



# GUIDEance

**GUIDEance to gender equality and diversity  
by the use of gender-sensitive language**



MOBILIZING EXPERTISE



IKObi



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of the European Union





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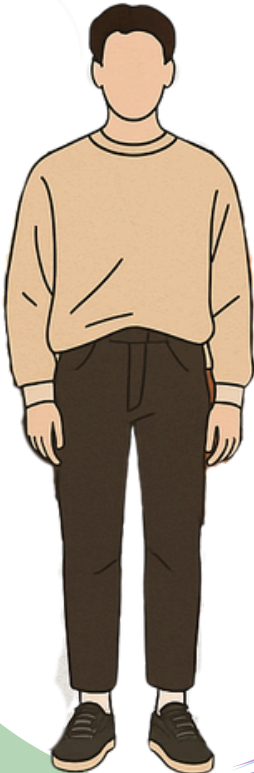
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# “GUIDEance”

Inclusive communication is not just about words — it's about creating a space where everyone feels seen, respected, and valued.






# Introduction

GUIDE is an Erasmus+ project [2023-3-DE04-KA210-YOU-000175960] designed to promote the use of gender-sensitive language within international youth work to create a more inclusive and diverse youth work environment.

By sensitizing youth workers of the use and effect of gender-sensitive and gender-neutral language in international activities and on an organizational level of youth organisations, GUIDE will enhance the awareness and knowledge about gender equality and diversity of professionals working with youngsters.

The project fosters inclusivity and diversity, sensitizes youth workers to the impact of language on gender equality, and empowers them to prevent gender discrimination. By reducing stereotypes, implementing gender-sensitive activities, and promoting social inclusion and equity, GUIDE provides a framework for modern youth work practices. In order to achieve the objectives of GUIDE we developed a workbook called GUIDeance for youth workers.

GUIDeance equips youth workers with the tools and knowledge needed to foster inclusivity through gender-sensitive language. By understanding the significance of pronouns, adopting gender-neutral terms, and learning from country-specific practices, youth workers can create equitable spaces where every participant feels respected and valued.

A stylized illustration of a person with short brown hair and a brown shirt, shown from the chest up. Above their head is a thought bubble containing text. The background features colorful, wavy lines in shades of blue, purple, and green.

Why is Gender-Sensitive Language important in Youth Work?

The recommendations and practices in this workbook are grounded in country-specific research and collaboration with focus groups from Austria, Germany, and Sweden. These insights ensure that the content is adaptable to different cultural and linguistic contexts while remaining practical and impactful.

## **The Importance of Gender-Sensitive Language in Youth Work**

Language shapes the way we perceive and interact with the world. In youth work, it plays a pivotal role in identity formation, fostering inclusion, and building trust. Adopting gender-sensitive language acknowledges and respects all gender identities, creating spaces where every participant feels seen and valued.

Beyond inclusivity, this approach challenges stereotypes and empowers individuals, contributing to broader cultural transformations. By adopting gender-neutral terms and inclusive pronouns, youth workers set a standard of respect and equality, ensuring that their programs and interactions reflect the diversity of their participants.



I've noticed that the pronouns we use can really shape how young people see themselves and feel included. How much do they actually affect our work with youth?

# Chapter 1

## Pronoun Use and Its Effects in Language

This chapter explores the significance of pronoun use in youth work, emphasizing its role in affirming gender identity, fostering inclusivity, and creating respectful environments where young people feel seen and valued.



# 1. Pronoun Use and Its Effects in Language

Pronouns are a fundamental aspect of language, directly tied to individual identity and social dynamics. Their correct use is crucial in affirming a person's gender and fostering inclusive interactions. Understanding pronouns and their role in gender identity involves recognizing that pronouns like "he," "she," OR "they" are more than linguistic tools - they are affirmations of one's existence and identity. For youth workers, this understanding is essential for creating spaces where young people feel acknowledged.

Traditional pronouns like "he" and "she" can inadvertently exclude non-binary and gender-nonconforming individuals. Gender-neutral and inclusive pronouns, such as "they/them" in English or "hen" in Swedish, address the needs of non-binary and gender-nonconforming individuals by avoiding assumptions about gender. For instance, "they/them" can be used when a person's gender is unknown or irrelevant, simplifying communication and enhancing inclusivity.

For youth workers, using correct pronouns is essential for creating environments where young people feel respected. This simple yet powerful act affirms identity, reduces the risk of marginalization, and fosters trust between youth and workers.

Pronoun use has profound implications for language and interpersonal communication. When pronouns align with a person's identity, they foster empathy, improve relationships, and enhance dialogue. Misgendering, on the other hand, can lead to feelings of exclusion and distrust.

Practicing pronoun usage regularly ensures that youth workers are prepared to engage with diverse identities. Using inclusive pronouns challenges traditional gender norms, empowering marginalized groups and promoting equality.

For example, by using "they/them" pronouns when referring to a participant who identifies outside the gender binary, youth workers actively challenge the expectation that everyone must fit into the rigid categories of "male" or "female." This not only affirms the participant's identity but also educates the group about the fluidity of gender.

