

# GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

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## FOREWORD

The Centre for Genomic Regulation (CRG) is an international biomedical research institute based in Barcelona.

The CRG received the "HR Excellence in Research" logo from the European Commission in 2013. It recognizes the institute's commitment in developing an HR Strategy for Researchers, including a Gender Equity Action Plan. In the same year, the institute's direction established the CRG Gender Balance Committee with the mission to **promote equal opportunities** for men and women at the CRG and **foment women's advancement in scientific career**.

Within the institute, the CRG Gender Balance Committee aims at providing an inclusive and motivating working environment. It strongly believes that opportunities should be available on a fair and equal basis and without discrimination. The Gender Balance Committee also aims at reaching gender equality across the institute and establishing working conditions that allow all employees to develop their skills, reach their full potential and achieve their personal and professional goals.

The CRG is therefore committed, and ensures that the facilities and support are present for all members of staff; including training and policy changes with the aim of making work and life work well for all employees and their families.

With this purpose, the CRG published in 2020 the new **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan 2020-2023**. The plan is the result of the institute's firm conviction and commitment to cooperate in the creation of a fairer, more tolerant and egalitarian society of women and men, that catalyses their advancement and development, and in which fundamental rights are respected and promoted. It is also a response to our national and international regulatory framework as concerns equality.

One of the strategic axis of this plan tackles **Communication and Language**, which aims at promoting communication that is inclusive from a gender standpoint. With this in mind, the CRG adopts these guidelines on gender-inclusive language, which provides practical advice in English, Spanish and Catalan on the use of gender-fair and inclusive language.

The CRG is committed to the use of gender-inclusive language in its written and spoken communications and we now invite the whole CRG community to contribute to raise awareness of these guidelines and the importance of their use in all our publications and communications.

## 1 WHAT IS GENDER NEUTRALITY IN LANGUAGE / GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE?

**Gender-inclusive or gender-neutral language is a generic term covering the use of non-sexist language, inclusive language or gender-fair language. The purpose of gender-inclusive language is to avoid word choices which may be interpreted as biased, discriminatory or demeaning by implying that one sex or social gender is the norm. Using gender-fair and inclusive language also helps reduce gender stereotyping, promotes social change and contributes to achieving gender equality.**

Gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language is more than a matter of political correctness. Language powerfully reflects and influences attitudes, behaviour and perceptions.

In order to treat all genders equally, efforts have been employed since the 1980s to propose a gender-neutral/gender-fair/non-sexist use of language, so that no gender is privileged, and prejudices against any gender are not perpetuated.

As part of those efforts, over the last decade, numerous guidelines have been developed and implemented at international and national level. International and European institutions (such as the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, the International Labour Organisation, the European Parliament and the European Commission), professional associations, universities, major news agencies and publications have adopted guidelines for the non-sexist use of language, either as separate documents or as specific recommendations included in their style guides. In the European Union, many Member States have also debated language policies and proposed such guidelines at various levels.

## 2 BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Using gender-inclusive language means speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender or gender identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes. Given the key role of language in shaping cultural and social attitudes, using gender-inclusive language is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias.

The resources provided here are aimed at helping the CRG staff to communicate in a non-sexist and gender-inclusive way in English, Spanish and Catalan.

The purpose of these guidelines is not to constrain authors in the CRG to follow a mandatory set of rules but rather to encourage our staff to give due consideration to the issue of gender sensitivity in language whenever they communicate.

These guidelines include a number of recommendations to help the CRG staff to use gender-inclusive language in any type of communication — oral or written, formal or informal, or addressed to an internal or external audience.

The recommendations and resources provided here will be revised and updated to reflect new feedback, suggestions and changes in the use of language.

## 3 MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT AT CRG

In the multilingual environment of the CRG, the principles of gender neutrality in language and gender-inclusive language require the use of different strategies in the most used languages, that is English, Spanish and Catalan, depending on the grammatical typology of each language.

