Inclusive Communication

Language Glossary

PARTOS

EXPERTISE CENTRE HUMANITARIAN COMMUNICATION

Inclusive Language Glossary

This Inclusive Language Glossary is created by Partos and the Expertise Centre Humanitarian Communication, in collaboration with the Glossary Working Group consisting of several Partos members. We have strived for a list that not only lists problematic terms and their alternatives but also explains the reasoning behind them, so that power relations become (more) insightful, ethical considerations can be addressed, and ambivalences discussed. Language is an instrument that creates possibilities but also limits us - not everything can be (easily) discussed, described, and said. Therefore, pain points will always remain, and a glossary like this one is never finished. Terminology that seems accurate and justified today may take on a new meaning a few years from now. For this very reason, we hope that the explanations of our choices will provide a tool for the reader to continue to evaluate and assess language critically. Ultimately, it is the values underlying ethical, inclusive and equitable language that should enable us to express ourselves well.

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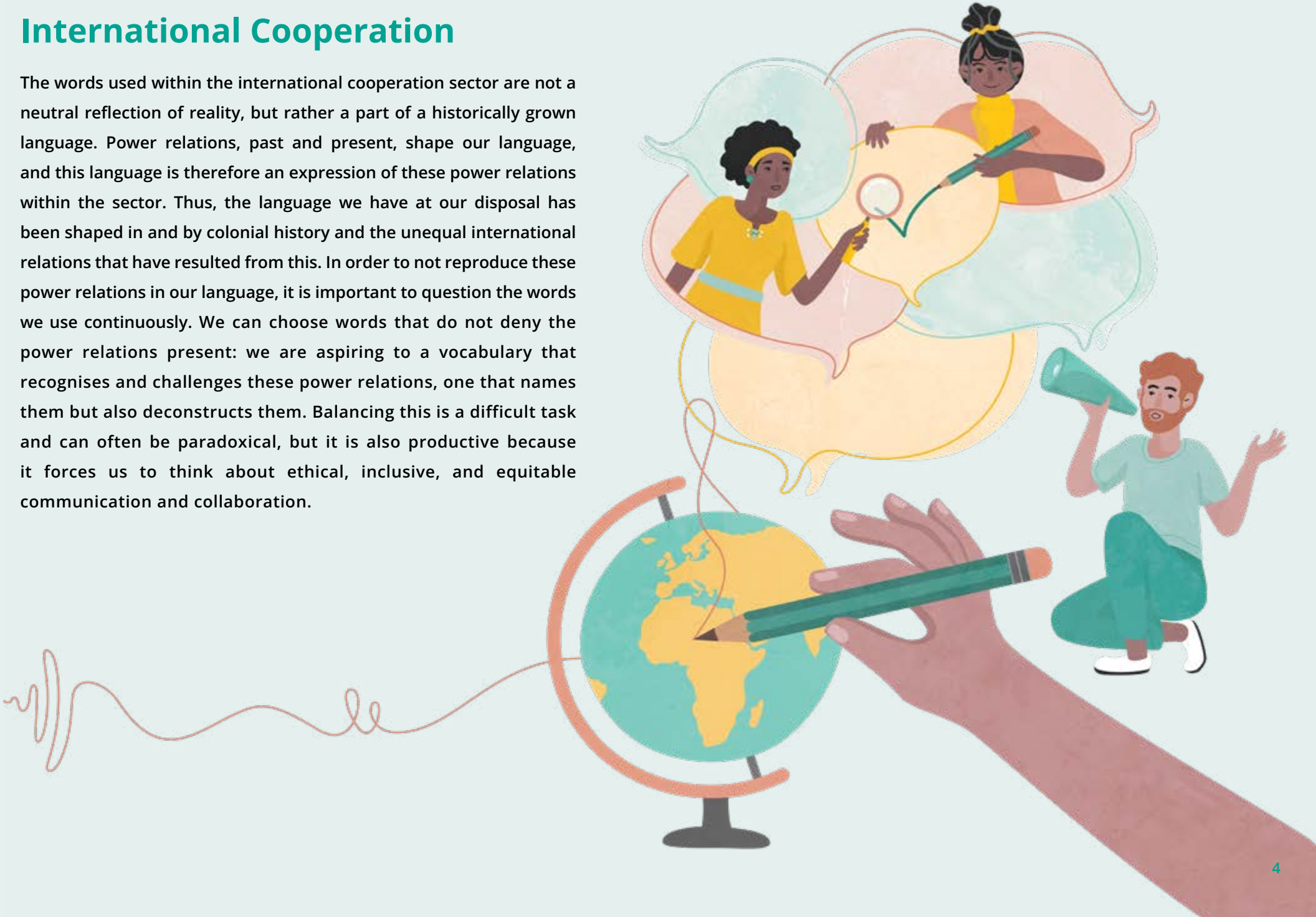
International Cooperation

The words used within the international cooperation sector are not a neutral reflection of reality, but rather a part of a historically grown language. Power relations, past and present, shape our language, and this language is therefore an expression of these power relations within the sector. Thus, the language we have at our disposal has been shaped in and by colonial history and the unequal international relations that have resulted from this. In order to not reproduce these power relations in our language, it is important to question the words we use continuously. We can choose words that do not deny the power relations present: we are aspiring to a vocabulary that recognises and challenges these power relations, one that names them but also deconstructs them. Balancing this is a difficult task and can often be paradoxical, but it is also productive because it forces us to think about ethical, inclusive, and equitable communication and collaboration.



International Cooperation

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Development, developing Development aid or work	(System) change Working towards international or global justice Contributing to international or global justice	The term development is probably the most commonly used term in the sector. Indeed, the sector itself has been called the development sector... Read more
Developing countries	Mention specific countries Countries in fragile situations Countries characterised by high(er) socioeconomic inequality Low- and middle-income countries Countries with high(er) poverty rates Partner countries	The best alternative to the word developing country is to name the country or region in question. As an alternative to developing countries,... Read more
Development cooperation	International cooperation International solidarity International justice International alliances Systems change	More than is the case with the term development, the term development cooperation emphasises the importance of working together... Read more
Development sector Development organisation	International cooperation sector Community of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) International cooperation organisation Organisation in the field of international cooperation (Non-governmental) organisation (INGO/NGO) Name specific focus or mission, e.g. human rights organisation or water supply organisation	An alternative to the terms development sector and development organisation is difficult. However, the international cooperation sector or... Read more

International Cooperation

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Help, charity Helping, giving, saving Helpers, saviours, heroes	Support Supporting, sustaining, facilitating, collaborating, contributing to, standing with or side by side	It is recommended to avoid the terms help and charity, as well as the verbs help, give and save, because of the dependency relationship between... Read more
Humanitarian aid	Emergency aid, support in times of need	The term humanitarian aid may suggest a distinction between 'humanitarian' and 'non-humanitarian' aid, when in fact, all aid is aimed at... Read more
Donor Well-doer, do-gooder	Partner (organisation) Ally	The term donor implicitly and the term well-doer (or do-gooder) explicitly express that there is an active and grateful giver of help... Read more
Beneficiary Recipient (of aid) Target group	Partner (organisation) Communities/people with whom the organisation collaborates Rights holder Specific names of partners, communities and people	The terms beneficiary, recipient and target group all imply a passive and grateful recipient of aid (and an active and grateful giver of aid). ... Read more