## **1.1 Gender-Neutral Terminology in Youth Work**

Gender-neutral language refers to the use of words and expressions that avoid specifying a particular gender, thereby making the language more inclusive of all gender identities. Instead of using gender-specific terms like "boys" and "girls" use neutral terms like "students" or "partner" instead of "boyfriend" or "girlfriend".

As youth workers, we have a responsibility to create environments where all young people feel seen, heard, and valued. This is especially true for those who may not fit into traditional gender categories. By using gender-neutral/gender-sensitive language, we can help to create spaces where every young person can express their identity without fear of judgement or exclusion.

Gender-neutral terminology avoids assumptions about a person's gender, ensuring inclusivity across identities. For example, instead of addressing a group with "Good morning boys and girls," opting for "Good morning, everyone" demonstrates a thoughtful approach to inclusive communication. In the context of sports clubs a coach might replace "Alright, guys, great teamwork!" with "Great teamwork, everyone!" to acknowledge and validate all participants. These adjustments create a welcoming environment that values all participants equally.

### **Examples in Youth Work:**

#### **Working with a youth group**

- Use "Everyone", "team", or "friends" instead of "guys".
- Use "Participants" rather than "boys and girls".
- Use "Group members" rather than "the boys/the girls"

## Gender-neutral terminology within youth activities

- Replace "Divide into boys' and girls' teams" with "Split into two groups of your choice." (Group Assignments)
- Say "Each participant shares their thoughts" instead of "Each boy or girl shares their thoughts."
- Replace "Good job, young man!" with "Great work!" or "Well done!" (Encouragement)
- Say "Sit where you feel comfortable" instead of "Boys on one side, girls on the other." (Seating Arrangements)
- Say "Would anyone like to share their thoughts?" instead of "Let's hear from the girls first." (Personal sharing)
- Use open-ended questions such as "What inspired you during today's activity?" rather than targeted questions based on gender assumptions. (Personal sharing)
- Say "Everyone can participate in this activity" rather than implying certain activities are for specific genders. (Sports)

## Family Roles

- Use "sibling" instead of "brother" or "sister."
- Use "parent" or "guardian" instead of "father" or "mother"

Adopting gender-neutral language dismantles stereotypes and creates opportunities for dialogue about identity and diversity. For example, a 2020 study in Social Psychological and Personality Science showed that using gender-neutral job titles e.g. police officer (instead of policeman) led to a more balanced view of traditionally male dominated professions, encouraging more women to consider these roles. [1]

Youth workers play a critical role in modeling these practices, inspiring participants to embrace inclusivity in their own lives.



## 1.2 Country-Specific Approaches in Germany, Sweden, and Austria

### Germany

In Germany the discussion around gender-neutral and gender-sensitive language has gained momentum, since the traditional structure of the German language is heavily gendered and presents unique challenges and opportunities.

Gendered terms like “Lehrer” (teacher) and “Schüler” (student) are inherently gendered, necessitating alternatives such as the gender asterisk (“Lehrer\*innen”), colon (“Lehrer:innen”), or gender gap (“Lehrer\_innen”). Germany’s typographic innovations provide a visual solution to gender inclusivity, particularly in written communication.

While these tools have gained popularity, societal debates persist, with resistance stemming from concerns about tradition and linguistic complexity. Some argue that these forms complicate the language. Others resist these changes on the grounds of tradition.

A survey on gender-neutral language conducted by YouGov in 2021 found out that about 62 % of respondents stated that they do not use gender-neutral language and do not believe it is necessary.

However, among those aged 18-29, approx. 42 % was in favor of its use. [2]

Furthermore, a study by “Kantar Public” in 2022 found that about 45 % of people aged 16 – 29 believe that gender-neutral language is important for promoting equality. This reflects a generational shift, with younger people being more open to inclusive language practices. [3]

## Sweden

In Sweden, the national language is Swedish, which has traditionally used the pronouns han (he) and hon (she) for male and female individuals, respectively. However, Sweden stands out as a pioneer in gender equality, with its adoption of the gender-neutral pronoun “hen” alongside “han” (he) and “hon” (she). The word hen was first introduced in the early 2000s by feminist and LGBTQAI+ activists to offer an alternative to gender-specific pronouns, particularly in cases where gender is unknown, irrelevant, or when referring to non-binary individuals. It gained widespread attention after being included in the Swedish Academy Glossary (Svenska Akademiens ordlista) in 2015, marking its official acceptance into mainstream Swedish language. [4]

Today, hen is used not only in legal, academic, and governmental contexts but also in everyday conversation, media, and education, making it a significant component of Sweden's language landscape.

In progressive and inclusive organizations, such as universities and NGOs, hen is actively integrated into official documents and internal communications, promoting respect for all gender identities. This shift towards gender-neutral language is particularly notable in public institutions and companies that are consciously working towards creating inclusive environments. In such settings, employees are often encouraged to share their pronouns (whether han, hon, or hen) to foster inclusivity. Organizations with a focus on gender equality or human rights, such as Rättviseförmedlingen (The Equalizer), are known to encourage gender-neutral language as a way of breaking down gender norms and challenging traditional perceptions of gender identity.

