

Guide on Inclusive Language in Workplace

AKBANK



This guide is prepared with contributions of Kadir Has University Social Gender and Women Studies Research Center. It is reviewed in 2024.

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The language we use is shaping how we interpret the world. It determines boundaries of thoughts and behaviors.

So, it is possible to change behaviors by changing communicative language and contents of means of communication we use.

When looked from the perspective of gender, judgments on social gender roles are noted to correspond to social gender perceptions in practice. They have roots that are clichéd and established in the course of time. These clichéd judgments have their reflections on language and all types of means of communication especially in such fields as character, physical properties, roles and professions.

An inclusive communication is possible only with use of inclusive positioning, language and visuals where all genders are equally represented, and all individuals are allowed to make equal use of all sources and opportunities, regardless of language, religion, race, ethnical origin or disability, and the balance is maintained in decision making processes, and the prejudices and taboos are questioned.

This guide, first prepared in 2021 in cooperation with Kadir Has University Social Gender and Women Studies Research Center and Es Career Consultancy on Employment of the Handicapped, aims to put forth how we can avoid sexist language which supports the clichéd judgments on social gender, and to display the examples of non-inclusive reflection on the language of such different characteristics as disability, age and seniority.

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List of Index



2	FOREWORD
3	LIST OF INDEX
4	USE OF SOCIAL GENDER-EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE
11	SOCIAL GENDER-EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE WORK PROCESSES
18	KEY CONCEPTS
25	SOURCES

Use of inclusive language



Gender equality is enormously relevant for assertion of human rights. General objective of gender equality is to build a society wherein all individuals enjoy same opportunities, rights and obligations in all tiers of life, irrespective of gender. This, in turn, is possible only if and when all individuals have an equal share in distribution of power and influence, irrespective of gender. Gender equality secures equal opportunities for business or for financial independence through employment or entrepreneurship . It also provides equal opportunities in access to such fundamental rights as education, health and work. It creates living milieus free from coercion, as well as mobbing and gender-based violence both at work and at home where domestic and child care responsibilities are equally shared.. For the creation of this equality environment, it is an imperative to achieve societal gender equality, particularly in economic, social and political platforms.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights is adopted by the General Assembly of United Nations on December 10, 1948. In Turkey, it is ratified by a decree of the Council of Ministers and put into force upon published in the Official Gazette on May 27, 1949.



According to the November 2023² Labour Statistics report recently published by the Turkish Statistical Institute, in Turkey, rate of employment of people of 15 years of age and above is 48.4%. Rate of employment of women in this group clearly sets forth the inequality therein:

Policies and practices not based on societal gender equality and inclusiveness are alienating women with children from employment. According to Women with Statistics 2022³ report published in 2023, rate of employment of women in 25-49 age group who have children below 3 years of age at home is 26.1%, and rate of employment of men is 89.1%. In this context, gender equality and women's empowerment do not imply the differentiation of men and women, but it rather means that access to opportunities and changes in life are gender-neutral or unrestricted on the basis of gender.

