

GSMA™

Inclusive Language Guidance

February 2025

The GSMA aims to maintain and promote a work environment that is representative of the rich diversity of our employees. We achieve this through celebrating diversity globally, helping everyone understand what it means to be inclusive and ensuring that equity is at the heart of everything we do.

The GSMA aims to create the conditions whereby people are treated fairly on the basis of their merits and potential; regardless of their race, nationality, gender, gender identity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic background, religious or political belief, caste or tribe, or military status.



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1. Introduction

What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is a form of communication that avoids using words, expressions or assumptions that would stereotype, demean or exclude people. For example, gendered language is commonly understood as language that has a bias towards a particular sex or social gender. In English, this would include using gender-specific terms referring to professions or people, such as businessman or fireman.

Please note the terms used in this guide reflect the diverse identities and experiences of British and American society, there might be alternative preferred terms in other regions which we look forward to capturing.

Language is powerful and can have varying effects, the issue is that language changes, it evolves, and with the best intentions, you can't get it right all the time. Changing personal habits needs both patience and empathy. This guide provides information to help all GSMA employees use inclusive language with confidence.

Why use inclusive language?

For individuals within marginalised groups, inclusive language indicates that this is a safe space where authenticity is welcomed. It signifies that inclusivity is a priority where every voice is significant and diverse opinions are valued.

For example, the use of pronouns is not just about clarifying which pronouns we use; it demonstrates our support as allies to the LGBTQIA+ community. The adoption of such language signals safe and inclusive environment.

2. Pregnancy and Parents



The traditional ideas about the roles of women and men have shifted over time but the assumptions and stereotypes that underpin these ideas are often deeply rooted.

It is common to assume a woman will have children, look after them and take a break from paid work or work part-time to accommodate the family. It is also common to assume a man will only want to take the minimum time off work.

Such assumptions and stereotypes can, and often do, have the effect of seriously disadvantaging people.

2. Pregnancy and Parents

- Avoid making remarks such as “baby brain” if someone is forgetful during pregnancy or calling someone who leaves early a “part-timer”.
- Don’t remind people of time they have spent “off” while on parental leave.
- Being away from work for a long period is life changing and can be challenging for many new parents, find ways to keep them engaged and included. Ask them and your People Business Partner for ideas on how to stay in touch before going on leave.
- Be cautious on assuming only women are affected by the challenges that come with having a family; consider the effect it has on men too and be mindful of language and behaviours that may stop them from requesting reasonable adjustments.
- A large majority of people that have been pregnant or have given birth identify as women. We can include intersex men and transmen who may get pregnant by saying “pregnant people” instead of “expectant mothers”.

INCLUSIVE TERMS	NOT INCLUSIVE TERMS
Parent/Parents	Mother and Father
Parenting	Mothering/Fathering
Parents/Guardians	Mums/Moms and Dads



3. Disability

16% of the world's population, experience some form of disability.

It is important to note, not every disability is visible and easy to notice. Invisible or hidden disabilities can be physical, mental or neurological conditions that limit a person's movement and senses. The very fact that these symptoms are invisible can lead to misunderstandings, false perceptions, and judgments.

Examples of invisible disabilities are depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, diabetes, HIV and epilepsy.

A lot of language used to describe disabled people can implicitly define those with a disability by their disability, suggest that disability is abnormal, or perpetuate stereotypes of weakness.



