



European Institute for
Gender Equality

EIGE Writing Guide

A practical guide to support inclusive, consistent and
effective communication

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An EU Agency

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Introduction

At the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), we produce content that is clear, inclusive and aligned with our values.

This guide shows writers, editors and contractors how to follow our writing principles. It draws on the Interinstitutional Style Guide (ISG), the European Commission's English Style Guide (ESG) and EIGE's own guidance on gender-sensitive, accessible and hope-based communication.

1. Style

1.1. House Style

Consistency is critical. Language is constantly changing and it's important to have an agreed reference point. Style guides demand effort and input from trusted experts to keep them up to date.

For this reason, on questions of grammar, punctuation, and spelling, we defer to the [Interinstitutional Style Guide](#) (ISG) and the Commission's [English Style Guide](#) (ESG). The tone and register of these guides are a good match for EIGE.

If you are unsure about how to refer to people and places, when and how to write out numbers, or the way to spell the English equivalent of a Greek or Bulgarian word, consult the ESG.

However, due to the specialist nature of our work, there are instances where we will diverge from, or build on, the two style guides. These special cases are set out over the following pages.

1.2. Gender-sensitive communication

Words matter. We use language that treats all people of equal value while respecting their dignity and integrity, regardless of gender.

To help writers, we produced the guide: [Words Matter: Supporting gender equality principles through language and communication](#).

This guide offers a broad and practical approach to using language and communication effectively to support gender equality. It sets out essential principles, challenges and terms you need to know.

The practical advice in this supersedes all else. It forms the core of all our communications and supports our writing principle of inclusivity.

On this topic, EIGE's writing guide instructions override section 10.6 on Gender-neutral language of the ISG.

1.3. Accessibility

We commit to producing outputs accessible to all.

We follow the Publications Office guidelines on accessibility: [Accessible publishing - Accessible publishing - Publications Office of the EU \(europa.eu\)](#)

Since most of EIGE's manuscripts are developed in MS Word, follow these guidelines: [handout-accessibility-publishing-word.pdf](#)

1.3.1. Accessibility & quality of images and charts

As EIGE's publications usually contain images and charts (with their sources), do not forget that in the manuscript provided to PO, the author should:

- Indicate clearly in the text where the image should appear, considering the reading order.
- In addition to image captions, provide alternative text for all images (e.g. graphs, diagrams, screenshots, maps, etc.) explaining them, either as part of the manuscript or in an additional file.
- Mark as 'decorative' any purely illustrative images that can be skipped by screen readers.
- Avoid redundancy. If a chart is described well in the main text and an alternative text would duplicate the same information, the chart should be marked as an 'artefact' or as 'decorative' so it will be ignored by screen readers.
- Deliver the high quality (300 dpi) version of the images in a separate folder and use a compressed version of the images in the word file. The word file should not exceed 5 MB.

These instructions will clarify what is 'spoken' by the accessibility screen readers.

Source: [handout-accessibility-publishing-word.pdf](#)

1.4. How we talk about our statistics

- We talk about 'making data comparable' not 'harmonising data'.
- We use the term 'sex-disaggregated data', not 'gender-disaggregated data'.
- We use 'women and men', not 'female and male'.
- Where feasible, we round percentages to the nearest whole number, so, 46 % not 45.8 %. For communication products (news articles, social media posts etc), rounding up is the norm, rather than the exception.
- We prefer the present tense, so 'The employment rate of women is 37 % compared to 52 % for men.'

- We use the past tense when referring to a specific period, so ‘More men studied this subject in 2015’.
- We avoid phrases like ‘in the past decade’, preferring ranges such as ‘between 2010 and 2020’.

1.5. How we talk about the Gender Equality Index

- For clarity, we never abbreviate the Gender Equality Index to GEI.
- After we first mention the Gender Equality Index, we may refer to it as the Index.
- We ‘release’ the Index, we do not ‘launch’ it as it is not the first edition.
- We include the year or edition when referring to a specific release of the Index.
- As the Index is a scale from 1 to 100, we refer to changes in points and not percentage points.
- When explaining the Index, we use the agreed descriptions of EIGE’s Gender Equality Index, which is also the basis for our web page. This text is written in a broad manner without jargon.

1.6. How we talk about gender-based violence

- We may refer to either ‘gender-based violence’ or ‘violence against women’.
 - We write these terms in full and avoid using the abbreviations GBV or VAW.
 - By writing these phrases in full, we avoid confusion and reinforce the importance of the issues.
- Similarly, we refer to ‘intimate partner violence’, not IPV.
- The only exception is ‘female genital mutilation’, which we may refer to as FGM.
- We do not use the phrase ‘female genital cutting’, or FGC.
- We talk about ‘FGM-affected communities’ not ‘FGM-practising communities’. This encompasses those who wish to leave the practice behind.
- We use the term ‘victim’ rather than ‘survivor’ to align with EU directives and strategies.
- We use the term ‘perpetrator’ and not ‘abuser’ or ‘offender’.
- We use the term ‘witness’ and not ‘bystander’.
- We talk about ‘cyber violence’ and not ‘cyberviolence’ or ‘online violence’.