International Cooperation

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Victim Vulnerable people	Ask how someone wants to be called Survivor People affected by... People who are (structurally) the target of... People in vulnerable situations	The term victim is usually appropriate when referring to victims of physical injuries in a disaster or other emergency. The designation victim can... Read more
Poor or vulnerable people Poor or vulnerable countries Poor, poorest (of the poor)	People in vulnerable situations Countries in fragile situations, name specific countries Low-income countries (see also 'developing countries') Countries with high poverty rates (see also 'developing countries') People (most) affected by, people who have little/less money to spend People in need, people in conflict areas	Placing the adjectives 'poor' or 'vulnerable' before the noun 'people' reduces the identity of these people to their poverty or vulnerability, ... Read more
Ghetto, slum Ghetto/slum dwellers	Vulnerable neighbourhoods Residents of a vulnerable neighbourhood District residents, local residents Place-specific designations such as favela	The terms ghetto and slum could best be avoided. By using these terms, and the same applies to ghetto and slum dwellers, people are reduced to... Read more
Poverty reduction Poverty relief Poverty alleviation	(Socio-economic) justice Combating (social) inequality Countering social exclusion and injustice	In most cases, it is advisable not to use poverty reduction, relief or alleviation since these terms suggest that poverty is a separate problem that.. Read more

International Cooperation

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Third World/First World West/non-West North/South	Name specific continents, regions and areas Global South/Global North Worldwide/global challenges (Former) colonising countries/colonised countries Minority world/majority world	The "longstanding categories of First World/Third World, West/non-West and more recently North/South are becoming increasingly outdated"…. Read more
Sponsor child(ren)	Children who are being supported	The term sponsor child reduces a child's identity to being a recipient of support from (usually) Western people. Besides emphasising … Read more
Empowerment Empowering people Giving people a face or voice	Amplifying (self-determination and self-reliance) Facilitating people Giving people a stage, facilitating a platform, contributing to voices being heard, amplifying voices	Empowerment often creates the impression that change, power and self-reliance among people in vulnerable situations are only possible with… Read more
Capacity building	Supporting (of self-determination) Facilitating (of self-reliance) Mutual learning	Like empowerment, the term capacity building suggests that people and countries need help building their capacity. Also, the term gives… Read more

International Cooperation

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Resilience	Do not use unnecessarily	Resilience, a term that nowadays seems to be used often in place of empowerment, suggests a process that focuses on making people... Read more
Local partners Local partner organisations Local communities	Employees, allies Partners, partner organisations (Partner) communities Name partners and communities specifically	In almost all cases, it is better to omit the word local, because a place is always local. Local often gets an exotic connotation, which mainly emphasises... Read more
Small-scale Small community Small entrepreneur Microcredit	Do not use unnecessarily Community Entrepreneur Credit	While it can sometimes be useful to name the scale of the work done, small-scale, like local, is often unnecessarily used. The small 'communities',... Read more
Going to the field Being on fieldwork/field trip Being on a mission Working on the ground	Places where we work (specifically mention these places) On site	The expressions going to the field (or on fieldwork/a field trip), being on mission, and working on the ground should be avoided because of... Read more

International Cooperation

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Country office	Specifically mention the country or city where the office is located National presence	The use of country offices, both in practice and language, is an established part of the international cooperation sector. However,...
Project	Be (context-)specific	The term project can suggest that international cooperation is about time-bound (and temporary) 'interventions'. This undermines the idea...
Bottom-up approach	Equal cooperation Co-creative decision-making Equal partnership Those directly involved Active citizens	The overuse of the term bottom-up has over time eroded this once important and valuable concept. What is important when using the term...
Stakeholder	Key figure Specifically name interested parties	The term stakeholder is sector jargon that is better avoided, especially since it is often unclear who are considered stakeholders and ...

Read more

Read more

Read more

Read more

International Cooperation

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Accountability	**Taking responsibility**	Like stakeholder, the term **accountability** is sector jargon that could at times better be avoided. Instead, **taking responsibility** can be used.... Read more
Slaves	**Enslaved people**	The term **slave** tends to reduce people to a (colonial) identity, namely that of oppressed victims. Using **enslaved** firstly emphasises the violence... Read more
Modern slavery	**(Extreme) exploitation** **Forced labour**	The term **modern slavery** is both misleading and harmful. As OneWorld (Nourhussen 2019) aptly described it, "What is called modern slavery... Read more
Child prostitution	**Sexual exploitation of children**	Because prostitution refers to legitimate, legal forms of sex work and is linked to children in a compound manner, the impression... Read more
Child marriage	**Forced marriage**	The same applies to **child marriage**: children cannot consent to marriage because they are minors. So, it always involves **forced marriage**... Read more

Diversity: race/ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, disability

When thinking or speaking about diversity, tensions may arise, particularly since the position of different groups in society is implicated in their conceptualisation. Whereas privileged groups often benefit from understanding identity as a given, with a clear framework of social rules and expectations, identity is fundamentally a social construction rooted in language, history and power. Dominant groups have often held the position of the 'neutral' standard: the position of white, cis-gender men is often presented as a "view from nowhere" (Nagel 1986), with no clear profile, colour or background. In this construction, the 'Other' is regularly measured against the invisible standard, with that marginalising, exoticising and essentialising groups. It is important, in our communication, to avoid this implicit ordering of groups and people. Four rules can be helpful in this regard:

1. Put people's right to define themselves at the centre. Thus, in addition to the considerations outlined below, it is important to inquire about how people identify themselves: how people can and want to be addressed and represented in ways that do justice to their identity;

2. Speak about people as much as possible. So say, for example, 'people who are hearing-impaired people' instead of 'the hearing-impaired' and 'transgender persons' instead of 'transgenders'. Based on this choice, you avoid reducing people to a specific part of their identity.

3. Be as specific as possible and avoid container terms. Thus, speak of the work being done in eastern Congo rather than 'projects in Africa.' Not only do you provide more relevant information in the former wording, but you also avoid the impression that an entire continent can be discussed as a homogeneous unit.

4. Consider the pros and cons of what Gayatri Spivak and others have called "strategic essentialism." In principle, Spivak opposes essentialism, in which people, groups or countries are reduced to one or a few aspects of their identity. At the same time, she sees the need for essentialism when people engage in social struggles in which they strategically emphasise one or a few traits (Bell 2021). As Stuart Hall already said in the 1990s, strategically positioning a collective identity has "played a crucial role in the rise of the most important social movements of our time - feminism, anti-colonialism and anti-racism" (Hall 1990). Speaking with one voice has given marginalised groups more directions and results in their struggle for equal rights. Thus, the strategic use of essentialist terms may be permissible as long as the user is aware of and explicitly names the dangers.

