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SAFE AND FREE:

***A messaging guide for communicators
fighting violence against women***

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This guide has been written in consultation with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in the context of EIGE's Communications Lab project. This project explores, through workshops with experts, techniques to improve communication on gender equality and, more specifically, gender based violence. The project supports communicators to broaden their communications skills, including how to respond to gendered disinformation and improve their understanding of target audiences.

Introduction

Who is the guide for?

This guide is a tool for staff in organisations that want to communicate more effectively with public audiences to build support for laws and policies that deliver a life free from violence for women and girls. This includes governmental departments and bodies, civil society organisations, foundations and international organisations promoting gender equality.

What's the scope of the guide?

Currently, campaigns on violence against women tend to focus only on one aspect of the issue: how to change the behaviour of victims, perpetrators and third parties. Campaigns do this by helping the target audience recognise that various forms of violence and certain attitudes are unacceptable and encouraging them to take action. Victims are encouraged (and informed how) to seek support, witnesses and bystanders are encouraged to intervene, women are encouraged to offer each other mutual assistance, and men are encouraged to correct behaviour and attitudes through peer pressure.¹

Changing behaviour in this way plays an important role in fighting violence against women and girls, but it is only one of a range of

measures that experts agree governments need to implement. Considering this, the guide offers communicators messaging advice that can be used in a broader range of campaigns than is the current practice; namely, to build support more for a broader range of laws and policies that prevent, intervene in and repair the damage caused by violence against women and girls. The guide structures the messaging advice according to these three aspects of the topic: prevention, intervention and repair.

Preventive measures are those designed to address the root causes of violence against women and girls. These include power imbalances between women and men, structural discrimination and the perpetuation of damaging gender stereotypes. When illustrating how to message to build support for preventive measures, this guide will focus on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes as a root cause. Research shows that the more strongly people hold traditional gender stereotypes, the more likely they are to be OK with violence against women. Traditional gender stereotypes refer to beliefs about the different roles women and men should play, and disagreement with equality between women and men. The more strongly people hold these ideas:

1 Campaigners working with victims of gender-based violence should ensure compliance with applicable ethical standards, such as: [WHO, 'Ethical and safety recommendations for intervention research on violence against women', 2016.](#)

- the more likely they are to see violence against women as acceptable,
- the narrower the range of acts they consider to constitute violence,
- the more likely they are to endorse victim-blaming and refrain from intervening in situations of abuse,
- and the less likely they are to support the victim or hold the perpetrator accountable.²

The perpetuation of gender stereotypes also underpins other factors linked to higher levels of violence against women, such as the imbalance of economic power between women and men. The guide offers advice on messaging to build support among public audiences to free people from traditional gender stereotypes.

In the guide, ‘intervention’ measures refer to those designed to remove the victim from danger and cease the harm. These include laws, policies and resources that allow incidents of violence to be reported, investigated, prosecuted and punished, while ensuring the safety of the victim and their dependents. For example, adequate training for police and the judiciary and funding for shelters.

The guide uses the term ‘repair’ measures to refer to those designed to support victims of violence to rebuild their lives, such as long-term

physical and mental health services, support with employment, housing and education.

This division into prevention, intervention and repair is not meant to be prescriptive. Rather, it’s designed to help communicators break the topic down into more manageable dimensions and minimise the risk of confusing or overwhelming the audience. Additionally, the solutions mentioned here and in the sample messages in Part IV should be treated as illustrative. There may be certain types of solutions that haven’t been mentioned or solutions you want to talk about that do not fit easily into one of the categories. For example, reparations could include measures to support recovery for victims, as well as measures to address root causes such as stereotypes and the attendant power imbalances. Similarly, a solution like providing more funding for feminist organisations could be relevant to all three aspects of the topic. The sample messages in Part IV will give you a feel for whether the aspect of the problem you wish to focus on relates to prevention, intervention or repair, and you can adapt those sample messages to feature the policy, legal, funding or other measures you wish to promote.

2 [Gracia, E. et al., ‘Attitudes toward intimate partner violence against women in the European Union: A systematic review’, 25\(2\) European Psychologist \(2020\), 104; Flood, M. & Pease, B., ‘Factors influencing attitudes to violence against women’, 10\(2\) Trauma, Violence & Abuse \(2009\) 125.](#)

Who are your public audiences?

Public audiences tend to divide into at least three segments on issues related to human rights, equality and social justice. Those who are solidly in favour of your cause, those who are solidly against, and those in the middle.

Those in favour of your cause can be thought of as your ‘base’ and include your existing supporters, but also people who would be very likely to support you if you can reach them with your messages. Research in different countries on different human rights-related topics suggests that this base can be anything between 15% and 25% of the population.³ The same is true of your opponents. Your base and your opponents won’t usually change their position. But the middle segments can. This ‘moveable middle’ is usually the biggest chunk of the public. This middle group can usually be broken down further and placed on a spectrum between our base and our opponents.

Public facing campaigns that are aimed at growing public support for a particular cause should try to mobilise your base and enlist their help to spread your message to shift at least part of the moveable middle over to your side. The messaging advice in this guide is designed to help you speak both to your base and to that part of the moveable middle that is closer to your base.

Limitations of this guide

Using this guide will allow communicators to make a big leap in the effectiveness of their messaging. The guide is informed by the science and practice behind narrative change or persuasive messaging. It is based on certain sensible assumptions about how your audiences in the public think about your issues and, based on this, what kind of messaging is likely to be effective. It draws heavily on the work of Anat Shenker-Orsorio of [ASO Communications](#) on various human rights and social justice causes and related projects, such as [We Make The Future](#), as well as published and unpublished case studies and messaging guides from other organisations, in particular the ‘[Framing gender equality](#)’ and ‘[Framing masculinity](#)’ messaging guides published by the Victoria Health Promotion Foundation. Much of the advice in this guide uses or adapts messages tested by these organisations in the USA, UK and Australia.

Having said this, you can and should go further in refining your messaging by carrying out public opinion research and message testing in your target countries. Public opinion research can give you more precise information that you can use in two ways. First, it can tell you in more detail how your audience thinks about the issues, which in turn tells you if you need to change or refine the messaging suggested in this guide because it clarifies what language to use and avoid, what misconceptions need

3 Much of this research is unpublished, but for published research that segments the population see research by More In Common on attitudes towards migration, available via their [website](#).

correcting, where your audience is already with you and where they need help to move. Second, it can allow you to segment the population into base, moveable middle groups and opponents and identify your target audience. This, in turn, will allow you to check you're picking the right messengers, channels, types of content and relevant trends to shape your final communications content. Message testing will allow you to see which of the suggested messages in this guide work better with different audiences and whether they need refining.

Users should also bear in mind that the way that messages are delivered has an impact on how willing your audience is to consume and spread the content. This guide focuses on the substance of the message in a written format. These written messages can be adapted for certain kinds of content easily, such as press releases, speeches, statements or blogs. But most of the kinds of content used in campaigning (like images, videos, slogans) require an additional creative process and further testing. This is not only a question of using the right channels and the right kind of content to reach your target audience, but also being able to tap into current trends, pick appropriate messengers and find the correct tone.

Communicators are encouraged to work with creatives with experience in narrative change and working with non-profit organisations on social justice-related causes to turn sample messages into campaign content.

The guide uses the terms 'violence against women' and 'violence against women and girls' interchangeably.

Part I: Current context

Majorities in all EU countries largely agree that women should live free from violence

The tenor of social media commentary, online hatred against women and attacks on bodies promoting equality can create the impression that public opinion is indifferent or hostile to eliminating violence against women. But public opinion research on attitudes towards violence against women shows this is not the case.

A recent Eurobarometer survey shows that a majority of the public in all EU countries - often by large margins - already support the

position that women should live free from violence, control or harassment.⁴ For example, majorities find it unacceptable for men to ogle or catcall women, make suggestive comments about a woman's appearance at work, 'occasionally slap' their partner, control their partner's relationships or have sex with their partners without their consent. Majorities in all EU countries also seem to reject the idea that women make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape, that domestic violence is a private matter to be handled within the family, or that women who decline a sexual proposal are 'playing hard to get'.

