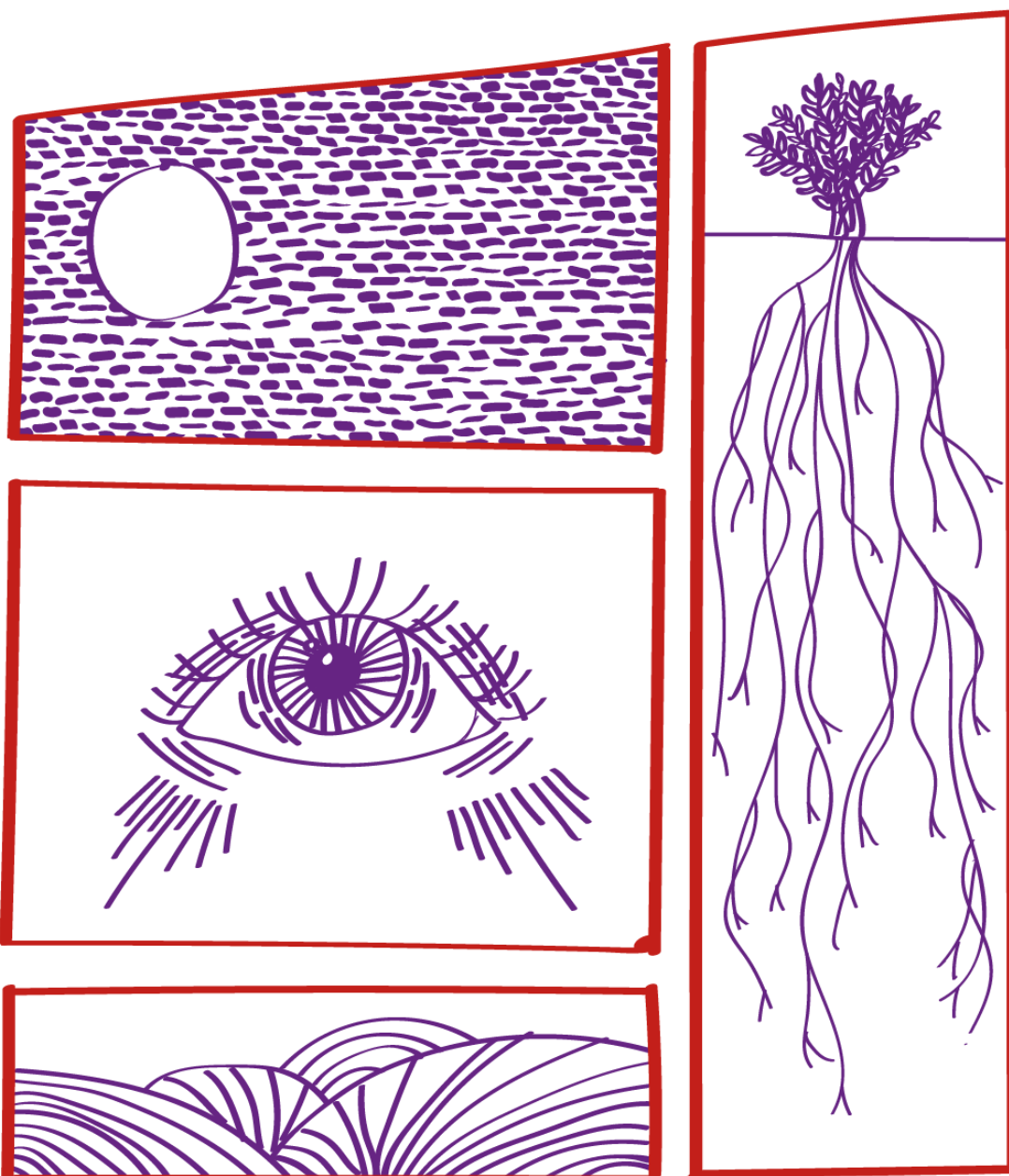


# THE OPEN MIND AND THE CRITICAL EYE

## HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE HUMANITARIAN FIELD

Theoretical and practical tools



EU AID VOLUNTEERS INITIATIVE

“EU Aid Volunteers supporting gender mainstreaming in humanitarian action – VOL4GEN”  
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# O. WELCOME

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Hello!

This is where our path to transformation begins. Communicating is much more than just speaking about what happens. Communicating helps us to evolve, it contributes to making the world fairer. But is this always the case?

What happens when we report on an armed conflict and do not analyse the use of women's bodies as a weapon of war? What happens when we write about a natural disaster and do not give an account of the increase in **sexual abuse** against women, girls and **non-binary people**? What if we only speak of reproductive health without mentioning sexual rights? What if our headlines only talk about heteronormative relationships? What if we speak of labor rights and do not acknowledge the **glass ceiling** or the discrimination against **racialized** women, against people with functional diversity or against transgender people? What if ... What if ... What if ...

This manual is intended to be a simple tool to guide you in your transformation towards communication with a gender perspective. In it, you will learn what communication with a gender perspective is and how to use the lenses of gender and intersectionality in communication. You will discover all the elements you need to talk about sexist violence, rights, and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) in a conscious way. You will also find many tips and tricks that will help make your work successful.

We believe that the best way to learn is one based on experience. Thus, you have at your disposal various practical resources; they are catalogued in three sections: to read, to listen and food for thought. You will find the answers to the practical resources in the ANSWERS TO "FOOD FOR THOUGHT" section. You can check them out whenever you want, but the best approach would be to try to complete the resources autonomously, as part of the learning process.

Before starting this journey we want to highlight a few points:

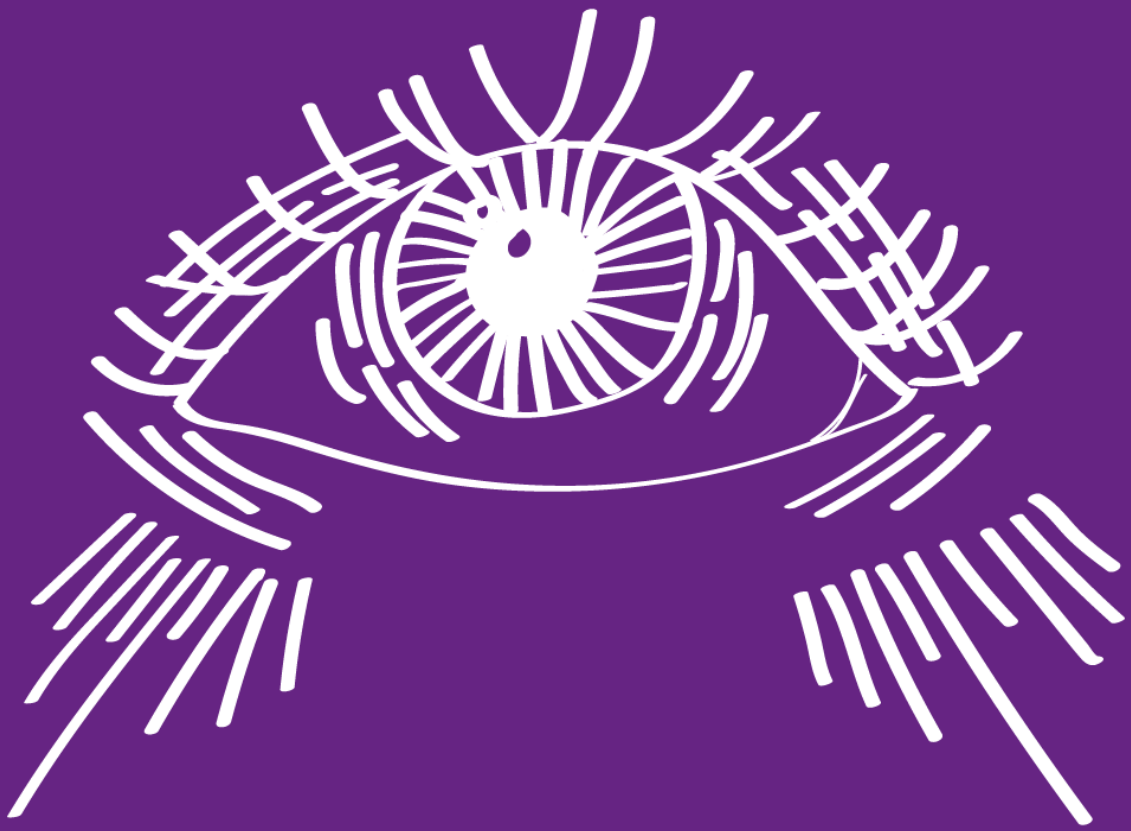
- It will not always be easy, you will have to call into question your **privileges** as a cis man, as a white woman... and that can cause discomfort, confusion or even reluctance.
- You are going to unlearn and then to learn again and this, as anything else, is a process. Be patient and don't lose your motivation.
- At the beginning you will have to make an active effort to use your five senses in your work, so that you don't leave any details out. Don't worry, with time everything will be much more fluid.
- Putting your new approach into action may involve confusion or discussions with your colleagues. Be patient and adopt a pedagogical attitude.
- It is possible that you think that you have already studied this topic, that you already know it or that you are not a *macho* or are not racist at all. We all live in a **cisheteropatriarchal** society (from now on patriarchal to make reading easier): everyone has to question themselves, you too.
- It's possible this guide is too general for you if you already have some expertise in this area. In this case, we invite you to continue addressing your doubts and concerns with other resources available to you.
- You may have the impression that some information is contradictory. In our opinion, contradiction is an intrinsic part of our lives, as we are in constant change. There are no absolute truths; contradictions are, in fact, symptom of reflection and of questioning oneself, which is what allows us to continue to evolve. Try to learn from each contradiction.
- Enjoy the journey. Think that you are ceasing to be complicit in and to protect a society that invisibilises, marginalises and devalues half of the population: women and non-binary people.
- If you don't understand something, look it up. We have included a small glossary at the end of the guide, where you can look up the words that are highlighted in the text. We've also added a lot of resources for you to consult, and otherwise, there's always the internet.

If you don't have specific knowledge of communication, we recommend that you take the course "Basic aspects of communication" which is available on the Alianza platform.

We propose here a quick initial questionnaire for you to measure your knowledge about communication with a gender perspective. We invite you to fill it out now and then to answer it again after reading the whole guide, discovering what you have learned throughout the process. You can check out the results in the ANSWERS TO "FOOD FOR THOUGHT" section.