Diversity

Important term	Explanation
Diversity	Precisely because **diversity** is an important cultural and organisational value, the word must be used carefully and accurately. An organisation can be diverse if different perspectives, backgrounds or interests... Read more
Inclusivity or inclusion	**Inclusivity**, or **inclusion**, refers to the extent to which people, with all their differences (in all their diversity), are allowed to participate (think, talk, determine, decide). Instead of exclusion (excluding people) or... Read more
Intersectionality	**Intersectionality** is about the fact that sex, gender, ethnicity, age, class/caste, and (dis)ability (and other aspects of identity) should not be viewed separately but always in conjunction with... Read more
Heteronormativity	**Heteronormativity** refers to a construction in which heterosexuality is the norm and in which everyone is implicitly expected to have a default sexual preference (European Institute for Gender Equality)... Read more
Cisnormativity	**Cisnormativity** or cisnorm refers to the norm that a person's gender identity matches the gender identity assigned to him/her/them based on his/her/their genitalia at birth.... Read more

Diversity

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Race	Race Racialised people Ethnicity Name the specific ethnicity (accurately) Ask people what they prefer to be called	The term race can be used when referring to "the social construct that still structures our social relations today by relying on the non-scientific notion... Read more
Ethnic	Name the specific ethnicity (accurately) Ask people what they prefer to be called	The word ethnic is often (and especially) reserved for non-Western, non-white people. Again, it is better to use terms that people themselves... Read more
Native	Indigenous peoples First Nation peoples Original (or earliest known) inhabitants Ask people what they prefer to be called	The term native cannot be used when referring to the original (or earliest known) inhabitants of a place due to its colonial and exoticising connotations.,... Read more
Tribes Tribal conflict	Group Society Community Ethnic group Ask people what they prefer to be called (Ethnically motivated) conflict	Tribes are not different from ethnocultural groups elsewhere in the world. However, because the word tribes has a clear primitive connotation,... Read more

Diversity

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Superstition	Beliefs Faith	Superstition usually refers to belief in the supernatural that differs from, or is not based on, an established religion. However, the term has often been used...
Coloured People of colour Tinted	Do not name colour when it is not relevant Non-white People of colour Black (with a capital letter) BIPOC Ask people what they prefer to be called	With each of these terms, the reason why colour is mentioned should be considered, but it should also be recognised that both the terms that are...
Sex	Gender Gender identity	Gender and sex are regularly confused with each other. Whereas sex refers to a biological fact that is relatively fixed, gender is a socio-cultural construct ,...

Read more

Read more

Read more

Diversity

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Men and women Ladies and gentleman Boys and girls	Persons People Children	It is almost never necessary to reproduce the binary opposition implied by men and women (which not everyone recognises). Where the specific role .... Read more
M/F He and she	M/F/X (of X/ F/M) He, she, them They Ask people what they identify as	Even when abbreviating men and women (if gender designations are needed at all, often they are not), adding the X can broaden the categorisation.... Read more
'Women and children'		Often, the phrase women and children is used as a synonym for vulnerable groups, which is unnecessary and incorrect.
Transgenders	Transgender people	Transgender includes a spectrum of gender-diverse people, including transgender men (or trans men, with a space), transgender women... Read more

Diversity

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Homosexual	LGBTQ LGBTQ+ Ask how people would like to be called	People who fall for people of the same sex used to be called homosexual. It is a term that can still be used properly, although caution is....
Gender mainstreaming	Gender equality, gender justice Equality between men, women and transgender people Gender inclusivity Gender awareness	The term mainstreaming may suggest that gender is a separate issue that should be included in general policy. Gender equality and gender justice...
Disability/handicapped Blind, deaf, hearing impaired AD(H)D'er, ASD'er	People with a (physical, sensory, psychological or intellectual) disability People with a visual impairment or hearing impairment Neurodiverse people Ask people what they prefer to be called	Rather than using terminology that equates or identifies people with disabilities, it is better to make it clear that this is only one aspect of ...
Suffering from or battling a condition, illness or disability	Having a condition, illness or disability	Speaking of a battle against a condition, illness or disability is problematic because it implies that it is about a competition that can be won or lost...

Diversity

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Wheelchair-bound Confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user	Tools give people freedom. Using a wheelchair is, therefore, like using glasses. It is, therefore, advisable to use the neutral term wheelchair user. .... Read more
High- and low-educated	(More) theoretical and (more) practical education	The division of people into high- and low-educated implies a hierarchy that has a stigmatising effect on people with a practical education or profession.... Read more
In the context of migration: Inflow Flow To drip in Tidal wave Tsunami	Do not use water metaphors for migration State the specific numbers	Water metaphors are frequently used within migration, which reduce people to a force of nature. The use of such natural... Read more
Refugee crisis Migration crisis	Border crisis Shelter crisis	When using the word crisis, try to carefully consider the precise nature of the crisis and who can or should play a role in it. The way in which borders... Read more

Diversity

To be avoided	Alternatives	Explanation
Migrants Refugees Asylum seekers	People who migrate People who flee People who move People who are looking for protection and safety	The term **migration** in itself might not be problematic, but the term **migrant** again risks identifying a person with the position in which that person.... Read more
Minorities	Marginalised people/groups Oppressed people/groups Non-privileged people/groups Groups/citizens/activists who stand up for their interests	The word **minority** has negative connotations. It is a term that suggests that we are dealing with a numerical minority perspective, and it is precisely ... Read more

Development, developing, development aid or work

The term **development** is probably the most commonly used term in the sector. Indeed, the sector itself has been called the development sector from the very onset, with the premise being that **development organisations** from the West do **development work** and provide **development assistance** (including ODA, Official Development Assistance) to what were called **developing** (or even **underdeveloped**) countries. The term has since been reconsidered, and rightly so, because **development** suggests a linear, uniform and progressive development according to the Western (capitalist) model of economic growth. This linear implication of development is highly hierarchical, with the "urban", "industrialised" and "modern" West being considered good and desirable, relative to the "rural," "agrarian" and "traditional" non-West, which should take the path to modernity and economic growth toward the mirror image of the (capitalist) West.

Because of the above, in almost all cases, it is advisable not to use the term development. Nowadays, the term **participatory**, **equitable**, **inclusive** or **sustainable development** is often used, making the term less problematic because of its emphasis on participation, equity, equality and sustainability. However, the historically fraught term **development** can still evoke associations with traditional development thinking. The term **(systemic) change** is often a more appropriate alternative. The terms **development work**, **development aid**, **development sector**, **development organisation** and **development countries** are best to be avoided at all times. An alternative to development sector and development organisation is difficult, but implementing **international cooperation sector** or **international cooperation organisation** could provide a new direction. Such longer variants are usually more appropriate, but also often (too) long. It is worth considering naming the specific focus or mission of the organisation, for example, human rights organisation, or simply only using **(non-governmental) organisation** or **international NGO** (or **INGO**).

Examples

"We are an international non-profit organisation dedicated to system change, focusing specifically on..."

"It is crucial to expand government funding for global justice."

Go back

Developing countries

The best alternative to the word **developing country** is to name the country or region in question. As an alternative to **developing countries**, the term **low-** and **middle-income countries** is nowadays often used. This can be productive (especially if the role of the colonial past in the structural and long-term impoverishment of countries is recognised). Still, this term essentially looks only at the average income level of countries and not at other relevant factors, such as access to healthcare and education and the degree of vulnerability to conflict and climate change. The same applies to the term **countries with high poverty rates**. In the context of INGOs, the term **partner countries** is increasingly used, referring to those countries where these organisations work. The emphasis here is on equality and cooperation, but of course, it is not the case that an organisation has an entire country as a partner. Specifically mentioning the countries in which they work is usually the most appropriate option. If these countries really need to be mentioned in more general terms, then **countries in fragile situations** and **countries characterised by high(er) socio-economic inequality** might be better alternatives (Hall 1992; Rist 2008; Teeven 2021).

Example

"Our organisation works closely with partners in Ecuador and Peru."

"In combating global inequality, special attention is paid to countries with high poverty rates, resulting in diverse explanations for the existence of inequality and injustice."