COMMENTARY ON SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS IS NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF PUBLIC OPINION.

It's not uncommon for hostile opinions on causes like equality, human rights and environmental protection to be overrepresented on Facebook and X, while commentary on Instagram can be more positive than in real life. It's not that social media debate doesn't have an impact on public opinion. Rather, public opinion - when measured using methods like polling, surveys and focus groups - tends to be less polarised and more moderate than social media channels suggest.

Public-facing campaigns have tended to focus on changing behaviour rather than law and policy

To date, campaigns to address violence against women and girls have focused on changing the behaviour of individuals. Either the behaviour

of victims, (potential) perpetrators, or third parties. These third parties can be divided into direct witnesses / bystanders, or those in the social networks of victims and perpetrators.

These campaigns tend to involve common elements, with certain differences depending on

⁴ [European Commission, 'Gender stereotypes - Violence against women', Flash Eurobarometer 544, November 2024.](#)

whether they are aimed at victims, perpetrators or third parties. They:

- Inform the audience of the prevalence and severity of violence against women, usually through the use of statistics, sometimes also with disturbing images showing or implying acts of violence, and sometimes using stories or images of real individuals to stimulate empathy.
- Make statements reinforcing the social rule that violence against women and girls is unacceptable and make statements that challenge damaging attitudes, especially victim-blaming.
- Educate their audience as to what constitutes 'violence' so that they can recognise that the treatment they have experienced, inflicted or witnessed is wrong and cannot be justified.

These campaigns are mostly aimed at encouraging individuals to take action. Victims are encouraged to seek support with messages that help them recognise that they have / are experiencing unacceptable behaviour, and inform them about how to access certain services, and reassurance that others have managed to escape similar situations. Perpetrators are urged to stop and seek support. Witnesses and bystanders are encouraged to intervene where they see violence against women taking place instead of ignoring the situation. The social networks of victims,

especially other women, are encouraged to show support and solidarity (rather than victim blaming), since these are usually the first people victims turn to for help, rather than to formal institutions. And the social networks of perpetrators, especially other men, are encouraged to use peer pressure to change perpetrators' behaviour.

Results of the recent Eurobarometer could be interpreted to suggest that these kinds of campaigns have helped to build or grow support for the rule that violence against women is unacceptable and to shift attitudes away from blaming victims to blaming perpetrators.⁵ Thus, campaigners may well have succeeded in changing certain cultural norms and attitudes that contribute to violence against women.

Today's challenges

Despite relatively strong public disapproval of the phenomenon, violence against women and girls remains a serious problem. While the sector has the expertise to identify the causes, the full range of solutions, and a European legal framework to put these into effect, these solutions are either not being implemented, or not being implemented adequately, by governments.

Why? First, because there don't seem to be efforts to leverage public support for a life free from violence for women and girls to apply political pressure on governments to implement the right solutions. As noted, campaigning has

⁵ See e.g. [surveys of public opinion in Lithuania before and after campaigns](#).

tended to focus more on talking to individuals about what they should (not) be doing, rather than telling governments about laws and policies they need to change. Second, because most people usually have other worries at the top of their lists; currently things like economic hardships, underfunded public services and war in Europe. Third, because most people probably don't understand the root causes of the problem, why measures to intervene aren't working properly or why long-term support for victims is needed. And if they don't understand the problem, there's little chance they will end up asking their political representatives to implement the right solutions.

At the same time, movements with authoritarian agendas are attempting to halt and reverse progress towards gender equality, as part of a broader attack on equality for marginalised groups, fundamental rights more generally, environmental protection and democracy. With particular regard to the subject of violence against women, these movements don't tend to directly advocate for violence against women. Rather, they tend to promote traditional stereotypes about the different roles (and consequently, status) of women and men - which research links to the prevalence of violence against women. Movements with authoritarian agendas also undermine public support for taking action to eliminate violence against women and girls by: deflecting blame for the problem onto certain ethnic minority groups and trans persons, portraying efforts to combat violence against women as victimising men and misrepresenting preventive measures like the Istanbul Convention as a threat to family, children and tradition.

How this messaging guide supports the sector

The advice in this guide will help communicators in three ways. First, to respond to attacks from movements that are against equality in a way that is most likely to dissolve their misinformation and persuade your audience to support your position.

Second, to make future campaigns more effective by incorporating rules of persuasive messaging. Campaigns to date may have helped to move public opinion on the acceptability of certain forms of violent behaviour and victim-blaming attitudes. But it is still possible to point to a number of counterproductive messaging habits that, if addressed, could make future campaigns more effective.

Third, to apply the rules of persuasive messaging to a broader range of campaigns. As noted, most campaigns on violence against women have centred on changing the behaviour of individuals, in particular by raising awareness, educating them and changing cultural rules. But this is only one of a range of steps that need to be taken to eliminate violence against women. While the sector promotes the full range of solutions towards policy-makers, it's much less common to see communicators using public-facing campaigns to build support for these solutions. And yet, decision-makers are more likely to implement the full range of solutions needed if they see that there is public support and pressure to do so.

To deliver a life free from violence for women and girls, the sector should broaden its

campaigns to include building public support to address the perpetuation of traditional gender stereotypes as a way of preventing the problem; and allocate the resources, infrastructure and expertise needed to intervene to remove and keep victims out of direct danger, and provide the longer-term support needed to repair the damage. Therefore, the guide will incorporate advice on how to grow public support for legal and policy measures to prevent, intervene in and repair the damage caused by violence against women and girls.

Part II: How could communicators improve current messaging practices?

Part II will outline how campaigners currently tend to message and how this could be made more effective. In Section A, it will look at current messaging practices at a more structural level, before looking at more specific issues in Section B.

Section A: The structure of current messaging

This section will outline the structure of a persuasive message and then compare this to how the sector tends to communicate currently on violence against women and girls.

i. What does a persuasive message look like?

As noted, just because your audience agrees that violence against women is wrong, this doesn't automatically translate into support

for the measures that experts are calling for to tackle it. Research and practice on public attitude change show that there are several common barriers that can prevent our audiences from lending us their support.⁶ These include: not seeing how the cause we are promoting delivers something that they find important; having an inaccurate understanding of why the problem is happening (leading them to support the wrong solutions); not having a vision to inspire them to action; and thinking that change is too difficult to achieve.

Communicators can overcome these barriers by developing messages that follow a particular structure.⁷ This type of three or four part message is referred to here as a 'narrative':

- **Values statement:** tell your audience how the cause you are advancing delivers something that they find important for

⁶ For an overview see: Sanderson, B. et al., 'The narratives we need', Public Interest Research Centre, (2018).

⁷ This formulation is based on repeated message testing across a range of social justice-related topics in different countries. For examples of published messaging guides that apply this approach, based on message testing, see the website of [ASO Communications](#).

themselves, people they care about or people whom they consider to be like them.

- **Explain the problem:** show your audience that the things they care about are at risk or aren't being delivered. Set out who or what is causing the problem and why.
- **Explain the vision your solution delivers:** tell your audience what the world will look like if your solution is put into practice. This is often a call-back to the substance of the values statement. Do name your solution, but don't dwell on the policy details.
- If necessary, show your audience that change is possible by reminding them of past positive social changes, and tell your audience what they can do to show their support for your solution.

Following these three or four steps in the order given has been shown to be the most effective structure for a message that shifts your audience's attitudes towards your position and mobilises them to take action to show their support for your cause.

ii. How far does current messaging on violence against women diverge from the structure of persuasive messaging?

Existing messaging in campaigns to eliminate violence against women and girls does not follow the three- or four-part structure set out above. Based on a review of campaigns aimed at eliminating violence against women, it's

possible to summarise the messaging broadly as follows:

- Violence against women is happening at unacceptably high levels and it's a lot more common than you think it is: here are the statistics. It's very serious for the victims (illustrated with images). Sometimes, communicators add that it's bad for the economy.
- We can stop it from happening if society as a whole commits to zero tolerance of violence against women, we change our attitudes over victim-blaming and we empower victims to recognise it and get support; reform and / or prosecute perpetrators; women offer each other support to leave violent situations; men pressure their peers to stop unacceptable behaviour.

