



European
Commission

#UnionOfEquality

European Commission Guidelines
for Inclusive Communication



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FOREWORD



Equality and non-discrimination are core values of the European Union. They apply directly to our work as an institution both in our internal and external policies as well as in the way we function within.

The European Commission must lead by example in its quest towards a Union of equality. To do this effectively, we must deliver inclusive communication at all times, thus ensuring that everyone is valued and recognised in all our material regardless of their gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

This is what 'United in Diversity' truly means.

People need to see a positive version of themselves in our communication. To meet this expectation we need to critically assess our use of language and visuals in terms of the diversity of representation and how different groups are portrayed.

These guidelines deliver exactly that.

Helena Dalli

Commissioner for Equality



INTRODUCTION

Everyone in the European Union has an inherent right to be treated equally, and hence to be included and represented, regardless of their gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Besides, people are complex beings with multiple characteristics and identities. It is therefore important to reflect this in our communication to ensure that no one is left behind.

The words and images we use in our daily communication convey messages about who we are as well as who we are not. They can therefore indirectly pass messages about who is included in our understanding of society, and by inference who is not. They reveal our own assumptions and biases and may perpetuate commonly held negative bias and stereotypes. In turn, this can also legitimise or even encourage marginalisation and discrimination.

The European Commission's work must value and empower everyone in the EU, in all their diversity. The use of language, imagery and audio-visual products must therefore be consistent with this objective.

Inclusive communication emanates from the core European values of equality and non-discrimination. It reflects the European Union's motto 'United in diversity'. As a public institution, we must lead by example.

Deep-rooted stereotypes and biases affect individual and collective behaviours, and words and attitudes in the workplace can cause lasting harm. Diversity is our strength and should be addressed at all levels.

Scope and purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to set common standards for inclusive communication and to provide practical examples and advice to all Commission colleagues. This concerns both external

and internal communication. The recommendations in this document may be useful for producing any type of communication material, including:

- Press material (press releases and Q&As)
- Factsheets and infographics
- Social media posts and visuals
- Training materials and presentations
- Material used in internal communication
- Speeches and op-eds
- Briefings.

These guidelines build on the existing Commission Style Guide¹ and encompass various aspects of inclusive communication, from written to visual communications and IT requirements for greater accessibility².

Some general principles

To improve outreach to target audiences, communication about the EU's activities should be written in clear and simple language, avoiding unnecessary difficult phrasing, jargon and abbreviations³.

Multilingual communication in all EU languages is a well-established principle for material targeting a general audience. Similarly, the availability of multilingual interpretation services at events is common practice.

Communication visuals should systematically reflect the diversity of the EU population and not only portray the limited number of profiles that are typically available in stock photography.

This must be done both in terms of the diversity of national attributes as well as diversity based on personal characteristics.

1 Link to Commission Style Guide:

https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/sg/Documents/commission_style_guide.pdf, in particular Part One, section F (pp. 44-45) on Inclusive language

2 These guidelines focus on general principles and examples in English. For considerations on inclusive language in other EU languages, see the series published by DG Translation on its intranet: <https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/dg/dgt/NewsPortal/Pages/inclusive-language.aspx>

3 A wealth of training materials are available on DG Translation's clear writing page: <https://myintracomm-collab.ec.europa.eu/networks/CWC/SitePages/Home.aspx>

Language changes over time, across cultures and generations. You are encouraged to stay curious and to be open and ready to update your language as appropriate.

These guidelines are full of suggestions to help you communicate effectively and sensitively, and incorporate a more inclusive approach into your work, whether it is in how you draft a text or organise an event.

To be followed at all times

While part of these guidelines' content is designed to give suggestions and help you reflect and find your own inclusive communication style, some rules must always be followed when you communicate on behalf of the Commission, regardless of your particular situation or personal stance. These include:

- **Never use gendered nouns such as 'workmen, policemen' or masculine pronouns (he, his) as a default.**
- **Do not organise panel discussions with only one gender represented, aim for gender balance instead.**
- **When using a variety of visuals, testimonies and stories, ensure that they reflect diversity in all its senses.**
- **Do not use Miss or Mrs, unless it is the explicit preference of the person addressed; use Ms universally.**
- **When asking about gender, do not offer only male/female options, add 'other' and 'prefers not to say'.**
- **Never address an audience as 'ladies and gentlemen' but use expressions such as 'Dear colleagues'.**
- **Do not reinforce in your visual or written communication harmful stereotypes on gender, age, ethnic groups, etc.**
- **Do not use the word citizens to refer to people in general.**

- **Do not assume anyone's sexual orientation.**
- **When addressing trans people, always respect self-identification.**
- **Do not refer to 'the elderly', use 'older people' instead.**
- **Referring to persons with disabilities, use people-first language ('John Doe has a disability', not 'John Doe is disabled').**
- **Do not use terms with a negative connotation such as 'suffering from HIV', 'suffering from autism', 'wheelchair-bound' (use 'with HIV', 'with autism', 'wheelchair user' instead).**
- **Ensure that your communication products always comply with accessibility guidelines, in particular web pages, pdfs, and forms used for example in public consultations.**
- **Never outsource communication products without specifying accessibility and inclusion requirements in the contract terms.**

In the following chapters you will find more details on the reasons and the context for these rules, together with a wealth of additional advice.



Quick checklist for preparing inclusive communication material

1 PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

- Who am I targeting with my communication?
- How can I make sure to reach all people within my target group, regardless of their possible disabilities, or their gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, socio-educational background, etc.?

