

Glossary of Sensitive Language for Internal and External Communications



The aim of this glossary is to help staff of the European Parliament communicate correctly in the areas of disability, LGBTI+ issues and matters pertaining to race, ethnicity and religion. As a rule of thumb, we advise all staff to ask individual members of diversity groups how they would like to be addressed. However, when it is not possible to do so, we kindly ask you to consult the following glossary of sensitive language, which the Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Unit of DG PERS, in close collaboration with DG TRAD, has carefully compiled.

Please note that within the full glossary there are three individual glossaries:

- | 1. Glossary of disability terminology**
- | 2. Glossary of LGBTI+ terminology**
- | 3. Glossary of terminology pertaining to race, ethnicity and religion**

Given the sensitive nature of these topics, all language versions of this glossary vary in content to accommodate the specificities and nuances of each language.

Glossary of disability terminology

1

Remarks from the European Disability Forum:

- In general, the language of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities should be employed. Part of the disability movement prefer 'people first' structures, such as 'people who are deaf'; others prefer 'identity-first terminology', such as 'the deaf'.
- The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD), ratified by the EU and all Member States, entails a shift away from charity/medical perspectives towards a human rights perspective. Its definition of persons with disabilities is: 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.'
- There is a distinction between disability, which refers to the interaction between someone's impairment and his/her/their environment (human rights-based approach), and the impairment itself (medical approach).
- 'Disability' used in its singular form refers to the concept of disability. Otherwise, it should be used in the plural form: 'persons with disabilities', 'persons with physical disabilities', etc. If you use the singular form, you are referring only to the impairment of the person, and thus not complying with the human rights approach to disability.
- It is important that in all terminology used it is never implied that persons with disabilities are of less value than others. This said, the European Disability Forum uses the terminology of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Preferred

Deaf persons/persons who are deaf/hard of hearing/deafblind persons

Persons living with mental ill-health
Persons with psychosocial disabilities
Users and survivors of psychiatry

Persons with physical disabilities

Persons who are blind or partially sighted/visually impaired persons¹

Persons in or who use a wheelchair/wheelchair users

Persons living with a specific condition

Person with a brain injury

Persons with a mobility impairment/persons who use crutches/a cane/a mobility scooter/a walking frame, etc.

Persons with a speech impairment

Persons with achondroplasia

To avoid

Deaf-and-dumb
Deaf-mute

Mentally ill
Hypersensitive
Insane
Crazy
Psycho
Emotionally disturbed

Handicapped
Wheelchair-bound
Confined to a wheelchair

Stricken with ...
Suffers from ...
Victim of ...

Brain-damaged

Cripple/crippled

Dwarf
Midget

¹ Alternatively, the European Blind Union recommends using either 'blind and partially sighted persons' (or one or the other if you want to be more specific) or 'visually impaired persons' (catch-all). The first term is preferable to make it clear that policies are also to the benefit of partially sighted persons, due to many people not understanding the nuance (for many people, a blind person sees 0 % while in reality there are various degrees of vision) – source: European Blind Union

Preferred

Persons with autism/autistic people

Persons with diabetes

Persons with disabilities from birth

Persons with disabilities/disabled persons
(some prefer the former, others the latter)

Persons with intellectual disabilities/persons
with learning disabilities (for the latter in
a UK context)

Persons without disabilities

To avoid

Savant
Rain man
Genius - be especially careful not to use the
common stereotype of autistic people being
super-smart, obsessively focused and socially
inept.

Diabetics

Birth defects
Deformity

Handicapped people
Differently abled
Handicap
Handicapable
Special needs
(These terms, while used in certain contexts can
also be offensive for some.)

The following terms are confusing/incorrect:
mentally disabled, mental disabilities, delayed.
Offensive: retarded

Normal
Able-bodied
Healthy

To consider:

- Avoid metaphors with disability, especially those that underestimate the impact of disabilities (e.g. 'I clean my desk because of my OCD, I am so ADHD today', etc).
- Take care to use human rights language based on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Do not use language such as 'special', 'courageous', 'heroic', 'inspiring' or 'brave'. Persons with disabilities, like all people, just want to live their life. Calling them 'brave' or 'inspiring' is patronising and is a way for society to hide a general lack of inclusion and accessible mainstream services.
- Likewise, persons with disabilities are not objects of pity; 'poor person, they have a disability' is not a correct sentiment. The focus should be on the obstacles that society creates.
- Do not refer to people with disabilities as objects of pity, help, special measures, etc. Instead, use pictures of people with disabilities/real persons to illustrate 'normal' situations (e.g. 'We want to communicate something about work, let's use a picture of someone with a disability [even if it's not disability-related]').
- The terms institutionalisation/deinstitutionalisation concern the segregation of persons with disabilities in residential institutions/settings (mental hospitals, 'homes for the disabled', etc.), where they lose independence and the possibility to participate in the community. However, in some countries (like France) deinstitutionalisation may be perceived as a dismantling of official institutions.