## How much do you know about communication with a gender perspective?

- Intersectionality is a phenomenon that reveals how
  - Each person suffers from oppression or holds privileges based on their belonging to multiple social categories
  - Each person has various privileges that they use in their everyday interactions
- The gender perspective in communication is necessary because
  - It contributes to creating social awareness of the inequalities experienced by women and non-binary people in their daily lives, and therefore it helps to fight and to change them
  - It contributes to creating social awareness of the inequalities experienced by women and men in their daily lives, and therefore it helps to fight and to change them
- Does communicating with a gender perspective mean raising awareness about the lived realities of women?
  - Yes
  - No
- Does it consist of interviewing more women?
  - Yes
  - No
- Is the language you adopt important?
  - Yes
  - No
- Does the gender perspective in communication consist only of a section or program developed for women?
  - Yes
  - No
- Indicate which of the following headlines is sexist
  - Michelle Obama presides over a solidarity event on Refugee Day
  - President Obama's wife attends a solidarity event on Refugee Day
- Which of these terms is more appropriate to report on violence against women?
  - Domestic violence
  - Gender-based violence
  - Both are correct



# 1. OPENING THE EYES

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## 1.1. WHY A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IS NECESSARY IN COMMUNICATION

The naturalization of male and female attitudes and roles has historically justified the oppression of half the population. Gender is an analytical category that provides us with tools to break down forms of power and inequalities. The objective of this concept is to denounce, transform and eradicate oppression and to build new, and more egalitarian, horizons.

Thus, a gender perspective is an analytical and practical tool that arises from feminist struggles. It enables us to identify and question the power relations that cause inequalities and exclusion for women and non-binary people. It also proposes actions that must be taken to create the conditions for change in the direction of gender equality and feminist societies.

Applying gender to the field of communication means understanding it as a category of transversal analysis in the entire communication process. When dealing with any kind of information, we have to take into account that the social discourse is unequal when we speak of men, women and non-binary people. It also means facing the themes of gender agendas alongside the acknowledgement that they affect every part of society. In this way, they cease to be exclusively "women's issues". Throughout the process it will be fundamental to highlight the causes and the consequences of gender inequalities in society.

A gender and **feminist** media perspective not only helps to raise social awareness of inequalities, but is also a legal requirement established by the international normative framework.

- Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995: Medias are identified as one of the 12 areas of interest for the promotion of gender equality. The strategic objectives propose promoting the participation of women in the media in order to foster a non-stereotyped image of them.

- Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Istanbul, 2011: It encourages medias to participate in the development and implementation of measures that help to prevent violence against women and to strengthen the respect for their dignity.

- Eleventh session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2010: The Brasilia Consensus includes in its fifth section the commitment to facilitating women's access to new technologies and to promote equal, democratic and non-discriminatory medias.

As we can see, the international legal framework talks exclusively about women, which implies that the way for non-binary people to fully achieve their rights is even longer.

Now that we know the basic concepts which are necessary to start working, we can imagine how the gender perspective goes far beyond dedicating a section or a column to women or non-binary people, or talking only about sexist violence or writing a certain number of posts and articles with a gender perspective.

Let's go on.

## 1.2. WHY WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE AS TRANSVERSAL AND INTERSECTIONAL

Dedicating specific news, columns, programs or sections to "women's issues" is surely a start, but doesn't contribute to the transformation of patriarchal society.

The gender perspective is not a separate issue, it is more like glasses. When we put them on, we all see the implications that any action, measure, law or program has for women, non-binary people and men in all areas of life. For example, without a gender perspective, when talking about decision-making in a refugee camp, we would only refer to religious or political male leaders.

However, after putting on the gender lenses, when we investigate a specific theme and we look for the sources, selecting disaggregated data and consulting experts on the subject, we will inevitably realize that the shortage of women in decision-making processes is the product of a patriarchal society. We will also notice that women have to face double or triple working hours and that this lack of time prevents them from taking part in community tasks such as participation. We will also discover that there are women leaders who are contributing to generating change that is not recognized by the men in decision-making positions, etc.

Understanding the gender perspective in a transversal way is about approaching reality in order to transform it. It allows us to focus on everything that was ignored and, therefore, it contributes to achieving a change which goes in the direction of a fairer and more egalitarian society. For sure, now you are thinking: how do we do this? Let's not get ahead of ourselves: in order to keep moving forward, we first need to know the basic theoretical framework.

At this point we have to ask ourselves a question: do all women and non-binary people have the same problems, needs, situations, conditions and starting point?

Indeed, the answer is NO. With this awareness, we are going to further enrich any communicative action.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- María, cis woman, Spanish, lawyer, is interested in renting a flat.
- Lupe, non-binary, Spanish, racialized, lawyer, is interested in renting a flat.

### **Who do you think is more likely to get the apartment?**

- Aisha, an Algerian living in France and a single mother, wants to study economics.
- Clair, a French woman living in France, wants to study economics.

### **For whom do you think it will be easier and more likely to enroll and to finish the degree?**

- Julia, a trans black woman, goes to a job interview.
- Ramona, a cis white woman, goes to the same interview.

### **Who do you think is more likely to get the job?**

It is necessary to incorporate the gender perspective from an intersectional view. In the previous exercise we have been able to observe that each person is crossed by different oppressions and privileges and that, therefore, women and non-binary people don't constitute a homogeneous group.

Intersectional analysis seeks to address the ways in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression, and other systems of discrimination create those inequalities that generate the relative positions of women and non-binary people. It takes into account historical, social and political contexts, and also recognizes the unique individual experiences that result from the conjunction of different types of identity.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Take a look at the table in the next page, taken from Mujeres activando website - detox 7 día 7.

Fill in the fourth column with your own data. Then, analyse how your categories intersect with those of the other women and reflect on your privileges and oppressions.

Has your way of positioning yourself compared to other women and identities changed after doing this exercise?

We encourage you to complete the feminist program "Detox en 7 días" on the same website if you have time, it is really interesting!

## TO READ

[The gender approach in the management of EU Aid Volunteers](#)

[A Year After Her Killing, Marielle Franco Has Become a Rallying Cry in a Polarized Brazil](#)

[Mona Eltahawy](#)

[#DearNonNatives](#)

[Muchacha Fanzine](#)

[Kuchu Times. Our voices, our stories, our lives.](#)

[Brutal Murders in Atlanta Are a Painful Reminder: We Need to Stop Misogyny, Anti-Asian and Anti-Women Hate Crimes, and Gun Viole](#)

	MARIELLA FRANCO <sup>1</sup>	HILLARY CLINTON	AMARANTA LÓPEZ REGALADO	YOU
ETHNICITY /RACE	black	white	Zapotec indigenous	
NATIVE LANGUAGE	Portuguese	English	Ixcatec	
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	lesbian	heterosexual	heterosexual	
GENDER IDENTITY	cis woman	cis woman	muxe <sup>2</sup>	
SOCIAL CLASS	low	high	low	
SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION	low income background	high income background	low income background	
GENERATION	young	adult	adult	
LIVING IN URBAN/RURAL AREA	urban	urban	rural	
IN OUTLYING AREAS? (URBAN AREA)	in outlying area (favela)	uptown neighbourhood	-	
HOW MANY CHILDREN?	a daughter	a daughter	none	

<sup>1</sup> Mariella Franco was murdered on March 14, 2018 for being a woman, a lesbian, a poor person, a feminist and an activist

<sup>2</sup> In the Zapotec culture they are people who are born with a certain biological sex but whose gender identity doesn't match their biological sex

## 1.3. HOW IS SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN THE THIRD SECTOR TODAY

“The media has a gender perspective. The one that corresponds to the male gender.”

Juana Gallego Ayala

After understanding what a gender perspective is and why it is transversal and intersectional, you may have realised that the communication we are exposed to on a daily basis does not, on many occasions, respond to this perspective. It is likely that you can think of many examples of issues that are well communicated and of others that leave much to be desired.

To start exploring this topic, we are going to take a critical and open-minded look at various articles, videos and campaigns of organisations and associations. After each piece of content, we will ask you a series of questions with the objective of analysing some elements of gender-sensitive communication. You will learn more about them throughout this guide.

At this point, we have to remember that we are in the middle of a learning process, that we all have to be in a process of constant revision and that when we admit our mistakes and recognise our privileges we are growing. We do not have to blame ourselves or martyr ourselves, but rather to learn from this acknowledgment process. The path will not be easy, as recognising ourselves in places where we haven't positioned ourselves before is going to stir up a lot of things inside us. Don't worry! Take care of yourself and give yourself time.

### How do you start over when you have lost so much?

This UNHCR campaign talks about refugees in the Central African Republic. After watching the video, answer the following questions.

- What do you think is the objective of the campaign?
- Who is telling the story? Where do the people who appear in the video come from and what role does each of them play: do they provide testimony, are they experts, are they activists...?
- Do we know why they are refugees? What is the conflict they are fleeing from?
- Are the refugees presented as autonomous and as endowed with decision-making power?
- Is it made visible that the condition of refuge affects men, women and non-binary people differently?

### Khanimambo's magic

#### Who Wants To Be A Volunteer?

*Khanimambo's magic* is an article by a volunteer about her experience in international volunteering in Mozambique with the Khanimambo foundation. *Who wants to be a volunteer?* is a campaign by SAIH Norway which parodies the quiz competition Who wants to be a millionaire? Check them out and come back to answer the following questions.

- What do you think is the goal of each of the informational products?
- What are the images that accompany the Khanimambo article like?
- Who is the protagonist of the story?
- Who is the target audience for the SAIH video?
- What is the connection between the article and the video?

### Following their dreams: voices and portraits of Palestinian women

This exhibition by Alianza por la Solidaridad and EU Aid Volunteers consists of photographic portraits of Palestinian women in their daily lives. The works have been realized by two female photographers. Visit the virtual exhibition and come back to answer the following questions.

- What do you think is the objective of the exhibition?
- What languages are used in the exhibition? To whom is it addressed?
- Is the body of women shown as an object and hypersexualized?
- What aspects of the protagonists' personal and working life are shown?
- What are the expressions of the women? How do they feel and display their emotions?
- What perception do you have of Palestinian women after seeing it?

### Give a shit

This WaterAid campaign consists of an animated video about the lack of toilets around the world. You can watch the video to answer the following questions..

- What do you think is the goal of the video?
- ¿Whom is the campaign addressed to?
- Are there any people represented? Are people without access to toilets associated with a specific image?
- Does the campaign tell us about who is mainly suffering from this problem? Does it explain that this issue affects men, women and non-binary people differently?
- Are the causes of the lack of access to toilets and drinking water explained?
- Are some possible solutions illustrated?

