



Gender inclusive language toolkit

Produced by SIPTU National Equality Committee
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Introduction

SIPTU's Gender Inclusive Language Toolkit was developed by the National Equality Committee supported by the Union's LGBTQ Network. The Committee was appreciative of input from members with lived experience of identities and issues referred to in the Toolkit.

The Toolkit is designed to help Union members, activists and staff interact with one another using words that respect and celebrate the diversity of gender identities in our Union.

Workers should feel safe and supported within the Union and the labour movement generally regardless of their gender identity.

Use of inclusive language at union events and meetings helps people to feel valued and welcomed.

The first edition of the Toolkit is being published to mark Pride 2024. It's a decade since SIPTU launched our campaign for marriage equality. Some of the progress made in Ireland around that time is now under threat. SIPTU is committed as ever to supporting and advocating alongside of our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer members, future members, friends and family. We will not stand by when hard-won equality gains are under threat.

Because language around gender, inclusion and identity is constantly evolving and changing, this Toolkit will be reviewed regularly to ensure the terms and information remain up to date, respectful and inclusive. Some of the words and terminology used in the Toolkit may be new to some readers. Therefore, we included a glossary at the back.

What is gendered language?

Language is one of the most powerful tools we have, but it is often unnecessarily gendered in ways that centre masculinity. While there has been a shift away from some of these words — firefighter instead of fireman; chairperson instead of chairman; solidarity instead of fraternity — the work is far from complete.

A number of jurisdictions have considered the impact of gendered language in the law and have taken steps to remedy male-dominated language in the public sphere. In the last two decades, countries such as the UK, Canada, New Zealand and Australia have officially launched policies committed to utilising gender-neutral language when drafting legislation and other government documents. The importance of gendered language and its effects has also previously been recognised by the Dáil. As far back as December 1993, the Dáil debated potential amendments to the Interpretation Act 1937 to remove gendered language and move towards more neutral terminology in legislation. Then Minister for Equality and Law Reform, Mervyn Taylor, stated "We are all aware nowadays of the importance of terminology in shaping perceptions of particular groups. It is no longer acceptable to use language which is sexist or which reinforces sexual stereotypes." During the course of this debate, the Government also made assurances that future legislation would be drafted in a gender-neutral fashion.

Gendered language is something that has been studied and analysed at great length, with the consensus being that, though seemingly innocuous, the use of gendered language is harmful. In fact, numerous studies have found higher levels of sexism in societies where gendered language is used. Gendered language can make trans, non-binary, and gender-fluid people feel invisible, and discredit their identities.

That is why we need to challenge deeply entrenched habits and always consider the types of words we use when addressing each other.

What is gender inclusive language and why is it important?

Gender inclusive language is a way of communicating that strives to treat people of all genders and those with no gender with respect and dignity — with the goal of making everyone feel included. It is language that honours the fact that we all have unique lived experiences of gender. It consists of communicating with words or phrases without prejudice and discrimination.

Additionally, gender inclusive language looks to challenge gender stereotypes and the frequent assumptions that we make about people's identities, often based solely on appearance. By using gender inclusive language, we are not only showing that we value inclusion, but we are also promoting gender equity for all.

According to the United Nations, gender-neutral language (also known as gender-inclusive language) is "writing and speaking in a way that does not discriminate against a particular sex, social gender or gender identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes".

Placing all people into the binary categories of male/female, man/woman masculine/feminine etc, is something many people do subconsciously. For centuries, western society has assumed that there are only two sexes (male and female) and two corresponding genders (man and woman). This belief excludes non-binary, gender non-conforming and transgender individuals as well as people who are intersex.

Even the most well-intentioned person may inadvertently use gendered words or language. It can result in distress, alienation, discomfort and discrimination for other gender and sexual minorities.

What is the difference between sex and gender?

Sex refers to the series of biological traits that define human beings typically within the categories of male or female. These include a person's primary sex characteristics such as chromosomes, hormones, gonads (i.e. testicles or ovaries), genitals and other secondary characteristics such as breasts or facial hair.

What is gender expression?

Gender expression is the way a person presents and communicates their gender. This can be done through clothing, speech, body language, hairstyle, voice etc. It is important to note that just because someone may express themselves in a way that you consider to be masculine or feminine, it doesn't necessarily reflect their actual gender identity. Never assume someone's gender based only on appearance or behaviour.

Gender expression is also not an indication of sexual orientation.