3. Disability

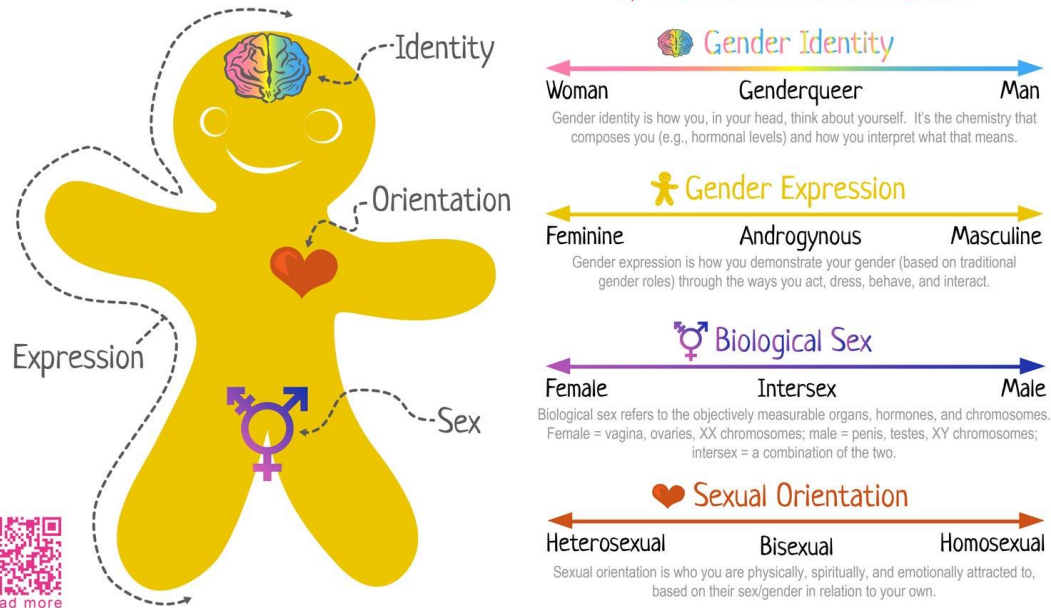
- The word 'disabled' is a description not a group of people.
- Use person-centred language. Seek to put the person first and the disability second, e.g. "a man who is blind" instead of "a blind man" or "a person with schizophrenia" instead of "a schizophrenic".
- Try to avoid language that frames any adaptive equipment as a limitation rather than something assisting the person e.g. "wheelchair user" or "person who uses a wheelchair" rather than "wheelchair bound".
- When speaking about disability, avoid phrases that suggest victimhood, e.g. "afflicted by," "victim of," "suffers from," "confined to a wheelchair".

INCLUSIVE TERMS	NOT INCLUSIVE TERMS
People with disabilities, Disabled People	The disabled/The handicapped
People without disabilities, Neurotypical	Normal people/Healthy people/Able-bodied
Blind people, partially sighted people, people with sight loss	The blind
They are indecisive/unpredictable	They are so bipolar
People living <u>with</u> a mental health condition	Mental, the mentally ill, psychotic
Neurodivergent/ neuroatypical	Suffer from a neurodivergence, on the spectrum

4. Gender and Sexual Orientation

The Genderbread Person

by www.ItsPronouncedMetrosexual.com



<https://www.genderbread.org/>

A lot of everyday language is based on the idea of two genders and one sexuality, and can erase the identities of others. The use of gender inclusive language respects and acknowledges all gender identities and removes assumptions of a patriarchal morphological structure, while the use of sexuality inclusive language avoids heteronormative norms and embraces all sexual orientations.

The acronym LGBTQIA+ is used to describe not just the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. The first three letters (LGB) refer to sexual orientation. The 'T' refers gender identity. The "Q" stands for Questioning or Queer, the "I" for Intersexual and the "A" for Asexual.

Gender identity is your own, internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or non-binary, as someone outside of that gender). Transgender or Trans is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

4. Gender and Sexual Orientation



Gender transition is the process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance.

Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns and/or be socially recognised as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions to match how they feel in the inside to their outside, while the extent and timing of the process varies from person to person.

Sexual orientation describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person (for example: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual). Transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would be typically identify as a straight woman

4. Gender and Sexual Orientation

- If you don't know the marital status of a woman, you should use 'Ms' instead of 'Miss' or 'Mrs'. A new gender-neutral title 'Mx' is now being widely used by the Government and many businesses in the UK.
- Terms like 'policeman' imply an occupation is exclusively male. Use terms such as 'police officer', 'firefighter' or 'salesperson'.
- Try not to make assumptions about the gender of someone's partner or erase LGBTQIA+ couples with your language e.g. "feel free to bring your husbands and wives." Instead, use "feel free to bring your spouses or partners."
- Avoid describing someone as trans unless that is how the person identifies and is comfortable with sharing. Do not try and compliment them by drawing attention to them being trans person.
- There are three common gender pronouns: she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/theirs. Use 'they' (rather than his or her) when unsure of someone's pronouns. It is okay to ask which gender pronouns they identify with. For example, "Hi, I'm Sam, and I use the pronouns she/her/hers. What about you?"
- 'Queer' is sometimes used as an umbrella term to refer to all people with non-heterosexual sexual orientations. Although it is a reclaimed term within the LGBTQIA+ community, it is still considered offensive to many and should only be used if necessary and appropriate. Ask how people want to be identified and be sensitive.
- People who share protected characteristics may choose to refer to themselves by terms outlined in and outside of this guide by way of 'reclaiming' the slur. The use of language in this way has entirely different implications and effects than a person from outside the group using it, especially intentionally using it in a derogatory way.

