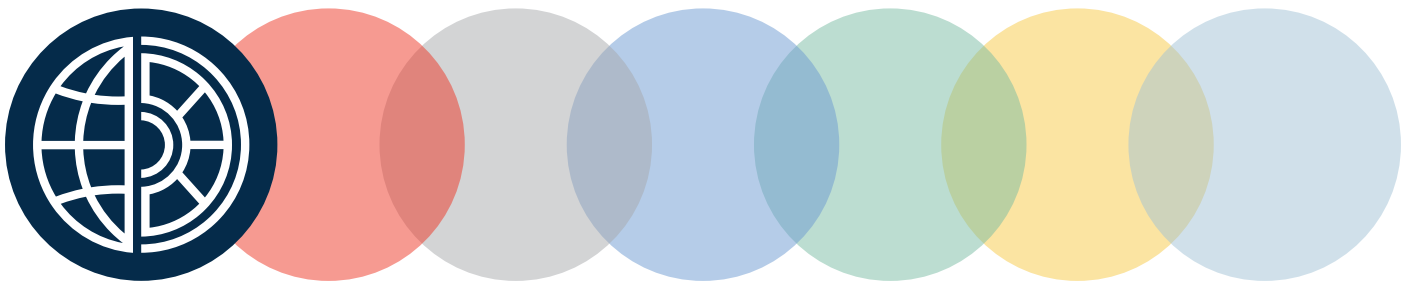# Guidelines on the use of gender-neutral language

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

A

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines provide general recommendations and guidance on using inclusive language in accordance with linguistic norms and practices.

As this is a topical issue, these guidelines are a living tool that can be adapted in line with the general development of practices.

B GENERAL PART

1 Purpose

These guidelines apply to:

- OTIF legal instruments under binding and non-binding institutional law which are addressed to natural persons or which refer to specific roles, functions or posts (including job vacancies), particularly in the Convention itself, the rules of procedure of the organs, the Staff Regulations and internal guidelines;

- documents or texts that are not legal instruments, particularly working documents, press releases and materials used in presentations.

2 Definition

"Inclusive language" includes all language, lexical, syntactic and graphic devices used to ensure equal, non-sexist and non-discriminatory representation of individuals and to avoid language that is likely to suggest that one sex or gender is the norm.

3 General principles

Whatever inclusive drafting procedures are chosen, it will be important to maintain the readability of texts and ensure that they are intelligible and clear. Discretion and consistency will be required at all times. In particular, it will be necessary to be aware of the possible ambiguities and shifts in meaning depending on the solutions chosen and to pay particular attention to them.

For legal instruments in particular, special drafting techniques for the use of inclusive writing should only be used if they are compatible with the requirements of precision and unequivocalness and if they make it possible to guarantee the legal certainty and consistency of the texts in OTIF's three working languages.

Inclusive language must be used systematically in all texts concerned. When a text is only partly amended, the drafting style used in that text should be followed. Inclusive solutions should only be introduced into a pre-existing text if the whole text is revised.

C
PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENGLISH

1. Authors of OTIF texts need to consider whether what they are writing is inclusive or gender-neutral and it is the translators' responsibility to ensure that an inclusive style is used when rendering the original.

2. Unlike French and German and other languages, English does not have genders for individual nouns as such (grammatical gender), e.g. "le texte", "die Regelung", and does not therefore require adjectives or verbs to reflect the gender of the noun they are associated with. In addition, there are often words to denote particular people, jobs or professions which are already gender-neutral, e.g. "doctor", "student", "writer", "staff".

3. However, there are cases in English where such titles are gender-specific (e.g. "postman", "chairman", "actress") and pronouns (he/she and their respective forms) which denote a particular sex.

4. English is perhaps easier than some other languages to write in an inclusive style, as these (nouns describing people, occupations and roles, and pronouns) are virtually the only issues in English where some attention needs to be paid to avoiding gender-specific terms.

5. The following are some examples of how to avoid being gender-specific when using English in OTIF texts.

(a) Avoid using gender-specific nouns:

AVOID	USE
Chairman	Chair (capitalised, to distinguish from a chair that you sit on)
Policeman	Police officer
Fireman	Firefighter
Chairmanship	Chairing
Spokesman	Spokesperson (sometimes "representative")

There are other examples of course. In contrast, British English has perhaps not changed as much as American English in this regard. Each time you use a job title or refer to a role, try to think whether it is gender-neutral and, if not, try to find an alternative (a thesaurus can help). Remember also that British English is used in OTIF texts.

(b) Avoid using "he", "she", "his", "hers" unless referring to a specific person. In the case of the Secretary General of OTIF, remember to use "he" or "she" when referring to the specific person, but "it" when referring to the Secretary General as an organ. Here are some examples of how to avoid using "he/she". In general, a singular pronoun can often be replaced with a plural pronoun (they/their instead of he/his or she/her). The Oxford English Dictionary says that "singular they has become the pronoun of choice to replace he and she in cases where the gender of the antecedent – the word the pronoun refers to – *is unknown, irrelevant, or nonbinary, or where gender needs to be concealed"*[1].:

AVOID | USE

AVOID	USE
Each delegate was asked to submit his proposal.	Delegates were asked to submit their proposals.
The member of staff must use his initiative to find a solution.	Members of staff must use their initiative to find a solution.
A representative may nominate another representative to speak on his behalf.	Representatives may nominate another representative to speak on their behalf.

[1] Oxford English Dictionary, https://public.oed.com/blog/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/

6. You can also avoid stereotyping and write more sensitively by choosing wording which is non-discriminatory. For example, you could use "the people" instead of "the men", or use "some colleagues" instead of "some women at work". Also, remember to use correct titles, as follows:

For women: Ms (unless the person in question specifically requests that "Mrs", "Miss" or, e.g. "Dr" or "Mx" (a relatively new gender-neutral title) be used. In general, remember that a person's marital status, gender and sexual orientation are irrelevant in a professional environment.

For men: Mr (unless the person in question specifically requests that another title be used, e.g. "Dr" or "Mx").

Remember also that transgender or non-binary people may not necessarily refer to themselves or wish to be referred to (he/she) as you might think. Try not to make any assumptions in this respect.

7. More generally, try to avoid using "his/her" or "he/she" when writing. This always looks inelegant and is jarring. Instead, try to think of some form of wording that is more inclusive, e.g.

AVOID

Each applicant must submit his/her application by email.

If the representative is attending in person, please note that he/she should inform the Secretariat.

It all came down to one person's vote. He or she would decide the future of the organisation.

USE

Applicants must submit their applications by email, or All applications must be submitted by email.

Representatives attending in person should inform the Secretariat.

It all came down to one person's vote to decide the future of the organisation.