48.4%

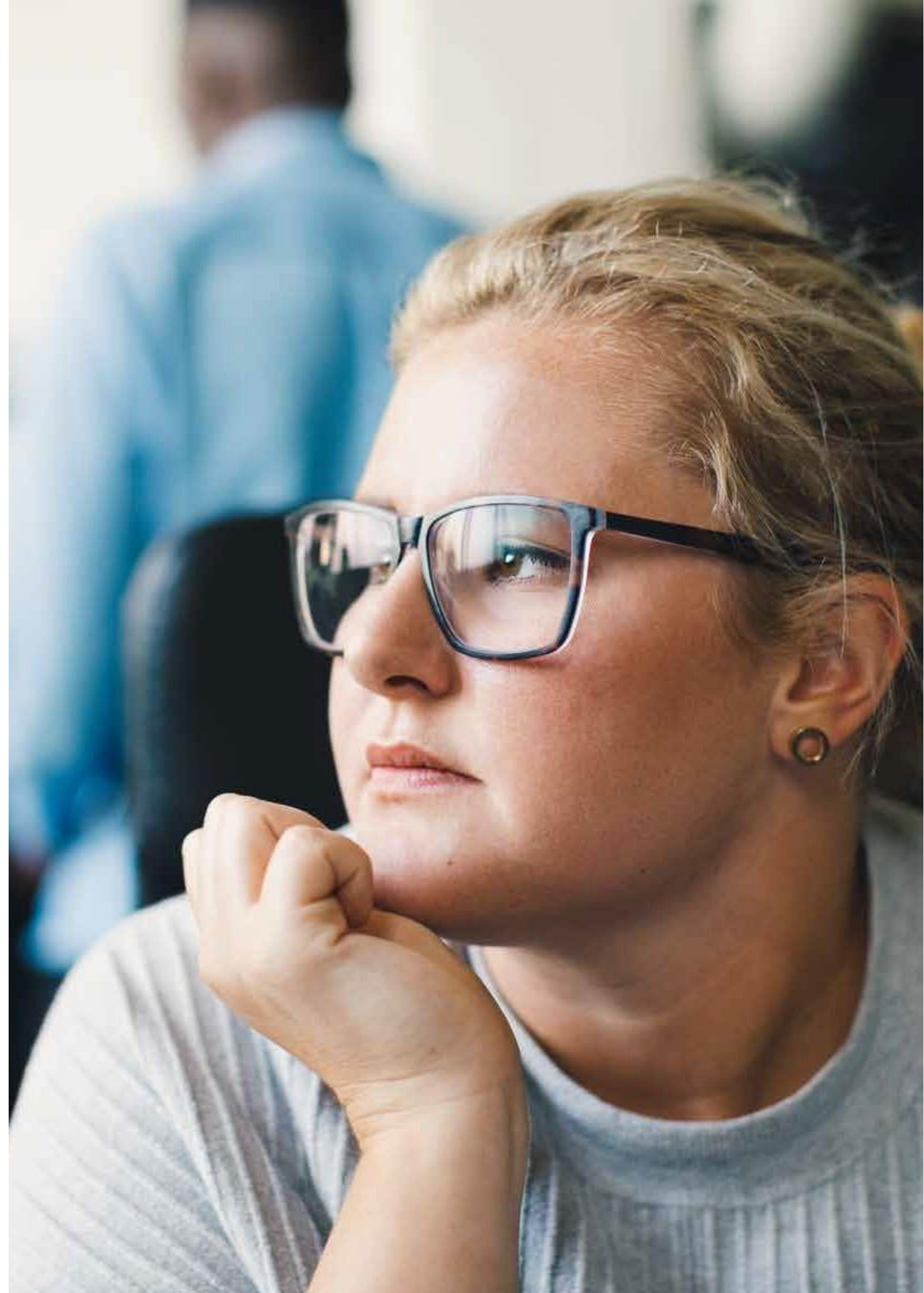
Rate of employment of people of 15 years of age and above

Women
26.1%

Rate of employment of women in 25-49 age group is 26.1%, and that of men in the same age group is 89.1%

²TUIK, Labour Statistics, March 2023, 04.03.2023, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Kadin-2022-45635>, Accessed on 28.12.2023.

³TUIK, Women with Statistics, 2022, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=%C4%B0statistiklerle-Kad%C4%B1n-2022-49668&dil=1>, Accessed on 28.12.2023.



We are aware of the fact that the assertion of inclusive behaviour patterns passes is made possible in the first place through review and revision of simple paradigms that we get to experience on a daily basis. Accordingly, a review of office practices revealed to us that it is important to take over equal responsibility in service, etc. needs, and there is involuntary gender-based responsibility sharing. Therefore, we think that such concepts as cited below need to be revised, and believe that we should accordingly review our behaviour patterns and practices.