2 INCLUSIVE TEXT

- Am I using the right language to ensure that I reach my target audience?
- Am I avoiding jargon?
- Am I using gender-sensitive, diversity-sensitive language?
- Could it be appropriate to create an easy-to-read version of my text?

3 INCLUSIVE IMAGES

- Am I ensuring that I do not represent gender, age, ethnic and other groups in a stereotypical way?
- Do my selected images fully represent European societies in their diversity of genders, racial and ethnic backgrounds, abilities, or do all the people represented belong to the same specific group?
- Am I ensuring that people with visual impairments can access the key message that the image conveys?

4 INCLUSIVE EVENTS

- Are my event venues and services accessible to people with disabilities?
- Are my panels diverse and gender-balanced?

5 ACCESSIBILITY

- Have I checked that forms, pdf files, documents, web pages comply with accessibility requirements?
- Have I provided alternatives to access visual content for people with visual impairments (alternative texts or transcripts that can be read by a screen reader)?
- Have I provided alternatives to access audio content for deaf people (transcripts, subtitles, International Sign Language or other sign language interpretation)?

6 FINAL CONSIDERATION

- Who may I be leaving out?





GENDER

Key messages

Gender-sensitive language treats different genders equally and positively. It is aware of stereotypical perceptions of gender roles and is used actively to undo them.

The Commission Style Guide sets out the basic principles:

- Avoid nouns that appear to assume that one gender rather than another will perform a particular role: ‘chairman’ is the most obvious example. Gender-neutral noun forms (‘chair’, ‘spokesperson’, etc.) are preferred.
- Avoid gender-specific pronouns for people whose gender is unknown. It is preferable to use ‘they’ or reformulate the sentence so that no pronoun is needed, or use “he or she”, “s/he” (albeit this option is falling out of favour)¹.

We should avoid expressions that may be little one of the genders or reinforce harmful stereotypes.

Dos and don'ts

When referring to women, avoid the titles Miss or Mrs, which unnecessarily reveal a woman's marital status, unless they prefer to self-identify as such. Use Ms instead. Pay attention to not always mentioning the same gender first in the word order, or addressing men and women differently (e.g. a man by family name, a woman by first name).

When choosing images to accompany your communication, make sure that women and girls are not represented in domestic or passive roles while men are active and adventurous. You should also ensure diversity in terms of racial and ethnic origins, and other aspects of diversity, including body shape and age.

When organising and promoting events, ensure gender-balanced panels² and that more than one gender is represented among the participants and speakers, and not just as facilitators or moderators. Ideally, all panels should be gender balanced. This especially applies when organising events on highly specialised and traditionally male/female-dominated topics³.

If a Commission staff member participates as a speaker at an event organised by a third party which is heavily dominated by one gender (especially male-only panels), this could reflect negatively on people's perception of the Commission as an organisation committed to gender equality. If this applies to an invitation you receive, you are recommended to let the organisers know that the Commission places great importance on the gender-balance of the events it attends and that you urge them to meet this goal too.

Refer to people who identify outside the gender binary of male and female by the pronouns that they identify with. In the absence of such information, Mx should be used as the default. For forms or surveys requiring a gender, refer to the guidelines in the section on LGBTIQ inclusive communication below.

1 See also for reference the European Parliament's multilingual guidelines on 'Gender neutrality in the language used in the European Parliament', first published in 2008 and revised in 2018, which aims to ensure that non-sexist and gender-inclusive language is used in the Parliament's documents and communications in all official languages. Refer also to guidance from DG Translation as mentioned in footnote 2.

2 This principle is enshrined in the mission letters addressed by President von der Leyen to each Commissioner: 'The Commission should also lead by example when it comes to ensuring better representation and a diversity of voices in our public life. With this in mind, all public events organised by the Commission should aim to feature gender-balanced panels and a broad range of perspectives from across Europe.'

3 The Brussels Binder (brusselsbinder.org) provides a database of women experts classified by area of expertise.

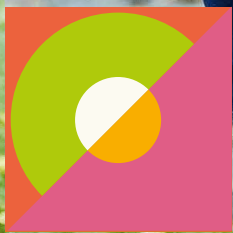
The table below provides some guidelines on the use of language for quick reference. For more in-depth examples of the differences between gender-discriminatory, -neutral and -sensitive language and a practical checklist, consult the Toolkit on Gender-sensitive Communication prepared by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)¹.