1.7. How we use references

Our research builds on the ideas and findings of others to create new, original thoughts. Referencing is vital to this. It's how we acknowledge our sources, build trust and tell the reader where to get more information. Referencing is also a legal obligation.

We include references whenever using facts, figures, quotes from external sources:

1. to acknowledge the authorship of the information used;
2. to support the message with examples from the most relevant sources.

While referencing is important, our first obligation is to help the reader understand our text. For this reason, we take care of the placement of references.

We do not interrupt the flow by breaking the sentences with references. Instead, we include the reference(s) at the end of each sentence.

We aim to have a maximum one reference per sentence. Too many references is an indication of many messages in one sentence, which should be avoided. If multiple sources can be used as references for one point, choose the most relevant/credible reference and indicate it as an example (using "e.g.").

1.7.1. Reference checklist

Too many references can clutter the text and distract readers from the main arguments.

To support our writing principles of accuracy, clarity and simplicity, when deciding whether to include a reference, first ask yourself the following:

1. Is the information up to date and peer-reviewed, or from a credible source?	2. Does the information support your message?	3. Will the information help your reader understand the context of your work?
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If the answer to all these questions is 'yes', then you should include a reference.

If there is a 'no', this information might not be of high quality to be included in the document.

A credible source includes for example peer reviewed academic articles, academic books, conference papers, official public organisation reports. Non credible sources include bachelor/master theses, random websites, unverified social media accounts.

1.7.2. Reference style

- The reference style we use is described in section 5.9 of the ISG.
- EIGE uses in-text references.
- EIGE does not use footnotes references.
- A footnote, which gives some extra content to the main text, can of course contain its own reference.
- All references are presented in the reference list, at the end of the document.
- All references presented in the reference list should be used in the document.
- We hyperlink references in the reference list, not in-text.

1.8. Readability

Short sentences are difficult to write. But long sentences are difficult to understand. Using overly long sentences makes it hard for the reader to make sense of the point you're making.

And if we only write in short sentences, we can sound mechanical. Variety is key. So, we pay attention to average sentence length across any single piece of content.

The readability score (available through Word's built-in 'Editor' tool) helps us pitch writing that works for our target audience. A lower score means more complex writing and may highlight the need for more editing.

On this scale, we aim for a score of 50 in our general communications and 40 in our research/reports. EIGE's adopted Typology document has norms for readability for all EIGE products, which should be adhered to. The 'Specifications' section gives more precise guidance about specific outputs.

This supports our writing principle of readability.

1.8.1. Readability—a quick quiz

Q: How would EIGE write to parliamentarians about the role they play in promoting gender equality?

1	2	3
Acknowledging the role that parliaments, as key decision-making institutions, have in driving changes towards gender equality in all spheres of life, in 2018 EIGE developed a gender-sensitive parliaments self-assessment tool to help parliaments at the European, national and re-gional levels assess their gender sensitivity and monitor progress towards gender equality.	Parliaments are our key decision-making institutions. As such, they play an important role in driving gender equality. To help them in this work, EIGE developed its gender-sensitive parliaments toolkit. It allows them to track their progress towards gender equality.	Parliaments are important. They make big decisions. And can help gender equality. We made a toolkit to help them. It gives them tips to do better. So, they can keep an eye on their progress.

A: Hopefully, you picked number 2. Number 1 is unnecessarily complex; 50 words is way too many for a single sentence. Meanwhile, 3 is over-simplified and staccato.

1.9. Jargon

Jargon is a useful shorthand for people working in a specific sector. But it can easily confuse or exclude those who aren't in the know. To support our principle of inclusivity, we avoid jargon wherever possible.

When there is no plain English alternative, we explain complex words and phrases the first time we use them.

Here are some examples of how we might do this:

- **Intersectional approach**, which means addressing how various social categories such as gender, age or ethnicity interact to create unique outcomes.

- **Intrahousehold inequalities**, such as gaps in wealth, resources or opportunities within a household.
- **Feminist principles** or ideas promoting equality between genders in policies and practices.

1.10. Compound words and hyphens

Compounds may be written as separate words, with hyphens, or as a single word.

With frequent use they tend to develop into single words: data base > data-base > database.

We follow section 10.1.8 of the ISG.