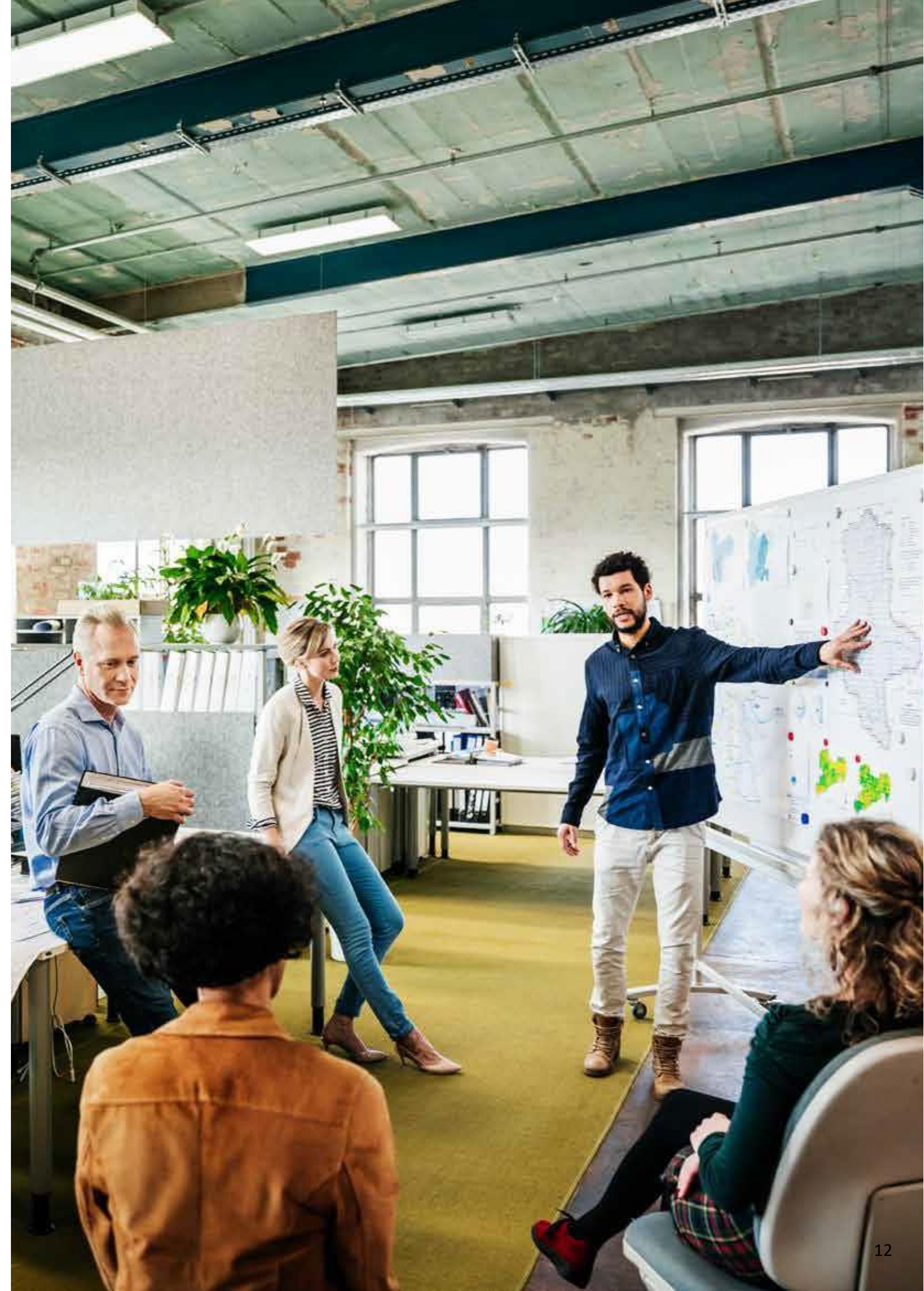
For instance:

In congratulatory activities, we must avoid saying, “Let ladies cut and serve the cake” to women, and “You don’t know how to cut a cake” to men.

We should not otherize and exclude a pregnant woman using such phrases as “you’re pregnant, you’d better not do this”.

“Lady” is a form of address used for women, and cannot be used for indication of gender, while “woman” expresses the sex of individual and indicates the genderized areas included in living quarters.

We should avoid using expressions negatively stigmatizing the word “Woman.” We must not use such words as “lady,” “madam,” “girl,” “sister,” etc. instead of “woman,” thinking that they are “more polite.”





✗ In non-equal daily language we get to hear “Lady! Where is Human Resources Department?”, but we don’t get to hear “Gentleman! Where is Human Resources Department?”

✓ “Welcome dear gentlemen and ladies” may be used instead.

Therefore, prefer “woman” where you are to use the word “man,” and prefer “lady” where you are to use the word “gentleman”. Dualities like the following, in our daily lives, show this distinction clearly:



Lady

~~WC for men/ WC for ladies~~

~~Male customer / Lady customer~~

~~Male personnel/ Lady personnel~~



Woman

WC for men/ WC for

Male customer/ Female customer


Male employee/ Female employee

We should not automatically assign a certain gender to names of individuals. Such names as “Deniz, Güneş, Sultan, Barış, Yaşar, Cansel” may be used for both women and men.

Problem: There may be situations you cannot decide how to address your addressee in written and verbal communications. In addition, just like individuals wishing to be addressed as “gentleman/lady”, there may also be individuals who do not like such address forms.

Solution: So as to take the preferences of individuals into consideration, you may ask “How do you want me to address you?”

We should avoid using phrases that externalize women by unnecessarily putting the word “woman” in front of such words, on the basis of assumption that some professions, expressions and words are particular only to men.

- 
- ~~Female~~ manager
 - ~~Female~~ banker
 - ~~Female~~ general manager
 - ~~Female~~ executive
 - ~~Female~~ engineer

In professions which are presently seen as a “feminine” profession, not to add the word “woman” again points at the same latent and implicit discrimination: Such as nurse, caregiver, kindergarten teacher, secretary. We should not use phrases which implicitly equate “to be a man” with “to be human/grow into a man”, and make the women invisible by claiming to include “everyone”.