Despite all the possible gender identities that exist on the gender spectrum, society operates within a gender binary where expectations of masculinity and femininity are placed on us from birth that dictate how we behave, should act, present ourselves, and navigate the world. These expectations follow us through our lives and can sometimes be destructive and harmful for those who don't prescribe or relate to these rules.

What is cisgender?

A cisgender person is someone whose gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth. Therefore, a cisgender man is a man who was assigned male at birth and a cisgender woman is likewise a woman who was assigned female.

What is transgender/non-binary?

In the case of trans and nonbinary people this is not the case. A trans woman for example is a woman who was assigned male at birth but whose gender is that of a woman and for a trans man vice versa. Non-binary describes a range of people whose gender is neither that of a man or woman regardless of what sex they were assigned at birth. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, may experience a fluidity between genders, multiple genders or may experience no gender at all. Many non-binary people identify themselves under the trans umbrella whereas others do not. Some non-binary people may use specific terms to encompass their gender and/or gender expression such as genderqueer, genderfluid, agender etc.

What is Transition?

Trans and non-binary people often typically go through a process of altering their gender expression to better align with their gender in some way. This can include changing of names, personal pronouns, clothing, mannerisms, voice etc. This is known as social transition.

Trans and non-binary people may also legally transition through the use of deed polls, gender recognition certificates, new passport/driving licence etc.

Currently in Ireland non-binary people and people under 16 are unable to avail of a gender recognition certificate which entitles people to legally correct their birth certificate and update the gender marker on forms of ID such as passports.

Some trans or non-binary people may undergo hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and/or surgical procedures to change their sex characteristics to better align with their gender. The extent of these interventions varies from person to person based on many, often highly personal factors. Trans people who do this often face many hurdles and barriers accessing this often life-saving healthcare due to legal issues, medical gatekeeping, health complications, social pressures or lack of funding and resources.

A trans person who does not or cannot hormonally or surgically transition is no less of a man, woman or nonbinary person than any other cisgender person and this should be reflected in the language we use.

While for some trans people, the process of transition is something they are open about and happy to share, for others it is a very private matter so it is important to respect people's boundaries when it comes to their personal health and private lives.

SIPTU advises and represents members who are transitioning or have transitioned on workplace issues or impacts on terms and conditions which may arise.

What is Intersex?

While most people can be classified as being born as either male or female, a certain number of people (0.5–1.7% of the global population) are born intersex or have differences in sex development. Intersex people, like endosex people (people who are born with typical male/female traits) can be cisgender, transgender or non-binary. Intersex people may also undergo hormonal or surgical procedures either to align with the sex assigned to them at birth, a trans or nonbinary identity or for other health reasons. Many intersex people have had hormonal interventions or genital surgeries performed on them as infants without their consent. This practice is sometimes referred to as IGM or Intersex Genital Mutilation.

What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation is the description of an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/ or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, heterosexual men and women, and other orientations, including pansexual (not limited in sexual attraction by biological sex, gender or gender identity), and asexual (a person who does not experience sexual attraction).

Use of the term 'sexual preference' may be considered offensive and is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice. Sexual orientation is a better term to use.

What is homophobia?

The term 'homophobia' refers to a fear and hatred of gays and lesbians. Homophobia ranges from derogatory comments to harassment, to violence, to silencing ("as long as they don't talk about it," etc.), to denial of human rights.

Do I say 'transgender' or 'transgendered'?

'Transgender' or 'trans' is the correct term. 'Transgendered' is grammatically incorrect.

It would be incorrect to say, "Tony is a transgender" or "The parade included many transgenders." It would be correct to say, "Tony is a transgender person" or "The parade included many transgender people."

Can I say 'transsexual'?

'Transsexual' is not an umbrella term, like 'transgender'. It is an older term originating in the medical/psychiatric communities. Many transgender people do not identify as transsexual and prefer the word 'transgender'. It is always best to ask which term a person prefers.

Union greetings

You may have been to a union meeting or event and heard members refer to other members as "brothers" and "sisters." The use of these words within the labour context dates back to the 1800s when the act of meeting to discuss strategies for improving working conditions was criminalised. These expressions may also have some roots in union members' religious affiliations.

While the initial focus was on "brotherhoods" and "brothers," the term "sisters" was added to the lexicon in the 1960s, which demonstrates that even deeply entrenched terminology can change and adapt to be more inclusive.

While the intention of using these terms has always been to demonstrate solidarity and unity amongst union members, it can lead to misgendering at meetings or on the conference floor, which might discourage trans and gender diverse people from speaking. That is why it is important to not make assumptions about a person's gender.