GUIDELINE	AVOID	DO THIS INSTEAD
Avoid considering people as masculine by default	'Each working citizen must know his rights.' 'The chair expressed his dissent.' 'The number of years a teacher will spend training depends on his country of origin.'	All workers must know their rights [If the text is to be translated, consider using a double form, making both masculine and feminine visible (e.g. 'his/her'), to ensure that the translation will be gender-sensitive. Gender-neutral texts often lead to gender-insensitive translations that use generic masculine forms only, particularly in languages in which a neutral form is not possible.] [If the text clearly refers to a specific individual whose gender is known, use a gender-specific pronoun:] 'Commissioner (woman) expressed her dissent.' [Otherwise, consider alternatives such as the second person, the imperative or plural which is common in English, or even omitting the pronoun altogether:] The chair expressed his/her/its dissent. 'The number of years teachers spend training depends on their country of origin.'
Avoid the use of gendered words	'Fire is man's greatest invention.' 'Man-made fabrics can require less manpower to produce.' 'Manned spacecraft', 'unmanned flight.' 'Man-made disasters.' 'Businessman, spokesman, mankind, fireman, policeman, spaceman, fisherman, housewife, ombudsman²	'Fire is humanity's greatest invention.' 'Synthetic fabrics can require fewer human resources to produce.' 'Crewed spacecraft, remotely piloted flight.' 'Human-induced disasters' 'Businessperson, spokesperson, humankind, firefighter, police officer, astronaut, fisher, homemaker/houseperson, ombudsperson'
Don't reinforce harmful gender stereotypes	Ministers with their wives. [This assumes ministers are male, heterosexual and married. Even when the ministers being referred to are men, we should not refer to their partners as wives or husbands, unless we are referring to a specific person by name] Examples and stories where nurses are women but doctors are men, IT staff are men and cleaning staff are women, the person taking care of the child is invariably a woman, etc... Miss Smith	'Ministers with their partners' Examples of women and men in un-stereotypical professions and roles Ms Smith or first name + last name without title
Don't patronise, victimise, minimise or ignore women's contributions and the specific impact on women	'Lithuania is playing well today and likely to win the match. Lithuania's women's team will also be playing tomorrow.' 'x% of people aged 18-65 stated that they had experienced sexual violence in the previous year.' [This may obscure the fact that women are disproportionately exposed to sexual violence, and result in support services not being designed in a way that takes this into account] Referring to women as girls, not mentioning their full name, using endearing terms such as 'darling' or 'honey' in a professional context.	'Lithuania's men's team are playing well today and likely to win the match. Lithuania's women's team will also be playing tomorrow.' 'x% of women and x% of men aged 18-65 stated that they had experienced sexual violence in the previous year.' Be equally respectful to women as you are to men in the same situation. Refer to women as women (not as girls, which should be reserved for women under 18) and do not use terms of endearment in a professional context.

- 1 European Institute for Gender Equality, Toolkit on Gender-Sensitive Communication. A resource for policymakers, legislators, media and anyone else with an interest in making their communication more inclusive, 2019.
<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/toolkit-gender-sensitive-communication>
- 2 While the term 'ombudsman' is often considered not gendered, as in European Ombudsman, many organisations prefer the use of the gender-sensitive version 'ombudsperson'.



STEREOTYPICAL:
if we always portray mothers as child-carers, we perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Fathers are carers too





LGBTIQ

Key messages

As a general principle of LGBTIQ¹ inclusive communication, do not assume anyone's sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics. Our communication should never presume that persons are heterosexual, identify with their gender assigned at birth, or identify in a binary way (male or female).

As a rule, you should always emphasise the person rather than fragmented characteristics, such as their sexual orientation, gender identity or racial or ethnic origin.

Dos and Don'ts

Avoid using language that devalues some relationships and only recognises the existence of traditional heterosexual families. Expressions such as 'partner', 'parents', 'relationship', 'in a relationship' are examples of LGBTIQ inclusive language.

You should also always respect self-identification. When referring to trans and non-binary people, always use the gender they identify with rather than the sex assigned at birth. In the absence of such information, Mx should be used as the default.

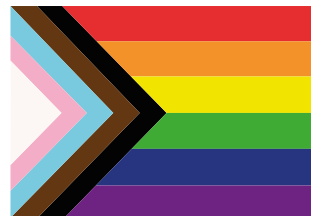
When creating forms or surveys requiring a gender, a title or a pronoun, include non-binary options (beyond male and female) and allow people to self-identify. For the question 'What is your gender', it is suggested that you include the following answers: female, male, other, prefer not to say.

When talking about families and representing them visually, include same-gender parents and other diverse families.

Avoid terms like 'both sexes' and opening addresses with 'ladies and gentlemen', so as not to exclude intersex persons and gender-queer people and not to make them invisible.

Some stock images and video portals pay particular attention to ensuring a dignified and non-stereotyped representation of LGBTIQ communities. They may employ LGBTIQ creators or issue guidelines endorsed by LGBTIQ advocacy groups. When looking for stock content, be sure to find a supplier that adheres to these good practices².

Similar resources also exist for underrepresented ethnic groups, older people or people with disabilities.



Use of the LGBTIQ flag

This version of the LGBTIQ flag is the one in use in the European Commission. Designed by Daniel Quasar in 2018, it is known as the Progress Pride flag and incorporates additional intersectional colours to explicitly represent trans people and LGBTIQ people of colour. It draws attention to inclusion and progress within the community.

1 LGBTIQ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, nonbinary, intersex and queer. For examples of images and social media texts on LGBTIQ equality, see the LGBTIQ social media toolkit: https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/lgbti-equality-social-media-toolkit_en prepared by DG Justice.

2 See for example Getty's efforts to improve diversity in its photo galleries: <https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/diversity> or <https://www.gettyimages.be/solutions/fr/collections>

The table below provides a few guidelines on the use of LGBTIQ inclusive language for quick reference.