There are three ways this messaging structure could be made more effective.

First, as you can see, campaign messaging tends to open with the problem, rather than values. It's common for campaigners to think that the way to make people care about our topic is to show them how big and serious the problem is and how much harm people are suffering. But this only works for our base, who already agree with us and understand the topic. For the moveable middle, we first have to remind them of the values that they hold. And then in a second step, we can create dissonance between these values and reality by showing them the problem. If you open your message by focusing only on the harm you're fighting, the moveable middle is likely to disengage.

Second, campaigns on violence against women don't tend to expressly explain why violence against women is happening. This habit is not confined to messaging around violence against women, and is common in current messaging around gender equality, but also equality and fundamental rights more generally.

Explaining where the problem comes from may be less relevant for the types of campaigns that are currently common on violence against women. That is because they focus on trying to change behaviour (of victims, perpetrators and third parties). The most effective kind of messaging to create behavioural change is messaging that appeals to social proof and social pressure. This involves telling your audience what the rules are and then showing them evidence that their peers agree and are following these rules.

However, this guide recommends that the sector broaden its choice of campaigns to include building public support for the resources, laws and policies needed to prevent, intervene in and repair the damage caused by violence against women and girls. These campaigns focus more on public attitudes, rather than behaviour. And this requires communicators to be explicit with their audiences about who or what is causing the problem and why.

Third, although it happens sometimes, campaigns rarely paint a vision of what the world would look like if their solutions are implemented. The major exception to this seems to be campaigns aimed at stimulating women to show mutual support and solidarity with each other, such as the UN's 'orange the world'

campaign. If we add this to the fact that we rarely open our messages by stating our values, it means that we give our audience very little in the way of something positive to fight for. It means our messaging is better at making people angry (which can move our base to action) than it is at inspiring people to build the world they want (which is what the moveable middle needs to be moved to action).

Section B: Particular messaging practices

Section B will review problematic messaging practices that are common in public-facing messaging on violence against women. As said, these messaging mistakes are common throughout the equality and fundamental rights sector and beyond. After identifying the problem, the guide will offer advice on what to do instead. Further examples of what good messaging looks like can be found in Parts III and IV of the guide.

i. Shocking images

Very often, campaigns contain images that imply an act of violence is about to occur, or show the results of a physical attack, or show victims of violence in a powerless or humiliating light. Presumably, communicators hope to shock their audience into taking action by confronting them with the harms of violence and perhaps generating sympathy for the victim.

This kind of imagery raises ethical concerns about how it portrays survivors of violence. Apart from this, it is also only likely to

generate the desired response from your base, who already agree with you and are equally outraged at the problem. Even using shocking images too often towards your base is likely to be counterproductive because they can interpret continued negative messaging to mean that they're not able to improve the situation, and they therefore become demotivated in the long run. Moveable middle audiences are also likely to be put off by these kinds of images and not want to engage with your message, because it will make them feel too uncomfortable and negative.

What works better?

When your message consists of words and images, the image is the most powerful element of the message. This means that:

If you're using video, then keep the negative images to a minimum and balance them out with other elements of your message.

If you're using a single image with text, use the image to show another element of your message, like explaining why the problem is happening, or giving your vision of how things should be / will be when your solution gets implemented.

Reserve shocking images for occasional use when your goal is to quickly mobilise your base into action.

ii. Statistics

Most campaigns invoke stark statistics about the prevalence of violence against women.

Statistics are important and useful, and new research data is often a great hook to get the media interested in the topic. But the way communicators tend to use statistics often deprives them of their persuasive power. Campaigns tend to use statistics in a similar way to shocking images: to catch the audience's attention and motivate them to take action by waking them up to the reality that this is a very big problem. As with shocking images, this is likely to work with your base, who are already firmly on your side and are angry about violence against women. But for the moveable middle, opening your message with statistics without couching them in other elements of a persuasive message is not very effective, for a few reasons.

First, when we use raw numbers to refer to the hundreds or thousands of incidences of violence, these can be overwhelming for your audience. The problem sounds so big that they think it can't be solved, even if they agree that violence against women is bad. Second, if you give your audience statistics without explaining why the problem is happening, then they will fill in the blanks themselves, often with inaccurate and incomplete information.

What works better?

First, situate statistics in the second step of your messaging, where you are explaining the problem, rather than opening with it. And give them a way to understand why this harm is happening. Otherwise, they will default to their existing thinking, which is usually inaccurate.

Second, present statistics in a way that is easy to remember and won't overwhelm your audience. Infographics can be helpful if the format you're using allows. Sometimes this is referred to as making your facts 'sticky'. Of course, it's important to still have the absolute figures available, for example, for journalists and policy-makers. But if you're talking to a public audience, continue prioritising easier to remember things like, '1 in 3 women...' and put the absolute figures somewhere less prominent. On top of this, bring home to your audience what this means: it means that there will inevitably be women and girls in their lives, whom they care about, who have suffered some form of violence or will do so in the future. You can put this into messaging with phrases like: 'A woman or girl you love / care about...' 'A close friend / relative / daughter / cousin / colleague...'

Activists may feel uncomfortable using this phrasing because it can sound like we're suggesting the wellbeing of women and girls is important only insofar as these women are related to people in your audience - which will include men. But using this kind of formulation is important for engaging moveable middle audiences because, unlike our base who agree with us on principle - they need to be shown how this issue affects them. And based on the lessons of previous campaigns on analogous issues, the most effective way to do this is to remind them that they're connected to the issue because it affects someone they love or care about.

iii. Negative tone

Our negative tone can come from our slogans, but also includes emphasising how bad things are now (instead of what we want things to look like). As noted, the human rights and equality sectors tend to focus on the harms we are fighting, probably because we think that this is what will make people care and take action. But it means that all our messaging can easily end up negative in tone. Slogans for campaigns in this field are typically exhorting people to 'end', 'stop' or say 'no' to negative behaviours and thoughts. It's also not uncommon to see negatively framed statistics, like '17% of people think that violence against women is often provoked by the victim.' The latter completely wastes an opportunity to use social proof as a tool to bind your audience to your cause by showing them that the vast majority of people agree with them. Negative messaging can be OK for mobilising people in your base who are already on your side. But people in the moveable middle are more likely to engage with more positive messaging.

What works better?

Try to get into the habit of focusing more on the future you want to create and / or on how we get there. Once you start using a narrative structure, which requires that you talk about your values and your vision, you will find that positive messages come more naturally. Sometimes it can be appropriate to use a negative statement or slogan. But even then, the broader narrative behind this is going to be much more positive in tone, and you are likely to have other communications content that is focused

on things like your vision and solution. Here are some examples of what a shift from negative to positive can look like.

FROM	TO
End / stop / no gender violence.	For a life free from violence / let's save lives.
17% of people think that violence against women is often provoked by the victim.	83% of people agree that it's not OK for a man to attack a woman.
2 out of 10 people agree that women aren't as good as men at certain jobs.	8 out of 10 people agree that gender is irrelevant to determining what job a person can do.
Boys raised according to outdated masculine stereotypes are more likely to abuse their partner later in life.	Boys raised free from outdated masculine stereotypes are more likely to enjoy healthy, respectful relationships later in life.

iv. Economic arguments

Sometimes, communicators use the argument that our audience should care about violence against women because of its economic costs. This can be an effective argument if you're targeting decision-makers and perhaps businesses because they tend to place great importance on economic development and profit. However, communicators should be cautious about using this argument towards public audiences. Making the economic impact of something the measure of whether your audience should care about it reinforces ways of thinking and worldviews that are incompatible with the kinds of attitudes communicators need to stimulate.

First, this way of reasoning allows necessary measures to tackle violence against women

to be dismissed if they are deemed too costly compared to their economic benefits. Second, at a deeper psychological level, it reinforces a competitive worldview where people see society as naturally hierarchical and with limited resources, where the goal is to accumulate as much wealth and power in order to maintain one's position against others trying to climb the ladder. The stronger this worldview is in your audience, the harder it is for them to support the social and economic equality needed to address violence against women.