Gender-sensitive language has been increasingly incorporated into the Swedish media landscape, advertising, and entertainment. Many Swedish news outlets, such as Dagens Nyheter and Sveriges Television (SVT), have adopted editorial policies that promote the use of gender-neutral language.

For example, these outlets often employ hen in cases where the gender of the subject is unknown or not relevant to the story, especially in pieces discussing gender identity, non-binary issues, or progressive social movements. Such practices help normalize the use of gender-sensitive language in the public sphere. [5]

## Austria

Austria balances traditional language with inclusive practices. Like Germany, it employs tools like the **gender gap** (“\_”), **gender asterisk** (“Lehrer\*innen”) or **colon** (“Lehrer:innen”). The different forms of gender-neutral terms have been increasingly used in media and official documents. However, their usage is not yet standardized, and different media outlets adopt different practices.

According to a survey only four percent always use gender-inclusive language, while nearly a third have never heard of gender-neutral language. 65 % of respondents believe that gender-inclusive language has no significance for strengthening all gender groups in our society. In general, women and those with higher education value it slightly more than men and people with lower formal education.

Some arguments in favor of the use of gender-neutral language in Austria are that girls and women do not feel addressed or represented when consuming media that fails to include them linguistically. [6]

The Austrian focus group identified various factors as obstacles to the use of gender-neutral language: 1) cultural resistance 2) no obligatory specifications. Although Austria has laws promoting gender equality, these laws do not specifically mandate the use of gender-sensitive language in all communications.

## Commonalities and Trends

All three countries strive to promote inclusivity through language. While Germany and Austria face greater societal resistance, younger generations are leading the charge for broader acceptance. Sweden's success highlights the value of cultural readiness and institutional support in normalizing gender-sensitive language.

## Self-Practice Exercise Chapter 1: Practicing the use of pronouns

Exercise Title	Practicing Inclusive Language in Youth Work
<b>Objective</b>	Enhance comfort and fluency with inclusive language by practicing gender-neutral pronouns (e.g., they/them) in youth work scenarios.
<b>Duration</b>	20–25 minutes
<b>Materials Needed</b>	Brief guide on gender-neutral pronouns (see Annex)
Step	Instructions
<b>1. Reflect</b>	Think about why using correct pronouns is important for creating a welcoming environment. Consider past situations where pronoun usage was relevant.
<b>2. Review</b>	Revisit gender-neutral pronouns like they/them or ze/zir. If you're unsure, consult the guide provided or look for additional resources.
<b>Example</b>	"I gave feedback to them."
<b>3. Identify Scenarios</b>	<p>Think of 2–3 situations you might encounter in your work. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A young person introduces themselves with they/them pronouns.</li> <li>- You need to give feedback to someone who uses they/them.</li> <li>- A participant is misgendered, and you need to correct it respectfully.</li> </ul>

## Self-Practice Exercise Chapter 1: Practicing the use of pronouns

Step	Instructions
<b>4. Apply Pronouns</b>	Imagine these scenarios. Use gender-neutral pronouns in your spoken or written responses. Focus on how you would naturally use them.
<b>5. Practice Dialogue</b>	Create and rehearse short conversations from your daily work. Speak aloud or write them down to improve fluency and confidence.
<b>6. Reflect</b>	Ask yourself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What felt comfortable?</li> <li>- What was challenging?</li> <li>- Did it feel natural, or did you have to pause to remember?</li> <li>- How can you bring this into real-life interactions?</li> </ul>
<b>7. Takeaways</b>	Write down 1–2 insights or lessons learned from this exercise to help you better support youth who use gender-neutral pronouns.
<b>8. Final Thoughts</b>	Remember: Practice leads to confidence. By incorporating gender-neutral pronouns into your daily language, you're creating a more inclusive space for all youth.



# Chapter 2

## Gender-Sensitive Communication

This chapter highlights the importance of gender-sensitive communication in youth work, ensuring inclusivity in digital and in-person interactions through neutral language, diverse visuals, and respectful online engagement.



## 2. Gender-Sensitive Communication

In the context of youth work, gender-sensitive communication ensures that young people of all genders feel represented, respected, and safe in their interactions with youth workers. This approach promotes an inclusive environment where diverse gender identities are acknowledged, empowering young people to engage fully without fear of discrimination or bias. [7]

Gender-sensitive communication is essential in youth work as it ensures that interactions and messages are inclusive, respectful, and equitable. In an increasingly diverse world, youth workers must recognize how gender biases can shape communication and, consequently, the experiences of young people. When communication is gender-sensitive, it avoids reinforcing stereotypes and promotes equality, which is critical for fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for all youth. [8]

In today's digital age, youth work is no longer confined to in-person settings. Much of the communication with young people occurs online, through social media, emails, and virtual platforms. Gender-sensitive communication needs to extend beyond face-to-face interactions to ensure that online content—whether in text, visuals, or videos—remains inclusive. As youth increasingly engage with content on multiple digital platforms, it is crucial that these spaces reflect the same sensitivity and inclusiveness to avoid alienating or misrepresenting any gender identity. [9]

Online communication offers unique opportunities but also poses challenges in maintaining this inclusivity, making it even more critical for youth workers to adapt their strategies across mediums.