4. Gender and Sexual Orientation

INCLUSIVE TERMS	NOT INCLUSIVE TERMS
Hi all, folks, team, friends, everyone	Hi girls, guys, ladies, gentlemen
Partners/Spouses	Boyfriend/Girlfriend/Husband/Wife
Nibbling	Niece/Nephew
Chair/Chairperson	Chairman
Humankind	Mankind
Toughen up	Man up
Best person for the job	Best man for the job
Sexual Orientation/Sexuality	Sexual Preference
Gender Identity	Decided to be a man or woman
A trans person or a transgender person	Tranny/ Transvestite
Transitioning/Transitioned well	Sex change/Looks “better” as man/woman
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	Homos/Homosexuals

5. Race and Ethnicity

Race is defined as a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits such as skin colour and hair texture.

The term ethnicities is more broadly defined as large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background.

Though race has no genetic basis, the social concept of race still shapes human experiences. Racial bias fuels social exclusion, discrimination and violence against people from certain social groups.

In turn, racial prejudice confers social privilege to some and social and physical disparities to others, and is widely expressed in hierarchies that privilege people with white skin over people with darker skin colours.



5. Race and Ethnicity

- Do not make assumptions about someone's national origin based on their appearance.
- There are a number of terms for different ethnicities and nationalities and different people will prefer and use different descriptors. It is best to ask what a person identifies with. For example, 'Black' vs 'African-American' or 'Latinx' vs 'Latina'.
- People can have multiple racial and ethnic identities that may not be obvious based on appearance. Do not assume that a person's skin complexion/appearance defines their nationality or cultural background.
- Representation - When using stock photos, try to strike a balance between intentionally including people of colour in images, and also being conscious of the context and not reinforcing stereotypes, for example, equating poverty with people of colour. It is important to rule out token efforts or gestures as they do more harm than good.
- Use adjectives, rather than nouns, where it is important to identify someone's race.
- Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a statement which has become an important way for people to show their support for black people who have experienced discrimination simply because of the colour of their skin. The statement comes from the demand for all lives to matter equally, for society to value the lives and humanity of black people continue to face and want to draw attention to. The sentiment of "all lives matter" is fine but the point is that actions of governments, law enforcement agencies and society in general can undervalue the lives of black people. People are now strongly encouraged to make steps towards being antiracist and fight against racism.
- The word blacklisting along with whitelisting reinforces the bias that black is bad and white is good. The managed services team is leading the industry with a plan to stop using terminology related to coloured lists.

5. Race and Ethnicity



INCLUSIVE TERMS	NOT INCLUSIVE TERMS
Block list, Safe list, Allow list, Deny list	Blacklisted, Whitelists
Other racial groups	Coloured people
Underrepresented groups, ethnic minority groups, People of colour	Minorities, BME or BAME
Mixed race, Biracial or Multiracial people	Half-Caste, Exotic
People from overseas	Foreigners
Black People, White People	The Blacks, The Whites

6. Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is about enabling people or communities to fully participate in society and improving the ability and opportunity for those typically excluded on the basis of their identity.

Exclusion is often based on social identity, which may come from one's location, citizenship status, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, among other factors.

Informal language used to discuss people of low socioeconomic status or for instance, those with experience of drug or alcohol use issues can strengthen negative stereotypes and downplay the real problems faced by these groups.

Avoid language that frames the person as a problem rather than the challenging situation they find themselves in. For example, "person with drug issues" is better than 'druggy', and "people with low-incomes" is better than 'poor people'.

INCLUSIVE TERMS	NOT INCLUSIVE TERMS
Socioeconomic status	Class
Substance use disorder	Substance abuse disorder
People facing barriers	People struggling
People with low-income or no income people	The poor or ghetto
Survivors	Victims
People who misuse alcohol	Alcoholics
"I look messy, untidy"	"I look like a tramp"
"I drank a lot"	"I am turning into an alcoholic"

7. Age

Age discrimination can be a serious barrier to younger and older people playing an equal part in society. Ageism is part of our everyday language and is so ingrained in society that many ageist remarks are often overlooked, missed or simply accepted. Being old is still equated far too often with undesirable attributes and incorrect views, including dependency and the inability to learn new things in the workplace.

'Old fart', 'little old lady', 'bitter old man' and 'old hag' are the most used ageist phrases on social media.

It is however important to note, inappropriate language can be targeted towards people of any age – young, old and in-between. You should avoid using language that stereotypes or implies that a particular age group is more or less able.