What works better?

This is not to say you cannot talk about economic issues at all. But if you want to talk about economic issues with a public audience, try to keep it focused on 'kitchen table' economics.

Rather than talking about how violence against women costs lost working days, GDP or productivity, talk about relatable, personal consequences that are linked to values like freedom, self-determination, care and wanting the best for our loved ones. For example, someone might not be able to support their family because they can no longer work, or they might have to give up a promising career or drop out of education due to physical or mental health problems that result from experiences of violence.

v. *Passive language*

Our sector often speaks in the passive voice when pointing out problems. e.g. ‘... country x has a problem with violence against women.’ For (quasi-)state and international institutions working on the topic, this may be a deliberate tactic to avoid antagonising governments. But if your goal is to encourage your audience to support a solution you are advancing, they need to understand that the problem is rooted in decisions taken by people. Your audience will only see that the problem can be solved by people if they recognise that it was created by people.

What works better?

To the greatest extent possible, point out who or what is causing the problem, and why. At one end of the scale, this can be done diplomatically, by explaining that we as a society have put in place or maintained particular rules that no longer fit with what most of us want and are creating harmful results. At the other end of the scale, you can be more pointed and highlight particular movements with radical

agendas, causing harm for political gain. What you choose will depend on what your organisation is comfortable with, whether you’re dealing with deliberate attacks against gender equality and who your audience is. Below are some examples of how to move away from passive language.

The examples are illustrative, not prescriptive. For example, the alternatives given for using the term ‘gender pay gap’ do not exhaustively cover the different manifestations or causes of the problem. The point is to illustrate how to move from using passive language (which can make the problem seem inevitable or natural) to active language that shows the audience that someone is doing something to cause the problem. Talking about it this way makes it more likely your audience will understand that they have the power to change the situation by deciding that things should be done differently.

FROM THIS	TO THIS
European countries have a problem with violence against women.	European governments are not doing enough to prevent and protect women and girls from harassment and attacks.' / 'European governments are not doing enough to educate young people about how to have respectful and healthy relationships when they grow up.
Women do more housework than men.	Women are more likely to be judged than men for not doing housework and end up doing the majority of it.
It's wrong that women earn less than men in the x industry.	It's wrong for x companies to pay women less than men for the same work.
Gender inequality is still a problem in country x.	Unfair assumptions / pressures / treatment of people based on gender / discrimination based on gender / outdated stereotypes or ideas about gender mean that [insert relevant unequal outcome].
There is a gender pay gap	Employers are paying women who work for them less than men.' / 'Employers are not paying the women who care for our old and sick relatives, clean our offices, teach our kids or prepare our meals enough to support their families.

vi. Language that is too technical or abstract

The type of campaigns on violence against women that this guide has discussed tend to do well at using non-technical, concrete language that will be understood by the target audience. But given the way that the gender equality

sector as a whole tends to communicate, it's likely that once you begin running campaigns on the broader aspects of violence against women, technical and abstract language will become a problem.

It's important to adjust the complexity of your language according to what your audience

understands. When talking to experts, you can use technical terms. You can probably use technical terms for your base as well, because they are likely to know a lot about the topic. But a moveable middle audience is unlikely to understand, and using language that your audience doesn't understand does not make you seem smart or credible. Rather, your audience will feel like they aren't clever or informed enough to take part in the debate and they will tune out. This is the opposite of what you want. Examples of technical language on the current topic probably include intimate partner violence, doxing, non-consensual sexting, femicide, intersectional discrimination, gender-based violence.

A related problem is using language that is too abstract. Abstract terms make it difficult for your audience to appreciate that the cause you're promoting delivers something they find important. Saying something like, 'this is important because it promotes gender equality / democracy / human rights' is probably too abstract for your audience to appreciate how these principles deliver something that they care about.

Another problem with abstract or technical language is that your audience probably doesn't know what they mean even when they use it themselves. At best, it means you're saying one thing, and your audience is hearing something else. For example, research in Australia found that many people don't know what 'masculinity'

means and conflate it with 'men'. Through public opinion research, they found it better to refer to masculinity as a 'stereotype' or 'outdated set of ideas' because this implies that it's something external to men and undesirable.⁸ It is likely that when communicators use the term 'violence against women', your audience is probably thinking of physical attacks and not necessarily the full range of behaviours that you're referring to.

What works better?

Communicators could consider drawing up a list of terms used by your organisation and review how likely it is that your target audience understands these in the same way as you do. Take into account how you see the terms being used in the media, by politicians and on social media. If possible, make it part of your public opinion research.

As a general rule, make your language as simple, concrete and tangible as possible. This will often involve forcing yourself to be very specific. For example, instead of using the term 'violence against women', consider spelling out with examples, the kinds of acts you're talking about, such as: stalking, harassment, physical attacks, rape, humiliating remarks, groping, mental abuse. Instead of using an abstract concept like 'equality', just pick out the particular aspect of equality you're talking about in the current context. Below are some more examples.

8 For more useful tips on how to talk about masculinity, including sample messaging, check out [Victoria Health Promotion Foundation, 'Framing masculinity: Message guide', 2020.](#)

FROM THIS	TO THIS
Women's rights are human rights.	No matter our genders / whether we are a man or a woman, all of us should have the same opportunities to do well in life / should be treated with dignity and respect. ⁹
Gender-based violence is wrong.	Most of us want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe whether they're at home, at work, out with friends or taking the bus across town / Overwhelmingly, we agree that it's wrong to harass, stalk, or humiliate a woman or girl with sexual comments.
We want equality for transgender persons	No one should be made to feel unsafe, unwelcome or humiliated just because they are transgender. / All of us deserve respect and the freedom to be who we are whatever our genders. / Most people agree we should be free to be true to ourselves / our authentic selves, whether we are transgender or not.

⁹ This guide often refers to 'genders' in the sample messaging. This is because message testing in the USA found that using the plural 'genders' rather than 'gender' can make your audience more accepting of the fact that there are more than two genders. See: [ASO Communications et al., 'Messaging guide: Transgender youth and the freedom to be ourselves', April 2022, 9.](#)

<i>FROM THIS</i>	<i>TO THIS</i>
<p>We must strive for gender equality.</p>	<p>No matter our gender / whether we are a man or a woman... all of us deserve to be treated with respect / the freedom to express ourselves / the same opportunities to do well in life / to feel safe whether we're walking home or chatting on social media / to be paid enough to support our families / to share the load fairly when it comes to caring for kids and doing housework. / Most people agree that your gender should not get in the way of you leading the life you choose. / We all want to be respected as unique individuals with our own interests, skills and aspirations, no matter our gender. / We expect people to treat each other as equals, no matter their gender.</p>

vii. Check whether your language has been hijacked by your opponent

Another downside of using technical and abstract language is that when most people don't understand the terms you're using, movements with authoritarian agendas find it easier to subvert the language we use to talk about our causes. Depending on the country, examples of this can include 'critical race theory', 'feminism', 'gender' or 'NGO'. Of course, authoritarian movements also subvert or redefine everyday terms like 'migrant' or 'family'. In general, it's best to avoid terms that have been captured by our opponents.

What works better?

As suggested above, review the terms you use to check whether you might be using wording that means something negative to your audience. If you conclude that a term you want to use probably has negative connotations for the audience you want to talk to, then you have to make a decision.

First, you can consider using an alternative. For example, if your audience research finds that the term 'feminism' is misunderstood as something negative by the people you want to talk to, then try describing what feminism delivers to our lives.

FROM THIS	TO THIS
I am a feminist.	I believe that the opportunities we have in life shouldn't be limited just because someone is a man or a woman. / All of us should have the same chances to do well in life, no matter our gender.

The second option you have is to reclaim the term. It's up to you to decide how important the term is to achieving your goals and take into account that mounting campaigns to change the meaning of a word will require significant time, resources and collaboration.