## 2.1 Use of Gender-Neutral Visuals on Websites/Publications

When selecting and using gender-neutral visuals, it is essential to prioritize inclusivity and representation. Choose images, illustrations, and icons that depict diverse individuals in non-stereotypical roles, avoiding traditional gender cues such as specific colors, clothing, or activities commonly associated with a particular gender.

Opt for visuals that showcase people of different body types, ethnicities, and abilities, ensuring a broad representation of identities. When designing characters or figures, use neutral clothing styles and avoid exaggerated gender characteristics.

## 2.2 Incorporating Gender-Sensitive Language in Email and Digital Communication for Youth Organizations

In this chapter, we will cover strategies to make email, digital, and social communication more inclusive. We'll also discuss how organizations can adapt their practices for digital platforms like WhatsApp, where many young people engage.

### Why Gender-Sensitive Language Matters on communication strategies

Language shapes perception and influences how people feel within a group. Using inclusive language:

- **Promotes Respect:** It respects all gender identities, preventing assumptions about people's gender based on name, appearance, or voice.
- **Encourages Belonging:** By using language that recognizes all genders, individuals feel acknowledged and welcome, which is essential in creating supportive communities.
- **Reflects Values of Inclusivity and Equity:** For organizations, it signals a commitment to diversity and ensures alignment with the values young people increasingly support post-COVID, such as social justice, equity, and mental health.

In the post-COVID world, digital communication has become central to youth organizations' engagement strategies. Many young people expect virtual spaces to be inclusive and safe environments, making it essential for organizations to adapt and refine their communication styles.


## **Strategies for Using Gender-Sensitive Language in Email Communication**

### **a. Use Neutral Terms for Referring to Individuals**

Using gender-neutral terms avoids the assumption that all individuals fit into traditional gender categories. Avoiding gendered titles and phrases is a straightforward yet powerful way to signal inclusivity.

#### **How to Implement**

- **Avoid Gendered Titles:** Instead of “Mr.” or “Ms.,” use first and last names only, or consider a gender-neutral title like “Mx.” if applicable.
- **Use Neutral Job Titles:** Replace “chairman” with “chair,” “salesman” with “salesperson,” and “businessman” with “businessperson.”
- **Inclusive Greetings:** Begin emails with “Dear Team” or “Hello everyone,” rather than “Ladies and gentlemen.”



But how can we  
make email  
communication more  
inclusive by using  
gender-sensitive  
language?

## Examples:

- Instead of "Each volunteer should submit his report by Friday," say "Each volunteer should submit their report by Friday."
- Instead of "Each team member should give his or her input," say "Each team member should share their input."

## b. Encourage Pronoun Introductions and Avoid Assumptions

Encouraging pronoun sharing and avoiding assumptions about someone's gender is respectful and promotes inclusivity. Pronoun sharing has become more common in professional communication, helping people feel seen and understood.

### How to Implement

- **Use "They" as a Singular Pronoun:** Use "they" when referring to someone whose gender is unknown, instead of "he/she."
- **Respect Pronoun Choices:** Once someone shares their pronouns, make a point to use them in all future communications.

## c. Creating Visibility in Email Signatures

Adding pronouns to email signatures can increase awareness and make pronoun usage visible. This is a straightforward way to introduce the concept of gender identity to those who may not be familiar with it, creating an inclusive professional environment.

### How to Implement

- **Add Pronouns in Your Signature:** For example, "she/her," "he/him," or "they/them" in your email signature.

## Example Signature:

*Casey Thomas (they/them)*  
*Youth Program Manager*

Use an invitation below your signature: An invitation can also be included under the signature to encourage people to state *their pronouns*

## Example Invitation:

“You are welcome to tell me how I should address you” or  
“My pronouns are [...] You are welcome to tell me your pronouns.”

## d. Applying Gender-Sensitive Language Across Digital Communication

Using inclusive language in emails and on platforms like WhatsApp ensures that messages are accessible and welcoming. For youth-focused communication, consider language that respects all genders and invites open participation.

## How to Implement

- Use Gender-Neutral Group Terms like “everyone,” “team,” or “participants” instead of “guys” or “ladies.”
- Practice Inclusive Call-to-Action Phrases. For emails or group messages, replace “he/she” with “they” and practice making group-wide messages more inclusive.

## Examples:

- Original: “Each participant should submit his or her report by Friday.”
- Revised: “Each participant should submit their report by Friday.”



## **e. Creating Inclusive WhatsApp Groups and Digital Spaces**

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted much of youth engagement and communication online, forcing youth organizations to adapt their strategies for a new, virtual environment. This shift has led to an increased focus on inclusivity in digital spaces, especially when engaging with young people who value diversity, equity, and social justice. Below is how to ensure these spaces remain inclusive.