- ~~To grow into a man~~
- ~~Like a man~~
- ~~To make a man~~
- ~~Like a wise man~~
- ~~Per man~~
- ~~Man-hour~~
- ~~s~~
- ~~Businessman~~
- ~~Science man~~
- ~~Mankind/Son of adam~~
- ~~Mans word~~
- ~~To be manless~~
- ~~Man of his words~~
- ~~Play the mafia boss~~
- ~~4 persons, 1 being a~~
- ~~woman~~
- ~~Tough guy~~
- ~~Tomboy~~



- To be a human
- Decent; properly
- To bring up, make operational, improve
- Thoroughly
- Per person
- Person-hour
- Treat everyone differently
- Business person
- Scientist
- Human, person
- Word of honour
- To be beneath someone,
- nonhuman True to word
- To get angry
- 4 persons
- Glutton for work
- Bold, self-confident woman

We must avoid using the word “girl” like “a sexually suggestive word” and using phrases where negative meanings are assigned to this word.

Maiden name
To laugh/walk like a girl

Let us avoid using the words “male, ”father” and “boy” in such manner to exclude woman implicitly.

Master of his domain	Play the mafia boss
Man of his words	Father’s money
Gentleman’s pact	Like father
	Father’s home

We must avoid using sexist discourse in idioms, proverbs and phrases.

Men make houses, women make homes.
Become an old maid
Mother’s darling
Prude (ladies)
Does it suit a lady like you?
Tomboy (Feisty girl)
Man among men
Man does not cry

For instance: The best profession for women is teaching. (So she can come back home early, take care of child, prepare food and do other housework.)





In traditional patriarchal societies, such responsibilities as care and service are assigned to women. In addition, in many businesses(SMEBanking, Commercial Banking, Human and Culture, Customer Communication Centre, Booking Clerk, etc.), assignments are carried on the basis of sexualist norms. We must be cautious of phrases we use in distribution of duties in business processes and such inhouse activities as meetings and celebrations.

In conglutatory activities, we must avoid saying, “Let ladies cut and serve the cake” to women, and “You don’t know how to cut the cake” to men.

We should not otherize and exclude a pregnant woman using such phrases as “you’re pregnant, you’d better not do this”.

In work life, we should not come up with excuses like “My team includes 3 pregnant; for this reason, we could not adequately perform in this period”.

We should avoid using phrases like “cleaning lady” or “tea lady. ”We can clear our sentences of traditional social gender roles and use such phrases as “cleaning attendant, ”catering worker” or “service attendant”.

During work, we must pay attention to not saying “You make good coffee. So, can you make it, please?” to women.





Achieving societal gender equality should not be isolated from other social, political and economic issues connected therewith.

Diversity, inclusion, marginalized/socially excluded groups, minority or disadvantaged groups, ageism, disability and gender concepts underlie the use of inclusive language. This means to say that we must consider all of these together as one and do away with all types of multiple discrimination, exclusion, marginalization and privileges exposed to by one person due to such identities and relations as social class, gender, appearance, disability status, immigration and family status.

Let us avoid discriminative phrases based on physical features and appearance. No-one must be exposed to discrimination, marginalization and exclusion due to their physical features and appearance.

➤ In workplaces, a lot of examples of discrimination based on appearance may be experienced:

Women with blond hair face difficulty in seeing the point.

Woman wears skirt; trousers is a man's clothing. Man does not wear a pink sweater.

As a woman, you are dressing too sporty, you must dress like a woman.

Today, you are looking too pale, didn't you make up?

Don't you ever pluck your eyebrows, they look too thick. (For women)

Are you plucking your eyebrows like a woman? (For men)

Women must do light exercises, muscly women look ugly.

You are too short/too tall for a woman.

Aesthetics is very important for women, you must have rhinoplasty.

Cliché phrases should not be used and individuals and groups should not be discriminated on the basis of age. To highlight the age and inexperience may be demotivating in business environment; we must put an end to age-based biases and discrimination towards older employees.

Addition of “-cim, -cim” and use of “dearie” word supposed to express sincerity with the names of younger workmates generally lead to age-based discrimination, and expressions and behaviours containing clichés and biases. We must avoid using such phrases and expressions.

Use in the work life of some phrases and expressions, like “menşeişehadetname” (certificate of origin), which are practically not used in daily language may make communication difficult in some occasions. Use of these words and expressions may not indicate the level of experience of an individual. Therefore, new generation employees and those who do not know these phrases may feel themselves excluded and left out. We may prefer to use current Turkish words and phrases in workplaces.