The objective of social communication is to transform reality; this can be achieved by identifying the origin of our inequalities and denouncing them. Bringing reality and daily life closer together, showing autonomy and **resilience** in response to violence and inequalities is a way to transform reality, but if isolated from the context these actions can move us away from our goal.

On one hand, this does not mean that in each of our communicative works we have to explain 5 pages of history, political relations and strategic interests, but it does mean that we need to make explicit references when contextualizing. Talking about "occupation" without mentioning who occupies what, or about gender roles without explaining the consequences this has for those who do not fulfill such roles, detaches the problem from the structure that perpetuates it.

On the other hand, the gender perspective in communication has to be present before choosing the topic on which we want to report and it has to be applied to the process of source selection. Sometimes we take maximum care of all the aspects of communication, but perhaps we do not include every relevant aspect of the topic and we end up reproducing power relations in an implicit way. If the people who face violence and conflicts do not participate in the communication process from the very beginning, it is easy for us to fall into stereotypes and to offer a biased vision, because we are not counting on their perspective.

We need to understand the responsibility we have for the inequalities suffered by other people, not only on a personal level but as individuals who have privileges simply because we were born in the place we were born and with the body we have. It is not a matter of blaming ourselves, it is a matter of being aware in order to pass the microphone and power imbalances. We also have to bear in mind the responsibilities of people who have oppressed and are still oppressing other peoples; if we don't do so, we won't understand the structural origin of many inequalities.

Don't worry if you feel like you can't do an in-depth analysis of the campaigns we've presented. Throughout this guide, we are going to learn the necessary tools to communicate with a gender perspective. Keep in mind that you can return to this section and to the other sections as many times as you need.



## 2. PUTTING GLASSES ON

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### 2.1. STARTING OFF ON THE RIGHT FOOT TO GO BEYOND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

#### 2.1.1. WHERE WE START

We have already mentioned that what is not communicated does not exist. So, if communication in the medias and in the third sector only talks about issues related to men or about how they affect them, it is making half the population invisible. The communication process with a gender perspective has to do with who is communicating, with the setting of objectives, with choosing communication channels and also with the dissemination of information.

The medias establish the agenda for public debate, so the selection of non-**androcentric** themes is of special relevance. On the other hand, when working with an organization or association such as Alianza por la Solidaridad, themes to be covered are normally chosen according to its mission and activity. In any case, once the topic is selected, we have to decide the focus that we are going to give to that specific piece of information.

The final objective of social communication is to transform society, and having this clear in mind we must establish what the objective of our communicative action is. Once done, we have to choose the most appropriate channel of dissemination. We can reach the population we are looking for by analysing the audience of each of the channels at our disposal, as information does not reach everyone in the same way.

We have to know that women, as individuals mainly in charge of care-roles, spend many more hours in the **private space** than in the **public space**. These kinds of elements must be taken into consideration. For example, if we distribute a brochure on sexual and reproductive rights at the door of the market, we will reach women, but if we do it in bars or gas stations, we may not. It is necessary to observe how social dynamics work and to be creative in our ways of reporting, so that information can reach everyone equally.

What do I have to take into account to report with a gender perspective?

- Analyse the condition and position of women and non-binary people with respect to men on the subject we are dealing with:
  - How and to what extent do women and non-binary people participate in private and public spaces and in political and community processes?
  - How much space and time are available?
  - What activities and roles do men, women and non-binary people perform?

- Understand gender relations:

- Knowledge. Androcentric and western knowledge is the only one to be considered valid and universal; it eliminates or puts in a lower place all knowledge and culture that exist outside of it.

- Beliefs, behaviors and rules. We also behave and believe according to western and androcentric precepts.

- Spaces and ways of communicating. The public and formal sphere is understood as the space par excellence for communication and, therefore, it is given greater visibility and credibility. However, the private space, mostly occupied by women and made invisible, offers the opportunity to communicate from affection, care and solidarity. Remember, the personal is also political.

- Identify the factors of inequality:

- Access and control of resources and assets. Those who own and distribute resources and goods are men, and therefore they enjoy the benefits. This implies that for women and non-binary people it is difficult or even impossible to access the same resources and assets, and consequently to enjoy the same benefits.

- Power. Power relations, in which men usually occupy the position of authority and control, condition people's lives. If men are those who decide about body, family and resources, the decision will reflect their interests. The context also influences and conditions the decisions.

- Recognise the power structures that perpetuate and reproduce inequalities:

- Laws, social constructs, customs, traditions. For example, many cultures and countries put the male surname first or omit the female last name.

- Access to and representation in politics. Less representation of women in decision-making positions. Although there are more and more women and non-binary people in politics, it is almost impossible to find them at the head of departments considered masculine such as the Ministry of Defense.

- Access and representation in justice. Women are underrepresented in this area too. In addition, we have to take into consideration that justice requires law interpretation, which is done by human beings. As a consequence, in a patriarchal society justice may not be gender-sensitive and male judges may be biased in a sexist way - as they have been socialized as men in a sexist environment.

On one hand, understanding how power structures contribute to perpetuating these inequalities helps to process the information from a gender perspective. On the other hand, recognizing these structures allows the construction of a story that does not approach any topic as an isolated case, but rather as a systemic problem. Finally, making visible and calling into question institutions, customs, norms, or laws contributes to their transformation.

- Analyse the impact of the information:
  - Awareness raising, denouncing, political advocacy... the purpose of our information will determine the approach we will adopt.
  - How this information influences the protagonists. Reporting a case of sexist aggression or a case of labor exploitation can have serious consequences for those who are facing it. It is our responsibility to analyse all the possibilities and to make decisions, such as not to publish everything even when we have the consent of the protagonists in case it may represent a risk for them.

- Analyse our role in this information and where our privileges place us:

- The approach we adopt in any field is based on our path, history and socialization. Sometimes it is very clear to us, but it doesn't always adjust to the cultural and social perspective of the place where we work.

Before starting to work, you have to listen, observe, ask questions and be silent. Communicative action must reinforce human rights and a gender perspective. Ask yourself who you are to report on this matter, ask your organization what it says and how it positions itself.

Sometimes communicating about issues - such as trafficking, laws that restrict women's rights or female genital mutilation - is not our job; or like the use of the *hijab* or the struggle of trans people. In Europe, for example, we have learned that the *hijab* is an oppressive element used to control women's bodies. However, in many countries, in addition to being an anti-colonialist symbol, it is also an element of protection for women against sexist violence.

Seeking collaborations with people who experience these struggles or violence at first hand may be an option. Thus, it would be better to invite a Muslim woman to talk about the *hijab* rather than letting a European atheist woman make those reflections.

### 2.1.2. WHO WE ARE TALKING TO

Sources provide us with the information we need to create our communication product, be it a news item, an article, a campaign, etc., so our choices will condition our final result. To ensure diverse communication we have to select a range of different sources.

How do we select the sources?

- Counting on women and non-binary people as main sources, not only as testimonies or protagonists, but also as experts. In most cases the expert sources are men, so they are represented as the only professionals on that topic and their androcentric knowledge is reproduced.
- Using sources directly involved in the topic. Too many times we have seen gynecology congresses chaired exclusively by men. From these examples, we learn that the voice of the protagonists has to be present, whether they are women, non-binary people, racialized people, elderly people, etc.

- Studying the relevance of institutional sources in the story. When it comes to advocacy, we must avoid reproducing political or institutional discourses that don't add any value and only describe the *statu quo*. Instead, we should use legal frameworks as a reference, and then check how laws are implemented. For example, we can explain what the law says about equal access to the labor market for women and non-binary people but then we should also analyse the unemployment rate. In this way we will see if the law has been implemented efficiently or not.

- Taking as secondary sources data and statistics disaggregated by **sex** and, if possible, other parameters such as age or ethnicity. In this way, we make visible how the same situation affects people differently depending on their gender, social class, etc.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Make a list of women experts in the country where you are on feminisms and gender perspective.

You can also make a list of experts on other topics that you are interested in.

We encourage you to share it with the other people on your team and with the organization you work with.

### 2.1.3. WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

In addition to investigating through the internet and through more traditional means, in the information gathering phase we will speak with our primary sources. It is our duty to ensure that people are treated with dignity and respect and we must take into account each person's history, culture, education and religion in order to do so.

Sometimes we will find sources who are very familiar with the communication process, such as members of institutions or experts. However, when working for an NGO, a collective or a similar entity, it is common to deal with people who share their life history with us and who do not have experience with interviews or other qualitative methods of research. Keep in mind that:

- People are not resources. When working for an organization, the justification of projects is a fundamental part, but we must never reduce people to mere resources for our work and dehumanize them. It is important that the information responds to the needs of the protagonists and that these needs are taken care of from the beginning.

- Each person needs their own space and time to open up. When people share their story, they should not adjust to the times set by the work schedule of an organization or by a means of communication. We should empathize, offer a safe space and go as far as the interviewee wants to. We shouldn't start with direct questions about events that may be traumatic for her.

- We shouldn't question the story of the protagonist, especially if we are talking about violence. We should put our prejudices aside and shouldn't expect the interviewee to adjust to our expectations.

- We should read up before conducting an interview and pay attention not to reproduce stereotypes, sensationalism, paternalism and victimization with our questions.

At this point, it is essential to involve the protagonists in the process, to explain to them what our work consists of and to make sure that they understand it and that they are aware of the objective of the information and of the final product. We should ask ourselves if the people we are going to interview feel capable of rejecting the interview and if they know that even if they refuse to be interviewed, their relationship with Alianza will not change.

### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

After many years of feminist fights, abortion is decriminalized in the country where you work and you have to write an article for your organization's blog.

Define the objective of the article and the focus you are going to give it; then, make a list of the sources, specifying the kind of information you are looking for from each of them.

You will find a resolution proposal in the section ANSWERS TO "FOOD FOR THOUGHT".

How to shape content?

- Contextualize the case. Things do not happen in isolation and it is important to explain the context in order to understand inequalities and the structures that legitimize them.

- Take care of language and images. We are going to further explore this topic in the next section.

- Avoid reproducing stereotypes of gender, sex, social class, racialization, age... Pay special attention to it and reverse roles when in doubt. Does a straight cis white man look ridiculous in this position?

- Unlearn what is established. Does the nationality, country of origin, gender, racialization or religion of the people we speak of provide valuable information, or does it only stigmatize and perpetuate stereotypes related to these intersectionalities? It is not the same to explain that a woman who experiences violence is a trans woman - as the violence she experiences has to do with her identity -, than to mention that an aggressor is a foreigner when this doesn't have a causal relationship with the structural sexist violence.