### **How to Implement**

- **Establish Group Norms Around Pronouns:** When forming a new group, encourage members to introduce themselves with their pronouns to set an inclusive tone.
- **Use Inclusive Language for Group Announcements:** Ensure announcements and messages avoid gendered terms and assumptions. For example, use “Hello everyone” rather than “Hi guys.”
- **Create Space for Feedback:** Occasionally, ask group members if there are ways to make communication more inclusive.

### **Message Example:**

*“Welcome to the team! We encourage everyone to share pronouns if they’re comfortable to help us communicate respectfully.”*

## **f. Designing Inclusive Application Forms and Registration Processes**

For digital forms and applications, inclusivity can be as simple as offering gender-diverse options and removing unnecessary questions.

## How to Implement

- Expand Gender Options in Forms: Instead of only “Male” and “Female,” offer options like “Non-binary,” “Prefer not to say,” or a free-text field.
- Avoid Asking Gender if Unnecessary: If gender is not essential to the form’s purpose, consider removing the question entirely.
- Use Inclusive Field Labels: Use neutral terms for fields, like “Name” instead of “First Name/Last Name.”

## Example of a Gender-Inclusive Form:

- Gender:
- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other: [Please specify]

Organizations can effectively promote diversity by using gender-sensitive language in emails, websites, and digital platforms.

Youth organizations show their commitment to diversity, equity, and belonging by using neutral language, honoring pronouns, and creating digital spaces that are accessible to people of all genders. Whether via online forms, WhatsApp messages, or emails, these methods foster a friendly atmosphere that embodies the ideals of a more accepting and caring society.



On the next page  
there's a self  
checker and  
organisation  
check exercise!

## Self-Practice Exercise Chapter 2: Gender-Sensitive Communication Challenge

Section	Details
<b>Objective</b>	To evaluate and enhance the use of gender-sensitive language in youth work communication, ensuring inclusivity across emails, websites, and WhatsApp groups.
<b>Self-Check Exercise</b>	<p>Review your last five messages or posts (email, WhatsApp, social media, or website updates).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify any gendered language (e.g., “guys,” “ladies and gentlemen,” “he/she”) and think of a more inclusive alternative.</li> <li>• Example: Change “Hi guys!” to “Hi everyone!”</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational Website Scan</b>	<p>Visit your organization’s website or recent publications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check for gendered terms (e.g., “chairman,” “mankind”) and replace them with neutral terms like “chairperson” or “humanity.”</li> <li>• Make a note of areas where language could be more inclusive.</li> <li>• Consider including pronouns on staff member profiles to promote gender diversity and approachability.</li> </ul>

**Self-Practice Exercise Chapter 2:**  
**Gender-Sensitive Communication Challenge**

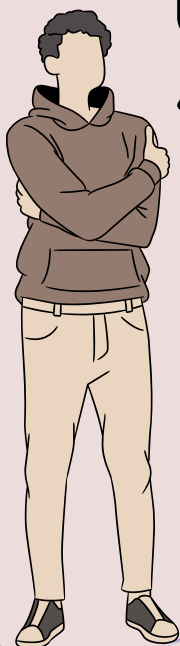
Section	Details
<b>Reflection &amp; Action</b>	<p>After completing the activity, reflect on these questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How easy or difficult was it to make these changes?</li><li>• Did you notice any common patterns of gendered language in your communication?</li><li>• What's one change you will continue practicing in your digital communication?</li><li>• <i>(Optional)</i> Share your reflections with a colleague or in your WhatsApp group.</li></ul>
<b>Bonus Task</b>	<p>If you found areas that need improvement, suggest one small update for your organization's website, email templates, or WhatsApp group guidelines to make them more inclusive!</p> <p><b>Repeat this challenge monthly to track progress.</b></p>



# Chapter 3

## Prevention of Gender Discriminatory Structures in Youth Exchanges

This chapter will guide you in creating youth activities where every gender identity is seen, respected, and empowered.



### 3. Prevention of Gender Discriminatory Structures in Youth Exchanges

Gender-discriminatory structures can hinder inclusivity and equality in international youth work, creating barriers to meaningful participation. Addressing these structures is essential for fostering an environment where every participant feels valued and empowered. This chapter focuses on proactive strategies for preventing gender discrimination and promoting inclusivity in youth activities. It combines theoretical insights with practical exercises to build the skills necessary for gender-sensitive facilitation.

#### 3.1. Gender-Discriminatory Structures

Gender-discriminatory structures refer to the systemic practices and cultural norms that reinforce stereotypes and unequal treatment based on gender, including both binary and non-binary identities (Shelton, Mallon 2022). These structures often result in exclusionary environments and can manifest in various ways:

- **Task Assignments:** Leadership roles are predominantly assigned to males, reinforcing the stereotype of males as natural leaders. Caregiving or support tasks, such as administrative duties or emotional labor, are often disproportionately assigned to females, perpetuating the belief that women are inherently more nurturing or supportive. Non-binary individuals may face exclusion altogether, with their contributions dismissed or their identities invalidated in task allocation. Additionally, their skill sets may be overlooked due to unconscious biases or a lack of understanding about non-binary identities.