7. Age



- When writing job descriptions, focus on the skills and core capabilities a candidate requires to be successful at the GSMA rather than number of years of experience or age.
- It is possible to wonder how a young manager would feel or cope with managing younger or older people. Instead of relating your questions to age, ask, “What skills do you have to enable you to effectively manage a team?”

INCLUSIVE TERMS	NOT INCLUSIVE TERMS
Older Person/People, Elderly Person/People	The Elderly, Old Man/Woman
An effective and diverse team	A young and diverse team
An experienced workforce	A middle-aged workforce
Proven experience is required	10 years' experience is required

8. Glossary of Terms

Ableism | Discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities.

Allies | Someone who does not experience the same structural oppressions as their peers but actively fights their corner.

Antiracist | Being antiracist results from a conscious decision to make frequent, consistent, equitable choices daily. In the absence of making antiracist choices, we (un)consciously uphold aspects of white supremacy, white-dominant culture, and unequal institutions and society. Being antiracist is believing that racism is everyone's problem, and we all have a role to play in stopping it. An action of being antiracist, rather than just not racist, would be to call someone out on a racist comment or action, rather than just silently disagreeing with it.

Anti-Semitism | Hostility toward or discrimination against Jews as a religious or racial group.

Assimilation | When a person dampens a part of their identity to blend into the culture of a workplace or industry.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) | an international social movement, formed in the United States in 2013, dedicated to fighting racism and anti-Black violence.

Colourism | Colourism is prejudice against people who have a darker skin tone - and/or the preferential treatment of those who are of the same race but lighter-skinned.

Cultural Appropriation | Theft of cultural elements for one's own use, commodification, or profit — including symbols, art, language, customs, etc. — often without understanding, acknowledgement, or respect for its value in the original culture. Results from the assumption of a dominant (i.e. white) culture's right to take other cultural elements.

8. Glossary of Terms

Equity | Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful compared to equality where everyone is treated the same.

Ethnic minorities | Ethnic minorities refer to all ethnic groups except the White British Group. Ethnic minorities include Asian or Asian British, Black, Black British, Caribbean or African, Mixed or multiple ethnic groups and other ethnic group.

Intersectionality | An approach largely advanced by women of colour, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive. It was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.

Latinx | A gender inclusive term used to refer to people of Latin American descent sometimes used in lieu of Latino or Latina.

Micro-aggression | Indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group.

Nibling | a gender-neutral term to refer to the child or children of your siblings.

Privilege | A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.

9. Glossary of Terms - LGBTQIA+

Asexual | The lack of a sexual attraction or desire for other people.

Biphobia | Prejudice, fear or hatred directed toward bisexual people.

Bisexual | A person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Cisgender | A term used to describe a person whose gender identity typically aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth. For example, someone who identifies as a woman and was assigned female at birth is a cisgender woman. The term cisgender is the opposite of the word transgender.

Closeted | Describes a LGBTQIA+ person who has not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming out | The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Gay | A person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Gender-fluid | A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender; of or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid or unfixed gender identity.

9. Glossary of Terms - LGBTQIA+

Genderqueer | Genderqueer people typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often, though not always, sexual orientation. People who identify as 'genderqueer' may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Homophobia | The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Intersex | An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. Those variations are also sometimes referred to as Differences of Sex Development (DSD.) Avoid the outdated and derogatory term 'hermaphrodite.'

LGBT / LGBT+ / LGBTQ+ / LGBTQIA+ | Acronyms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual or allied.

Non-binary | An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside these categories. While many also identify as trans, not all non-binary people do.

Outing | Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety or religious or family situations.

9. Glossary of Terms LGBTQIA+

Pansexual | Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.

Queer | A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations and an umbrella term used as an inclusion of all identities within the LGBTQIA+ community. Note that this term is perceived as offensive by some so should be used carefully.

Questioning | A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Transsexual | A person who physically transitions from male to female or vice versa.

Transgender | A person who identifies differently from their biological sex. For example, a transgender person who is biologically female may feel that a male identity is a better fit and use male pronouns instead of female pronouns or/and dress as a man. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Transphobia | The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people.

10. References / Further Reading

- Rebel Ideas: The Power of Diverse Thinking by Matthew Syed
- [An Incomplete Guide to Inclusive Language for Startups and Tech](#)
- [Speaking for Everyone | A Guide to Inclusive Language in the Workplace](#)

Recommended Training

- <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/leading-inclusive-teams/using-inclusive-language>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/diversity-inclusion-and-belonging>
- <https://www.linkedin.com/learning/diversity-and-inclusion-in-a-global-enterprise>

Sources

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