When the meaning of a particular term is deeply entrenched in public thinking, it will make more sense to use a different term, rather than trying to change its meaning. For example, researchers in Australia tested different messages aimed at persuading their audience that we need to change harmful masculine stereotypes. One approach they tested was to take an existing phrase of the 'real man' and try to change what this meant to their audiences. This involved using statements like a 'real man' protects women and having 'real strength' means being able to cry. Researchers found this wasn't persuasive, in part because this phrase kept triggering traditional ideas of what it means to be a 'real man', which didn't fit with the new messages. Instead, what worked better were messages that explained that men are constrained by harmful gender stereotypes

and that by freeing them from these outdated ideas, men can be 'good human beings / people', 'decent men'.¹⁰ By way of illustration, this would mean that instead of using a message like 'real men show their emotions', 'it's healthy to show your emotions, and we should free men from harmful gender stereotypes so they can express themselves', would work better.

The importance of family

If there is one term that our sector cannot afford to surrender, it's 'family'. Family is most probably a term that has not been captured by movements with authoritarian agendas. Nevertheless, many equality campaigners feel uncomfortable talking about 'family' because authoritarian movements have tried to claim the term. The latter claim that causes like gender equality threaten 'families', which they want to protect, and define 'family' as made up of a man, woman and biological children, where each member must conform to certain restrictive roles in a hierarchy. The equality sector cannot afford not to talk about 'family'

¹⁰ [Victoria Health Promotion Foundation, 'Framing masculinity: Message guide', 2020.](#)

as a term. This is because it tends to be one of the most important things in a person's life.

Communicators can talk about family in two ways. First, we must show our audiences that fighting violence against women and girls is important for them because doing so protects relatives and close friends they consider 'family'. Second, where relevant, we can also change the frame that people have for family. For example, you may find through audience research that the people you need to speak to are wary about supporting certain measures to protect victims of violence because they think it could lead to family break-up, whereas your audience favours trying to keep families together. It could also be the case that this audience conceives of 'family' primarily in terms of living arrangements, that is, as a couple living in one household with children. To overcome your audience's resistance to your solutions, you may need to reframe their idea of 'family' to centre instead on something like the existence of loving, respectful, supportive relationships and a safe, stable environment.

For an example of communications that reframed the concept of 'family' see the #FamilyIsFamily campaign in Hungary.¹¹ Here, campaigners were trying to stimulate public support for same-sex parents to have the same parental rights as mixed couples. Part of this involved shifting the frame people had of

'family' away from man-woman-child(ren) and focusing instead on the essence of what it means to be a good parent: to provide a loving, caring environment for your children. Under this alternative frame of family, the gender of the parents becomes irrelevant, making it nonsensical for the law to distinguish between same sex and mixed sex couples.

viii. Avoid direct contradictions and 'myth-busting' formats

As noted, the field of gender equality is one where movements with authoritarian agendas are actively spreading misinformation to undermine public support. Communicators have a habit of reacting to our opponents' lies by directly contradicting them, using facts to counter their claims. Simply fact-checking misinformation can be OK when we're only talking to our supporters, whose views on gender equality are set and aligned with ours. But when talking to the moveable middle, directly contradicting misinformation tends to backfire.

When we try to counter our opponents by directly contradicting their claims, we can end up reinforcing the original damaging message in the mind of moveable middle audiences, rather than the correction. By contradicting a claim we end up repeating it, and repetition makes information stick in the brain.¹² The

11 See: <https://www.acsaladazcsalad.hu/home> and https://www.instagram.com/a_csalad_az_csalad/ for examples of communications materials from this campaign.

12 See review of research in: Schwarz, N. et al., 'Making the truth stick and the myths fade: Lessons from cognitive psychology' 2 Behavioural Science and Policy (2016), 85.

emotive words carry more weight and the words we use to negate the false claim ('no', 'not', 'no one', 'nothing') get forgotten. For example, saying that 'gender equality will not destroy the family' is more likely to be remembered as 'gender equality will destroy the family'.

DISSOLVING NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES

Having read the above, you will hopefully recognise that direct contradictions of negative stereotypes are unlikely to be effective at dissolving these and are, instead, likely to just reinforce the original negative way of thinking. It's likely that victim-blaming tropes, because they have been so commonly entrenched in our cultures, are stuck in your audience's mind, even if they say that they disagree with them. So campaigners should rethink using statements like 'never asking for it' or 'never her fault' superimposed over an image of a woman because this unconsciously reinforces the message 'she was asking for it'.

Communicators could consider using **three** other approaches if your message is going to reach moveable middle audiences - either directly or through being spread by your supporters. **First**, remind your audience that you're not talking about some fictional person who could fit a negative stereotype. Remind them that we're talking about people dear to them, some of whom have inevitably been victims of violence. **Second**, make use of storytelling and choose messengers wisely when getting your narrative across. Your audience is likely to drop a negative stereotype once you stimulate empathy and they realise that we're talking about people like them or similar to women and girls in their lives. **Third**, explain why the negative stereotypes persist, and if relevant, whether there is an ulterior motive behind it. Are these stereotypes being perpetuated by advertising companies because those in charge are out of touch with what the public thinks, or by religious institutions who want to recover lost power and influence over people's private lives? People are more likely to discount information when they question the credibility of the source.

What works better?

The guide will cover how to counter misinformation in more detail in Part IV, by exploring reframing and truth sandwiches. In sum, you should respond by reframing the issue with your own message that reminds your audience

why they should agree with your cause. If you have space, you can expand this into a truth sandwich by pointing out that your opponent is lying and naming their ulterior motive. Below are a couple examples of what reframing (but not a truth sandwich) looks like.

Attack	Respectful relationships education is teaching students about radical gender theory.
Traditional response	Respectful relationships education isn't teaching students about radical gender theory.
Reframed response	Respectful relationships education helps students question outdated gender stereotypes.

Attack	Transgender persons are a threat to the safety of our women and girls.
Traditional response	Transgender persons are not a threat to women's safety.
Reframed response	Most people think it's wrong to discriminate against someone because they are transgender and want to find practical and fair solutions on things like sports and changing rooms.

Attack	The Istanbul Convention gives women privileges over men.
Traditional response	The Istanbul Convention does not privilege women over men.
Reframed response	The Istanbul Convention gives us the tools to demand that we all get the same opportunities and the same protection, no matter our genders / whether we are a woman or a man.

ix. Educational approaches

There is a tendency among the human rights and equality sectors to try to educate our audiences into agreeing with us. This tends to involve breaking down complicated concepts or explaining legal texts or their origins. Sometimes this is combined with myth-busting, for instance by explaining to our audience how the Istanbul Convention isn't a foreign imposition because our government was involved in writing it and because gender equality is already part of our obligations under other treaties.

The problem with educational or legalistic approaches is that they tend to hide from the audience what you're committing to deliver that they find important. If you want your audience to care about the Istanbul Convention, then you need to explain how it makes life better for them and the people they care about. For people outside our base, because it's part of international law' / 'because we wrote it' is not a reason to care.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

Our sector tends to refer to legal documents as a reason why our audience should care about something. As if when something is recognised in a legal document, this should make it important to people. We need to approach legal documents from the opposite direction.

1. If a particular rule or standard gets put into a treaty, then it must deliver something really important. What is it that it delivers? Focus on talking about this. e.g. 'all of us want the women and girls we care about to feel safe'.
2. If you need to have a conversation about the Istanbul Convention at all, talk about it as a tool that allows us to force governments to deliver the values that we share with our audience: safety for women and girls, freedom from harmful and limiting stereotypes, a path to safety for women and their families, a chance to repair and rebuild after being a victim of violence.

Although formal human rights education has been shown to make students more supportive of human rights, we are not communicating in an educational setting. We cannot force our audience to absorb hours of our materials. For our purposes, educational content is a useful tool for helping our base or journalists deepen their knowledge. But it doesn't work

well at moving over the moveable middle. This isn't to say that we cannot give the moveable middle new information and perspectives. But we need to do this in the confines of what we know makes for persuasive messaging. In Part IV communicators can see examples of how to do this.