- **Participation Dynamics:** Males often dominate discussions or decision-making processes, especially in formal or professional settings, leading to unequal opportunities for other voices to be heard. Females may be sidelined in traditionally "male-dominated" activities, such as technical fields, sports, or high-stakes negotiations, resulting in reduced visibility and influence. Non-binary individuals frequently encounter systemic barriers to participation, including being ignored, misgendered, or deliberately excluded from discussions due to the lack of inclusive practices. They may also feel unsafe or unwelcome in environments where their identity is not recognized or respected.
- **Stereotypical Expectations:** Assumptions about abilities or roles based on traditional gender norms persist, such as the belief that men are naturally better at math or engineering, while women excel in caregiving or creative fields. These expectations can extend to non-binary individuals, where their existence is invalidated by assuming that only binary genders exist. Non-binary individuals often face misgendering through the use of incorrect pronouns or the refusal to use their chosen pronouns, further alienating them. Such stereotyping creates an environment where individuals feel pressured to conform to gender norms, limiting their full potential and self-expression.

Research on the ERASMUS+ program has shown that there is still a structural gender bias visible in participation across subject areas. While women are often overrepresented in activities relating to humanities, they are still underrepresented in STEM-related activities, thus reinforcing stereotypes about gender roles in the professional world. [10]

## Practical Examples:

- A male participant is often assigned technical tasks while a female participant is asked to manage social aspects, regardless of skills or interest.
- A non-binary participant repeatedly addressed as "she/her" because others assume their appearance aligns with female stereotypes.
- During a group activity, facilitators unconsciously defer leadership roles to male participants.
- Language in communication excludes non-binary participants, such as using "ladies and gentlemen" instead of inclusive terms like "everyone" or "team."

## Addressing the Issue [11]

- Train facilitators and participants on respecting and using correct pronouns: Conduct regular workshops and sensitivity training sessions to ensure that everyone is aware of the importance of pronoun use and is equipped to use them correctly. These sessions should also address the nuances of gender identity and provide strategies for creating a respectful and affirming environment for non-binary individuals.
- Actively monitor task assignments to ensure equitable distribution based on skills and interests, not gender: Regularly evaluate whether individuals from underrepresented gender identities are being given opportunities to take on leadership or high-visibility tasks.
- Use inclusive language in all communications and materials: Review all internal and external communications to eliminate gendered language and replace it with inclusive terms. Additionally, ensure that official documents, signage, and forms allow individuals to self-identify their gender and pronouns.
- Implement frequent gender-based trackers to proactively identify task and leadership assignment biases.
- Encourage and model allyship: Promote allyship through visible actions, such as publicly recognizing contributions from underrepresented genders or challenging harmful stereotypes.

## 3.2. Gender Sensitivity in Youth Work

Gender sensitivity entails recognizing and addressing the unique needs and experiences of all genders. This requires awareness of intersectionality and a commitment to inclusivity for both binary and non-binary participants. It involves addressing systemic challenges, such as binary norms in education and youth work, which disproportionately marginalize gender-expansive individuals. [12,13]

Facilitators must also be willing to understand the trauma and resilience of gender-expansive youth, who often face higher rates of violence, discrimination, and exclusion rooted in systemic binarism. [14]

### Practical Examples:

- **Program Design:** Include activities appealing to diverse interests, avoiding binary categorizations (e.g., assuming sports are for males or arts for females) and ensuring inclusivity for non-binary individuals. For example, design programs that highlight diverse role models from non-binary and gender-diverse backgrounds. [15]
- **Respect for Pronouns:** Include an introduction activity where participants state their names and pronouns, normalizing this practice. In addition, provide a brief explanation of why pronoun usage is important to foster understanding among participants unfamiliar with the concept. [16]
- **Flexible Facilities:** Infrastructure, such as restrooms and accommodations, that adheres strictly to binary genders can marginalize non-binary individuals. Studies emphasize the distress caused by such facilities among gender-expansive youth, advocating for universal design to promote inclusivity and reduce stigma. [17]
- **Corrective Measures:** Address misgendering promptly and provide guidance to participants who repeatedly use incorrect pronouns. Use restorative approaches to educate participants on the impact of misgendering, prioritizing growth over punishment. [18]

- **Gender Equity in Leadership:** Encourage all genders to take on leadership roles during group activities, addressing imbalances through conscious facilitation. Empower marginalized participants by assigning leadership roles in contexts where they have traditionally been excluded. [19]
- **Intersectionality:** Address the compounded challenges gender-expansive youth who also belong to other minority groups face. For example, recognize and address the unique struggles of gender-expansive youth who are also racial or economic minorities, using an intersectional lens to craft support strategies. [20]