As far as grammatical gender is expressed in these languages, a distinction can be made between two types of languages and the accompanying strategies to achieve gender neutrality:

- **Natural gender languages** (such as English), where personal nouns are mostly gender-neutral and there are personal pronouns specific for each gender. The general trend here is to reduce as much as possible the use of gender-specific terms. In these languages, the linguistic strategy most usually used is neutralisation. In order to avoid gender references, one can use gender-neutral terms, i.e. words that are not gender-specific and refer to people in general, with no reference to women or men ('chairman' is replaced by 'Chair' or 'chairperson', 'policeman' or 'policewoman' by 'police officer', 'spokesman' by 'spokesperson', 'stewardess' by 'flight attendant', 'headmaster' or 'headmistress' by 'director' or 'principal', etc.). This gender-neutral trend has led to the disappearance of the older female forms, with the previous male

form becoming unisex (e.g. 'actor' instead of 'actress'). Gender-inclusive language is also used, replacing, for example, 'he' as a generic reference by the terms 'he or she'.

- **Grammatical gender languages** (such Spanish and Catalan), where every noun has a grammatical gender and the gender of personal pronouns usually matches the reference noun. As it is almost impossible, from a lexical point of view, to create widely accepted gender-neutral forms from existing words in those languages, alternative approaches have been sought and recommended in administrative and political language.

- **Feminisation** (i.e. the use of feminine correspondents of masculine terms or the use of both terms) is an approach that has become increasingly used in these languages, in particular in professional contexts, such as job titles when referring to women. Because most occupations have been, by tradition, grammatically masculine, with only a few exceptions, typically for traditionally feminine jobs such as 'nurse' or 'midwife', the feeling of discrimination has been particularly strong. Therefore, female equivalents started to be created and increasingly used for virtually all functions of masculine gender ('presidenta', 'senadora', 'assessora', etc.). Also, replacing the generic masculine with double forms for specific referents ('todos los investigadores y todas las investigadoras') has gained acceptance in many languages. Thus, the use of generic masculine terms is no longer the absolute practice.

## 4 COMMON ISSUES IN LANGUAGES

Although the specific ways to avoid sexist language vary from one language to another, a number of the following issues are common to most languages.

### I. GENERIC USE OF THE MASCULINE GENDER

The traditional grammatical convention in most grammatical gender languages is that for groups combining both sexes, the masculine gender is used as the 'inclusive' or 'generic' form, whereas the feminine is 'exclusive', i.e. referring to women only. This generic or neutralising use of the masculine gender has often been perceived as discriminating against women.

Most grammatical gender languages have developed their own strategies to avoid such generic use. Relevant strategies are described in the specific guidelines at the end of this booklet. Solutions that reduce the readability of a text, such as combined forms ('s/he', 'him/her'), should be avoided.

In addition, the use in many languages of the word 'man' in a wide range of idiomatic expressions which refer to both men and women, such as manpower, layman, man-made, statesmen, committee of wise men, should be discouraged. With increased awareness, such expressions can usually be made gender-neutral.

By combining various strategies (see the specific guidelines), it should be possible, in most cases, to apply the principle of gender neutrality and fairness in CRG's texts.

### II. NAMES OF PROFESSIONS AND FUNCTIONS

When referring to functions in CRG's texts, generic terms are used in natural gender languages and in genderless languages, while the masculine form may be used by way of exception in grammatical gender languages (e.g. 'cada investigador principal té el seu propi laboratori').

If the gender of the person is relevant to the point being made, or when referring to individual persons, gender-specific terms should be used, in particular in grammatical gender languages (e.g. 'la jefa del grupo de investigación X'). Generally speaking, a person's own wishes as to how he or she would like to be addressed or referred to, should be respected. Maybe this comes up later in the document but when referring to a person ie in a press relase for example, it should be for

example “Michael Johns group found...Michael/Sarah have been studying XXX”. not “Michael Johns group found...he/she have been studying XXX”.? More inclusive to just use the names not he/she

Notices of vacancies should be drafted in a gender-inclusive way in order to encourage both male and female candidates to apply.