- Reporting on violence is a very sensitive matter. In Section 3 we will see how to do it correctly, respecting the people who are victims of it and raising awareness to transform society.

### **2.2.2. THE FORM OF THE MESSAGE**

*"Language is an important symbolic space that shapes the human mind and behavior."*

Luisa Antolín

If we consider writing an article or doing any work with a gender perspective, it is likely that inclusive language will come to mind. Although we have already seen that the gender perspective is a transversal process and that we have to have it in mind before deciding what to write about, language is certainly another step towards a transformative communication. Words, sounds and images shape our thoughts and imagination, they make us feel part of or make us feel excluded from something.

## **2.2. THE STORY**

### **2.2.1. CONSTRUCTION OF THE INFORMATION**

As we have seen, the communication process with a gender perspective begins before making the decision of what we want to say. The writing or editing of content is perhaps the dimension in which inequalities or stereotypes are more evident, and that's why we have to take care of all aspects.

### **(RE) NAMING: INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE**

In English, unlike other languages, there are feminine, masculine and neuter genders and the language evolved in such a way that only personal pronouns and some nouns still have gender inflections today. This greatly facilitates communication through inclusive language, but it is important not to be complacent and to take care of all the aspects.

There isn't a single way to adapt the language so that it includes everyone, but we can combine these strategies depending on the context, choosing the ones that best suit our way of expressing ourselves and what we want to say.

- Use generic forms when nouns are gender-marked.
  - Humanity instead of Mankind
  - Chairperson instead of Chairman
  - Siblings instead of Brothers
- Change the tone of the sentence.
  - I was invited to my friend's birthday instead of My friend invited me to her birthday
- Use the pronoun "one".
  - A cooperator earns more than one in Italy instead of A cooperator earns more than he would in Italy
- Use the relative pronoun "who".
  - The person who was here left five minutes ago instead of She was here and left five minutes ago
- Use the plural when you are speaking of a generic group of people.
  - The students who do not sleep may have problems during their exams instead of The student who does not sleep may have problems during his exam
- Leave the gender-marked word out.
  - Efforts are welcome instead of Her efforts are welcome
- Instead of the pronouns and possessives he, she, her and his, it's better to use they and their; this is because they don't have a gender mark and are more suitable for speaking about non-binary people. In 2017, they was added to the Associated Press Stylebook as neuter gender. There are more pronouns like ze/zir or ze/hir; "ze" is the gender neutral version of he/she (subject pronoun), while "zir/hir" are the gender neutral versions of him/his and her (object pronoun and possessive adjective), "zirs/hirs" are the gender neutral versions of his/hers (possessive pronoun). You can learn about them and about other pronouns at [mypronouns.org](http://mypronouns.org).
  - They are my friend Jo instead of He is my friend Jo
  - Everyone must submit their article instead of Everyone must submit his article
  - Ze was born in Jordania instead of She was born in Jordania
- Instead of the titles Mr, Ms, Mrs or Miss, you can use Mx, which has no gender inflection and doesn't make any reference to the marital status of the person we are talking about.
  - Mx. Smith is here instead of Mrs. Smith is here
- Use the slash (e.g. s/he, she/he, he/she) only when you have no other option. You can use them in non-official documents, where there is a lack of space (a questionnaire, a survey). Keep in mind that if we only write he/she we are excluding those people who don't fit into the **gender binary**.

Other aspects to be taken into consideration:

- Order creates hierarchies. The trend is to list the male first: you can reverse it and interchange it.
- Provide full names. When we quote someone by their surname, the imaginary leads us to a man. Writing the full name increases the representation of women and non-binary people in certain areas. Using both surnames, in the countries where this exists, makes the maternal part visible.

- Don't assume a person's gender. You can ask people what pronouns they are comfortable with or you can use neutral terms if it isn't possible to ask.

- Analyse proverbs and idioms. Many expressions are based on sexist, racist, classist, etc. stereotypes and beliefs. Some examples are the association of black with something negative, the association of strength with masculinity and the association of weakness with femininity.

- Blacklist
- Blackball, black mark
- She fights like a boy
- Don't be a pussy

- We talk about different genders differently. Women and non-binary people "are elected" and "plan", while men "hold mandates" and "assert".

**Did you know that...** the concept of genderphobia refers to the resistances caused by linguistic renewal from a gender perspective and by the use of language as an inclusive element and as a means to make inequalities visible.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Replace these words or phrases with more inclusive ones without changing the meaning. You will find a resolution proposal in the section ANSWERS TO "FOOD FOR THOUGHT"..

- Landlord
- Mrs. Cortez
- I work with her
- Manmade
- The situation he is describing
- Congressman

## TO READ

[A guide to how gender-neutral language is developing around the world](#) (English, Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, German, French and Swedish)

[Communications & Gender Checklist: Things to Consider](#)

[The Guidelines – How Not To Be Sexist](#)

[Guide to nonsexist language](#)

## SEEING: AUDIOVISUAL LANGUAGE

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Take a piece of paper and some pencils, pens, markers or whatever you have at hand and draw a migrant person. It doesn't have to be an artistic and professional illustration, do it however you can and are able to! If you can't draw, describe it in words.

When you are done, answer the following questions.

- Is the subject male, female or a non-binary person?
- Is the person racialized?
- What is the subject's expression like? Is the person sad, happy...?
- Where is this person? Is this migrant person on the move to their destination or in the host country?
- Does the subject you have drawn look like the migrants you see on the medias and social media?

Images, whether photographs, illustrations or videos, accompany us wherever we go. A news item in a newspaper, an article in a blog or a publication on a social network is accompanied, most of the time, by an audiovisual element and, just as we saw with language, images are not innocuous.

With the exercise of drawing a migrant person we aim to recognize all the expectations we have in mind in order to understand how they are constructed. Perhaps you have drawn or described a person without any particular features that indicate that they are a migrant, but perhaps your drawing shows a racialized person dressed in worn and patched clothes. Why do we think of a small boat when hearing the word "immigration" or of a white woman when we read "expert"? Because in the images we have always seen in advertising, on television, in films, in the medias and in books, people are depicted in the same way - according to their gender, social class, racialization, physical or mental abilities, etc. - over and over again.

Images need to show bodies and identities that are underrepresented, but is showing more women and non-binary people enough? There's more to it than that: Read on to understand more:

- They are active subjects. All of us are active subjects and we want to be represented as such. Not as numbers, not as resources, not as victims, but as people with capacity, decision-making and autonomy, regardless of the context in which they are.

- The representation of women and non-binary people cannot be limited to their specific issues. It is about them occupying all the spaces they do not have access to now, such as the economy, politics, culture... And not only about being seen when talking about gender-based violence, **LGBTQIA+** Pride or migration phenomena. Remember what we have seen about transversality? Don't forget it.

- Stereotypical presence is not presence. If the image is supporting the stereotypes that are associated with the person represented we shouldn't use it. If we are going to talk about poverty and we have an image of a black homeless woman we are perpetuating the association of racialized people with poverty. In this case, it might be better to use an image of an unlit room instead. There are other resources we can use, such as generic images of places or objects, abstract images, conceptual images... Get imaginative!

- Sensationalist images are superfluous, especially when we talk about violence, conflicts, natural disasters, etc. We should not publish intimate or morbid images, we have to keep in mind at all times to respect the dignity and privacy of the people involved. How would we feel if they published a photograph of us right after losing our family? And what was the objective of publishing the photograph of Aylan Kurdi, the Syrian refugee child who died while his family was trying to reach Europe, so long after it was taken?

- Respect children. If we wouldn't think of photographing a 10-year-old in the street and publishing that image, why would we think of doing it with people in other countries or with people we work with? We can still see campaigns with the typical images of children with swollen bellies and flies on their noses. Their negative impact has been proven, it's time to change course.

If we are doing an audiovisual campaign, a photo-report or any other format on gender-based violence where the image is the main communicating element, we should pay particular attention to be respectful in our work. Here are some tips:

- Do not give information about prostitution and trafficking with images of hypersexualised women (in miniskirts, underwear, etc.), or with elements associated with this (high heels, a pole dance pole, etc.).
- If you portray a woman or a non-binary person who has experienced sexual violence, avoid any sexualisation. Think that this person is willing to be portrayed in order to denounce a situation/phenomenon and to help others. Try to understand where they are in their recovery process and what they want to show of themselves, and work with empathy.
- Do not re-victimize people who have experienced violence. If you show them as an object or represent them with paternalism, you are framing them exclusively in the role of victim.
- You can portray women and non-binary people who have experienced violence together with their family and friends. Finding themselves surrounded by other women and non-binary people may help them and may also help others who are in a similar situation to get the feeling of support they may need.
- Don't show images that could lead to the identification of people who have experienced or are experiencing gender-based violence if they don't give you permission. It's important to know that it may put them in danger.

## LISTENING: RADIO LANGUAGE

Since radio doesn't transmit images, the process of constructing information with a gender perspective is very similar to that of written communication; we have to take into account the language and the rest of the aspects we have discussed so far. However, the particularity of radio lies in its immediacy. It is not the same to write a text, thinking over terms and correcting those words that sound wrong, as it is to communicate orally, which requires agility and improvisation, even if we have a script in front of us. The more we practice inclusive language, the more natural it will become.

We must take into account the characteristics of the audiovisual format when we talk about podcasts, as they usually have a header image, or when promoting the radio programme through other medias such as social networks. It is important to incorporate the gender perspective in all dimensions of the communicative act: from the promotional image, to the script, the protagonists and, of course, the message.

In many countries, community radio, mosque loudspeakers or community loudspeakers are the media that have the greatest impact on the population because of their wide reach. It is common to disseminate information through advertisements, thematic series, novels or any format you can think of.

## 2.2.3. COMMUNICATING FROM THE MARGINS

Here are some practical recommendations for talking about various women's collectives and non-binary people in a conscious way.

We should not call **older women and non-binary people old people**, nor should we use terms that presuppose their life trajectory based solely on their age (e.g. retirees. grannies). We should avoid talking about older people with terms that infantilize them. If age is an important element of social recognition, then we should refer to them respectfully, using terms such as older person, older adult or elderly person.

It is better to refer to **women and non-binary people in situations of imprisonment** as persons deprived of their liberty or persons in the context of imprisonment, rather than prisoners, in order to put their human condition first. If it is not relevant to the narrative, we should avoid mentioning other intersections that feed a stereotype of incarcerated women and non-binary people, such as their migrant status.

