>Gender-discriminatory language</b>	<b>Gender-sensitive language</b>
Male and female	Man and woman
the youngest female winemaker	the youngest woman to be a winemaker
Male parliamentarians	Men in parliament
Female farmers	Women farmers
male labour participation rate	labour participation rate of men
mankind	humankind
fatherland	native land
mother tongue	native tongue
brotherhood	community, kinship
maternity leave, paternity leave	parental leave
motherly	loving, nurturing
Businessman or businesswoman	Business executive
Policeman, policewoman	police officer
Chairman, chairwoman	chairperson
Female lawyer	Lawyer
Actor, actress	actor
Salesman	Salesperson, sales clerk
congressman	member of congress
Camerman	Camera operator, for plural: camera crew
Repairman	Repairer, technician



cleaning lady	cleaner
Steward or Stewardess	Flight attendant
male nurse	nurse
waitress	waiter, server
freshman	first-year student
housewife, househusband	homemaker
an author and his audience	an author and their audience
each doctor must take the test himself	each doctor must take the test themselves
Master of ceremonies	Host
Frenchmen	the French
Masterplan	Grand plan
the policeman will ask you to show him your ID	the police officer will ask you to show them your ID
Guests are cordially invited to attend with their wives	Guests are cordially invited to attend with their partners.
Fathers babysit their children.	Fathers care for their children.
Every nurse should take care of her own uniform and cover the expense herself	Every nurse should take care of his or her own uniform and cover the expense themselves.
Delegates are free to make presentations in their mother tongues and translations will be provided.	Delegates are free to make presentations in their native languages and translations will be provided.
Best man for the job	Best candidate for the job, best person for the job, best woman or man for the job
Fire is man's greatest invention.	Fire is humanity's greatest invention.
maiden name	birth name
no-man's-land	limbo, unclaimed territory
Under the law, all men are equal.	Under the law, all people are equal. Under the law, all women and men are equal.
The responsible citizen will report anything suspicious he sees to the police.	The responsible citizen will report anything suspicious she or he sees to the police
Each applicant must submit his resumé.	Each applicant must submit his or her resumé.
Manmade fabrics can actually require less manpower to produce than natural fabrics.	Synthetic fabrics can actually require fewer human resources to produce than natural fabrics
Mr and Mrs Alistair Farrar will be attending this evening.	Jessica Farrar and Alistair Farrar will be attending this evening.
The usherette helped me to my seat just as the actress came on stage.	The usher helped me to my seat just as the actor came on stage.

I'll get one of the girls from my office to help me move the boxes.	I'll get one of the women from my office to help me move the boxes.
This house is located in no man's land between two villages.	This house is located in unclaimed territory between two villages.
Lithuania is playing well today and likely to win the match. Lithuania's women will also be playing tomorrow.	Lithuania's men are playing well today and likely to win the match. Lithuania's women will also be playing tomorrow.
Research scientists often neglect their wives and children.	Research scientists often neglect their families.
John and Mary both have full-time jobs; he helps her with the housework.	John and Mary both have full-time jobs; they share the housework.

**VISUAL AND AUDIO COMMUNICATION**

Gender also plays an important role in visual communication. Stereotypes and clichés should not be encouraged by rash decisions. Pictures, graphics, illustrations, video and audio materials are powerful communication tools to influence perceptions, attitudes and eventually social changes. The principles for gender inclusive written and oral communications above also apply to audio and visual materials i.e. videos, photographs, and infographics to be developed by UNDP Turkmenistan.

UNDP Turkmenistan will be promoting the use of social media, as a powerful tool to advocate for elimination of violence against women and promoting gender equality. The visuals are the key in running the CO social media platforms to interact with public on development issues. Therefore, the CO will make a special focus on developing visuals that adherer to the principles of incisiveness and gender equality and will be suing gender-sensitive communication approach mentioned above.

UNDP Turkmenistan will apply principles of gender sensitive communications for its social media channels and all communications products, including text, video and audio materials to avoid any stereotypical portrayal of men and women in terms of social beliefs, norms of expected behavior, sexual division of labor, access and control to resources decision making and power differentials. When choosing pictures for publications, it is good to consider the following:

- When it is not possible to have an equal number of women and men in every photograph, illustration, cartoon or video segment, it is important that in the total presentation in these media, the presence of women in the society be demonstrated as balanced not as exceptional or sporadic.
- Generally, women should be portrayed as equal and active participants in all aspects of life: in the workplace, in manual labor positions and in white collar professions; at

- home; at educational institutions; in politics and in civil society; in public life and in the community.
- When preparing written, audio and visual materials including voice overs, please remember to strive for a balanced representation of women and men: include women as chairs, participants, interviewers, interviewees and speakers, as well as moderators at events as well as combining female and male voices in voice overs.

Useful tips for organizing the events to ensure a gender-sensitive communication:

- ✓ Count the number of women and men who are represented and strive for gender balance when:
  - a. selecting or taking pictures to be published;
  - b. producing a video;
  - c. preparing infographics;
  - d. using anthropomorphic drawings;
  - e. selecting whose voices to reflect in a communication piece;
- ✓ When organizing and planning an event, reach out to female professionals and experts and spare more efforts to strive for a gender balance among speakers, moderators, chairs, rapporteurs, etc. or among authors or artists whose work is featured. Ensure that women are not only represented as listeners or subordinates but also as speakers, experts and professionals with authority;
- ✓ When chairing and organising an internal meeting, be aware of these dynamics and make sure the voices of women and men are heard by giving the floor to both and allocating speaking time equitably;
- ✓ Do not always place men at the foreground and women in the background. Do not place women and men separately, which is often the case in a local context;
- ✓ Avoid stereotypical use of colors, such as soft colors for women and strong colors for men.

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