Phrases that need to be abolished in daily life in relation to age may be listed as follows:

- “This business was not done in such way(many) years ago.”
- “You wouldn’t know, back in those years...”
- “I was working here while you cared baby/cooked/did the ironing at home; I deserve to be the manager,”
- “You wouldn’t understand, since your time,... has changed a lot.”
- “Were you born then?”
- “When I was at your age...”
- Rookie
- Teenager
- Novice
- Noob
- Dinosaur
- Fossil
- Aunt, uncle
- X, Y, Z, generations
- Millennium kid

We must communicate properly with a disabled individual, just as we communicate with everyone else in social circles and workplaces.

- ✗ We must greet a disabled individual, just as we greet anyone else. To give an extra reaction or treat them differently may also draw their attention and cause their annoyance.
- ✗ We must not say “Get well!” Disability status is generally permanent and is not a disease.
- ✗ We must not use disability as a way of intimidation as if it was a bad condition, and we must only adopt it as a type of diversity.
- ✗ We must not use the word “cripple” instead of disabled or handicapped.

Rates of disability are not proportional to mobility or emotional state of individuals. We must not discriminate against and prejudge the disabled individuals. We must stay away from clichés which define disabled individuals as unusual and needy-indigent persons. Biases and prejudices may lead to discrimination and may preclude us from having an inclusive culture.

Phrases that need to be abolished in daily life due to disability-related considerations may be listed as follows:

“The handicapped are bold and courageous.”

Disabled individuals need not be bold or remain firm against all and any circumstances. No-one should be subject to such a generalization. Every individual may fail to be bold, courageous or strong depending on his or her psychological, social or economic circumstances.

“Wheelchair users are bound to their wheelchairs.” Wheelchair functions like a bicycle or a car and is a means of transportation enabling an individual to go from one place to somewhere else.

“A person with 90% rate of disability is bedridden and cannot move.” Rates of disability are not proportional to mobility or emotional state of individuals. A kidney-transplant individual may have 70% rate of disability and may move easily, while an individual incapable of using only one hand may have 40% rate of disability.

“The handicapped may be employed only at foundational level jobs.” Disabled individuals may also be employed in every position depending on their her qualifications and according to equal opportunity principle.

“A candidate with hand disability cannot use computer.” Shortcuts are developed for use of computer and different software programs. Disabled individuals can easily use computer by means of these shortcuts.

“The handicapped have absenteeism problem.”

Like everyone else, the handicapped may also have different health problems. Everyone with chronic diseases may regularly go to health controls.

“The workable handicapped are very few.”

In Turkey, there are approximately 2 million of workable disabled individuals. When prejudices are broken down, candidates having appropriate capabilities, skills and job experiences must be taken into consideration for each job position, regardless of their disability status.

Inclusive work processes



It is possible to see societal gender perceptions in every field of our daily lives. Societal gender equality and inclusivity should be applied effectively and wholly at home, street, workplace and school, shortly in all living areas. At workplace, societal gender equality may be achieved only in case of equal access to resources and opportunities, regardless of any gender, identity and belongingness.