When talking about **indigenous women and non-binary people**, it is advisable not to generalise or speak as if they were a single, homogenous group. It is important to speak of indigenous people as subjects of rights, understanding their rights in both their individual and collective dimensions. Indigenous peoples have pre-Hispanic ancestral diversities, so we should not assume them with the Western forms of lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people... In the indigenous cosmivision, sexuality and gender are seen as part of Mother Earth, of Pachamama and Abya Yala.

**Rural women and rural non-binary people** should be presented as rural when making this condition visible leads to the recognition of their rights. If instead it is a factor of discrimination that perpetuates stereotypes, it should be ignored.

We can refer to **women and non-binary people with disabilities or with functional diversity**. Some people reject the term disability because the prefix dis- denotes denial or contrariness, while others argue that functional diversity can make the group invisible because the word "diverse" implies that this condition is not widespread in society.

**Migrant women and non-binary people** should not be represented as separate from society, as otherness. We should mention that they are migrants only when useful to give them visibility and to denounce violence experienced because of this intersection. We should never confuse racialized people with migrants (sometimes the condition of racialized person and the condition of migrant coexist, but other times they don't). We should never speak of illegal immigrants, as a person cannot be illegal. We will speak of people - putting their human condition first - with an irregular immigration status.

**Racialized women and racialized non-binary people** should also not be confused with migrants. The term racialization vindicates the oppressions that many people suffer due to the social construct that defends both the existence of **aces** and the superiority of the white race over the rest of the people. All this considered, racialized is not the politically correct way of saying gypsy or black, but it rather makes visible another power structure. The intersectionality of racialized people should be used to make these groups visible and to denounce violence, otherwise it should be ignored in order not to perpetuate inequalities.

We shouldn't speak of **women and non-binary people in prostitution** as otherness either, because it only perpetuates the discrimination they suffer. The terminology is complex in this case as it clashes with political positions such as the legal consideration of prostitution. We can talk about people in prostitution or in the context of prostitution. Often people in prostitution define themselves as sex workers or prostitutes. The term prostituted persons has been proposed in the context of abolitionism; this word would highlight the intrinsic gender-based violence of prostitution, but may be considered problematic because of the dehumanisation and paternalism towards women and non-binary people it implies.

**LGBTQIA+** stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and also includes all the people who don't feel represented in the mentioned intersectionalities. We must be careful not to homogenise the community, not to label them in ways they may not feel comfortable with and to always ask how they define themselves.

Sexual orientation is traditionally classified according to the gender and sex of the people to whom one is attracted: heterosexual is someone who is attracted to people of another gender and sex, and homosexual is someone who is attracted to people of the same gender and sex, such as a lesbian or gay person. There are also forms of plurisexuality, such as bisexuality, pansexuality, multisexuality or onmisexuality.

In western culture, trans people are those whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex and gender they were assigned at birth (although not all of these people identify as trans), while cis people are those who do identify with their assigned sex and gender. There are many diverse trans identities. Within the gender binary, there are trans women and trans men. Outside the gender binary we can find non-binary people - non-binary women and non-binary men - whose identity is similar to that of women or men but who don't conceptualise identity as a binary; trans-feminine and trans-masculine people, who identify more in the sex and gender assigned at birth but also do not understand gender as binary; demigirls and demiboys, who identify only partially with female or male gender; gender-fluid people, whose identity varies according to context; bigender, trigender and polygender people, who identify with several genders at once; queer or genderqueer people, whose identity breaks with "normality"; agender people, who identify with no gender or whose identity is being genderless; and gender-neutral people, who position themselves in the middle of the male-female spectrum.

**Mental health** activist groups propose avoiding a pathologizing language. Your situation doesn't define you as a person. We can use terms such as people with mental health problems or people with psychological suffering. Making visible the main forms of psychological suffering such as anxiety, depression, psychosis, manic episodes, hallucinations, etc., is key to understanding mental health as part of the diversity inherent in our societies. As far as the term neurodiversity is concerned, it was conceived by the autistic community to refer to the atypical neurology of autism, and is used to dissociate this condition from mental health diseases.

We speak of **homeless or street women and non-binary people** highlighting their status as people instead of limiting to their status of homeless. This group includes those who spend the night on the street and those who have insecure or inadequate housing, such as shantytowns, flats with eviction orders, etc.

In any case, the first thing we have to do is to ask people and groups how they do and do not want to be called. We have to accept when someone tells us that what we say does not represent them or is offensive in order to redress it by addressing their needs. We should also educate ourselves about other communities by using resources created by people within them, or by listening to these people. Keep in mind that getting information from people who experience or who are directly involved in something is fundamental; at the same time, we shouldn't expect others to teach us about their lives. The bibliography at our disposal is vast and we should use it.

Can you think of any other collectives that we haven't mentioned? Carry out some research to find out how to refer to people that belong to that community.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Imagine that you have to design the poster for a sexual and emotional education workshop for young people in Morocco to be shared on social media. Choose an image you find on the internet to go with it and answer the following questions. You will find a resolution proposal in the section ANSWERS TO "FOOD FOR THOUGHT".

- Are there any people in the image? Why?
- If there are any, what are these people like? Do they identify with the audience the workshop is addressed to?
- If not, what have you chosen as an illustration for the poster?
- What does it symbolise?

## TO READ

[How to write about africans](#)

[Communicating gender for rural development](#)

[Women's Refugee Commission: Home](#)

## 2.3. DISSEMINATION AND IMPACT

It is common for international organisations to run campaigns in countries in the **Global South** which later on are presented and distributed only in Europe. In many cases, the people involved are not even aware of the final product they are participating in.

Remember that we have to inform and involve the protagonists from the beginning in order to promote a participatory process from the beginning to the end. In the distribution we should try to:

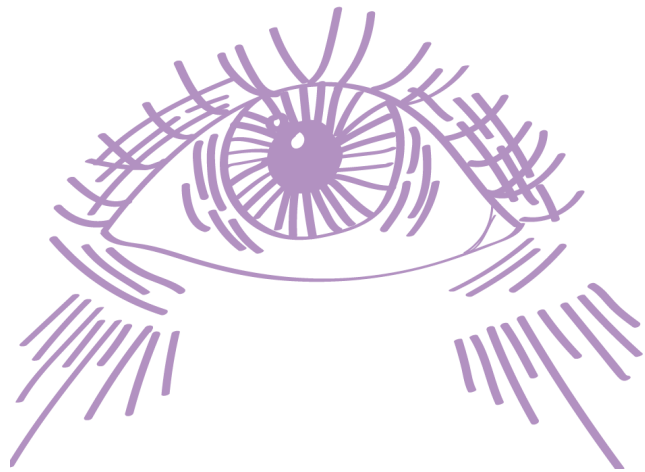
- Check, if possible, that the protagonists agree with the approach and content of your information before publishing it.
- When you publish the information, share it with them and ask them how it has impacted them on a personal level, on a social level, on a working level, etc.
- Follow up on the development and impact of the case. For example, if you tell the story of a woman who has been sexually assaulted, follow the legal process and the healing and reparation processes; or if you report on the bombings in the Gaza Strip, go on investigating what other strategies Israel develops and what other attacks it carries out when the bombings are over.

We can also study the impact of the information on the rest of the population to understand who has been reached and who has not been reached, how and why. This will help us improve our communicative actions, reinforcing its strong points and identifying errors.

Some ideas to explore and some questions to ask in this analysis:

- Reach out to the people involved in the issue. If we write an article about a rural women's cooperative in the department of Santa Cruz in Bolivia, does that news reach women in the whole department? And what about those in the rest of the country?
- Review the distribution channels. If we have a story about how the national public transport strike has affected the population and particularly women in Mauritania, we can ask ourselves the following questions: has it been published only on our blog or in the medias too? Are the medias involved local, national or international? Which people does our story reach through the channels we are using?
- Monitor comments. Audience studies have been replaced by statistics on social networks, websites and blogs. We have tools at our fingertips which allow us to analyse impact, such as comments, likes, or saves. If we are publishing a series of posts on trans rights, for example, through the discussion in comments we can find out whether the audience we are reaching is aware of the issue or not.

As we have already seen several times in this guide, special attention must be paid when communicating about gender-based violence. That is why in the next section we will learn specifically about how to report on violence.





## 3. LOOKING FURTHER AHEAD

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“Tell what matters, not what impresses.”

Rosa María Calaf

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Write down all the forms of gender-based violence you can think of and try to categorise them.

Did that sound easy? It is very likely that you don't know very well how to classify the different types of gender-based violence. This is normal since we must constantly update the theoretical concepts we handle, as the conceptualisation and classification of the different types of violence experienced by women is under constant debate. We live under a changing patriarchal system that adapts to the times.

Reporting on sexist violence and sexual and reproductive rights may seem simple at first glance. However, people often make mistakes that have serious consequences for the collective imagination.

The first thing we need to understand is that gender-based violence is a systemic problem, and is not about isolated cases of men with mental problems or addictions. As a result of this violence, thousands of women continue to be murdered every day across the globe.

Gender-based violence refers to violence against women as a manifestation of discrimination and inequality in the framework of a system of power in relations between men and women. It is exercised through physical, economic or psychological means, including threats, intimidation and coercion, and it results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, whether it occurs in the public or private sphere. In short, gender-based violence is any violence suffered by women simply because they are women in the context of unequal power relations between women and men.

Talking about different types of violence is important in order to communicate correctly about the complexity of the issue. However, we should be careful that talking and reporting on different types of gender-based violence doesn't lead to fragmentation, resulting in the incapacity to understand sexist violence as structural. The different types of violence we are going to illustrate shortly should be understood as interrelated, as a continuum.

Some of the most popular classifications are as follows:

- **Economic violence.** It corresponds to any action or actions, whether direct or by law, that restrict access to economic/patrimonial resources.

- **Work-related violence.** Difficulty in women's access to positions of responsibility, complications in their development or stability within their company due to the fact that they are women.

- **Physical violence.** This translates into any action that causes physical harm or suffering and affects the integrity of the person.

- **Sexual violence.** Any action that threatens or violates a woman's right to decide about her sexuality; it includes any form of sexual contact. Sexual violence is not limited to forcing a woman against her will, but to any form of **harassment**, exploitation, abuse or intimidation, regardless of whether it occurs inside or outside marriage or any other type of relationship.

- **Institutional violence.** Institutional violence is violence whereby officials or authorities hinder, delay or prevent access to public life, adherence to certain policies or even the ability of individuals to exercise their rights.

- **Psychological violence.** It can occur in all kinds of contexts, although home, partner and family tend to be three of the most common. It consists of any action that we feel demeans us as people or that tries to control our actions or decisions.