We do not hyphenate these terms		
Gender mainstreaming	Gender impact assessment	Gender planning
Gender budgeting	Gender indicators	Gender stakeholder consultation
Gender statistics	Gender analysis	Institutional transformation
Gender statistics database	Gender evaluation	
Gender equality	Gender monitoring	

1.11. Supporting documents

- EU Interinstitutional Style Guide (ISG) <https://style-guide.europa.eu/en/>
- The European Commission's English Style Guide https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/styleguide_english_dgt_en.pdf
- Words Matter: Supporting gender equality principles through language and communication <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/words-matter-supporting-gender-equality-through-language-and-communication.pdf>
- The Publications Office guidelines on accessibility <https://op.europa.eu/en/web/accessibility>

- The Publications Office guide for producing accessible Word documents [handout-accessibility-publishing-word.pdf](#)

2. Our tone of voice

Everyone has their own unique writing voice. But, if you're writing on behalf of EIGE, you're not just writing as yourself. You're representing the whole Agency.

Consistency is vital whether you're writing an email or a policy recommendation. The following advice will help adapt your style to reflect EIGE's preferred tone.

2.1. Hope-based communications

Focusing solely on the negative aspects of gender equality can leave people feeling powerless and discouraged, reducing their willingness to act.

We don't shy away from bad news. But we also showcase positive pathways. Our hope-based communications aim to inspire readers to help make a difference.

By emphasising constructive solutions and the impact of individual and collective actions, we empower our audiences to play their part. For problems we highlight in our writing, we aim to present positive solutions.

We recognise the potential and value of all individuals regardless of gender. So, we strive for fairness in our writing, avoiding stereotypes such as portraying men as inherently bad and women as inherently good.

2.1.1. Hope-based communications—a quick quiz

Q: How would EIGE write a series of hope-based headlines in a report on gender equality in the media?

1	2	3
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why are the vast majority of Europe's top editors men? 2. Male dominance of the media continues to marginalise women 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Great news 40% of all journalists are women 2. Media offers equal opportunities for all genders 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Only 22% of the top editors across Europe are women 2. Challenging gender bias: how the media can empower all voices

<p>3. How male-driven narratives silence female voices</p> <p>4. The media's gender bias: a battle women are losing</p>	<p>3. Celebrating women and men on an equal footing in the media</p> <p>4. A gender-neutral media landscape: The future is already here</p>	<p>3. Overcoming barriers: taking steps toward gender equality in media</p> <p>4. Creating inclusive narratives: the media's role in promoting gender balance</p>
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A: If you picked 3, that's great. It presents the challenge and offers hope for the future. Option 1 focuses only on the negative, while 2 ignores the existing gaps in media representation.

2.2. How we offer advice/recommendations

EIGE doesn't issue directives or demands. We provide evidence and advice to improve gender equality. So, when we're drafting policy recommendations, we avoid words like 'should', 'must', 'shall' or 'will'.

First, we identify the organisation or institution that we are addressing. For example: 'Recommendations for Member States'.

We then list advice or recommendations, resulting from our research, as concise, direct bullet points. Each point begins with an active verb such as: 'use', 'integrate', 'collect', 'develop' or 'recognise'.

By taking this approach, we aim to foster a sense of achievable, evidence-based progress.

2.3. Avoid using the third person—write actively

We're proud of our work at EIGE. We believe we should take ownership of the important things we do. That means using the word "we" more often than academic institutions.

Because we want to engage with people, we are comfortable with using the word "you". Especially when what we're writing about impacts the reader. In our research and reports, we strive to avoid sounding subjective. But for everything else, we think it's good to show a bit of personality.

Similarly, we prefer active verbs to passive ones. We strive to use the active voice unless there is a compelling reason to use the passive. Sentences written in the active voice tend to be shorter, clearer and more engaging for our readers.

3. Quick reference grid

✔ Do	✘ Don't
Use gender-sensitive language (e.g. "women and men")	Say "female and male" or use gendered language unnecessarily
Follow the Interinstitutional Style Guide (ISG) and European Commission ESG	Invent new styles or ignore EIGE-specific instructions
Adopt an inclusive, hope-based tone that highlights solutions	Focus only on negative issues without suggesting progress or action
Use active voice and personal pronouns ("we", "you")	Default to passive constructions or overly formal, distant writing
Round percentages (e.g. 46%) and prefer whole numbers	Use decimals (e.g. 45.8%) unless necessary
Refer to the Gender Equality Index in full on first mention, then "the Index"	Abbreviate as GEI or use percentage points to describe changes
Write in plain English and explain jargon at first use	Overuse technical terms or sector-specific shorthand
Provide in-text references only (and hyperlink in the reference list)	Use footnote-style referencing or hyperlink within the text
Ensure all images/charts have alt text unless marked decorative	Skip accessibility features or insert visual content without descriptions
Use templates and maintain accessibility/readability standards	Create outputs with poor formatting or dense, hard-to-read language



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