GUIDELINE	AVOID	DO THIS INSTEAD
When speaking about or representing families, make sure you include non-heterosexual or non-cisgender¹¹ households, or indeed single parent households.	Assuming that a person's family members are their wife, husband, mother and father if you do not know the specific situation, or that there are two adults in each household. Using just one image to represent all families.	'Spouse, partner, parents' Ideally have diverse families represented.
Be careful about the use of gay and lesbian as nouns, which may be considered inappropriate. Transgender, bi or intersex are not nouns. Say trans people, gay person, etc. or refer to the person explicitly.	'Gays and lesbians are now allowed to marry in many EU countries.' A gay, two lesbians. 'Transgenders/Transsexual' 'Hermaphrodite' (this adjective can only be used to refer to an animal or plant) Using the term 'homosexual'. It can be considered offensive because it follows the medical model and is sometimes used by anti-gay activists.	'Same-gender couples are now allowed to marry or have registered partnerships in many EU countries.' 'gay person, lesbian couple' 'Trans people/persons' 'Intersex'
Allow for self - identification	Using Ms or Mr based only on the sex assigned at birth, as this disregards self-identification. Only offering male/female as options in forms.	In case of doubt, use 'Mx' Include non-binary options (beyond male and female) and allow people to self-identify, e.g. for the question 'What is your gender', it is suggested you include the answers 'female', 'male', 'other', 'prefer not to say'.
Be open and ready to update your language, since it changes over time and can differ across cultures and generations.	Asking what pronoun a person 'prefers'. [This assumes that gender identity is a personal preference – it is not.] Addressing an audience as 'ladies and gentlemen'	Ask how they describe themselves. 'What are your pronouns?' 'Dear colleagues, Dear participants'

1 Cisgender refers to individuals who self-identify with the sex that was assigned to them at birth. Cisgender comes from the Latin word 'cis' ('on this side of').





WHO WOULD WE LEAVE OUT...
if we used an image with a dozen raised hands,
all of them white?





RACIAL & ETHNIC BACKGROUND

Key messages

There are 450 million people living in the EU, and each and every one of them contributes with their uniqueness to the European diversity that we celebrate in our motto, 'United in Diversity'¹.

The way we communicate must ensure that we celebrate and value this diversity, and do not systematically put the same group of people in the spotlight, or mention or portray certain groups in a derogatory way.

A centuries-long exposure to structural and cultural racism means that even if we actively reject it, certain subconscious stereotypes and biases may still be present. We need to become aware of this in order to fight implicit bias and to avoid it unwittingly coming through in our communication.

Dos and Don'ts

When organising and promoting events, consider the diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds: in the composition of panels, when inviting participants and speakers, and when selecting testing panels, focus groups and your own communication teams².

Choose photos of people with a variety of ethnic backgrounds (as well as other forms of diversity) to ensure that the images we use in our channels represent the real diversity of the EU population.

The table below provides a few guidelines on the use of language for quick reference.

GUIDELINE	AVOID	DO THIS INSTEAD
Avoid assumptions about different nationalities and cultures as they give a simplistic image.	'African immigrants are only able to seek unqualified jobs.' 'Roma/Romani people live in extreme poverty.'	'Structural aspects, such as a lack of equal opportunities, lead to African migrants being overrepresented in unqualified jobs.' 'The statistics show that many Roma/Romani people live in extreme poverty.'
If you refer to a person's ethnicity or nationality, be as specific as possible.	'The Commissioner welcomed a group of Asian visitors.' 'Roma/Romani people had a meeting with the Commissioner.'	'The Commissioner welcomed visitors from Japan and South Korea.' 'Eastern Slovakian Roma/Romani representatives had a meeting with the Commissioner.'
Avoid victimising or portraying specific groups as helpless, passive or deprived of independence.	One-sided examples and stories where migrants, Roma/Romani people, or other ethnic minorities are in desperate need of assistance.	Provide examples or stories where people from ethnic minorities are portrayed in a dignified way.

1 'United in Diversity', the motto of the European Union, came into use in 2000. Translations into all EU languages are available here: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_en

2 People from ethnic minority backgrounds are underrepresented in EU bodies as well as among EU staff. This is being addressed. For example, in 2020, the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) launched a special initiative to increase diversity and inclusion in its selection procedures. See: https://epso.europa.eu/how-to-apply/equal-opportunities_en. In March 2021, the Commission and the European External Action Service conducted the first ever survey on diversity and inclusion of staff.





CULTURES, LIFESTYLES OR BELIEFS

Key messages

When communicating, we may unconsciously end up falling back into the use of learnt forms of language that portray anyone deviating from a privileged standard as being at a disadvantage or something 'other'.

Instead of reverting to harmful stereotypes, we must strive to open ourselves up to a more expansive attitude of connectedness.

Any language that expresses any kind of intolerance or judgment towards a religious group, fuels stereotypes or singles out one religious group must not be reproduced.

Dos and Don'ts

Consider the diversity of cultures, lifestyles, religions and socio-economic backgrounds in the composition of panels you organise, when inviting participants to events, and when selecting testing panels, focus groups and your own communication teams.

Make space in your visual communication for different kinds of cultures, celebrations and rituals that are popular in different parts of the EU and in different communities.

The table below provides a few guidelines on the use of language for quick reference.