### Implementation Strategies:

- Facilitate workshops on gender norms, pronoun usage, and inclusivity at the start of the program. Incorporate role-playing exercises to practice using correct pronouns in real-life scenarios. [21]
- Use name tags that include pronouns to normalize their visibility.
- Create mixed-gender groups for collaborative activities to encourage balanced participation. Ensure facilitators actively monitor and guide discussions to prevent dominant voices from overshadowing others. [22]
- Provide a safe and anonymous way for participants to report any incidents of discrimination or misgendering.
- Provide gender-neutral facilities, such as restrooms and accommodations, designed with universal accessibility in mind. [23]

### 3.3 Inclusive Facilitation Practices

Inclusive facilitation practices actively promote equity by ensuring diverse perspectives are heard and valued. These practices emphasize respect and empowerment for both binary and non-binary participants. They also highlight the importance of challenging systemic biases, such as binary frameworks, that may unconsciously influence participants and facilitators). [24] Facilitators must adopt trauma-informed and intersectional approaches to address the compounded challenges faced by marginalized participants. [25]

#### Examples:

- **Discussion Management:** Use structured techniques like "progressive stack" to ensure all genders, including non-binary participants, have opportunities to speak. Additionally, apply frameworks such as the Gender Minority Stress and Resilience Model to understand and address disparities in participation.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Address instances where participants fail to respect others' identities or pronouns immediately and sensitively. Adopt restorative practices to educate rather than punish offenders, creating a space for growth and understanding. [26]
- **Balanced Representation:** Ensure visual aids and examples represent a variety of genders. Include intersectional examples that acknowledge overlapping identities, such as race, class, and ability, to reflect diverse experiences. [27]

## Implementation Strategies:

- Appoint a gender-inclusivity advocate within the facilitation team.
- Start each session by reaffirming ground rules, including respect for pronouns and equitable participation.
- Rotate leadership roles in activities to ensure all genders have opportunities to lead. Use role-reversal activities to challenge traditional leadership stereotypes, especially in male-dominated contexts. [28]
- Use mixed-gender and diverse groups to promote cross-gender understanding. For example, introduce collaborative tasks designed to highlight complementary skills across genders. [29]
- Conduct icebreakers and energizers that challenge stereotypes (e.g., role-reversal activities). Incorporate scenarios highlighting gender-diverse perspectives to foster empathy and reduce unconscious biases. [30] **You can find two examples at the end of this chapter.**
- Create anonymous feedback mechanisms to allow participants to report inclusivity concerns. Use both digital and in-person tools to ensure accessibility for all participants. [31]
- Regularly debrief facilitators to address any observed gender imbalances or missteps. Encourage facilitators to share personal reflections on their role in perpetuating or addressing biases during these sessions. [32]
- Provide additional support to participants who feel marginalized due to gender bias. Offer one-on-one check-ins or group discussions to address concerns in a safe space. [33]
- Use inclusive terms like "folks," "team," or "everyone" in all communications. [34]

# Examples of Icebreakers and energizers that challenge stereotypes

## **a. Gendered Words Challenge**

**Purpose:** To raise awareness of how gendered language impacts communication.

Give participants a list of gendered words (e.g., chairman, businessman, waitress) and ask them to come up with non-gendered alternatives (e.g., chairperson, businessperson, server).

**Debrief:** Reflect on how language shapes our perception of gender roles and how we can use inclusive language to be more mindful of diverse identities.

## **b. Gender-Role Charades**

**Purpose:** To break down gender stereotypes through humor and play.

Write common gender roles (e.g., "Stay-at-home dad," "Female CEO," "Non-binary artist") on slips of paper and have participants act them out for others to guess.

The key is to include non-binary and less traditional roles to challenge preconceived notions of gender and identity.

**Debrief:** Talk about how gender roles can sometimes limit people's choices and how we can support a broader range of identities and professions.



## 3.4 Strategies for Prevention

### a. Gender-Neutral Task Distribution

- Avoid assigning tasks based on gender stereotypes.
- Use random assignment methods or allow participants to self-select tasks based on interest.
- Rotate leadership and decision-making roles to ensure equal participation across all genders.

### b. Trust-Building Activities

- Implement activities designed to foster mutual respect and understanding among participants, with explicit respect for pronouns and identities.
- Focus on collaborative exercises that require equal input from all group members.
- Avoid activities that reinforce binary gender norms (e.g., segregated team-building exercises).

### c. Code of Conduct Development

- A Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines or rules designed to outline acceptable behaviors and practices within a specific organization, group, or community. It serves as a framework for how members should behave, interact, and treat each other.
- To prevent gender discrimination during a Youth Exchange, it is useful to:
- Establish a code of conduct explicitly addressing respect for pronouns, gender neutrality, and inclusivity.
- Use gender-sensitive and inclusive language in all communication.
- Ensure all participants understand and agree to the code during introductions.