Sources

[UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

Consultation with European Disability Forum (not official position)

Glossary of LGBTI+ terminology

2

Preferred	Meaning/comments	To avoid
Agender Genderless Gender-free Non-gendered Ungendered	Terms describing someone who identifies as having no gender or being without a gender identity (not to be used by non-LGBTI+ people).	
Asexual	A person who does not feel sexual attraction towards others.	
Assigned sex	The sex assigned to a person at birth, with the main criterion being the baby's genitalia.	Biological sex
Homophobia Biphobia Transphobia Interphobia	Fear, hatred, discomfort or mistrust towards people who are perceived as homosexual, bisexual, transgender or intersex.	
Bisexual Pansexual	A person potentially attracted to more than one or all genders.	
Cisgender/Cis Cis man Cis woman	A term denoting a person whose gender identity aligns with the gender assigned at birth.	
Civil union/registered partnership	Terms denoting that the relationship of a couple is legally recognised - not always with the same rights and/or benefits that exist for marriage.	
Deadname	The name that a transgender person was given at birth and no longer uses upon transitioning.	
Deadnaming	Deadnaming is using that name. Important: when talking to a trans person, always use their chosen name rather than the name that was given to them at birth.	

Preferred	Meaning/comments	To avoid
Different-sex relationship	A relationship between people of two different sexes.	Opposite-sex relationship
Fair/equal treatment Treating people fairly and equally		LGBTI+ rights Gay rights Trans rights
Gay	A man who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men.	It is not advisable to use 'gay' as a blanket term also covering lesbians.
Gender confirmation treatment/ gender-affirming treatment Gender affirmation surgery	This refers to various medical interventions that may be part of someone's transition. Medical term for what trans people often call gender confirmation surgery: surgery to bring the primary and secondary sex characteristics of a trans person's body into alignment with his or her internal self-perception.	Pre-operative Post-operative Sex reassignment surgery Sex-change 'The surgery'
Gender expression	This refers to people's manifestation of their gender identity. Typically, people seek to make their gender expression or presentation match their gender identity/ identities, irrespective of the sex they were assigned at birth.	Not to be confused with: sexual orientation, sex or gender identity.
Gender identity	This refers to each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.	Not to be confused with: sexual orientation or sex.

Preferred	Meaning/comments	To avoid
Gender-nonconforming	A term for individuals whose gender identity does not fit into the societal expectations related to their assigned sex at birth.	
Non-binary gender	Any gender that falls outside of the binary system of man/woman.	
Gender-fluid	Denoting or relating to a person who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender.	
Gender transition/transition	<p>The process a person goes through in order to live in the gender with which they identify, which is different from their assigned sex at birth. This transition can be divided into three main pillars:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social transition: when the trans person decides to come out as trans; • Medical transition: if the trans person decides to undergo medical treatment; • Legal transition: when the trans person brings their legal documents into line with their chosen gender identity and/or gender expression. 	<p>Sex change Gender change Sex reassignment surgery</p>
Given name	The name that was given to a person at birth.	Real name
Heteronormativity	This refers to cultural and social attitudes whereby men and women are led to believe that heterosexuality is the only conceivable sexuality; it implies that heterosexuality is the only way of being 'normal'.	

Preferred	Meaning/comments	To avoid
Intersex	Individuals born with any of several variations in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones or genitals that do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies.	Hermaphrodite
Joint adoption	When a couple is allowed to apply for the adoption of a child.	
Lesbian	A woman who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women.	
Lesbian Gay Bisexual	Use person-centred language, such as 'lesbian', 'gay' or 'bisexual' people rather than 'lesbians', 'gays' or 'bisexuals'. Opponents of LGBTI+ equality often use words like 'homosexual' to stigmatise gay people by reducing their lives to purely sexual terms.	Lesbians Gays Bisexuals Homosexuals
LGBTI	Acronym for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Intersex.	
LGBTI+	When the '+' is added, other realities/identities are included such as (but not limited to) asexual, pansexual, gender-nonconforming, etc.	
Marriage equality	Where national marriage legislation also includes same-sex couples – e.g. gender-neutral reference to spouses.	Gay marriage
Opponents	Those who oppose protecting LGBTI+ people from discrimination.	Anti-gay groups
Other gender/sex		Opposite sex
Parents/caregivers	It is important to recognise diverse family formation.	Mother/father