FROM	TO
<p>Experts from our country helped to write the Istanbul Convention and our government approved the text. Gender equality is already part of our international legal obligations.</p>	<p>We all want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe. But today someone you care about has already been or will be harassed, stalked, humiliated by sexual remarks, groped or worse. If we want our partners, daughters, granddaughters and female friends to live free from violence, then we have to change the rules that allow this problem to happen. The Istanbul Convention gives us a way to force politicians to do their job and keep us all safe, no matter our gender.</p>
<p>Multiple discrimination refers to a situation where someone faces discrimination on several grounds, such as their gender, sexual orientation and their religion or ethnicity.</p>	<p>No matter our genders, who we love, who we pray to or the colour of our skin we all deserve to be treated with the same respect and dignity and have the same chances in life.</p>

Part III: How to build narratives for a life free of violence

Part III will explain how communicators can apply the narrative structure summarised in Part II to grow support among public audiences for measures that will prevent, intervene in and repair the damage caused by violence

against women and girls. While users will be offered some illustrative examples along the way, most of the sample messaging will be set out in Part IV.

SUMMARY OF THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

1. Values statement: tell your audience how the cause you are advancing delivers something that they find important for themselves, people they care about or people whom they consider to be like them.
2. Explain the problem: show your audience that the things they care about are at risk or aren't being delivered. Set out who or what is causing the problem and why.
3. Explain the vision your solution delivers: tell your audience what the world will look like if your solution is put into practice. This is often a call-back to the substance of the values statement. Do name your solution, but don't dwell on the policy details.
4. If necessary, show your audience that change is possible by reminding them of past positive social changes, and tell your audience what they can do to show their support for your solution.

Step 1. Values statement: why should your audience care?

This step is designed to remind your audience of something they find important for themselves, people they care about or people they consider to be like them, and then show them how the cause you are promoting delivers this. There are many issues competing for your

audience's attention. Recent surveys suggest that the top concerns of the public across EU countries tend to relate to their own material needs, such as their financial position, growing economic inequality, their ability to access housing, the state of key services like health

care and education and existential threats like the climate crisis and war in the region. It's possible to verify your audience's top concerns by looking at publicly available survey data or commissioning your own research.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'VALUES'?

We're not talking about values in the sense of what organisations themselves have determined they stand for in their internal documents. This guide uses 'values' in the scientific sense from the theory of basic values developed by Shalom Schwartz in the field of social psychology, validated by decades of empirical evidence. Values are subconsciously held guiding principles that determine our attitudes and opinions and influence our behaviour. While our supporters and our opponents are fixed in the values they prioritise, the moveable middle shift the values they prioritise depending on the messages they are exposed to. Our opponents deliberately trigger values relating to religion, tradition, security, and socio-economic hierarchies because these underpin opposition to equality. When messaging to create support for equality and rights, it's important to appeal to values relating to things like individual freedom and autonomy, creativity and development, solidarity, care and compassion for others. Triggering these values allows makes your audience more likely to recognise that a life free of violence for women and girls is something that they find important. For more information about values and how they affect attitudes see: [Holmes, T. et al., 'The Common Cause Handbook', 2012.](#)

Communicators have at least **three options** to elevate the goal of a life free from violence for women and girls into your audience's top concerns.

First, identify something that your audience finds important, which is put at risk by violence against women. This could be directly related. For example, our desire to feel physically safe - and therefore free to move around or be ourselves - in our places of work, when socialising, when travelling between places, or in the home. This is where communicators tend to focus at the moment.

But we could also think about other values that violence against women threatens indirectly. Research suggests that women victims of violence and their children may suffer a range of physical and mental health problems, which make it harder to live what your audience would consider a 'normal' life with all the things that they want for themselves. So communicators could also appeal to things like our desire to be physically and mentally healthy, and the freedom and independence that this gives us so that we can do things like build meaningful relationships with friends and family, fulfil our dreams and develop our potential by pursuing

an education, or support our families by being able to find and hold on to a decent job.

Second, communicators should tie the chosen values to your audience's loved ones. Many people in your audience will never experience violence themselves, and this can mean that the topic won't become a priority for them because they consider it to be someone else's problem. But everyone in your audience will have girls and women in their lives whom they care for and for whom they want a good life. We should remind them that being free from violence or having the freedom to thrive is important not just because they want it for themselves, but because they want it for their family and friends.

Third, as discussed, attacks against gender equality (along with other grounds of equality)

are often part of a strategy by movements with authoritarian movements to acquire or maintain political power. Either such attacks are used to mobilise a voter base, or to deflect blame for voters' problems onto marginalised groups or to distract voters from genuine problems onto manufactured threats. For example, certain politicians may attack feminist causes to shift public attention away from tax cuts to the ultra-wealthy and the defunding of public services; or they may blame feminists for social problems that have really been caused by the government failing to create secure, well-paying jobs. In sum, attacks on gender equality are often part of a strategy to avoid solving the problems that genuinely worry your audience. If communicators are messaging in this context, you can bring violence against women and girls into your audience's top concerns by showing that they are linked in this way.

WHERE DO WE NEED MORE DATA?

Find out: what are your audience's top concerns and how importantly do they rank solving violence against women and girls; what are the things that your audiences value which are threatened by violence against women and girls (e.g. health, independence, safety, freedom to move / express yourself / be yourself, ability to pursue a career and education); to what extent does your audience recognise that movements with authoritarian agendas are attacking gender equality as a strategy to acquire and maintain power?

Step 2. Explain the problem: set out the harm, and who or what is causing it and why

Explain the harm

As noted, current campaigns on violence against women tend to focus primarily on the physical and sometimes on the mental harms. Often campaigns do this only implicitly, through their choice of statistics. It is important to highlight these harms expressly. But in addition, campaigners should expand their focus to the broader consequences of these physical and mental harms, such as chronic physical and mental health problems and their impact on one's ability to live a 'normal' life.

This is for two reasons. First, it's likely that your audience defaults to thinking about short-term recovery from physical injuries when thinking about solutions around violence against women. But if you want to build support for solutions like funding for services that provide long-term physical or mental health care, you need to make your audience aware that these harms exist. Second, acts of violence don't only affect our safety. Through their primary and secondary effects, they also affect our ability to do other things that we value, like study, advance in our careers or form meaningful relationships. By naming these other harms, we can show our audience how violence against women and girls threatens other things that they value, beyond physical safety.

Explain why it's happening

Although we are very good at showing our audience the harms we want to remedy, we're not good at explaining to them why they're happening. It's important for our audience to understand that the problem we want to solve isn't inevitable or natural and that it has been created by people who decided to make certain norms, laws or policies. If people made the problem, then people can also decide to fix it by doing things differently in future. Explaining the problem makes it more likely that your audience will take the action your campaign is asking of them because it will help them see that we can do something to change the situation.

To know what to put in our message by way of explaining the problem, it's important to know what our audience already thinks about the problem: what do they already know, how accurate is their understanding, what gaps exist in their knowledge? Although the moveable middle might agree with us that violence against women and girls is wrong, where they differ from our base is probably that they hold conflicted and mistaken beliefs about why the problem is happening.

Without public opinion research on a given country that segments our audiences and digs into how they think, we can't say for certain what our audience thinks are the causes of violence against women and girls. But we can make some sensible assumptions. Experts have found that certain ways of thinking are common in public opinion across different social

justice-related topics.¹³ There is also research into public thinking on racial discrimination in the USA and the UK¹⁴ and gender equality in Australia,¹⁵ which offers us some clues on how public audiences probably think about violence against women because it is also a form and manifestation of discrimination. Moveable middle audiences tend to hold contradictory beliefs at the same time, which is apparent from the summary below. Part of our job is to build on those ways of thinking that will help our audience understand the issue in the way that we do. The following three bullet points summarise what a moveable middle audience is likely to think about discrimination more generally:

- Discrimination is caused by individuals who are prejudiced. That is, discrimination is caused by bad apples, rather than bad systems and structures that perpetuate it. But discrimination also exists in institutions, such as through hiring practices, and the media is responsible for perpetuating negative stereotypes.
- Women and men should have the same opportunities in life. But there are natural differences between women and men, which make them suited to different roles.

