

Supporting the Use of Gender Pronouns in the Workplace

CGIAR's vision for our global workplaces is that they are enabling and inclusive. Diversity in all its dimensions is embraced and every person is supported to reach their full potential, so as to drive the engagement and innovation needed for a world free of poverty, hunger and environmental degradation.

In line with our Framework for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion for CGIAR's workplaces, we recognize and value the multiple, intersecting dimensions of social and professional diversity in our global workforce. We commit to providing a welcoming workplace that accommodates, respects and values people of all identities, abilities and life stages, and we adopt diversity-positive approaches to talent management. We inform, empower and enable our workforce to identify and address all forms of inequality and bias in our workplaces, in ways that are sensitive to local contexts.

This includes respectful ways to recognize and support gender identity.

Q1: What is gender identity?

A: Gender identity is one's personal and psychological concept of gender, which may or may not conform to traditional norms or societal expectations around gender. A non-binary person is somebody whose gender identity does not belong to either male or female. A non-binary person may consider themselves to be neither male nor female, or both, or sometime male and sometimes female.

Q2: Why is it important to identify and recognize gender pronouns of your colleagues?

A: We don't want to assume someone's gender identity based on their physical appearance or the body into which they were born.

Q3: What are examples of gender pronouns?

A: A person may use gender pronouns that are masculine (he/him/his), feminine (she/her/hers), or gender non-conforming (they/them/theirs).

Q4: Why is it important to support the use of gender pronouns in email signatures?

A: This practice allows any employee to advise others on the best way to refer to them without having to have multiple, face-to-face conversations with everyone in the workplace.

Q5: What gender pronouns should I use in referring to a colleague or peer?

A: The pronouns that that particular employee has chosen to identify himself/herself/themselves.

Q6: How should I refer to someone if I am unclear as to what gender pronouns they like to use?

A: Simply ask the person to share the pronouns they like to use.

Q7: Are gender pronouns simply a matter of preference?

A: No. Gender pronouns reflect how a person sees himself/herself/themselves. Gender pronouns are not a matter of preference; they are a sign of one’s personal identity. This is why it’s important to not automatically use the language of “preferred” or (traditional) pronouns.

Q8: Does everyone have to reference gender pronouns in their email signature block?

A: This is not mandatory. In fact, depending on your local context and your cultural sensibilities, you may feel that the issue of gender pronouns is not a germane or relevant issue. However, if you want to support greater inclusion and promote diversity in the workplace, this is a great way to start.

Gender pronouns, and the more specific issue of gender identity, is an emerging diversity and inclusion topic in the Global North as well as areas of the Global South. A number of organizations have adopted the practice of using gender neutral language to build inclusivity.

Misgendering someone, or mistakenly assuming their gender, can be very hurtful to an employee and can create embarrassing situations in the workplace. Referencing gender pronouns in your email signature shows support and allyship for people who are transgender or gender non-conforming (“GNC”). Adopting this practice makes it easier for transgender and GNC people to express their identity without feeling isolated.

Once again, this is not a mandatory practice, but more and more organizations are supporting gender neutral language and giving their employees the option of designating their gender pronouns in their email signature line and company bios.

Q9 Is there a standard way to list gender pronouns in the email signature block? Should I be concerned that adding gender pronouns to the signature block might look cluttered or unprofessional?

A: Adding a simple line to your signature block is sufficient: “Gender Pronouns (they/them/theirs).” Others have chosen to add the pronouns right after their names (e.g. Juan Bautista (he/him/his)) without any label, title, or descriptor. There is no standard way to add gender pronouns to one’s email signature, and the addition of gender pronouns to one’s signature block can be done in a discreet and professional way so as to minimize any concerns about corporate branding.

Q10 What does the GDI Function advise on the use of titles such as Mr. / Ms.?

A: Mr., Ms., Miss., and Mrs. are traditional salutations that speak to a gender binary. To be inclusive, we recommend eliminating gender references whenever possible. This typically includes omission of the courtesy title – Mr., Ms., Miss., and Mrs.. Consider using the person’s first name (or initials) and family name. For example, instead of “Dear Ms. Banda”, use “Dear Lesedi Banda” or “Dear L.T. Banda”.

Your communications team may be able to provide further guidance, including guidance specific to your location.

Q11 How do we support staff members whose gender identity is different to their identity at birth?

A: CGIAR respects that a gender identity assigned at birth may differ from an individual’s subsequent expression (of gender identity). We value the unique contribution of all staff, including those who identify outside of the gender binary.

We do not tolerate discrimination, victimization, or harassment on the basis of a person’s gender identity. We aim to provide a welcoming and supportive environment for people to be who they are, irrespective of their gender identity. We consciously foster enabling environments, and are committed to providing fair, safe and inclusive workplaces. Read more about this in the Framework for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion in CGIAR’s Workplaces.

Q12: Who should I contact if I have any more questions?

A: Feel free to consult with your Human Resources team, your Gender, Diversity and Inclusion (GDI) Focal Point, and/or the CGIAR System Function on Gender, Diversity and Inclusion f.farrell@cgiar.org if you have questions or want to learn more about gender pronouns and gender identity.