GUIDELINE	AVOID	DO THIS INSTEAD
Avoid describing people as either married or single (this makes cohabiting couples invisible).	Portraying households as the stereotypical nuclear unit. [It can make some people feel unrepresented.]	Portray a variety of household structures including young people in a house-share, families with children, couples with no children, single parents, blended families, extended families, adoptive families, etc. Avoid linking the concept of family to a legal status.
Avoid assuming that everyone is Christian. Not everyone celebrates the Christian holidays, and not all Christians celebrate them on the same dates. Be sensitive about the fact that people have different religious traditions and calendars.	'Christmas time can be stressful.'	'Holiday times can be stressful.' '...for those celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah'
Use 'first name', or forename, or given name, rather than 'Christian name'. In examples and stories, do not only choose names that are typically from one religion.	'Maria and John are an international couple.'	'Malika and Julio are an international couple.'
Do not make assumptions about religious or other beliefs, based on other characteristics.	Using Middle Eastern or Arab as a synonym for Muslim	Make clear whether you are talking about a religion, a nationality, or an ethnicity and avoid clichés. Arabs are an ethnic group, not a religion. The same goes for Israelis (nationality) and Jews (religion).
Try to use examples from all EU countries, rather than limiting yourself to older or bigger Member States such as France or Germany.	'Whether you are in Berlin, Rome or Paris, EU laws protect you.'	'Whether you are in Berlin, Budapest or Vilnius, EU laws protect you.'
Be mindful of stateless people and immigrants: not everyone in the EU is a 'citizen'.	Avoid 'every citizen has the right to be safe'...	...if you mean 'everyone' has the right to be safe'
	Generally speaking, in English, use 'citizen' only when you specifically want to refer to things that only affect people because of their nationality.	'EU citizens and their family members have the right to free movement within the EU territory.'
Do not use 'European' as a synonym for people living in the EU - Ukrainians, Bosnians and Albanians are Europeans as well. Do not refer to the European Union as 'Europe'.	'As of today, all Europeans are protected by a new regulation.'	'As of today, people living in the EU are protected by a new regulation.'
Be mindful of the negative connotations of terms such as colonisation or settlement	'Colonisation of Mars' 'Human settlement on Mars'	'Sending humans to Mars' 'Human inhabitation of Mars'



NOT INCLUSIVE:
stock photos used on recruitment pages risk sending the wrong
message, if they show almost no diversity





DISABILITIES

Key messages

The Commission Style Guide¹ recommends using person-first language, which emphasises the person rather than the disability (e.g. 'people/persons with disabilities' rather than 'disabled people/persons').

It is important to emphasise each person's individuality and capabilities rather than defining them by a condition. As for other grounds of discrimination, representations of people with disabilities should not be exclusive to topics revolving around their condition. For example, a person in a wheelchair may appear in a visual illustrating green or economic topics, and not only when talking about inclusion.

We address the accessibility of websites and online publications in a later chapter. This applies also – or especially – to public consultations, stakeholder meetings and any situation where accessibility is key to ensuring the participation of people with disabilities in the policy-making process.

Dos and Don'ts

Avoid collective nouns such as 'the disabled' as this can sound dehumanising, and people with disabilities are not a homogenous group.

Use neutral expressions instead of negative or passive phrases. For example, use 'person with a mental health condition' instead of 'person suffering from a mental disorder', and 'person using a wheelchair' instead of 'person confined to a wheelchair' or wheelchair-bound.

Make sure that any event venues used by the Commission are accessible to wheelchair users and people with other disabilities, and that we offer sign language interpretation when appropriate during external events (digital or physical) or large internal events when appropriate. Venues should also be designed in a way that can accommodate interpreters, personal assistants, guide/assistance dogs, etc.

Include people with disabilities among the speakers at your events, well beyond the area of disability itself.

Providing subtitles and interpretation in International Sign Language is strongly encouraged and expected for key events as it may be key to ensuring that people with sensory disabilities can fully access audio-visual materials and follow/participate in discussions.

People with disabilities who require such services must have access to all information, and not only information on equality or social policy issues.

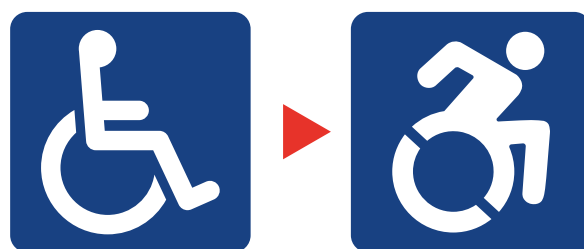
1 See footnote 1.