Examples of inclusive language and greetings

Here are some examples of inclusive language that can be used at meetings, events, conferences and in general communication. The language you use may need to shift depending on the audience you're addressing.

Brothers, sisters, and *friends*
 Greetings, *everyone*
 Comrades
Colleagues
 Delegate at the mic, please state your point.
 What is the name of the *member* who just spoke?

What and how are pronouns used in Gender Inclusive Language ?

What is a preferred pronoun?

A pronoun refers to a person's gender, such as 'he'/'she', 'him'/'her', 'herself'/'himself', 'hers'/'his'. Assuming pronouns based on someone's appearance can lead to errors and assumptions. This is why asking is more inclusive.

Why are gender-neutral pronouns used?

Pronouns such as 'he' and 'she' come with certain assumptions about someone's gender. This can often feel limiting to someone who does not fit into binary (i.e. male/female) identity. Using a gender-neutral pronoun such as 'they'/'them' can make a non-binary individual feel welcome and respected.

Pronouns are words we use to reference someone without repeatedly using their name. The pronouns we use can also express our gender to others.

An individual can use one set of pronouns or multiple sets, which can include *they/them/their*, *ze/hir/hirs*, *she/her/hers*, and *he/him/his*, among many others.

How do I ask someone what pronouns to use?

When you are not sure what pronouns a person uses, use their name. You can't know for sure what pronouns someone uses just based on their appearance, behaviour or by hearing them speak. Avoiding assumptions by asking for a person's pronouns and correctly using them is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender and your commitment to inclusion.

Examples:

"Marie (they/them/their) is our new committee chairperson. They have been an activist for 10 years and their contribution is invaluable."

Asking people about their pronouns can seem invasive but confirming how a person wants to be referred to is an inclusive practice that demonstrates care and respect. Normalising and increasing this practice will ensure that trans and gender non-conforming people aren't singled out.

Start by sharing your own pronouns, which can encourage others to share theirs.

For example:

"Hi. I'm Marie, and I go by they/them pronouns."

“What’s your name? And how should I refer to you?” or “What are your pronouns?”

Remember, not everyone wants to share their pronouns publicly. While it's always appropriate to invite people to share their pronouns, if someone doesn't share, don't force them.

Trans and non-binary members are vulnerable to harassment and discrimination and may choose not to share their identity with everyone. It is imperative never to out anyone and to respect their right to safety and privacy. If you encounter someone who doesn't want to share, it's always best to just use their name.

What do you do if you don't know what gender someone is?

Simply ask, “What are your pronouns?” If you make a mistake and misgender someone take the steps outlined in the next section of this Toolkit.

What is misgendering?

Misgendering can happen when someone makes assumptions about a person's gender, uses their 'deadname', and/or uses the wrong pronouns. Though misgendering may be unintentional, it can have harmful impacts. When someone is referred to with the wrong pronouns, it can make them feel stigmatised or excluded and signal that their gender and/or experiences aren't respected.

For many people who are transgender, and/or non-binary, being misgendered is often a regular occurrence and can impact their mental health and ability to navigate their daily lives.

If you wish to use gender inclusive language, 'they' is your new best friend – a term that has become popular in recent years to use instead of 'he' and 'she', 'they' is gender inclusive. Mis-gendering people with 'he' or 'she' if they do identify differently, can lead to awkward situations both for them and you, so using 'they/them/their' is a great way to avoid this.

In a situation where you do not know a person's pronouns but you need to refer to them in the third person, it's often good practice to default to they/them until you are more certain. This can reduce the chances of unintentional misgendering.

What if I make a mistake?

Mistakes will happen. Everyone makes mistakes from time to time. What is important is that we keep striving to do our best by being as inclusive as possible with our language.

If you misgender someone or use the wrong pronouns, acknowledge your mistake and move on. Don't dwell on it and don't make it about you. Apologising and correcting yourself demonstrates care, respect and a commitment to equality.

For example, "She is great writer. I'm sorry, I meant they are a great writer. Their last novel was phenomenal."

On the next page, you'll find more tips for what to do if you misgender someone, adapted from materials by Awaken, an organisation focused on empowering inclusive and authentic leaders and teams.

Strategies for when you misgender someone

Calm your defences.	Listen and practice self-management.
Apologise and acknowledge your mistake.	Apologise without leading with your intention. "I'm so sorry." "Wow, I really messed that up — sorry!"
Express gratitude for correction (if applicable).	Thank them for the courage it took to correct you. "Thank you so much for telling me."