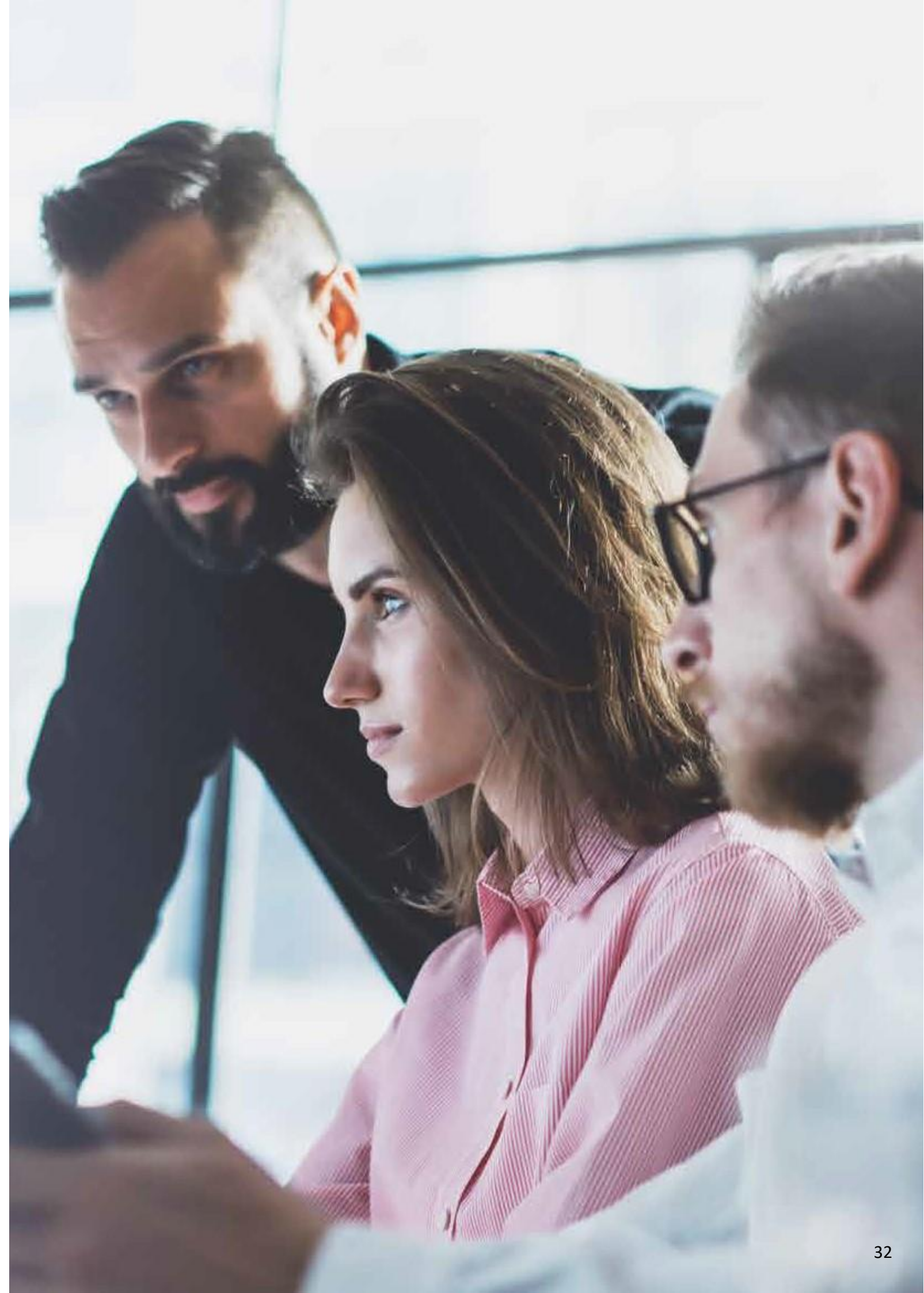
- For correct formulation of marketing strategies for brands, it is crucial to correctly determine customer needs and target audience. We must take care of language and visuals used in digital and traditional promotional activities.

For instance, on the basis of traditional patriarchal societal gender norms, such acts as investment and payment transactions may be attributed to a male profile, while such acts as spending money and doing shopping by credit card are attributed to a female profile.

- In contents and visuals of messages published for religious, national, professional or other special day celebrations, we must avoid using discriminative norms, or phrases that imply discrimination based on traditional societal gender roles, age and religion.



- Particularly in addresses prepared for religious feasts, portrayal of family, mother, father and child images therein may cause the individuals who do not have any family or have lost their family members feel themselves left out. Such sensitivities must be taken into consideration in use of contents and visuals.
- There may be employees with different religions in the same organization. For this reason, profiles of all employees must be taken into consideration in planning and publishing of messages of celebration.
- The organization may have won a prize or have achieved a success story. It must be kept in mind that a lot of employees have contributed to this, regardless of gender and age. Therefore, in communication of messages, we must avoid using any written or visual phrases referring to masculine perceptions like “boy-father-cup- winning a prize”.
- Equality and inclusivity approach must be favoured in all processes like recruitment, promotion and dismissal. In all texts and messages, we must avoid using marginalizing and exclusionary phrases which discriminate individuals on the basis of identity or belongingness.





Within the frame of Akbank Diversity and Inclusivity policy, we prepared Recruitment Manifest by bringing the principles of Recruitment together.

Diversity and Inclusivity For us For our candidates

In all recruitment processes, we adopt the principles of diversity, inclusivity, equal opportunity and objectivity, and we are acting on the basis of these principles in all of our practices.

In all our processes, we are assessing the candidates on the basis of their qualifications, capabilities and proficiencies, and focusing on their potentials in future. We do not take into consideration such personal features as sex, belief, religion, ethnical origin, nationality, political thought, age, disability status or marital status.

So as to provide all our candidates with equal opportunities, we do not take such gender-based issues as pregnancy and military duty into consideration as selection, measurement and assessment criteria. We avoid using such discriminative phrases in job ads as well.