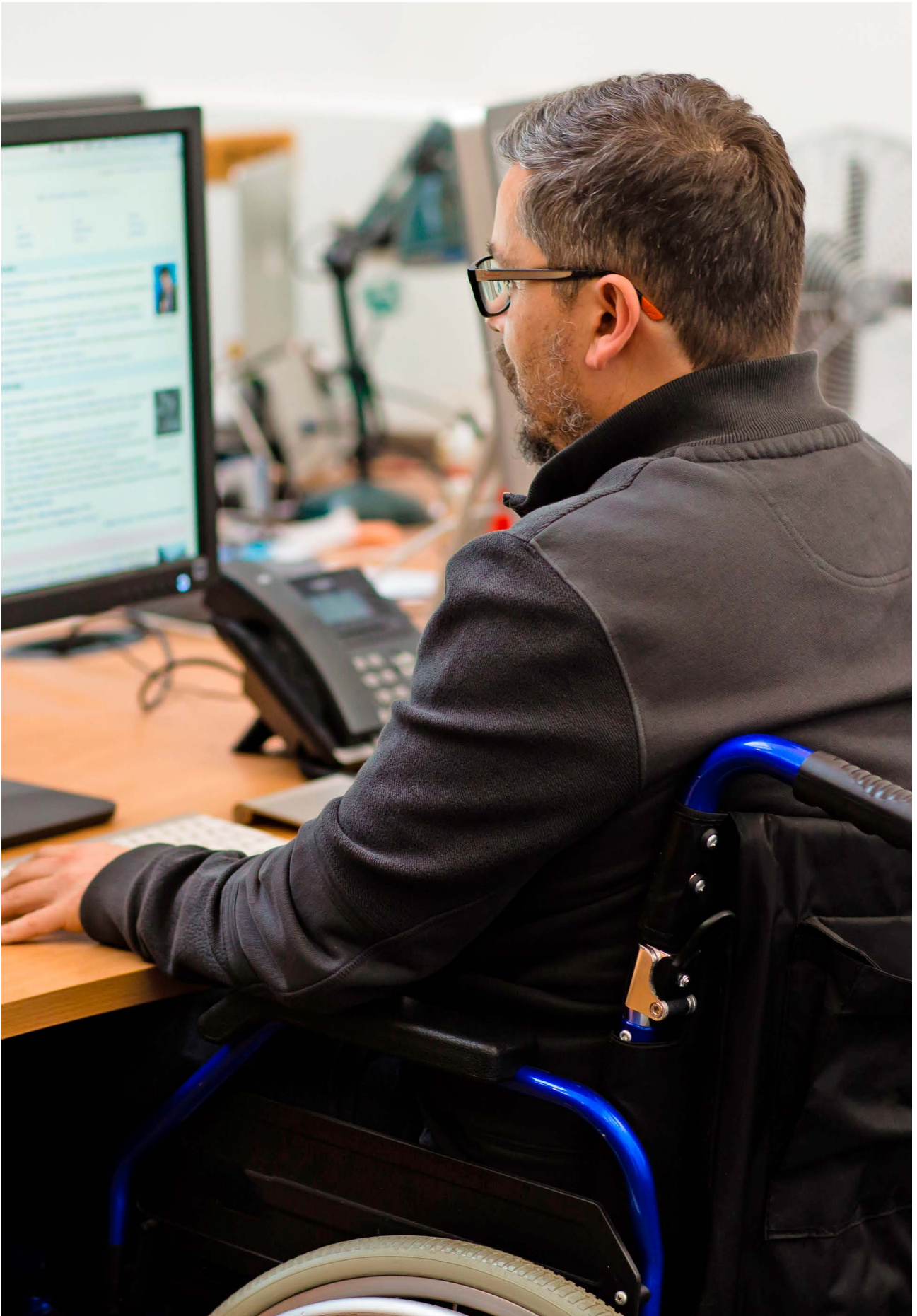
The table below provides a few guidelines on the use of language for quick reference.

GUIDELINE	AVOID	DO THIS INSTEAD
Emphasise the person rather than the disability: the disability is not what defines the person.	'Handicapped person', 'Down's child' 'The disabled' 'The blind', 'people with blindness' 'The deaf', 'deaf-mute person'	'Person with disabilities', 'child with Down's syndrome' (people first language) People/persons with physical/cognitive/developmental/intellectual/learning/sensory disabilities or impairments, people/persons with a mental health condition, people/persons with reduced mobility, etc. Persons who are blind, people with a (severe/slight) visual impairment (different than blind); people with a vision impairment; people who are vision impaired; people who are sight impaired. People/persons who are deaf, people with a hearing impairment, person with hearing loss However, keep in mind that autistic people, for example, may prefer to be referred to in this way rather than as 'people with autism'.
Avoid grouping all people with disabilities	'The disabled have difficulties accessing education'	'People with different physical and cognitive abilities can face different barriers to accessing education.'
Avoid stereotypes about people with disabilities.	'Sofia needs a wheelchair to get around. Now that she is a new mum she depends on her parents to drive them everywhere.'	Change the stereotypical narrative, focus on the person. Example: 'Sofia is a new mum and a wheelchair user. Due to photosensitivity issues she cannot drive.'
Avoid portraying people with disabilities as if it was the entirety of their identity.	Representing people with disabilities only when the topic is disability or inclusivity. Using 'tropes' when representing people with disabilities: do not focus on their disability disregarding what the person stands for, has achieved or wishes to communicate. Avoid representing people with disabilities as 'inspirational' just because they have a disability.	Make people with different abilities part of your campaigns on topics other than just accessibility, social inclusion or employment. Why not have more people who are diverse in your communication about data protection, digitalisation or climate change? The representation of diversity in all its forms must be mainstreamed into all topics. Emphasise the human achievement over the disability.
Avoid pity , negative phrases that present people with disabilities as victims.	'Person suffering from mental illnesses' 'Person confined to a wheelchair', 'wheelchair-bound' ... has a birth defect	'Person with a mental health condition', 'neuro-diverse people' 'Person who uses a wheelchair', 'wheelchair user' '... is born with (specify the disability)'

A modified symbol to focus on the person

The International Symbol of Access (also known as ISA) is used to mark the removal of accessibility barriers or other issues related to disability. The European Commission now favours the pictogram on the right over the one on the left. Designed by Sara Hendren and Brian Glenney, the modified ISA displays an active, engaged person.









AGE

Key messages

As more than 1 in 5 people in the EU is over 65, our communication needs to take into account the specific needs of older audiences and avoid ageist¹ language or visuals. The Commission Style Guide recommends avoiding language that suggests that being older is an undesirable state.

At the same time, we need to ensure that youth and younger people are adequately addressed both in terms of representation and in the way we reach out to them.