- **Symbolic violence.** It includes stereotypes, messages, values or symbols that transmit and encourage the repetition of relationships based on inequality, **sexism**, discrimination or on the naturalisation of any role of subordination of women in our societies.

- **Vicarious violence.** Any form of aggression or intimidation exercised against minors, animals or people close to the woman, with the aim of causing her distress.

## 3.1. HOW TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In order to communicate consciously about gender-based violence, it is important to take into account a series of elements. You can keep the following list at hand and check it every time you write a press release, carry out a campaign or any other work on gender-based violence. It will be very useful.

### GENERAL CONCEPTS AND NOTIONS ABOUT STORY-TELLING

- Give it the relevance and space that a political and social problem requires.
- Avoid the androcentric point of view. The male gaze is not the universal point of view.
- Do not use terms such as domestic violence, intimate partner violence, family violence or crime of passion. Instead, use sexist violence, gender-based violence or violence against women.
- Provide useful information for women and society to understand and remove themselves from the violent situation. For example, talk about resources for those who have experienced violence, prevention programmes, telephone helplines, etc.
- Don't spread myths or unsubstantiated ideas or messages. For example, don't say that a perpetrator was drunk or that he was a low-class man. We must know the myths of male violence so that we don't reproduce them over and over again.
- Don't spread speculations or personal opinions you hear from the neighbourhood or from other people close to the perpetrator. For example, the typical comments "they seemed happy", "he was a very nice man".
- It is essential that you reinforce a discourse based on social rejection of the perpetrators and on questioning their attitude; on the other hand, you should report on the complexity of the process of legitimization of the people who have experienced violence and try to free them from the unfair burden of guilt and responsibility.
- To show that this is not an isolated incident, you can contextualise the news item in the wider framework of the gender-based violence problem.
- When it comes to linguistics, avoid impersonal forms such as "is disappeared" or "turned up dead". These passive constructions hide the subject of the action and the political reason. It's better to use active forms such as "made her disappear" or "have killed her".
- Show how the patriarchal system and the norms of hegemonic masculinity are central in gender-based violence. The demonstration of power, the display of virility, the domination of women - which comes from considering them as a property -, the defence of the privileges of patriarchal masculinity and homophobia, among others, are closely linked factors that cannot be ignored.
- Avoid a narrative that may create social alarm and that may invite women to reduce their social participation and freedom.
- Gender discrimination is intersected by other forms of discrimination due to country of origin, ethnicity, disability, age, racialization, etc. Remember to communicate in an intersectional way and to do so without stereotyping or discriminating.

- Communication cannot be neutral in dealing with gender-based violence, just as it is not neutral when reporting on other human rights issues.

### GENERAL ISSUES TO KEEP IN MIND ON PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING

- Trafficked persons may be refugee women or girls, which accentuates the need to treat the story with the utmost respect.
- Denounce the structures that promote and maintain trafficking. Go deeper into the context, the roots and the conditions of exploitation to which trafficked persons are subjected.
- Always point out trafficking as a serious crime against human rights in your work.
- Delegitimise accepted and tolerated social practices that encourage any kind of abuse.
- If the violent act takes place in a private setting, it shouldn't be highlighted that the woman is in prostitution. If it happens for the sole reason that she is a woman and also a prostitute, it is necessary to make this intersection visible within a wider framework and as an act of denunciation.

### THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

- Don't reveal names, surnames, information or images without prior consent. Use initials and other audiovisual resources as we have seen in the previous section.
- Don't blame them. Don't convey the idea that women don't leave the violent situation because they don't want to. Physical and psychological violence immobilises them so that they don't fully perceive the violence and don't act against it. Each woman gets out of the violent situation when she can and in the way she can. Avoid phrases such as "after 10 years of experiencing violence, she ended up murdered".
- Tell stories of resilient women who have managed to break the cycle of violence. Present them as the protagonists of their own lives.
- Don't portray women as weak and dependent. Avoid statements such as "poor woman, she had to bear a lot", or "she was alone at night".
- Don't make any analysis of the assaulted women's behaviour before or after the assault. The assault is the news and its seriousness is independent of the previous or subsequent behaviour of the woman who has been assaulted.
- Patriarchal culture condemns a woman victim of **rape** or assault to conform to the stereotype of the "perfect victim". If she wants to retain credibility she has to be and to appear shattered, heart-broken and victimised for life. Never post information such as "rape victim goes on a trip with her friends".
- Sons, daughters and other family members are also victims of violence and should be recognised as such.
- Be especially careful about reporting on types of violence that in the country where you are located are considered a fundamental part of the culture, such as female genital mutilation. Remember, our androcentric and **eurocentric** view is not the only valid one.

## THE REPRESENTATION OF PERPETRATORS

- The perpetrator is a subject who commits violence against a woman because she is a woman, deploying his power and domination on her directly or through her children. Both the perpetrator and the exercise of power are protected by the patriarchal culture. This is the reality you need to show.

- The focus should be on the perpetrator and on the legal and social consequences that his action may entail.

- You shouldn't use a headline that presents the perpetrator as a victim. You shouldn't treat the perpetrator as a victim in your text either. You shouldn't do it even if he is killed during the violent action. They are the perpetrators, the killers, and you shouldn't disguise the violent action or excuse them.

- It is misleading to present perpetrators as men who are not integrated into society, as people suffering from temporary alienation or depression. The perpetrators belong to all social classes, nationalities, etc. and most of them have an ordinary everyday life. Most violence is perpetrated by partners, ex-partners or men who are known and trusted by the women.

- Gender-based violence is not the result of an impulse or an extreme situation. It is part of a process in which there are multiple and continuous episodes of more or less visible violence. Perpetrators do not usually improvise a **femicide** or a violent act; they have often thought about it and have planned it.

### TO READ

[Fixed it](#)

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We suggest that you underline, cross out, change and delete anything that does not convince you in order to rewrite these headlines from a gender perspective. You will find our resolution proposal in the section ANSWERS TO "FOOD FOR THOUGHT".

- «Woman found dead in Medellín in a possible case of gender violence»
- «Stabbed to death by her husband a day after asking for help to get a divorce»
- «The Bolivian truck driver who was driving through Argentina, Yésica, got her throat slit after arguing with her boyfriend»
- «The minor who was gang raped was spending the weekend with some friends and got drunk»
- «A drunk man kills wife and shoots his son»
- «Jordanian woman reports obstetric violence at central hospital during delivery of second child»
- «Kills spouse and mother, then kills himself»
- «An illegal Maghrebi immigrant gives birth in the street»

## 3.2. HOW TO COMMUNICATE ABOUT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Before you start reading this section, we suggest that you make a list of terms that you would use to make a social media post about women who have died from unsafe abortion. At the end of the section and after reading the GLOSSARY, you can come back to the exercise and change the terms, or expand the list.

Up until recently, the classes we were given at school on sex education, if they were given at all, were reduced to talking about Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and contraceptive methods, leaving aside a global and feminist view of health and a view of health from a rights perspective. The humanitarian and cooperation field wasn't much more advanced either, and the projects only reflected maternal and children's health perspectives.

In the late 1990s, there was a turning point in the global gender equality agenda. Since then, the concept of sexual and reproductive health has included the social component of health, emphasising the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights and working on sexual and reproductive education of both sexes.

As evidenced by international commitments, and in spite of how much progress remains to be made, sexual and reproductive health and rights is still a fundamental axis in the fight against poverty. At Alianza por la Solidaridad we work on specific projects on sexual and reproductive health and rights in Bolivia, Colombia, Palestine and Jordan.

The main aspects humanitarian actions and development cooperation deal with in their projects are:

- Sexual violence
- Maternal morbidity and mortality
- Family planning
- Unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion
- Adolescent Pregnancy
- STIs
- Access to and use of contraceptives

- Rights of non-binary people and women in prostitution
- Female genital mutilation (FGM)
- Forced marriage
- Child marriage

It is very likely that among your tasks you will be communicating or even working on health education issues and it is important that you keep these elements in mind:

- Always use the full term sexual and reproductive health and rights. When we talk about maternal and child health we make the rights of women and other pregnant people invisible and reduce them only to their role as mothers, reproducing sexist roles and stereotypes. It is an obsolete term.

- Listen to them and show them as the protagonists and owners of their bodies and decisions. Don't blame them when unwanted pregnancy or abortion is discussed.

- Respect local belief and culture and align with Alianza's position on a potentially sensitive issue.

- Sexual and reproductive health are human rights and are therefore inalienable. A gender perspective allows you to understand that the patriarchal system has historically controlled women's bodies. We have to go beyond reproduction and family planning, attending to and making visible the needs of self-knowledge, exploration and pleasure, among others.

- Report with diversity in mind. Tell stories of non-binary people from an intersectional point of view.

- Deconstruct heteronormativity in your communication processes. If on one hand it is necessary for women and non-binary people to be the protagonists of their rights, on the other hand it is positive to break with heteronormativity and to make sure that men respect and accompany the decisions that women make about their own bodies. For example, in many parts of the world men are the ones who decide whether to use or not to use contraceptive methods. If we only inform women about contraceptive techniques, the information we are giving may be of little use in case men refuse to use them.

- Provide verified information in a language and tone that is suitable for the target audience. In this way, the sexual and reproductive health advocacy you are undertaking will be well understood.

- Just like you should do with gender-based violence, when reporting on sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, forced marriages, etc., it is necessary to explain the context in order to understand that these are not isolated problems but rather consequences of the patriarchal system.

Here is a box of resources that can help you expand your knowledge of gender-sensitive communication in the field of gender-based violence.