- We have made lots of progress towards equality (more than is actually the case). Progress happens from one generation to the next, which means that as a society, there's not much we can actively do to improve the situation. But the education system also has the power to teach people not to be prejudiced, and one of the reasons things are better now than before is that we have laws that punish discrimination.

Based on this, it's likely that when we talk about violence against women, the moveable middle defaults towards thinking about the causes in the following ways:

- It's primarily caused by bad individuals who think it's OK to use violence, and it's more likely to be caused by men because men are naturally more violent than women;
- It's hard to mitigate because individual victims feel that they cannot escape a situation of violence or seek support or report an incident, and people in the social network or physical proximity of the victim and perpetrator are reluctant to intervene;
- The media has some responsibility for violence against women because music, film and other entertainment sometimes still portray negative behaviour as if it's normal.

13 <https://publicinterest.org.uk/narratives-we-need/>.

14 Equally Ours, 'How to shift public attitudes on equality', 2019; Gilliam, F., 'The architecture of a new racial discourse', Frameworks Institute, 2006; ICM Unlimited, 'Reframing Race: How the public talk about "race", racial equality and racism', 2020.

15 Victoria Health Promotion Foundation, 'Framing gender equality: Messaging guide', 2021.

These ways of thinking might even be perpetuated by the dominant campaigns on violence against women because they tend to focus on correcting individual behaviour rather than focusing on systems, laws and policies.

Our audience is less likely to think:

- There are deeper root causes, like the fact that enduring stereotypes about traditional gender roles make violence against women and girls more likely and that these stereotypes are perpetuated by various industries like advertising, gaming, clothing and toys and institutions like the education system and religious bodies.
- There are structural factors that make violence hard to disrupt, such as a lack of fairly paid work in professions dominated by women, and a lack of support services like housing and financial support which make it harder for victims to remove themselves and dependents from danger; lack of specially trained police, health workers and judges to identify, report, investigate and try offences while keeping the victim and dependents safe;
- There are structural factors that make it harder to repair the damage, such as long-term physical and mental health care, education, employment and housing support.

Our messaging needs to fill in these blanks for our audiences, because they need to share our understanding of the problem for our solutions to make sense. For example, if the object of a campaign is to grow support for introducing respectful relationships teaching at school, but we don't explain that harmful stereotypes are a root cause of violence, then our audience defaults to thinking that violence is simply the product of bad or violent people. In which case, measures like prosecution and punishment to deal with the perpetrator will make sense to them, but not measures related to education.

As noted above, moveable middle audiences probably do already have some awareness that certain structural factors play a role, like institutions, education, the media, the law, and economic hardship - they're just unlikely to be the first thing that they think of. But we can build on what's there. Part IV includes examples that put these explanations into messages.

Communicators might feel that the range of structural causes is large and complicated, making it hard to communicate to audiences. You should keep in mind that we don't need to do all of this in one message or even in one campaign. An organisation working in this area would do well to come up with a long-term strategy that breaks down the range of things that need to change to eliminate violence against women and girls and then build a series of campaigns around smaller goals.

POINTING TO 'MEN' AS THE PROBLEM

The vast majority of violence against women is carried out by men,¹⁶ which can make it tempting to allocate blame for violence against women with 'men'. Whatever the factual and moral merits of this position may be, there are several reasons why it's not a good idea to make this part of your messaging towards a moveable middle audience. First, it probably reinforces the thinking that violence against women and girls is rooted in the actions of bad individuals rather than the systems and structures that make violence more likely to happen. Second, it's easy for your audience to interpret such an assertion to mean that all men are bad or potential perpetrators, which is asking them to think negatively about people your audience cares about and probably doesn't seem plausible. Third, if your audience includes men, then this message risks making them feel shame, guilt or defensiveness, which will cause them to reject your message.

Explain who is behind the problem

If relevant and politically feasible for your organisation, it's helpful to point out to your audience when there is a particular actor behind the problem. Broadly speaking, you have three options.

First, you might be talking about an aspect of the problem where there isn't really a particular actor to blame, or you may find through message testing that your audience reacts better to messages that don't assign blame. In this situation, it can simply be a case of telling your audience that we put in place certain laws and policies in the past that worked for our societies then. But, these rules have not kept pace with what people in society want today and it's time to modernise them.

Second, in other situations, it might be possible to point to certain actors who are blocking change. It may be appropriate to combine this with the first option. For example, if your goal is for women to be more economically independent (as a way to address power imbalances between women and men), you may be campaigning for those sectors of the employment market, like the care and education sectors, which are dominated by women and are underpaid, to be paid fairly. These demands might face resistance from businesses who want to maintain their profits or public services that are underfunded. In this kind of situation, you can explain that our leaders are putting corporate interests first instead of doing what's best for ordinary people by refusing to make them either pay the people who work for them enough to live on, or refusing to tax them properly to pay for teachers.

16 See for example, Our Watch, 'ABS Personal Safety Survey: Women are still not safe and some are at higher risk of experiencing violence than others', 2023.

Third, in other situations, you may be facing a more active attack on gender equality, such as campaigns that oppose ratification of the Istanbul Convention. These campaigns often use misinformation to undermine public support for equality. Here, it's important to point out who is doing this and expose that they

have ulterior, negative motives. Such as diverting public attention from certain political problems, creating instability or mobilising an extremist voter base. Part IV will set out how to deal with misinformation in greater detail with examples using a 'truth sandwich'.

WHERE DO WE NEED MORE DATA?

Find out: the extent to which your audience is already aware of the direct and indirect harms that result from violence against women and girls; how well does your audience differentiate between prevention, intervention and repair dimensions of the problem; to what extent do they explain the problem by reference to individuals or to systemic causes; to what extent do they find explanations about systemic causes convincing and if not, why not; does your audience recognise that negative gender stereotypes continue to dominate public thinking and do they understand how these stereotypes get perpetuated; how explicit do you need to be about the actors responsible and their motivation for your message to be persuasive?

Step 3. Your vision & solution

It's important to show your audience that you have a solution which will bring the problematic situation (set out in Step 2) back in line with what people find important (set out in Step 1). Otherwise, your audience is more likely to think that the problem can't be solved, which will make them less likely to take any action your campaign is asking of them. There are two rules you should apply with setting out this part of your narrative.

First, name the solution, but don't get bogged down in legal or policy talk. Of course, you should elaborate on legal and policy solutions

with decision-makers and expert audiences, but it will turn off public audiences. Rather, you should spend more time setting out your vision: when your solution gets implemented, what will things look like? This is not to say that you don't need to be prepared to explain how your solutions work or why they are the right ones when asked in an interview or to have more details ready for those who want to go deeper, for example in FAQs or explainers on a campaign website. But in the limited space you usually have for delivering your message, focus more attention on the vision.

Second, the vision you set out should correspond to the things you appealed to in your values statement. For example, imagine your

campaign is going to build public support to address gender stereotypes. The values statement of your message might therefore remind your audience that we want the girls and boys in our families to grow up free from outdated stereotypes that tell them that there are certain things that they can and can't do because of their gender. When you set out the vision that

your solution delivers, it should fit with this values statement, for example: 'when we stop forcing limiting stereotypes on our children they are free to pursue their dreams and reach their full potential.' A vision that talks about feeling free to get home safe, for example, wouldn't fit well here.

WHERE DO WE NEED MORE DATA?

Find out: the extent to which your audience already understands and is supportive of the solutions you're suggesting; which formulations of your vision are best at making your audience say they'd be willing to take the kinds of actions you might ask of them in a campaign, like sharing content, signing a petition, joining a march or donating.

Step 4. Past Successes and call to action

By asking your audience to do something to show that they support your solution you help to build their attachment to your cause. Research shows that when people take action to support a cause it helps create a 'social identity' for them, which in turn makes them more likely to remain engaged and take further action in future.¹⁷ This is important if you're trying to expand your base of supporters to mobilise in future campaigns. A call to action

can be something small like asking them to share or respond to your content.