Check your own biases and do not reinforce the ageist stereotypes that are entrenched in our society, which may legitimise discriminatory behaviours. Again, try to focus on the person first and see how relevant it may be in a particular context to refer to their age.

Use a similar approach when talking to or about young generations and children. Children are not a homogenous group either, so consider their specific needs in your communication.

Dos and Don'ts

Avoid collective nouns like 'the elderly' as they are not a homogenous group. Refer to 'older people' or 'an older person' rather than an 'old person' or 'old people'. Do not portray older people as being passive, weak or helpless in visual communication or in drafting a text.

In visual communication, include people of all ages. Visuals have proven to be a particularly effective tool when communicating to children. Make sure to differentiate between the images you use for younger children below 12 and those you use for 12-18 year-olds.

If you aim to reach a younger audience, you should tailor your text to the age-group addressed².

The next chapter on accessible online publications is helpful for ensuring that everyone, including older people, has access to all information, regardless of any visual, cognitive or other impairment.

The table below provides a few guidelines on the use of language for quick reference.

GUIDELINE	AVOID	USE THIS INSTEAD
Emphasise the person rather than the group which is not homogenous	'the elderly' 'old person' / 'old people'	'an older person' / 'older people'
In visual communication or in drafting a text, do not portray older people as being passive, weak or helpless	'The elderly are dependent on their loved ones.'	'Older people can require greater support from their loved ones.'

¹ Ageism refers to discrimination against people because of their age, and the underlying tendency to regard older people as unworthy and debilitated.

² The team behind DG Communication's EU Learning Corner website can give you advice on this. You can also seek the views of the members of the Teachers Testing Panel on products aimed at 5 to 18 year olds. See https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/dg/comm/whatwedo/Citizens/Pages/Citizens_Information.aspx.





ONLINE ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) is the first international legally binding instrument setting minimum standards for the rights of people with disabilities. It is the first human rights convention ratified by the EU. It obliges all signatories to make documents, publications, websites and communications accessible to all.

In addition, in 2018 the European Ombudsman¹ recommended that EU institutions take the necessary measures to fully apply web accessibility standards and provide information in sign languages, Braille, augmentative and alternative communication, and other accessible forms for people with disabilities, including easy-to-read formats and language.

The European Commission needs to lead by example, given its leading role among the EU institutions in the area of web accessibility. We have achieved a lot since the Commission's first commitment to adapt its websites in 2003, but we can and should always strive for more. In the 2021-2030 strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities² the Commission committed to adopt an action plan on web accessibility and to improve accessibility across its audiovisual communications and graphic design services.

Inclusive communication concerns not only the content of your communication, but also how usable it is to everyone. You must ensure that your content is usable and available to as many people as possible³. To be disability-inclusive, the content must be accessible in line with well-established guidelines and standards. This includes, for example, complying with the requirements of the European standard for accessibility ICT EN 301549⁴ which point to the requirements set by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)/Web Accessibility

Initiative (WAI). This is important as people with different disabilities use the web in different ways⁵.

Also, bear in mind that this accessibility for people with disabilities can improve access for people without disabilities in certain situations.

The following general principles of accessible websites and their content illustrate some key features of the standards and guidelines:

- **Keep it simple and avoid jargon:** always use clear and simple language. This makes it easier for everyone to understand your texts, including non-native speakers and people with a cognitive impairment or learning difficulty, for example⁶.
- **Always include subtitles or transcripts for videos, and transcripts for podcasts.** These are vital for people with hearing impairments or cognitive disabilities, and they will also help anyone working in a noisy environment or watching a video on public transport, for example. Provide alternatives in sign languages. You can find examples of sign language alternatives on the World Wide Web Consortium website⁷.
- **Include alternative text with visuals:** alternative text for images and other objects such as infographics or maps is essential for people who cannot see the images. Screen readers read alternative text aloud, so it is the only information many have about the image. Good alternative text helps them understand the information communicated by the image. You can find examples of how to ensure that your image is accessible in the Office of Publications' guide on alternative text⁸. The World Wide Web Consortium's alt decision tree⁹ can help you decide how to use the alt attribute in various contexts.

1 See footnote 6 on the use of the term ombudsman as opposed to ombudsperson in this case.

2 COM (2021) 101: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1484>

3 For more information, refer to the accessibility section of the Europa Web Guide:

<https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/WEBGUIDE/01.+Accessibility+overview> and to the OP guide on accessibility of digital publications: <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/accessibility>

4 European harmonised standard for accessibility EN 301549:

https://www.etsi.org/deliver/etsi_en/301500_301599/301549/02.01.02_60/en_301549v020102p.pdf

5 See a collection of stories centred on user experience at: <https://www.w3.org/WAI/people-use-web/user-stories/#accountant>

6 See footnote 2 for useful guidance from DGT on this point.

7 <https://www.w3.org/WAI/media/av/sign-languages/#creating-sign-language-alternatives>

8 https://op.europa.eu/documents/6388565/7101341/Alternative+texts_Tips+and+tricks.pdf/

9 <https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/images/decision-tree/>