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

- [A Participatory Programme](#)
- [Brothers for life](#)
- [Reproductive Health Access Project](#)

## PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING

- [Sex Work And Sex Workers: A Guide For Journalists Workers](#)

## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- [Gender-Based Violence, Media and Communications](#)
- [Explore the facts: Violence against women](#)
- [Gender-based Violence](#)
- [Reporting on Gender-Based Violence – Sonke Gender Justice](#)

## FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

- [End FGM: End Female Genital Mutilation](#)

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE

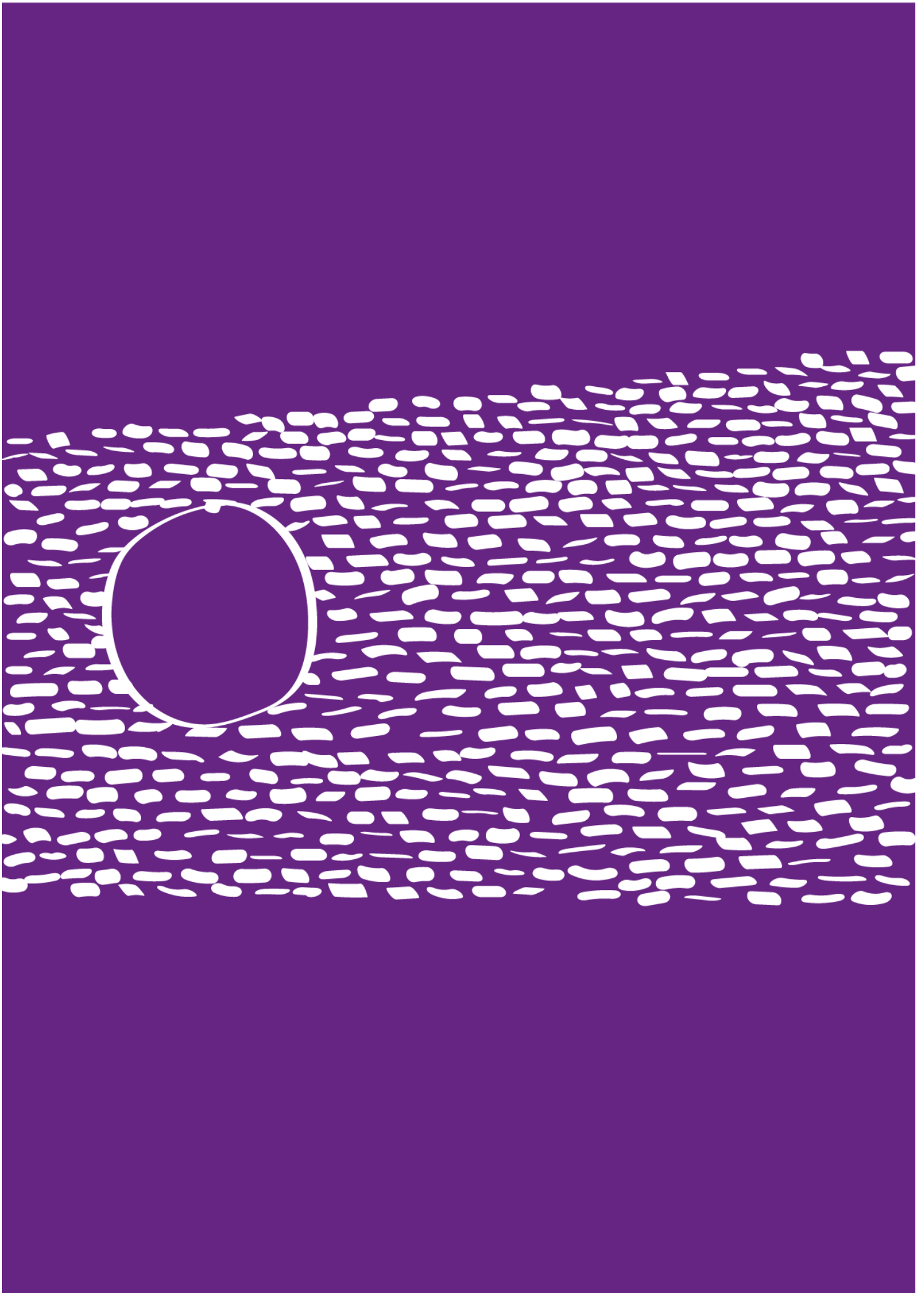
- [SGBV Prevention and Response - Training Package](#)

## ABORTION

- [Sam's Medication Abortion](#)

## CHILD MARRIAGE

- [Child Marriage](#)
- [Stand up, Speak out!](#)
- [How can the media do its part to end child marriage?](#)



## 4. ADJUSTING THE FOCUS

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### 4.1. FIELDWORK

We must live our own learning and deconstruction process in the field, and for this reason we always welcome tips and tricks to help us improve our work. We know that this section will be of great help to you both if you receive the guide before starting your fieldwork or if you read it when your fieldwork has already begun.

We are sure that you will be able to expand this section through your own experience. We encourage you to pass it on to Alianza and partner organisations so that they can continue to share all this knowledge with the next volunteers and workers. Here are your tips:

- During fieldwork, timings are tight and the daily hustle and bustle in the office is often intense. It is very likely that sometimes you will have to deliver work at very short notice. What is the key to successfully achieving your objectives? Plan your tasks and make the most of your productivity.

- On the other hand, keep in mind that the schedules and daily tasks of the communication teams in the headquarters and in the field are different. If your work requires it, maintain regular communication and try to contextualise the activities as much as possible, so that the other people and teams can support you.

- Sometimes the communicative component is not overly relevant to projects. This means that you may have to carry out communication actions with very little budget. Express your creativity and talk to your colleagues to convey the importance of communication in future projects.

- You may also meet some people in your team who are at a different stage of the deconstruction process than you are. Adopt a pedagogical attitude.

- The organisation you work with certainly has some resources on communication or gender perspective, among others. Get them, they will be of great help for your work.

- If you are participating in a volunteer program, you should be aware that you are under the responsibility of the organisation. Remember that you are mainly learning and be aware that you are not going to save anyone. Therefore, you should always respect the safety standards of the organisation.

In case of volunteering for the EU Aid Volunteers programme, you will have to carry out certain tasks related to visibility such as writing articles that will be posted on the EU platform. You are free to write about whatever you want, but consider that you could take advantage of the spaces you are given to make the inequalities experienced by women and non-binary people visible. European Union platforms, in fact, have a wide reach. Remember everything you have learned in the guide and take the opportunity to play your bit to raise social awareness against the patriarchal system.

- If you are designing or participating in the process of developing the communication plan for the fieldwork, put your gender lenses on and don't take them off at any time. This is a great time to advocate for change at institutional level.

- It is very likely that you won't find official statistics or data with a gender perspective. You should be aware that this is an obstacle that will condition your work on some occasions. Check if Alianza has access to previous studies, ask your team for other sources from and with a gender perspective, design a research study or a survey, etc. Life stories can help us to understand reality when data is not accessible.

- In a situation of emergency, when information has to be released very quickly, we may panic and present data that is not real. This can have very serious consequences for the population or for the protagonists. The best thing to do is to make sure that all the information we give is correct and to omit information that is not verified. It may also be a good idea to postpone publication until more consolidated information is available.

- Be aware that bureaucratic mechanisms and administrative timeframes may be very different from the ones you are familiar with. You should consider it in your schedule, for example when you need to contact government institutions or other medias.

- When it comes to illustrating a work you may find there is a shortage of images with a gender and intersectional perspective that are suitable for the context. Here are some alternatives you can use: commission a local artist to create an illustration on a paid basis, keeping in mind what we have learned about audiovisual language. You can also go out and take some photos, as long as the security context allows you to do so.

- There are many sensitive issues that may come up for discussion. You need to remember that it is not your culture and you should be careful that your communication doesn't cause any problems to the people you are collaborating with. A very good strategy to avoid this is listening and observing without judgement.

- If you are involved in activities in direct contact with the local population, you may establish trusting relationships and, unfortunately, you may listen to first-person testimonies from people who have experienced gender-based violence. You have to be very careful. First and foremost, discretion. Talk to people who can help you deal with the situation and look for national or local resources that can help these people.

Last but not least: enjoy, learn, build, deconstruct, share, explore, reflect and embrace everything you know. It will help you become more professional and a better person.

## 4.2. ANALYSE, REVERSE AND REPAIR. WHAT TO DO WHEN THE COMMUNICATION FAILS

What happens if the communication fails and we harm or render invisible a group? It may happen that despite paying a lot of attention to the guide, despite taking note of what the Alliance team and the partner organisations have explained to us, we have still made a mistake. Doing things well is difficult because you have to be aware of all aspects, you need to question and to reformulate. As to err is human, we have to know what to do when we fail.

In Spain, a controversy has broken out around the [Equality Stamps](#) campaign of the Spanish postal company, Correos. The public company released a collection of stamps that have less value the darker they are. What was initially intended as an anti-racist campaign with the aim of denouncing racial inequalities, turned into a communication that reproduces stereotypes and doesn't delve into the problem.

Well, the main point is to recognise our mistake. Sometimes we find it hard to admit that we have done something wrong and it may seem an easier solution to keep our position, to let it go or to withdraw the information as if nothing had happened, but the only way to make things right is to recognise that something has gone wrong.

If my intentions were good, how is it possible that the communication didn't succeed? In order to find out the reasons, you have to listen and analyse the work with a critical eye. Remember that it is a learning process: identifying mistakes is about learning for the future, not about blaming yourself for whatever went wrong.

As well as apologising, we need to repair the damage. In the case of the stamp campaign, Correos could take real anti-racist measures within the company, such as reviewing racial diversity within its staff. This would be a sign of real commitment to the antiracist fight and would help to fix the bad communication.

There are actions that may be out of our hands at the minute, but we are part of Alianza and have a responsibility to work to make them happen at the organisational level. Some ideas for remediation:

- **Training.** If we made a mistake because we don't have knowledge of anti-racism, for example, training organisational staff in **decoloniality** and gender will help to have a broader view in the future.

- **Diverse people do inclusive things.** If we want to do a campaign to denounce gender-based violence and the whole team who is working on it is composed of white cis men, many perspectives will be left out. The more diverse the team, the more points of view will be present in the work, and the better the final result will be.

- **Active listening.** Each reparation process depends on the individual or collective that has suffered harm. The best thing to do would be to create a space to listen to the harmed people's needs and, starting from these needs, to elaborate some proposals together. The individuals we have hurt may need us to let them have space to share their message, for example, but they may also not want to collaborate (as they are within their rights and have no obligation to teach us).

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

When your work period ends, come back to this section to do an exercise of reflection, learning and self-esteem.

Make a short list summarising the main difficulties and barriers you have encountered in your fieldwork and what tools and strategies you have adopted to overcome them.

It is time to say goodbye. Endings can be sad, though really we've started a journey that will last a long time.

Before you go and after all the things we have seen about communicating with a gender perspective, here is an exercise for you. Do an internet search on the population you work with or are going to work with, for example women and non-binary people living in rural areas in Mauritania. Look for articles, NGDO campaigns, exhibitions, news... Gather at least 5 different sources.

Analyse how these women are portrayed and what image is projected. Check the authorship, the selection of sources, the information, the inclusive language, the audiovisual language and the distribution and reflect on how these information products could be changed to better adapt to a gender perspective. This reflection will help you to take into account all aspects of communication in your work from now on.

In this guide we have given you some tips on how to approach gender-sensitive communication. You can come back to it as many times as you need, and from now on it is up to you to continue to broaden your vision in order to grow.