Go back

Development cooperation

More than is the case with the term **development**, the term development cooperation emphasises the importance of working together to improve the quality of life of people worldwide, including social, economic and environmental dimensions. It is still a very common term, especially in politics (think for example, of the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation) and among the general public. When it is necessary to use the term development cooperation, it is advisable to do so in the context of inclusive, equal, and sustainable cooperation.

Instead of **development cooperation,** it is recommended to use the alternatives **international cooperation**, **international solidarity** and, above all, **international (or global) justice**. The use of **international cooperation** emphasises (the importance of) equal cooperation and respect for each other's knowledge and skills. However, it can be interpreted as international relations language and thereby mainly emphasises an economic perspective (instead of a liveable world with equal opportunities for all). This could be overcome with **international cooperation for sustainable change** or international cooperation for a just world. The term international partnerships is also often used. This term may more clearly encompass the cooperation between partners. However, it does mask the structural power differences that are often still present. The terms **international cooperation(s)** and **international alliance(s)** are therefore more apt.

The term **international solidarity** emphasises a shared global interest and the need to redistribute power and resources around the world. However, the danger of the term 'solidarity' is that we can get stuck with the binary opposition where the West (the ex-coloniser) stands in solidarity with the non-West (the ex-colonised) out of charity and pity. It is therefore advisable, when using this term, to stress that solidarity is about equality and justice. Still, the preferred term is **international justice**. This term emphasises that it is about (striving for) equal human rights worldwide, politically, economically, socially and culturally. The term thus addresses the unequal distribution of power and resources and transcends the binary opposition between the West (or global North) and the non-West (or global South). It may also be apt to talk about **systemic change,** but it should be made clear what kind of systemic change is at play.

Examples

"In recent years, organisations working on international justice have increasingly focused on the impact of climate change."

"While international cooperation has been able to make a positive difference in many countries, it is also common for projects to create an unintended and unwanted side effect."

Go back

Development sector, development organisation

An alternative to the terms **development sector** and **development organisation** is difficult. However, the **international cooperation sector** or **organisation** could provide a new direction. Such longer variants are more appropriate, but at times, possibly (too) long for easy use. In addition, it is worth considering mentioning the specific focus or mission of the organisation, e.g. **human rights organisation**, or simply using a **(non-governmental) organisation** or **international NGO** (or **INGO**).

Examples

"The new generation in the international cooperation sector is putting language and words under a magnifying glass."

"Human rights organisations have long been pointing out the far-reaching implications of this bill."

Go back

Help, charity, helping, giving, saving, helpers, saviours, heroes

It is recommended to avoid the terms **help** and **charity**, as well as the verbs **help**, **give** and **save**, because of the dependency relationship between the (Western) giver and (non-Western) receiver it evokes. In particular, save refers to the colonial process (and white-saviour syndrome) of civilising (and Christianising) non-white people. It is important not to portray (Western) aid workers and donors as **saviours** or **heroes**, to give credit to organisations and communities, and to emphasise that it is a joint fight against injustices in the world. For example, do not say, 'We help people in poverty', but rather say, 'We stand in **solidarit**y with those addressing the root causes of poverty within their own communities.' Also, don't say, 'Make a donation so we can **save lives**', but rather say, 'Make a donation and contribute to a more just world.'

Examples

"Over the past year, we have supported important organisations that strengthen democracy."

"In doing so, we facilitate initiatives that..."

Go back

Humanitarian aid

The term **humanitarian aid** may suggest a distinction between 'humanitarian' and 'non-humanitarian' aid, when in fact, all aid is aimed at improving people's lives. The alternative **emergency aid** emphasises the immediate need to support people affected by a conflict, disaster or other crisis. It is recommended to be as specific as possible about the emergency aid being provided, for example, rehabilitation or temporary reconstruction support.

Example

"Emergency assitance after the dam breach focused on providing medical and sanitation resources."

Go back

Donor, well-doer, do-gooder

The term donor implicitly and the term **well-doer** (or **do-gooder)** explicitly express that there is an active and grateful giver of help (and a passive and grateful recipient). Instead, the terms **partner (organisation)** and **ally** emphasise the equality of people and the importance of cooperation and solidarity. Do always make sure that it really is about equality; often, there is a reference to 'our' partners or allies, again introducing a hierarchy (and a position of leadership). In general, it is most appropriate to mention the specific names of the organisations and people involved.

Examples

"Our partners, [organisation X and Y], are committed to improving working conditions. We have supported them financially in this regard."

"The money we raise through this directly benefits our allies who are working hard for better working conditions. See what [organisation X and Y] are doing here."

Go back

Beneficiary, recipient (of aid), target group

The terms **beneficiary, recipient and target group** all imply a passive and grateful recipient of aid (and an active and grateful giver of aid). The terms **partner (organisation)** and **communities/people with whom the organisation collaborates** emphasise the equality of people and the importance of cooperation. The term **rights holder** emphasises that these are people or groups whose rights - to which they are entitled - are often precarious or violated. In general, again, it is most appropriate to mention the specific names of partners, communities and people.

Example

"Several youth organisations now claim the right to further education. We are therefore working with these groups to enforce this right."

Go back

Victim, vulnerable people

The term **victim** is usually appropriate when referring to victims of physical injuries in a disaster or other emergency. The designation victim can also be used in cases of mental and sexual violence. However, **survivor** is nowadays often more desirable, as to emphasise the strength and control (rather than passivity and helplessness) of victims. The term **victim** is often used for someone who has recently experienced sexual violence, and victim is also commonly used in the legal context. In contrast, the term **survivor** often refers to someone who is in the process of recovery (or has completed it), so here it is more about the long-term effects of sexual violence (SAKI 2015).

In short, the desirability of using the terms **victim** and **survivor** is context-specific and situation-dependent and mainly depends on how the person himself prefers to be called. It is, therefore, best to ask about a person's preference. In most cases, the more neutral term **people affected by** (e.g. a disaster, war or crime) or **people who are (structurally) the target of** (e.g. sexism, racism or oppression) can be used. When people suffer and continue to suffer from, said misfortunes, they are not **vulnerable people** but **people in vulnerable situations** (see also below).

Examples

"Our organisation tries to support people in vulnerable situations by..."

"People affected by the earthquake are particularly concerned about..."

Go back

Poor or vulnerable people, poor or vulnerable countries poor, poorest (of the poor)

Placing the adjectives 'poor' or 'vulnerable' before the noun 'people' reduces the identity of these people to their poverty or vulnerability, while this is an external situation they find themselves in due to circumstances. The adjective 'poor' before 'countries' (or continents, regions, cities, places or neighbourhoods) reduces these places to their economic situation, while they are (made) economically vulnerable by unequal power relations and unjust trade structures - and can be rich in natural capital (such as nature and resources) and human capital (such as knowledge and culture). Classifying the world into rich and poor countries (including **low-income** and **high-poverty countries**) creates the same kind of association as **developed** and **underdeveloped countries**.

Sometimes the term **impoverished countries** is used to make explicitly clear that poverty is a consequence of action: countries are not poor by themselves, but impoverished as a result of political-economic power relations. The disadvantage of this term again is that it reduces countries to being (made) poor. Where possible, the noun 'poor' reduces people's identity even more to their poverty, while the term **poorest (of the poor)** further emphasises helplessness (and compares levels of poverty). In specific emergency or conflict situations, it is best to describe this as accurately as possible, providing context to the acute situation. This can ensure that these specific groups, countries or regions are not identified with the acute problem.