- **Graphics / text colours and backgrounds should have sufficient contrast to make them readable for people who have a colour vision impairment.** Colour should not be the only means of conveying information or distinguishing a visual element; for example: in charts use symbols, or add a description (example: use letters instead of just colours: instead of ● ●●, use v x).
- Avoid certain colour combinations, as they have an impact on how the information is perceived by people with a colour vision impairment such as red and black, red and green, blue and yellow; as well as ‘vibrating’ colour combinations (e.g. green and magenta, yellow and cyan). You can find examples of how to use colour in an accessible way online on the World Wide Web Consortium’s website¹⁰.
- **Use meaningful hyperlink text that can be understood even if read without the surrounding text:** avoid using link texts like ‘Click here’ or ‘read more’. This helps blind users using a screen reader who can extract and listen to a list of all the links on a page. You can find more information on how to write meaningful link text on the World Wide Web Consortium’s website¹¹.
- **Structure webpages and documents with headings:** titles, subtitles and section titles should use the proper heading structure (H1, H2, H3, etc.). Do not rely on formatting features alone, like bold, underline and font size.
- **When you use a table,** provide information about the relationships between header and data cells in complex table **and specify column header information.** In the case of a form to fill in, you can also allow respondents to choose between a table and a list of questions. If you use a table, having a table header row with column headings provides context and helps with readability. People who cannot see the table can have column headings read aloud. Tips are available on how to create a simple, accessible table structure¹².
- **Adequate text size and line/paragraph spacing** helps people with cognitive disabilities and is essential for ensuring that people with low vision can process text more easily. Use a maximum of two fonts, if possible and avoid block capitals and italics. Consider sans serif fonts for easier readability.
- Consider creating an **easy-to-read version**¹³ of your documents, news items or of the legislative texts you are communicating about.
- **Avoid flashing lights in videos or at events,** as these may trigger seizures in people with epilepsy.
- **Hashtags:** use a capital for the first letter of each word in hashtags and domain names to help people with a vision impairment (e.g. #MobilityWeek; www.MobilityWeek.eu). This allows users to distinguish with greater ease where each word is beginning and ending.
- **Use the accessibility checkers in the software that you use** (e.g. MS Word, Adobe Acrobat Pro). For Word, you can follow these steps to run the Word Accessibility Checker:
 - ▶ Open the **Word** document.
 - ▶ Select the **File** tab.
 - ▶ Select **Info** from the left-hand menu.
 - ▶ Click the **Check for Issues** button.
 - ▶ Select **Check Accessibility** from the drop-down menu.
 - ▶ Review the list of potential errors in the **Accessibility Checker** pane¹⁴.

¹⁰ <https://www.w3.org/WAI/tips/designing/#dont-use-color-alone-to-convey-information>

¹¹ <https://www.w3.org/WAI/tips/writing/#make-link-text-meaningful>

¹² <https://www.w3.org/WAI/tutorials/tables/tips/>

¹³ Inclusion Europe provides guidelines for creating Easy-to-read (ETR) versions: <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read/>. The European Union is explained in an easy-to-read format here: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/easy-to-read_en. DG Employment and the EU Ombudsman, among others, regularly publish ETR versions of their texts.

¹⁴ The OP website has lots of guidance on creating accessible documents: <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/accessibility/documents>
Training on creating accessible documents is regularly offered by the OP and available on EU Learn

- Check the specific instructions for the programme you are using, such as Adobe Acrobat Pro and Microsoft PowerPoint¹⁵. Accessibility templates are also available in Eurolook¹⁶.
- If you outsource any work of this kind, you must ensure that all deliverables comply with online and digital accessibility requirements. These requirements must be clearly stated in all contracts¹⁷.

15 Guidance for accessibility on Adobe Acrobat (creating pdf files): https://helpx.adobe.com/be_en/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html and Microsoft PowerPoint: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-powerpoint-presentations-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-6f7772b2-2f33-4bd2-8ca7-dae3b2b3ef25?ui=en-us&rs=en-us&ad=us>

16 <https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/news/AuQuotidien/Pages/corporate-accessibility-template-2021.aspx>

17 'the contractor must respect the W3C guidelines for accessible pdf documents as provided at: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>'

USEFUL LINKS

Inclusive communication

European Commission Style Guide: https://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/sg/Documents/commission_style_guide.pdf

Gender-neutral language in the European Parliament: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/151780/GNL_Guidelines_EN.pdf

Inclusive communication in the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35446/en_brochure-inclusive-communication-in-the-gsc.pdf

Toolkit on gender-sensitive communication by the European Institute for Gender Equality: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/toolkit-gender-sensitive-communication>

Interinstitutional Style Guide: <https://publications.europa.eu/code/en/en-4100600en.htm>

Visual communication

Resources for Commission's graphic designers: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/wikis/pages/viewpage.action?spaceKey=GraphicDesigners&title=Resources+for+graphic+designers>

Images that change the world, a guidebook by Swedish photographer Tomas Gunnarson: <https://sharingsweden.se/app/uploads/2020/03/images-that-change-the-world-guideboken-final.pdf>

LGBTIQ social media toolkit by DG JUST: https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/lgbti-equality-social-media-toolkit_en

Image gallery on equality: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/illustrationphotos/?thematic=54410>

Accessibility requirements

Making e-publications accessible for all by the Publications Office: <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/accessibility>

Accessibility section of the Europa Web Guide: <https://wikis.ec.europa.eu/display/WEBGUIDE/01.+Accessibility+overview>

Web accessibility guidelines: https://www.etsi.org/deliver/etsi_en/301500_301599/301549/02.01.02_60/en_301549v020102p.pdf

Inclusion Europe's guidance on Easy-to-read documents: <https://www.inclusion-europe.eu/easy-to-read/>

To give feedback on this guide, please contact:

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