As diversity, inclusivity and equal opportunities are fundamental principles for us, in job interviews, we do not ask questions, like the following ones, related to personal features, tendencies or private life.

Do you think to get pregnant in one year?

Do you think to get married soon?

If you are starting a new job/recently had a baby/recently married, how are you going to achieve work-private life balance?

Your name is different. What is your origin?

In job offers, we are acting with fair wage principle, and in determination of wages, we adopt an unprejudiced and equitable approach free from the aforementioned personal features.

We, as Akbank, as a requirement of our recruitment policy, are proceeding with equal pay for equal work principle, and are determining wages and fringe benefits of our workmates only on the basis of their work outputs.



Epilogue

In a workplace, inclusive communication is possible only through equal access of all individuals to all resources and opportunities from press bulletins to social media shares, from recruitment processes to rewarding, etc., regardless of language, religion, race, ethnical origin, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability status.

Corporate visibility creates a broad sphere of social influence, besides employees at the workplace. For this reason, it is fairly important to use an inclusive language in written, verbal and visual communications, irrespective of any taboos or stereotypes.

To develop diversity and inclusivity related awareness mechanisms and to implement them actively and wholly is one of the fundamental goals of our bank.

Key Concepts



Privilege

It refers to an advantage owned by only one person or group generally due to social life positioning or economic level.

- In a community, a man says “If I need to move to another place, I do not hesitate in renting or buying a house in a district which I can afford and where I want to live”, while in the same community, a woman prefers to choose a safe position for herself.

Discrimination

It refers to directly or indirectly behaving differently and unfairly to certain humans solely due to their belonging to a certain group.

Unconscious bias

It refers to social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Bias is an unfounded thought or belief in favor or disfavor of a subject, person or group generally in an unfair manner.

- For instance, in a business meeting, a female employee says something on the subject matter, and no-one is interested therein. Then, a short time after, a male employee says the same thing, and everyone at the table supports him. Such unconscious biases may diminish the motivation of women, thereby causing them avoid sharing their ideas in meetings.

Gender-based norms

These norms are comprised of a series of dominant beliefs and rules of behavior as to how boys and girls, men and women will behave, and what they will do how, and with what they will be interested, as determined by a community or a social group.

- Such phrases as “Women are very emotional, and are not authoritarian enough to be a manager” and “Men know nothing about child care” come out as societal gender based norms in the community.

Gender equality

It means that women and men, girls and boys have the same rights, resources and opportunities and are subject to the same protective laws. Gender equality does not mean that girls and boys or women and men are the same or need to be treated entirely in the same manner.

- Gender equality exists only if and when both genders can equally share the distribution of power and influence, and encompasses the following opportunities:
 - To have equal opportunities for financial independence,
 - To make use of equal access to education and of the opportunities to develop personal goals, areas of interest, and abilities,
 - To share the domestic responsibilities, and
 - To be free from coercion, mobbing and gender-based violence both at home and at work.

Gender inequality

It refers to in equal distribution of powers, resources, opportunities and assets recognized for women and men in the society, due to societal gender based norms and structures.

Several examples of gender inequality in society may be listed as follows:

Departing from the assumption that some professions, words and phrases are specific only to men, the word “female” is unnecessarily used in front of some words like prime minister, executive, driver, journalist and doctor, thus marginalizing the women.

By some stereotypes like “men make houses women make homes” and “man is the head of household”, the distribution of duties and roles is determined according to societal gender norms.

Gender role

It refers to social and behavioral norms generally believed to be fit for a man or a woman.

According to patriarchal, traditional societal gender norms, child care is defined as a role for women, while repair, etc. works are defined as a role for men.

Gender-based violence

It is a general term used for societal gender based violence occurring as a result of in equal power relations between humans of different genders. It is a commonly accepted fact that such types of violence are mostly inflicted by men against women. Societal gender based violence types may be listed as physical, emotional (psychological) and sexual violence.

Diversity

It refers to different nature of a community, for instance, in terms of social class, gender, immigration, family status, minority groups and majority group.

Empowerment

It is related to the ability of women, men, girls and boys to control their own lives, like:

- Determining their own agenda;
- Developing their skills (also including life skills);
- Forming a self-confidence;
- Solving the problems; and
- Further developing the self-confidence.

Empowerment process makes it possible for women, men, girls and boys not only to question the existing inequalities, but also to take action for change.

Binary gender regime⁴

It is a regime which accepts genders only as woman and man, and argues that this is natural, because each human is either a woman or a man. According to binary gender regime, woman and man are genders which are definitely separated in biological terms.

⁴Feminist Bellek, E. İrem Akı, İkiliCinsiyetRejimi, <https://feministbellek.org/ikili-cinsiyet-rejimi/>, Accessed on December 16, 2021.