### III. USE OF TITLES

In some languages (for example Spanish and Catalan), titles such as ‘Señora’, ‘Señorita’, ‘Senyora’ or ‘Senyoreta’ originally indicated the marital status of the woman to whom the title applied. This has changed over the years and the use of those titles no longer reflects such status. Administrative practice is following this trend. The title ‘Señorita’ is for example progressively being deleted from administrative forms in some countries, leaving only the choice between ‘Señora’ and ‘Señor’.

## 5 SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR ENGLISH

In English, there is a difference between “grammatical gender”, “gender as a social construct” (which refers to the roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society at a certain time considers appropriate for men or women) and “sex” as a biological characteristic of living beings.

English has very few gender markers: **the pronouns and possessives** (*he, she, her* and *his*); and **some nouns and forms of address**. Most English nouns do not have grammatical gender forms (*teacher, president*), whereas a few nouns are specifically masculine or feminine (*actor/actress, waiter/waitress*). Some nouns that once ended in *-man* now have neutral equivalents that are used to include both genders (*police officer* for *policeman/policewoman*, *spokesperson* for *spokesman, chair/chairperson* for *chairman*).

A challenge for gender-inclusive communication in English is the use of the masculine form by default. For example, “*Every Permanent Representative must submit his credentials to Protocol.*”

It is really important to use gender-neutral language: it makes women visible and breaks the stereotypes that promote inequality. It is a gesture that will help us build a fairer and egalitarian world.

### USE GENDER-NEUTRAL WORDS

Avoid the generic use of 'man' and its derivatives:

#### Less inclusive:

Mankind  
Manpower  
Man-made  
Frenchman  
Frenchmen  
Committee of wise men  
Statesmen

#### More inclusive:

Humankind; humanity; human race  
Staffing; staff  
Artificial; synthetic; human-caused  
French person  
The French; French people  
Advisory panel  
Political leaders

## USING FEMININE AND MASCULINE PRONOUNS

Complete rephrasing may sometimes be necessary to avoid using *'he or she'* or its derivatives. See examples below:

- Use plural forms

Less inclusive:

A PhD should defend **his** thesis

More inclusive:

PhDs shall defend **their** thesis

- Use the imperative

Less inclusive:

**He** should send **his** CV to...

More inclusive:

Please send your CV to...

- Omit the pronoun altogether

Less inclusive:

A PhD salary is not dependent on **his** length of service

More inclusive:

A PhD salary is not dependent on **his** length of service

- Use the passive

Less inclusive:

**He** should send the relevant documents to...

More inclusive:

The relevant documents should be sent to...

- Use the pronoun *one*

Less inclusive:

A staff member in Antarctica earns less than **he** would in New York

More inclusive:

A staff member in Antarctica earns less than **one** in New York

- Use the relative pronoun *who*

Less inclusive:

If student is not satisfied with the board's decision, **he** can ask for a rehearing.

More inclusive:

A student **who** is not satisfied with the board's decision can ask for a rehearing.

If none of the above strategies work, use *'he or she'*, but do so sparingly and avoid repeating it more than once in the same sentence.

Avoid combined forms such as *'he/she'*, *'him/her'*, *'s/he'*

Avoid alternating masculine and feminine forms

However, it may not always be possible to avoid the occasional generic use of *'he'* or *'his'*, but strenuous efforts should be made to reduce such use to a minimum.

### 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.'*

### USING PLURAL PRONOUNS/ADJECTIVES

In informal contexts, such as emails, plural pronouns may be used as a shortcut to ensure gender inclusiveness. Such strategies are not recommended in formal writing

Example: *'Someone may not know **their** ORCID ID. In that case, **they** should ask...'*

This may be considered acceptable, though caution should be exercised when it comes to the reflexive/emphatic form: should one accept *'Someone may unintentionally cause harm to themselves'*? In such cases *'themselves'* is a possible neologism, but does not appear to be established as yet, although this may evolve. For the moment and if there is no alternative, use *'themselves'*.

### FORMS OF ADDRESS / TITLES

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

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.

#### Less inclusive:

“Professor Smith (surname and title for a man) and Madeline (first name for a woman) will attend the luncheon.”