Examples

"Poverty is a system of oppression. People who have little to spend are therefore entitled to our solidarity."

"People in conflict areas often benefit from psychosocial assistance."

Go back

Ghetto, slum, ghetto/slum dwellers

The terms **ghetto** and **slum** could best be avoided. By using these terms, and the same applies to **ghetto** and **slum dwellers**, people are reduced to the precarious (urban) situation they live in. In addition, the term suggests decline while, in fact, these neighbourhoods often show progress in various ways. Particularly the term **ghetto** carries negative stereotypes and should be avoided at all times (Izadi 2011). The alternative **(residents of a) vulnerable neighbourhood** is better in this respect, but also not perfect. Instead of generalising and reducing a neighbourhood to a word, it is better to describe the specific characteristics of the neighbourhood, which you are concerned about. If a place-specific term is available, such as **favela** (Catcomm 2014), this is preferable because it is often more accurate.

Example

"Residents struggle with heat stress in their neighbourhood."

Go back

Poverty reduction, poverty relief, poverty alleviation

In most cases, it is advisable not to use **poverty reduction**, **relief** or **alleviation** since these terms suggest that poverty is a separate problem that can be solved by (only) financial aid. Instead, it is important to emphasise a broader approach that promotes socio-economic equity. It is about systemic change that addresses the root causes of poverty.

Example

"One of our guiding principles here is fighting inequality: countering social exclusion and injustice is at the heart of our work."

Go back

Third World / First World, West / non-West, North / South

The "longstanding categories of **First World/Third World, West/non-West** and more recently **North/South** are becoming increasingly outdated" (Slater 2004). While the term **Third World** may have offered progressive opportunities to emphasise autonomy and independence when it was first introduced, the term is now intertwined with stigmatising negative connotations about instability, conflict and poverty. It suggests that the **Third World** is different from and inferior to the First World. Similarly, the West/non-West pair carries the risk that the **West** is central, from which the **non-West** is derived, with the West traditionally representing a model and standard of progress for the world. Similarly, the terms **North** and **South** risk reinforcing the division between old-fashioned development thinking, although the North-South distinction is less burdened by the entrenched associations of the primary position of the **First World** and the **West** (Slater (2004). Still, by continuing to talk about the North and the South, the classical aid narrative can be reinforced, ignoring the root causes of inequality.

It is necessary to let go of the above dichotomies to truly change power relations and work together on the basis of equality and shared responsibility for global challenges. If possible, it is therefore preferable to name as specifically as possible which continents, regions and territories are referred to (Slater 2004; Dogra 2013). However, there are cases where it is important to discuss the shared experience of larger, formerly colonised territories. Here, using the **West** or **Western** and the non-West or non-Western can be productively used, as a means of naming and questioning precisely the centrality of the West.

The most common terms at the moment are the **global South** and the **global North**, mainly because the negative connotations associated with earlier terms are not (yet) dominant here. When the word **global** is added, the need for global solidarity and cooperation to address global challenges is emphasised despite the continuing association of a dichotomy. The use of **global South** and **global North** highlights the geopolitical reality of a world divided into politico-economic power blocs. Inequality has to do with the skewed power relations resulting from colonial history and the neocolonial present.

Global challenges is an alternative term that works well to make clear that many issues at play with regard to the economy, politics and the environment are, in fact, related to worldwide challenges, where both the problem and the possible solution to it are everyone's responsibility - not just that of the people facing its excesses. The downside is that inequality and injustice created by the colonial past (and neocolonial present) are not embedded in the term, which can make it seem as if the challenges are the same all over the world. **Formerly colonising** and **colonised countries** are, therefore, often an appropriate alternative, although the contemporary (neo)colonial legacy needs to be accounted for as well. In other words, in many cases, 'former' is not appropriate because colonial power relations have been (largely) maintained after the political independence of former colonies.

Nowadays, the terms **minority world** and **majority world** are increasingly used as well. They are alternative terms for the global North (or West) and the global South (or non-West), respectively. The majority here refers to the fact that the vast majority of people live in socio-economically less privileged countries, and only a small minority of the world's population live in more privileged countries. Above all, it makes it clear that the rich countries whose decisions impact the majority of the world represent only a fraction of humanity (Alam 2008).

Examples

"In West Africa, there are concerns about the high number of armed conflicts."

"Although climate change is a global challenge, we see that not all areas are equally affected."

"Formerly colonised countries still bear the burden of the structural impoverishment that has taken place.

Go back

Sponsor child(ren)

The term **sponsor child** reduces a child's identity to being a recipient of support from (usually) Western people. Besides emphasising the dependency relationship with this, the term **sponsor child** also seems to suggest that the child is owned by the so-called 'adoption parents' - especially when talking about **'our' sponsor child**. The use of the term **sponsor child(ren**) is always discouraged.

Go back

Empowerment, empowering people, giving people a face or voice

Empowerment often creates the impression that change, power and self-reliance among people in vulnerable situations are only possible with outside help (and especially help from INGOs). The verb 'to empower' literally means 'to enable someone to do something'. **Empowerment** is often seen as an awareness-raising process, encouraging people to find, activate and use their own strengths. As such, it assumes 'vulnerable people', who can change their own individual vulnerability, rather than 'people in vulnerable situations', people who are already powerful, but, because of the vulnerable situation they are in, cannot get out of it if this situation does not change. It is not about **empowering** people, but about **providing support to people** in vulnerable situations and, more importantly, addressing the vulnerable situations in a structural way. It is, therefore, about facilitating people and promoting **self-determination and self-reliance**.

In the context of **empowerment**, it is also often said that INGOs **give people a face or voice**. However, besides being factually incorrect (people always have a face or voice of their own), it again suggests that outside help is needed to get a face or voice. **Amplifying voices**, **facilitating a platform** or **providing a stage** is better to use. There is more balance when using one of these terms, as an organisation, platform or stage merely contributes to people's ability to be seen and heard (Calvès 2009; Nourhussen 2019).

Examples

"To strengthen the proposals of the LGBTQ+ community, we organised events so that they could reach even more people with their message."

"By providing audio equipment, we facilitated journalists' outreach."
"Organising meetings in the neighbourhood promotes a sense of community, so residents can make a stronger fist to tackle..."

Go back

Capacity building

Like **empowerment**, the term **capacity building** suggests that people and countries need help building their capacity. Also, the term gives the impression that it is a one-way street, where non-Western people and countries can only learn from Western people and countries and not vice versa. Instead, it is about learning from each other, standing side by side, shoulder to shoulder, and in solidarity with activists and other citizens who stand up for their rights. In this context, mutual learning can be used, but make sure it is actually mutual and equal learning (and not an empty shell to disguise one-way traffic or exoticise two-way traffic). At all times, it is important to emphasise one's own autonomy in **supporting self-determination** and **facilitating self-reliance**.

Examples

"Through training and education, we encourage young people to take matters into their own hands."

Go back

Resilience

Resilience, a term that nowadays seems to be used often in place of **empowerment**, suggests a process that focuses on making people in vulnerable circumstances more resilient and resilient. Again, it is about changing people (who should be able to cope with more vulnerability) rather than changing circumstances (which should be made less vulnerable). In addition, people in vulnerable situations are often called **resilient**, while they are 'just' trying to survive. As a result, the stereotype of resilient people carries the risk of trivialising the vulnerable circumstances they find themselves in - after all, they are **resilient** enough to deal with them.