Inclusivity

It is a practice or policy aiming to provide equal access to resources and opportunities for individuals who may be excluded or marginalized due to their sexual identity, sexual orientation, physical or mental disabilities, or due to belonging to other minority groups.

Marginalized/excluded group

It is the risk of exposure to multiple discrimination due to different personal features or gender, societal gender, age, ethnical origin, religion, belief, health status, disability, sexual orientation, sexual identity, education, income or geographical region within a certain culture, context and history.

Bias (Prejudice)

It covers to make a judgment and form an opinion without any evidence or cause. Bias refers to a negative belief or attitude developed against a person who is only assumed to belong to that group and is believed to have inconvenient features attributed to them due to only being a member of that group.

Just like the phrases “Girls are grouchy” and “Boys are messy”.

Stereotypification

It means to make assumptions about humans on the basis of certain features, and suppose that all humans of a certain group are the same, and label them as such. Stereotypes, or to put it in other words, clichés and stereotypic phrases are generally based on outdated ideas, and are maliciously untrue, and are used to offend humans.

➤ For instance, such assumptions as “Short-haired women are rebellious”.

Micro aggression (Inadvertent acts)

It refers to a comment or an act negatively targeting a group of marginalized humans. For example, to make offensive comments or ask offensive questions or adopt such approaches to a person in respect of his/her membership in a group discriminated or exposed to certain clichés. What makes micro aggression so disturbing is that it is done randomly, frequently, and most of the time, without any intention to harm in the daily life. This means to say that it may be malicious or accidental. This is a type of discrimination.

➤ For example, “You are too clever for a woman” or “You are too emotional for a man” are types of verbal micro aggression.

Social gender

It refers to stereotypes built by socially learned roles, behaviors, activities and qualities, deemed fit by the community separately for men and women. Social gender is built by such stereotypes as:

- Acceptance of such responsibilities as housekeeping, child care and cooking as roles assigned to women in traditional societies.
- Acceptance of such technical responsibilities as repair and such out-of-home responsibilities as shopping as roles assigned to men in traditional societies.

Social gender based discrimination

It refers to behave negatively to humans due to their gender, and to make discrimination on the basis of gender-related clichés and assumptions. Such approaches as:

- Asking the women in job interviews whether they are married, and whether they think to have a child or not, and
- In auspicious occasions such as birthday parties at workplace, saying “Let the women to lay/clear the table”

attribute roles to humans on the basis of social gender norms, thus causing discrimination.

Social gender based stereotype

It means to make assumptions about features and activities fit for a person according to that person’s gender.

- Phrases “Women are sentimental” or “Men do not cry”, and
- Attributing teaching profession to women, and engineering profession to men may be listed as stereotypes built according to social gender roles.

Ageism

Cliché behaviors and phrases used about or against individuals or groups due to their ages are also types of prejudice and discrimination.

Disability

It refers to any physical or mental condition that prevents, makes difficult, or limits certain activities of a person in any area of daily life, or participation of that person in a certain area.

Orthopedically handicapped:

It refers to an individual who has deficiency, or limited movement, or loss of function in musculoskeletal system. Shortness, deficiency, excess, limitation of movement, deformity, muscle weakness, bone disease, paralysis, cerebral palsy, spastics, spina bifida in body limbs - hand, arm, foot, leg, finger, spine - are also included in this disability group.

Visually impaired:

It refers to an individual with complete or partial loss or impairment in vision in one eye or both eyes.

- For instance, those using ocular prosthesis together with vision loss, with colour blindness and night blindness (nyctalopia) are included in this group.

Hearing impaired:

It refers to an individual with complete or partial hearing loss in one ear or both ears.

- For instance, those using hearing aid are included in this group.

Speech handicapped:

It refers to an individual who cannot speak for any reason, or who has a disorder in speech rate, fluency or voice disorder.

- For instance, people who cannot speak despite hearing, those who use devices to speak, those who have stuttering, aphasia, or disorder in tongue/lip/palate/jaw structure, and those who have had their larynx removed are also included in this group.

Mentally disabled:

It is defined as material underdevelopment in general mental functions, compared to normal humans, due to various different reasons occurring before, during or after birth, as well as insufficiency in adaptive behaviors.

Persons with disabilities due to chronic diseases:

This group includes those diseases that require continuous care and treatment and cause disability of functions as well as working capacity of the person (blood, cardiovascular, digestive system, urinary tract, reproductive organs, skin/skin diseases, cancer, endocrine, metabolic diseases, mental behavioural disorders, nervous system diseases, HIV carriers are also included in this group).

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