What if I notice someone else misgendering a person?

If someone is being misgendered, but isn't present to make the correction for themselves, it's important for others to hold the speaker accountable to foster and create inclusive environments. When someone misgenders another person, there are a few options:

In a casual conversation, you can politely interject by saying

"By the way, Marie's pronouns are they/them."

You can repeat back the sentence a person has just said using the correct pronouns.

Speaker 1: "I just met Sam; he seems really nice."

Speaker 2: "Yes, you're right, they are really great!"

If you encounter someone who continues to use the wrong pronouns or repeatedly misgenders someone, it may be time to change tactics. You can explain that this language and behaviour is unacceptable and discriminatory and not becoming of a SIPTU member.



Glossary of Definitions

LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual. The plus sign represents other sexual orientations, gender expressions, and romantic orientations that exist within queer communities.

Agender refers to a person who doesn't identify with or experience any gender. Agender is different from non-binary because many non-binary people do experience gender.

Cisgender refers to an individual who identifies with their sex and gender assigned at birth. For example, a cisgender man is a person assigned male at birth who identifies as a man. A cisgender woman is a person assigned female at birth who identifies as a woman.

Deadnaming occurs when an individual, intentionally or not, refers to the name that a transgender or gender diverse individual used at a different time in their life. This can cause trauma, stress, embarrassment, and even danger. Some may prefer the terms birth name, given name, or old name.

Gender binary is the disproven concept that there are only two genders and that everyone must be one or the other. It is also often misused to assert that gender is biologically determined. This concept reinforces the idea that men and women are opposites and have different roles in society.

Gender expression is the way a person presents and communicates gender identity to society, through clothing, speech, body language, hairstyle, voice, and/or the emphasis or de-emphasis of bodily characteristics or behaviours and traits, used publicly to express one's gender as masculine or feminine or something else. Gender expression IS NOT an indication of sexual orientation.

Gender-fluid describes a person who doesn't consistently adhere to one fixed gender and who may move among genders.

Gender identity refers to a person's individual experience of gender, which may be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

Gender non-conforming is a term for those who don't follow societal and cultural expectations of binary gender roles. It's often an umbrella term for non-binary genders.

Gender queer refers to individuals who blur preconceived boundaries of gender in relation to the gender binary.

Gender spectrum is the concept that gender isn't just limited to a simple masculine/feminine binary model, but instead exists on a continuum.

Misgendering is when someone makes assumptions about a person's gender identity, uses their deadname, and/or uses the wrong pronouns.

Non-binary and/or genderqueer and/or gender nonconforming.

These are terms used by some people who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman. They may define their gender as falling somewhere in between man and woman, or they may define it as wholly different from these terms.

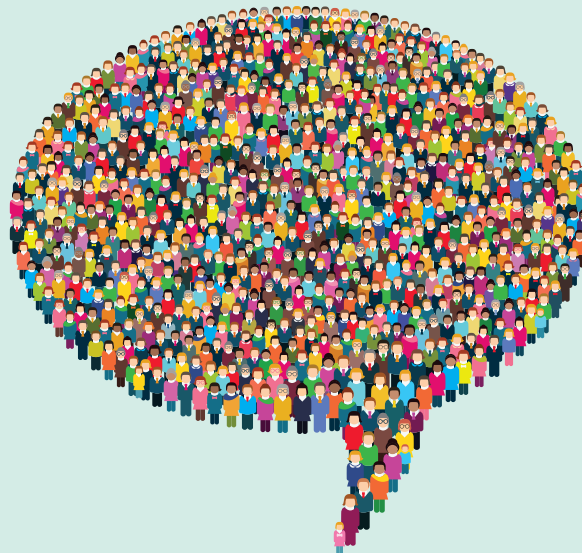
The terms are not the same as 'transgender' or 'transsexual' and should only be used if someone self-identifies as non-binary and/or genderqueer.

Outing is the deliberate or accidental sharing of another person's sexual orientation or gender identity without their explicit consent. Outing is disrespectful and can present a danger for many LGBTQ+ individuals.

Sex assigned at birth is the sex assigned to an infant at birth based on the child's visible sex organs/genitalia.

Sexual Orientation is the description of an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/ or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, and is inclusive of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, heterosexual men and women, and other orientations, including pansexual (not limited in sexual attraction by biological sex, gender or gender identity), and asexual (a person who does not experience sexual attraction).

Transgender or Trans is an umbrella term to describe a wide range of people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differ from the sex they were assigned at birth and/or the societal and cultural expectations of their assigned sex.



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