Lebanese-Italian journalist Farah-Silvana Kanaan, for example, argued after the 2020 Beirut explosion that perpetuating the "mythical 'Lebanese resilience' (...) does more harm than good": "After the explosion, you could hear both international and Lebanese media saying about the Lebanese: 'They are resilient'", but "people take forced action themselves because the state is just totally absent" (Vermeer 2021). An exception may be discussing a (political) system, environment or economy as 'resilient', which refers precisely to the context in which people live and about creating an environment that protects people from external shocks or emergencies.

Examples

"Providing resistant seeds will increase the resilience of the agricultural sector."

"A fund for investigative journalism makes democracy more resilient."

Go back

Local partners, local partner organisations, local communities

In almost all cases, it is better to omit the word **local**, because a place is always local. **Local** often gets an exotic connotation, which mainly emphasises that a (Western) 'outsider' (such as an aid worker or ambassador) is going to an environment that is foreign to him/her/them in the non-West. Nowadays, **partner** (or **partner organisations**) is often used, but this term implies equality, while partnerships are (still) often unequal. The terms **employees** or **ally** are better in this respect, as they suggest cooperation but do not remove the (possible) power relationship.

The term **local community** is also frequently used when **local** could just as well be omitted. In addition, the term community often suggests smallness of scale. In contrast, often large areas or groups are suggested (referring to an 'area', 'province', 'parish', 'region' or 'society' might be more accurate). In this context, the term **community o**ften builds on (non-Western) stereotypes of communal collectivity and belonging. It is important to be as specific and accurate as possible when naming a community (and first check whether it can really be called a community). The term **partner community** is already more specific, but even here, the question remains whether the whole community is a partner and whether it confirms stereotypes. Please note that, when it comes to naming a level of governance, local (versus regional, national or international) could be used.

Examples

"Employees of one of the partner organisations prioritised public safety."

"The community opposed the expansion of the port, with our partners providing legal support."

Go back

Small-scale, small community, small entrepreneur, microcredit

While it can sometimes be useful to name the scale of the work done, **small-scale,** like **local**, is often unnecessarily used. The small 'communities', 'entrepreneurs' and 'credits' spoken of are often kept small, literally and figuratively. It is advisable to carefully consider whether emphasising smallness adds something to the story being told, or whether it mainly has a belittling and/or exoticising effect.

Example

"Entrepreneurs are particularly active in agriculture and industry, where we are committed to loans on good terms."

Go back

Going to the field, being on fieldwork/field trip, being on a mission, working on the ground

The expressions **going to the field** (or **on fieldwork/a field trip**), **being on mission**, and **working on the ground** should be avoided because of the colonial (military and missionary) associations. It is advisable to talk about staff working **on site**, or, even better, to refer to the specific places of collaboration with partners, communities, activists, etc.

Example

"We are trying to expand our presence in Mali, to..."

Go back

Country office

The use of **country offices**, both in practice and language, is an established part of the international cooperation sector. However, **country offices** perpetuate unequal (colonial) power structures in the sector, and especially between INGOs and 'their' partner organisations. It indicates the existence of an INGO headquarters in the global North that directs multiple **country offices** in the global South (and from where workers 'go to the field' to direct activities, Mathews 2021). It is better to talk about **national presence** and even better to **specifically name the country, region or city** where the office is located.

Example

"Our office in Accra is working on..."

Go back

Project

The term **project** can suggest that international cooperation is about time-bound (and temporary) 'interventions'. This undermines the idea of international cooperation as a process. Always try to be as specific as possible: is it about an initiative, programme, intervention, campaign, operation or investment?

Examples

"The investments are aimed at improving infrastructure."

"It is a broad programme to give different marginalised groups a place at the negotiating table."

Go back

Bottom-up approach

The overuse of the term **bottom-up** has over time eroded this once important and valuable concept. What is important when using the term is whether one can actually speak of equal cooperation, where the initiative lies with **those directly involved**, e.g. **active citizens**, interest groups or civil society in general. Emphasising **equal cooperation**, **co-creative decision-making** and **equal partnership** can work well if this is actually the case. In addition, the role of **directly involved** and **active citizens** can be named - thus exchanging the somewhat abstract term **bottom-up** for a more precise interpretation.

Examples

"We prefer to leave the initiative to those directly involved."

"We increasingly complement our work with equal partnerships with interest groups and active citizens."

Go back

Stakeholder

The term **stakeholder** is sector jargon that is better avoided, especially since it is often unclear who are considered **stakeholders** and what (power) position they occupy. **Key figures** is a possible alternative, partly because it indicates a specific (power) position, but does not always seem to cover what is being meant (not all stakeholders are key figures and vice versa). It is usually best to be as specific as possible and explicitly name the various stakeholders who play a part.

Example

"Where employers and the government agree on wage trends, workers try to defend their interests through trade unions."

Go back

Accountability

Like stakeholder, the term **accountability** is sector jargon that could at times better be avoided. Instead, **taking responsibility** can be used. The advantage of these terms is that an abstract value (accountability) is reformulated as something that can be actively done (taking responsibility).

Examples

"In our annual report, we take responsibility for the use of the funds made available to us."

"It is important to take responsibility for the long-term impact of our programmes."

Go back

Slaves

The term **slave** tends to reduce people to a (colonial) identity, namely that of oppressed victims. Using **enslaved** firstly emphasises the violence inflicted on these people and, secondly, that they are not slaves, but were made slaves, and are human beings with all sorts of characteristics and experiences.

Example

“The transatlantic trade of enslaved people left deep marks”.

Go back

Modern slavery

The term **modern slavery** is both misleading and harmful. As OneWorld (Nourhussen 2019) aptly described it, "What is called modern slavery today is, in fact, paid labour, but extremely lowly remunerated. There are often other circumstances involved: labour is usually illegal and therefore punishable. That makes it an unfair comparison for descendants of enslaved people to the centuries-old, legal system under which their ancestors lived." So while it is important to use strong, condemning language for exploitation, "modern slavery" is not an appropriate term for this.

Example

"In the cobalt mines, there is extreme exploitation and forced labour."

Go back

Child prostitution

Because prostitution refers to legitimate, legal forms of sex work and is linked to children in a compound manner, the impression may be created that the child may have given informed consent (and that this may be relevant). It is, therefore, better to name what it is about, namely the **sexual exploitation of children**.

Example

"The sexual exploitation of children is unacceptable and separate from prostitution policy."

Go back

Child marriage

The same applies to **child marriage**: children cannot consent to marriage because they are minors. So, it always involves **forced marriage** and the exploitation of children.

Example

“The forced, illegal marriage that children face...”

Go back

Diversity

Precisely because **diversity** is an important cultural and organisational value, the word must be used carefully and accurately. An organisation can be diverse if different perspectives, backgrounds or interests are represented. In its current use, however, diversity sometimes refers to the person or persons who, on the basis of their background or perspective, make an organisation (which was homogeneous in the traditional sense); often, these are people who do not belong to the (white, patriarchal and heteronormative) norm. However, they are not inherently **diverse** and do not bear the responsibility to express diversity**. Diversity** is a general value, for which everyone (and people in privileged positions in particular) is responsible and which, if used correctly, can contribute to a broad view, versatility, flexibility and, above all, justice and equal opportunities.

Go back

Inclusivity or inclusion

Inclusivity, or **inclusion**, refers to the extent to which people, with all their differences (in all their diversity), are allowed to participate (think, talk, determine, decide). Instead of exclusion (excluding people) or segregation (separating people), inclusion is about involving people in (the decision-making about) a group, organisation or society.