Preferred	Meaning/comments	To avoid
Queer	Although historically used as a negative term, 'queer' is now more commonly used by the 'Rainbow Community' as an inclusive term to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual and transgender people.	
Same-sex relationships/ couples	These terms cover relationships or couples consisting of two people of the same sex.	Homosexual couples
Second parent adoption	When a person is allowed to adopt their partner's biological child/children.	
Sex characteristics	Genitals, chromosomes, hormones, body hair and other human body characteristics which all people have.	Not to be confused with: sex/gender.
Sexual orientation	How one finds oneself feeling drawn (or not drawn) to another person in a sexual and/or romantic way.	Sexual preference Lifestyle choice Same-sex attraction Sexual identity Gay/lesbian/bisexual lifestyle
Social name/chosen name	The name a trans person prefers to use instead of their given name.	
SOGIESC	Sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics.	
Successive adoption	When a person is allowed to adopt their partner's adopted child.	

Preferred	Meaning/comments	To avoid
Surrogacy ²	An arrangement in which a woman carries and delivers a child for a third person or third-party couple.	
Third gender/sex	Used in relation to a gender identity that describes someone who considers themselves, or is considered, neither male nor female by societal definition; in other contexts, used to describe individuals whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth.	
Trans/Transgender	An overarching term for individuals whose gender identity or expression differs from societal expectations of the sex they were assigned at birth.	Transgendered A transgender 'Transgenders' Transvestite Sheboy Ladyboy Drag queen
A trans/transgender person	'Trans' is shorthand for 'transgender' and is used as an umbrella term to include transgender/transsexual people.	
A trans/transgender man	The term for a transgender individual who identifies as a man (or whose gender identity is that of a man) and was assigned female at birth.	
A trans/transgender woman	The term for a transgender individual who identifies as a woman (or whose gender identity is that of a woman) and was assigned male at birth.	

² Surrogacy is outlawed in several EU Member States. In some others, surrogacy arrangements are void and unenforceable.

Sources

[An Ally's Guide to Terminology, Talking About LGBT People and Equality](#)
[United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Terminology Guidance](#)
[Council of Europe: Gender Equality Glossary](#)
[IGLA-Europe Glossary](#)
['The genderbread person' \(website\)](#)

Glossary of terminology pertaining to race, ethnicity and religion

3

Terminology denoting race is contextual, and born from social processes of racialisation, therefore subject to difference in opinion. However, these are some guidelines:

Preferred

To avoid

Anti-gypsyism

(Anti-gypsyism is a specific form of racism towards Roma, Sinti, Travellers and others who are stigmatised as 'gypsies' in the public imagination.)

Asian people

Orientalists

Asylum seeker/refugee/migrant

(depending on the specific legal status).

Immigrant

Bi-racial

Multiracial

Half-caste

Black European/people of African descent/ Black people

Negroes

French of Algerian descent/French Algerian British Indian

(for people with more than one set of roots).

People of colour

Racial/ethnic/religious minorities

People with a migrant background

(commonly used in German and Swedish contexts; not generally applicable).

Coloured
Non-white

Members of minority groups

('Minorities' is not a contested term.)

Roma/Sinti/Travellers

Roma community

Sinti community

Itinerant

Tinker

Gypso

Romani people

Traveller community

Travellers

Gypsies (not acceptable when used by people outside of the gypsy community).

Preferred

Undocumented/irregular migrant

White people

To avoid

Illegal migrant

Caucasians

Comments regarding race, ethnicity and religion:

- Call people by the term that they prefer. If in doubt, just ask them.
- Avoid identifying people by race or ethnic group unless it is relevant.
- Refer to specific minority groups when possible (e.g. Roma).
- Use the names of countries or regions when referring to nationalities, i.e. Nigerian or North African. Do not overgeneralise by referring to 'Africans' or 'Arabs'.
- It is acceptable to say Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, etc. Sometimes people can be offended when religious terms are used to describe people's personalities, such as: 'He is such a Jew'.

Sources

[Language and the British Sociological Association: Ethnicity and Race](#)

[Citizens Advice, United Kingdom](#)

[Council of Europe](#)

[Consultation with the European Network against Racism](#)