**We wish you the best of luck!**



## 5. GLOSSARY

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We know how important the meaning of terms is when it comes to realising communication from a gender perspective. Through language you can be part of the change and there is no better way to do it than knowing the terms we propose in this glossary.

**ANDROCENTRISM.** Androcentrism isn't only a worldview centred on the male point of view, but rather a paradigm that places men at the centre of everything and that is considered the best, the only possible and the universal perspective. Androcentrism implies that what is good for men is good for humanity. Things, either good or bad, are important only in relation to the partial view of men. It is a form of sexist discrimination against women and non-binary people.

**ASSISTENTIALISM.** Model of vertical solidarity in which those who donate or help have the power and those who receive it need to accept it. It is based on charity and doesn't attack injustices or inequalities. It reproduces colonial patterns and creates situations of dependency and abuse of power.

**CISHETEROPATRIARCHY.** It is a socio-political system in which cisgender masculinity and heterosexuality have supremacy over other identities and other sexual orientations. It emphasises that discrimination against both women and non-binary people has the same sexist social principle.

**GENDER BINARY.** A way of classifying people in contemporary societies. There are only two categories, and these two categories shape the two possible ways of living: the man connected to everything masculine, both in his body, appearance, character and behaviour, and the woman connected to everything considered feminine. Non-binary people are excluded from society.

**COLONIALITY.** It is the power structure that resulted from modern colonialism. It refers to how knowledge, labour, authority and intersubjective relations are articulated using the logic of the Global North, the capitalist system and colonial differences. This structure underpins racism and North-South inequalities.

**EMPOWERMENT.** A term coined during the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing to refer to increasing women's participation in decision-making processes and access to power.

Empowerment is a concept that can imply paternalistic or welfarist action. Many thinkers and activists recommend using concepts such as autonomy or freedom as opposed to empowerment to refer to the principle of freedom and independence in all spheres of life and to women's fight against inequalities.

**EUROCENTRISM.** The paradigm that considers the fact of being European and Western, European knowledge and European power as superior. Historically, this paradigm became a motivation for domination and submission over other civilisations whose values were considered inferior, and therefore not worthy of respect. There is also talk of Westerncentrism, including North America in the model of supremacy.

**FEMICIDE.** This refers to the killing of a woman because she is a woman. This term is appropriate because it mentions who the victims are and the fact that a murder has taken place.

**FEMINISM.** This term includes the diversity of the socio-political movements that arise as a result of women becoming aware of their subordinate status in society with respect to white, adult, heterosexual, middle or upper-middle class men. In this way, feminisms propose to break with the logic of patriarchal society at all levels, and so they fight against inequalities based on gender, class, race, etc.

**GASLIGHTING.** A type of sexist violence that consists of making women or non-binary people believe that the reality they live in is false and that this distortion may be due to memory failures or mental alterations.

**GLASS CEILING.** A barrier which is invisible and very difficult to overcome. It makes it difficult for women to access high positions of power in organisations, politics and business, despite having the same qualifications and merits as their male peers.

**GLOBAL SOUTH / GLOBAL NORTH.** It emerges as an alternative to obsolete terms such as "third world" or poor countries. It proposes a geographical classification to avoid politicised terms with racist and discriminatory connotations. Global North is used to refer to countries that were considered "first world" and that exert oppressions on the Global South.

**LGBTQIA+.** This acronym stands for the movement for equality, decriminalisation and depathologisation of sexual orientations. It seeks to obtain political protection against violence for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other diverse identities in the working, social and health spheres.

**LINGUISTIC DISOBEDIENCE.** It is a response to linguistic sexism. It is about flouting the rules of the language academies, and consists of removing gender markers from the language.

**MISOGYNY.** It is the aversion, distrust and hatred towards women.

**NON-BINARY (PEOPLE).** This term is a framework for diverse identities, corporealities and experiences that share an action: that of confronting compulsory heterosexuality and the mandates of normative gender through one's own existence. Non-binarism implies dissenting, one step further than disagreeing.

**PRIVILEGE.** It is the exemption from an obligation or the exclusive or special advantage that someone enjoys as a concession from a superior or due to certain circumstances. It is the result of a systematic practice of exploitation, of a situation of social oppression of one group over another.

**PUBLIC-PRIVATE SPACE.** Traditionally, production, politics and culture have taken place in the public space under the laws of the state and the market, while care and reproduction activities were carried out in the private space under its own laws.

Feminist theories have disputed this separation in order to claim that what happens in a supposedly private space is also political. It aims to revalue the devalued and socially unrecognised private space.

**RACE.** Social construct that divides human groups into different categories in order to maintain relations of power, control, subordination and inequalities between the white race and the rest. Racism is the result of this social construct.

**RACIALIZATION.** It is a way of describing the racial category, such as gender or sexuality. Although all people are racialized, since categorisation by race or ethnicity determines whether we receive favourable or discriminatory treatment, it is used to make visible the people who experience oppression and inequality because of it. Society discriminates against racialized people on the grounds of their race or ethnicity.

**RAPE.** On a legal level, rape implies sexual aggression with physical violence and non-consensual penetration of any of the orifices of the body. However, the feminist movement rejects the sexist nature of the legislation and considers any sexual assault as rape, since intimidation or abuse of power are forms of violence.

**RESILIENCE.** Resilience is the capacity of a person or of a group of people to recover in the face of adversity. Sometimes difficult circumstances or traumas allow the development of mental or physical resources that were latent and unknown until that moment.

**SEX.** The concept of sex indicates the biological, physical and bodily characteristics that distinguish men from women. These are strictly physical and not cultural (gender) differences.

**SEXISM.** The expectation and belief that men are naturally superior to others. This practice understands it as normal that machos (men who respond to hegemonic masculinity) go out to work outside the home, while women stay at home in charge of domestic chores and childcare, care for the elderly, and even for their husbands. It includes various levels of discrimination against those who do not fulfil these two traditional roles and against those who are not included in the gender binary.

**SEXUAL ABUSE.** Access to the body of another person without their consent and without physical violence.

**SEXUAL HARASSMENT.** Any verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature that has the purpose or has the effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when it creates an intimidating, degrading or offensive environment.

**WHITE SAVIOR.** The white savior syndrome is one of the manifestations of coloniality. It occurs in white people who think they have to save other people they consider somehow inferior (because of their racialization, socio-economic status, etc.). The help white people believe is necessary to save another population always sets them up as heroes and heroines and responds to their social and emotional needs rather than to those of the people "to be saved".

## TO READ

- [Gender equality: glossary of terms and concepts](#)
- [AZ Index | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

# 6. ANSWERS TO “FOOD FOR THOUGHT”

## Resolution - How much do you know about communication with a gender perspective?

- Intersectionality is a phenomenon that reveals how

Each person suffers from oppression or holds privileges based on their belonging to multiple social categories

- The gender perspective in communication is necessary because

It contributes to creating social awareness of the inequalities experienced by women and non-binary people in their daily lives, and therefore it helps to fight and to change them

- Does communicating with a gender perspective mean raising awareness about the lived realities of women?

Yes

- Does it consist of interviewing more women?

Yes

- Is the language you adopt important?

Yes

- Does the gender perspective in communication consist only of a section or program developed for women?

No

- Indicate which of the following headlines is sexist

President Obama's wife attends a solidarity event on Refugee Day

- Which of these terms is more appropriate to report on violence against women?

Gender-based violence

## Resolution - FOOD FOR THOUGHT section 2.1.2.

- The Objective: For women to access information on decriminalisation as part of their sexual and reproductive rights.
- Approach: We can talk about voluntary interruption of pregnancy through a particular movement or a certain struggle, such as the green handkerchief movement in Argentina
- Sources: We rely on the voices of women who are part of the movement to provide information about the struggle, of women who have had abortions to talk about their stories and about how they receive the news, and of experts in gynaecology and care for women who have had complications from unsafe abortions.

## Resolution - FOOD FOR THOUGHT section 2.2.2.

We propose the following options, but there may be more.

- Owner
- Mx. Maria Cortez
- We work together / I work with them
- Artificial / human-made
- The situation being described
- Legislator / congressional representative

## Resolution - FOOD FOR THOUGHT section 2.2.2.

- If you have chosen to represent people there should be diversity, in terms of gender, racialization, social class, etc.
- If the image of people perpetuates stereotypes, look for another option. For example, if you choose an image with only boys, the poster will contribute to associating sexuality with men (unless it is a workshop on hegemonic masculinities for boys).
- Images should be adapted to the context and religion.
- You can opt for more abstract representations that capture for example sexual and reproductive health features such as fruits or diverse bodies etc.

## Resolution - FOOD FOR THOUGHT section 3.1.

- «Woman found dead in Medellín in a possible case of gender violence»

When it is confirmed as a murder, we should say: A woman was murdered in Medellín in a possible case of gender-based violence.

- «Stabbed to death by her husband a day after asking for help to get a divorce»

We could say: A woman was allegedly murdered by her partner.

Do not hold her responsible for the fact that she did or did not ask for help.

- «An illegal Maghrebi immigrant gives birth in the street»

It would be better to say: A woman with an irregular immigration status gives birth in the street because she is denied emergency care.

People are not illegal. Their immigration status is relevant in the news to understand the institutional violence they experience, and this is how we should explain it. The Maghrebi origin is irrelevant

- «The Bolivian truck driver who was driving through Argentina, Yésica, got her throat slit after arguing with her boyfriend»

It would be better to say: Yésica Cortez got her throat slit by her boyfriend.

It would be better to avoid mentioning the previous fight in the headline in order to avoid the perpetuation of the fallacious cause-effect link that blames the victim. We also should reflect on whether it is necessary to mention the victim's profession. Finally, be aware that women don't get their throats slit by unknown forces. The subject of the action should be clearly stated.

- «The minor who was gang raped was spending the weekend with some friends and got drunk»

Better to say: The men who gang-raped a minor took advantage of the girl's vulnerability.

Don't mention the weekend or anything else related to it: it is not the cause of the violence. In fact, this headline could lead to a new aggression towards the survivor. The news should focus on the rape and the perpetrators.

- «A drunk man kills wife and shoots his son»

It would be better to say: Murderer shoots his wife and child to death in a case of gender-based violence.

Avoid any information based on myths or that disassociates gender-based violence from the patriarchal system.

- «Jordanian woman reports obstetric violence at central hospital during delivery of second child»

Mentioning the woman's place of origin doesn't provide any relevant information; it gives, instead, a racist tone to the headline.

- «Kills spouse and mother, then kills himself»

Better to say: Man kills spouse and mother in double femicide

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