Go back

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is about the fact that sex, gender, ethnicity, age, class/caste, and (dis)ability (and other aspects of identity) should not be viewed separately but always in conjunction with each other. These dimensions always work together to create different positions of power and multiple layers of oppression and exclusion. So one must always look at how these dimensions intersect, how they are intersectional. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), who coined the term **intersectionality**, put it: 'The intersection of racism and sexism plays out in the lives of black women in ways that cannot be fully understood as distinct from the ethnicity and gender dimensions of these experiences.'

Go back

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity refers to a construction in which heterosexuality is the norm and in which everyone is implicitly expected to have a default sexual preference (European Institute for Gender Equality). Although this norm has been and is continuously being challenged in the Netherlands and many other countries in the world, contemporary society is still predominantly heteronormative.

Go back

Cisnormativity

Cisnormativity or **cisnorm** refers to the norm that a person's gender identity matches the gender identity assigned to him/her/them based on his/her/their genitalia at birth. In other words, being **cisgender** is the dominant norm in society.

Go back

Race

The term **race** can be used when referring to "the social construct that still structures our social relations today by relying on the non-scientific notion of race and still influences the social position of **racialised people**" (11.11.11, 2021). The term racialised people also covers the load linguistically well and can be used. When referring to a specific ethnicity, it is best to name this specific ethnicity. Accuracy is needed here; in the Dutch context, for example, people often refer to 'Moroccans' when, in fact, they are often referring to 'Moroccan-Dutch people'. In doing so, it is always strongly recommended to use the (specific) terms that people themselves (want to) use and that they find respectful.

Examples

"At airports, during safety checks and other procedures, travellers are often racialised and treated differently based on their ethnicity or origin."

"French footballers of Senegalese background can choose which country they want to represent."

Go back

Ethnic

The word **ethnic** is often (and especially) reserved for non-Western, non-white people. Again, it is better to use terms that people themselves use and that they find respectful.

Example

"Ethnicity plays an important role in debates about multiculturalism, while descent is often difficult to define."

Go back

Native

The term **native** cannot be used when referring to the **original (or earliest known) inhabitants** of a place due to its colonial and exoticising connotations. The term **Indigenous peoples** (with Indigenous capitalised and peoples in plural) is nowadays the most common and widely recognised term to use when talking about these groups in a collective and political sense. However, the term First Nation peoples is increasingly being utilised as well. Again, it is always recommended to use the (specific) terms that people themselves use and find respectful.

Examples

"The Indigenous peoples of the area rightfully claim the natural resources."

"The position of the Māori in New Zealand society is under pressure due to political, economic and social marginalisation."

Go back

Tribes, tribal conflict

Tribes are not different from ethnocultural groups elsewhere in the world. However, because the word **tribes** has a clear primitive connotation, it is stigmatising to talk about some groups as tribes. Especially in the context of armed conflict, mentioning the role of tribes contributes to an image of irrationality and primitivity. Almost all conflicts revolve around a combination of power, resources and identity, and this is no different in regions that are often still spoken about in terms of **tribes**. Again, it is strongly recommended to use the (specific) terms that people themselves use and find respectful.

Examples

"Different ethnic groups and communities have their roots in the area, which can create tensions."

"The borders for large parts of the African continent, which were defined during the Colonial Conference in Berlin, still cause ethnically motivated conflicts today."

Go back

Superstition

Superstition usually refers to belief in the supernatural that differs from, or is not based on, an established religion. However, the term has often been used in the (colonial) past to legitimise a dominant (Western) religion and portray other kinds of (non-Western) **beliefs** as exotic, irrational and indecent. Because of this colonial rhetoric, the term **superstition** is no longer used in (religious) scholarship, and it is advisable not to do so elsewhere either. A distinction between **faith** and **superstition** cannot be made anyway.

Go back

Coloured, people of colour, tinted

With each of these terms, the reason why colour is mentioned should be considered, but it should also be recognised that both the terms that are not advisable and its alternatives often express whiteness as an implicit norm. There are situations where this is also the goal; particularly when racism is discussed, it is important to make it clear that racism normalises whiteness. Naming individuals or groups as **non-white** makes it clear that people from many different backgrounds are marginalised in systems where whiteness is the norm. Like **non-Western**, the term **non-white** is also problematic because of its negativity, "as if people who are not white only had an identity by virtue of what they are not" (Dyer 1997). Yet this term can be preferred to **people of colour** or **Black** because these raise similar problems while not explicitly highlighting them.

The term **people of colour** is often used as a way of discussing the shared experience of people outside the white norm in a similar way to non-white. Its use is (only) productive at the moment when it denounces normative whiteness. Outside this context, the use of the term is usually not desirable because it assumes that some people are of colour and others, namely white people, are not. As Dyer (1997) aptly puts it: "We need to recognise that whiteness is also a colour, one of many, and we cannot recognise that the moment we continue to use a term that attributes colour to all but white people". The term **Black** (capitalised to emphasise the shared (political) experience) is often used in academic and activist circles. It offers a good alternative in various contexts, but the term also has two drawbacks. First, it excludes people who are neither white nor black, and second, there is the risk of reaffirming the traditional distinction between white and black. In contexts where the shared (political) experience of being different (and oppressed) based on ethnicity and skin colour is not central, it is better to choose terms that express as precisely as possible which group or culture is being referred to. The acronym **BIPOC**, which stands for 'Black, Indigenous, People of Colour', is increasingly used as an umbrella term for people of different backgrounds facing similar racial injustices. As an umbrella term, the term highlights both the internal diversity within the group while also it refers to the shared experiences of injustice.

Example

"Although the differences are many times greater than the similarities, non-white people of different origins share their position in relation to the white norm."

Go back

Sex

Gender and sex are regularly confused with each other. Whereas **sex** refers to a biological fact that is relatively fixed, **gender** is a socio-cultural construct of norms and behaviours that are different to people based on their sex assigned at birth. **Gender** can also be understood as an identity. A person's innate sense of one's own gender may or may not correspond to the gender assigned to them at birth, e.g. trans men and women and non-binary people and people of other genders as differentially expressed in the different contexts and cultures in which they operate. Because the binary opposition in which two genders are spoken and thought is strongly embedded in language, it can be difficult (or feel forced) to actively change this. However, try to avoid formulations that unnecessarily reproduce this opposition as much as possible.

Go back

Men and women, ladies and gentleman, boys and girls

It is almost never necessary to reproduce the binary opposition implied by **men and women** (which not everyone recognises). Where the specific role of men ('men play a dominant role in municipal politics') or women ('women play an important role in trade unions') is at issue, these terms can of course, be used. However, a general appeal to either gender ('the women and men in the city provide shelter') is unnecessary and can simply be replaced by 'people' - a definition that includes everyone.

Go back

M/F, he and she

Even when abbreviating **men and women** (if gender designations are needed at all, often they are not), adding the **X** can broaden the categorisation. This also applies to pronouns such as **he, she and them**, e.g., "At this hospital, anyone can indicate at what time **he, she or them** would like to be helped. In a general sense, for person identifiers, the starting point should always be to refer to people as that person wants to be referred to. There is no need to add further interpretation to the personal gender identity that a person has determined for himself or herself, and certainly not if it detracts from his or her own preferences.