## Self-Practice Exercise Chapter 3: Guide to Gender-Sensitive International Activities

Code of Conduct & Real-Life Application: Respecting All Genders	
<b>Objective</b>	Build practical skills in applying a gender-sensitive approach in international youth activities, ensuring respect for all genders.
<b>Duration</b>	60–75 minutes
<b>Materials Needed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Journal or digital document for note-taking</li> <li>- Internet access for brief research (optional)</li> <li>- Sample code of conduct template (optional)</li> </ul>
Step	Instructions
<b>1. Gender-Neutral Task Distribution</b> <i>(15 minutes)</i>	<p><b>Reflect:</b> Consider how tasks are currently assigned in your activities. Are there patterns based on gender stereotypes or binary thinking?</p> <p><b>Research:</b> Look into best practices for inclusive task distribution (e.g., random selection, self-selection based on interest, rotating roles).</p> <p><b>Action Plan:</b> Write down three specific strategies to ensure task assignments are gender-neutral and pronoun-respecting.</p>

# Self-Practice Exercise Chapter 3: Guide to Gender-Sensitive International Activities

Code of Conduct & Real-Life Application: Respecting All Genders	
Step	Instructions
<b>2. Inclusive Trust-Building Activities (20 minutes)</b>	<p><b>Reflect:</b> Review the trust-building activities you typically use. Are there any that may unintentionally exclude or disadvantage participants based on gender identity or pronouns?</p> <p><b>Evaluate:</b> Identify possible adjustments or replacements that are inclusive to all gender identities.</p> <p><b>Optional:</b> Test one activity in a small group or discussion setting and note feedback.</p>

## Self-Practice Exercise Chapter 3: Guide to Gender-Sensitive International Activities

Code of Conduct & Real-Life Application: Respecting All Genders	
<b>Duration</b>	30 minutes
<b>Materials Needed</b>	<p>Sample code of conduct (or blank template)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Notes from previous exercises</li> <li>- Group input and feedback</li> </ul>
Step	Instructions
<b>1. Review</b>	<p>Examine an existing code of conduct or create one collaboratively. Ensure it includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clear guidelines for using correct pronouns.</li> <li>- Policies on addressing gender bias and discriminatory behavior.</li> <li>- Concrete examples of inclusive practices in youth activities.</li> </ul>
<b>2. Collaborate</b>	<p>Involve youth participants in reviewing and refining the code. This helps create a sense of ownership, shared responsibility, and mutual respect.</p>
<b>3. Implement</b>	<p>Finalize and distribute the code of conduct. Take time to explain its purpose and relevance at the start of all youth activities or programs.</p>

## Case Study: Respecting All Genders in Practice

During a youth exchange: Alex, a non-binary participant using they/them pronouns, was repeatedly misgendered. Emma, a female participant, noticed leadership roles were mainly given to males. Both raised concerns during the feedback session.

### To address these issues, the facilitators:

To address these issues, the facilitators: Held a meeting to reinforce the importance of respecting pronouns and equitable task distribution with all participants. Introduced a "rotation" system to ensure leadership roles were shared equally among all genders. Privately apologized to Alex and Emma, affirming their commitment to inclusivity. Implemented a "pronoun buddy" system to support correct pronoun usage and facilitated discussions on implicit biases. By the end of the exchange, both participants reported feeling more included, and the group expressed greater awareness of gender dynamics.

### Additional Strategies and Tools

#### 1. Gender-Sensitive Feedback Mechanisms

Create anonymous channels for participants to report concerns about gender discrimination or misgendering. Regularly solicit feedback about inclusivity and adapt activities accordingly.

#### 2. Scenario-Based Learning

Use case studies or role-playing scenarios to address issues like misgendering or leadership imbalances.

Discuss the impact of repeated biases on participants' well-being and engagement.

#### 3. Cultural Considerations

Address cultural differences in understanding gender and pronouns sensitively.

Provide context-sensitive training to facilitators on navigating diverse cultural perspectives while respecting inclusivity.

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# Gender-Neutral Pronoun Guide

Gender-neutral pronouns refer to people without assuming their gender identity, promoting inclusivity and respect for non-binary, genderqueer, or genderfluid individuals. While "they/them" is the most common, others exist.

Common Gender-Neutral Pronouns	Example Sentences
<b>They/Them/Theirs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- They went to the store.</li> <li>- I spoke to them yesterday.</li> <li>- This is their book.</li> </ul>
<b>Ze/Hir (or Zir)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ze went to the store.</li> <li>- I spoke to <i>hir</i> (or <i>zir</i>) yesterday.</li> <li>- This is <i>hir</i> (or <i>zir</i>) book.</li> </ul>
<b>Xe/Xem/Xyr</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Xe is working on the project.</li> <li>- I asked xem for help.</li> <li>- This is xyr jacket.</li> </ul>
Using Gender-Neutral Pronouns in Sentences	Example Sentences
<b>Referring to a person in the third person</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "They are leading the group discussion today."</li> <li>- "Ze is really good at solving problems."</li> </ul>
<b>Giving feedback or instructions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I spoke to them about their idea."</li> <li>- "Xe completed the project on time."</li> </ul>
<b>Correcting misgendering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Actually, Taylor uses they/them pronouns."</li> </ul>





# GUIDEance Workbook

**GUIDEance to gender equality and diversity  
by the use of gender-sensitive language**