#### More inclusive:

“Professor Smith and Professor Jones will attend the luncheon (surname and title for both).”

Use *'Mr'* for a man; *'Ms'* for a woman, avoiding *'Miss'* and *'Mrs'*, unless it is known that the person referred to specifically wants to be referred to by one of those titles; use *'Dr'* for both genders (in the sense both of *'medical doctor'* and *'Ph.D.'*); use *'Professor'* (abbreviation: *'Prof.'*) for both genders.

### NAMES OF PROFESSIONS AND FUNCTIONS

#### Use gender-neutral job titles

Generally, in English, it is by now long-established that words like *'doctor'* or *'lawyer'* refer to a professional of either sex (without *'woman'*, *'lady'* or *'female'* tacked on the front). In some cases, a substitute is available (*'firefighters'*, *'flight attendants'*, *'athletes'*), but it is still normal to use *'fisherman'*, *'midwife'*, and some other gender-specific terms. A list of recommendations is set out in the Appendix.

#### Use *'Chair'* instead of *'Chairman'*

'Chairperson' should be avoided, as the tendency has been to use it only when referring to women. 'Chair' should be used consistently for both sexes (for example, 'the Conference of Committee Chairs').

Use '**press officer**' or **paraphrase: 'a representative for ...' or 'speaking for ...'** or (sparingly) use '*spokesman*' or '*spokeswoman*', depending on the actual sex of the specific person concerned.

## 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.'

### Less inclusive:

Guests are invited to attend with their wives.  
Fathers babysit their children.

### More inclusive:

Guests are invited to attend with their partners.  
Fathers care for their children.

## APPENDIX: RECOMMENDED NAMES OF PROFESSIONS AND FUNCTIONS

It is generally not difficult to find a gender-neutral term for professions, occupations, functions, etc. in English, although there are some exceptions. The following is a non-binding list of recommendations, with alternatives where relevant.

- Actor/actress (actor is now commonly used for both genders; use actress if the person's gender is relevant)
- Administrator (for both genders)
- Ambassador (for both genders)
- Architect (for both genders)
- Assistant (for both genders)
- Attaché (as in 'cultural attaché - also use for women attachés, attachée does not appear to exist)
- Author (not authoress)
- Business person/executive (plural: business people) (not businessman; businesswoman
  - only if the person's gender is being stressed; alternatively, and in plural contexts, use
  - business circles or business milieux)
- Commissioner (for both genders)
- Director, Director-General (for both genders)
- Doctor (for both genders - avoid lady/woman doctor)
- Editor (for both genders)
- Engineer (for both genders)
- Firefighter (not fireman)
- Fisherman/fishermen ('fisher' and 'fisherfolk' are not widely accepted)
- Flight attendant or (in plural) flight crew (not air hostess or stewardess)
- Head/head teacher (of primary or secondary school; not headmaster/headmistress)
- Intern (for both genders)
- Interpreter (for both genders)
- Journalist (for both genders)
- Judge (for both genders)
- Lawyer (for both genders)
- Layperson (plural: lay people; not layman/laymen)

- Lecturer (for both genders)
- Manager (not manageress)
- Mayor (not mayoress)
- Midwife (for both genders; there is no accepted alternative for male midwives)
- Nurse (for both genders; avoid male nurse)
- Official (for both genders)
- Police officer (not policeman/policewoman unless the officer's gender is relevant)
- Politician (for both genders)
- President (for both genders)
- Priest (only use 'woman priest' if relevant; 'priestess' only in a historical context, e.g. ancient Rome)
- Prime minister (for both genders)
- Professor (for both genders)
- Rector (of university; for a UK university, vice-chancellor)
- Sales representative (not salesman)
- Scientist (for both genders)
- Speaker (for both genders)
- Teacher (for both genders)
- Technician (for both genders)
- Trainee (for both genders)
- Translator (for both genders)
- Usher (in whatever context; in a cinema, not usherette)
- Waiter/waitress (no gender-neutral term has been successfully proposed)
- Weather reporter/forecaster (not weatherman)
- Writer (for both genders)

## 6 APPROVAL

This document has been described and approved by:

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