Example

"Yara fights for a gender-diverse society. It is important to them that everyone feels safe on the street and in the hospitality industry, regardless of gender identification or sexual orientation."

Go back

Transgenders

The term **transgender** includes a spectrum of gender-diverse people, including transgender men (or trans men, with a space), transgender women (or trans women, with a space), people who engage in cross-dressing, and many others who do not (only) identify and/or behave as male or female.

Example

"Steve is a trans man and works as an anesthesiologist at Isala Hospital."

Go back

Homosexual

People who fall for people of the same sex used to be called **homosexual**. It is a term that can still be used properly, although caution is advised because "gay" as a commonly used slur is unfortunately surrounded by negative connotations. As a result, the term, and many other labels such as lesbian, bisexual, and transgender, does not always do justice to the many sexual and gender diversities. The alternative, the acronym **LGBT**, stands for lesbian women (L), gay men (H), bisexual people (B), transgender and intersex people (T). Another, even more inclusive abbreviation that can be used is **LGBTQA+**, where the Q stands for Queer or Questioning, and the A stands for Asexual. Finally, the plus (+) in **LGBTQA+**, stands for all forms of gender and sexual orientation not covered by the other letters, such as Non-binary and Pansexual. If you want to be more specific, use characteristics or (partial) identities as an adjective instead of a noun: a cis(gender) or trans(gender) person, woman or man (it is important here that there is a space between trans man or trans woman), an intersex person, a gay man, a lesbian woman, or a bisexual person.

Examples

"During Pride, the LGBTQA+ community celebrates diversity in its broadest sense."

"Isa identifies as queer."

Go back

Gender mainstreaming

The term **mainstreaming** may suggest that gender is a separate issue that should be included in general policy. **Gender equality** and **gender justice** emphasise the importance of taking gender factors into account in all aspects of international solidarity and justice. Gender equality and justice can be seen as jargon, but instead, the longer phrase equality between men, women and transgender people can be chosen. **Gender inclusivity i**s also often an appropriate term, while **gender awareness** can also be made explicit. Gender identity is the often deeply felt personal conviction to belong to a certain gender or to deviate from it. The gender identity can be male or female, both male and female, or neither male nor female.

Examples

"For us, gender justice is an important principle."

"We must also be keen on gender inclusivity in emergency situations because marginalised groups are vulnerable in times of crisis."

Go back

Disability/handicapped, blind, deaf, hearing impaired AD(H)D'er, ASD'er

Rather than using terminology that equates or identifies people with disabilities, it is better to make it clear that this is only one aspect of a person's identity. So avoid using disability as a noun or adjective,such as **deaf people**, and mention that people are deaf or, usually even better, have a **hearing impairment**. This is also called 'person first language'.

However, there are also exceptions: some (groups of) people with disabilities prefer 'identity-first language'. Some people who are deaf consider deafness to be an important part of their identity, with their own language and culture. They say about themselves: "I am deaf". So, always check which terms people with disabilities use themselves. Also, avoid euphemistic words such as 'people with different skills'. Indicating that someone has a disability or limitation is not automatically problematic. It is good to realise that a disability is not the same as an impairment. A disability is having a (physical, sensory, psychological or intellectual) limitation plus the barriers that this entails in society.

Examples

"At this location, people with visual impairments are supported in their search for suitable work."

"A neurodiverse workforce ensures that our organisation looks at a task from different perspectives."

Go back

Suffering from or battling a condition, illness or disability

Speaking of a **battle** against a condition, illness or disability is problematic because it implies that it is about a competition that can be won or lost, in which someone is (partly) responsible for how this turns out. At the same time, the use of the word **suffering** gives a contrary impression, in which someone suffers their condition, illness or disability passively and without will, which does not do justice to the way in which people deal with this. **Having a condition, illness or disability** (or living with it) is a more neutral way to express this, within which there is ample space to express how someone deals with a specific situation.

Go back

Wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair

Tools give people freedom. Using a wheelchair is, therefore, like using glasses. It is, therefore, advisable to use the neutral term wheelchair user.

Example

“There are still insufficient facilities for wheelchair users, especially outside the major cities.”

Go back

High- and low-educated

The division of people into **high- and low-educated** implies a hierarchy that has a stigmatising effect on people with a practical education or profession.

Examples

"Practical professions are increasingly valued and sufficiently rewarded."

"It is unacceptable to us that students with a practical education receive a higher interest rate on their student loan than students with a theoretical education."

Go back

In the context of migration: Inflow, flow, to drip in, tidal wave, tsunami

Water metaphors are frequently used within migration, which reduce people to a force of nature. The use of such natural metaphors is dehumanising, because the human dimension disappears, and instead, we speak in terms of anonymous (natural) forces. As a result, a discourse is created that is threatening and suggests uncontrollability, while the personal, human aspect of migration fades into the background. Ultimately, dehumanising language therefore encourages political choices that go against the fundamental rights of migrants and refugees.

Examples

"The number of people who came to the Netherlands has remained the same."

Go back

Refugee crisis, migration crisis

When using the word **crisis**, try to carefully consider the precise nature of the crisis and who can or should play a role in it. The way in which borders are monitored regularly leads to violations of human rights, while inadequate reception of refugees leads to social problems. When such issues are discussed, it is good to mention the correct crisis: that of **borders** and **shelters**. These can be good alternatives to naming a crisis in which the problem seems to lie in the presence of migrants or refugees. After all, migration is a historical constant, about which clear agreements have been made in international treaties.

Example

"There is a shelter crisis, which is the result of the continuous downscaling of facilities and shelters."

Go back

Migrants, refugees, asylum seekers

The term **migration** in itself might not be problematic, but the term **migrant** again risks identifying a person with the position in which that person finds themselves. Migration, and especially fleeing, is not an identity. The terms **refugee** and **asylum seeker** are often used interchangeably. The term asylum seeker is more often in the news in a negative way than the term migrant or refugee. Because of the often negative connotation of the word **asylum seeker**, we prefer to talk about someone who applies for protection or who is looking for protection.

Examples

"People who flee are vulnerable and deserve our protection and support."

"For people looking for protection from conflict, internet access during the trip is very important."

Go back

Minorities

The word **minority** has negative connotations. It is a term that suggests that we are dealing with a numerical minority perspective, and it is precisely for that reason that the interests of marginalised groups are regularly pushed aside. It is better to state what these groups stand for or are working on. Moreover, the term minority suggests a vulnerable position, while the reason for this position is rarely made explicit. With **marginalised** and **oppressed** groups, this is clearer, and a verb is also used. The latter is important, because marginalisation and oppression are social processes that do not inherently belong to (the position of) a group, but are part of a social (power) dynamic. More or less, the same applies to non-privileged people or groups (versus privileged people or groups), with the emphasis on the (structural) privileges that people have or have not received in (and by) a society.

Example

"Within our work, we mainly focus on the position of marginalised groups."

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Colophon

This Inclusive Language Glossary is a product of the Partos Innovation Hub in collaboration with the Expertise Centre Humanitarian Communication (HuCom). Partos is the Dutch member association for international cooperation organisations. The Partos Innovation Hub offers professionals in the field of international cooperation the space to learn and innovate together, to be better able to navigate the future and accelerate structural changes within themselves, their organisations, and international cooperation at large. HuCom is a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving communication about international cooperation. They consider ethical, inclusive and equal communication as essential for creating a more just world and offer international cooperation organisations in the Netherlands and abroad feedback and tools to become aware of and contribute to this.

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Source statement

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