Research also shows that even when you convince your audience to agree with you, they can still be reluctant to do things you ask of them because they have a sense of fatalism and feel that 'nothing changes'.¹⁸ As noted above, research on attitudes in certain countries on discrimination suggests that your audiences might think that there's not much we as a society can do to improve the situation because progress happens by itself from one generation to the next. At the same time, it seems that

17 See e.g., Bamberg, S. et al., 'Environmental protection through societal change: What psychology knows about collective climate action - and what it needs to find out', in *Psychology and Climate Change* (2018).

18 For an example of how fatalism affects your audience see: NEON, NEF, Frameworks Institute & PIRC, 'Framing the economy: How to win the case for a better system', (2018).

people recognise the power of legal changes and education to change attitudes and behaviour.

Considering this, it's likely that your audiences will need reminding a) that there have been positive changes in society in the past and b) this didn't happen by itself, it happened because we decided to change laws, policies and practices. The examples of past successes you give need not relate directly to the field of gender equality, as long as they resonate with your cultural context. Having said this, this is a field where notable progress has been made

in the past, so there should be lots of examples from within the topic to choose from. Here are some of what this part of the narrative can look like:

'Just like we joined together to achieve paid parental leave / marriage equality / free pre-school day care / care for each other during the pandemic ... we can demand that our leaders... If you agree, share this content / talk to a neighbour / tell us why you care and include the campaign hashtag ...'

WHERE DO WE NEED MORE DATA?

Find out: whether your target audiences think the problem is inevitable or too big to be solved, or that it will solve itself if we do nothing; what kinds of examples of progress from the past are best at making your audience realise that they have the power to make the changes you're calling for?

Things to keep in mind when converting your narrative into communications assets

i: How to use the four-part narrative structure

Follow the four-part structure in full as often as you can. Some formats make it possible to use a full narrative, or allow you to add to the narrative with more detail, statistics, storytelling elements, or hooks for the media. For

example, press releases, speeches, lines to take in an interview, or a video script.

Of course, it won't always be appropriate or possible to deliver the narrative in full every time. Sometimes you will be using communications formats with limited space. In this situation it's fine to use only part of your narrative. Choose which part of the narrative to focus on according to what you think your audience needs to hear the most. For example, if you think your audience doesn't understand why the problem is happening, you might choose to focus only on this. Or if you think your audience believes that change is too difficult, you might choose to emphasise past successes. Sometimes the format you have available only allows you to

summarise the essence of your narrative, such as when you develop a campaign slogan and image or hashtags.

Look at your campaign materials in the round and ask: are there enough products carrying the whole narrative for my audience to see it; do my communications products either remind my audience of the overall message or help them understand it? And don't forget, you don't need to deliver all your message using words: you can represent elements of it through images and videos. Work with a creative person or agency who has some experience of narrative change work and has worked on social justice-related causes with non-profit organisations to convert your narrative into creative assets for campaigning. For more inspiration you can consult Liberties' online course '[Foundations of Persuasive Progressive Messaging](#)', modules six and seven or part three of Liberties' guide '[How to Message on Human Rights](#)' on audio-visual materials.

ii: Story-telling

Storytelling is an effective tool for making your message less abstract and more relatable for your audience. Campaigners should keep a few things in mind, though. The risk of storytelling is that the storyteller focuses only on the individual they're talking about without including the broader picture such as: how many people are in a similar situation, what are the rules or systems that produced this problem, why are the rules like this and how can we change them? A consequence of storytelling that is only focused on the journey of the protagonist(s) is that although we

might succeed in getting the audience to want to help that individual, we don't change the way that the audience thinks about the issue in general to support changing the system. A more effective way of approaching storytelling is to begin from your narrative. Campaigners can then integrate the story or stories of individuals into the narrative to give life and colour to their narrative.

iii: Messengers

Communicators should keep in mind that the messenger can be as important as the message. Your audience should perceive your messenger as warm, personable, authentic and credible. The latter meaning that they have some competence or experience to speak on the issue and are not perceived as promoting a self-interested agenda. The messenger doesn't just include people who physically repeat your message, but also the people who you show in your visual materials.

Different messengers will be effective for different target audiences. To know for sure whether your messenger will be effective you need to research your audience. If you need to speak to different audiences you can choose to include a mix of messengers or work in coalition with other organisations, including from other sectors such as trade unions or business, and divide your target audiences among yourselves.

There is research from Canada suggesting that feminist activists will not always be regarded as effective messengers by people outside their existing supporters because the public can have a negative view of them as militant, angry,

dictatorial, condescending and generally not very nice. Research participants said that they would be less likely to support causes advanced by activists who fit this stereotype, and more likely to show their support when activists did not fit these stereotypes.¹⁹

The 'ordinary person' as a messenger.

Successive editions of the Edelman Trust Barometer suggest that audiences find 'a person like yourself' to be trusted messengers. This seems to be corroborated by campaigns that have used messengers whom their target audience identify as 'like me'. This means that if your target audience is people from the marginalised group itself, they may be more likely to regard people from their own group as an effective messenger. So if your campaign is focused, for example, on encouraging women who have experienced violence to take action, then featuring women who have experienced violence among your messengers would make sense.

Conversely, it also means that if you're talking to men or women who haven't necessarily been victims of violence, you probably need to include messengers from these groups as well. If you don't, there's a risk this audience would perceive women who have been victims of violence as self-interested in advocating for a cause that benefits them.

This raises an ethical difficulty because often one of the problems campaigners are trying to combat is the fact that people from the groups you're campaigning on have been deprived of a voice in society. Using people messengers from outside the group may well feel like perpetuating the marginalisation you wish to combat. Campaigns have tried to reconcile these concerns by: including messengers both from the affected group and the target audience; by including visual materials that show people from the affected group together as part of a community with people from the target audience in addition to focusing only on people from the affected group.

For the purposes of communicating on violence against women and girls, campaigners could consider, alongside storytelling by women and girls who have experience of violence:

- teachers, parents, grandparents, child psychologists and paediatricians, children themselves, if campaigning for changes relating to education, such as incorporating respectful relationships education into the curricula, or educational measures to dissolve outdated gender stereotypes;
- health care professionals like doctors, nurses, counsellors and psychologists, people who run shelters, if talking about things relating to the short and long-term physical and mental harms caused by violence against women, and the kinds of

19 Bashir, N. Y., et al., 'The ironic impact of activists: Negative stereotypes reduce social change influence.' 43(7) European Journal of Social Psychology (2013).

supportive measures needed to help victims rebuild their lives;

- relatives and friends of women and girls who have experienced violence speaking about their experiences to avoid victims appearing self-interested or at fault and to show that we have the aspirations for our loved ones. This also helps to remind your audience that they should care about the issue because it affects people they love and helps them relate to the messenger.

This list is just meant to give you some inspiration. Communicators should do some testing around who makes for an effective messenger for their target audiences.

Part IV: Sample Messaging

Part IV will set out examples of narratives that could be used to grow public support for the laws and policies that deliver a life free from violence for women and girls. As stated earlier, these suggestions are informed by academic research and case studies on analogous topics in a range of countries. Communicators can be confident that the messages suggested in Part IV are more effective at persuading moveable middle audiences than the way the sector currently messages. However, there are limits, since the guide has not benefited from

public opinion research in target countries and message testing with target audiences. In particular, it's not possible to tell which of the messages would work best with a given audience, whether the messages could be refined, whether certain messages might backfire with particular audiences, or whether other more effective messages could be developed. Communicators can settle these questions by carrying out public opinion research on their target country and message testing with their target audience.

SOME NOTES ON LANGUAGE

Communicators should note that the sample messages tend to use the terms 'gender' or 'women and men' interchangeably. You should decide which term to use based on a couple of considerations. **First**, if 'gender' in your country is seen negatively and misunderstood by your audience, it may make more sense to use 'women and men'. **Second**, using 'women and men' could result in confirming a binary distinction that you don't want to reinforce, for example, if you are speaking in a context about transgender persons. In this situation, you might try using the term 'genders' (e.g. 'no matter our genders...'), which has been found in testing in the USA to weaken the idea that gender is binary and support equal treatment for transgender persons.

Communicators may notice that when the narratives talk about the physical harms, they do not always refer to rape, physical attacks or murder explicitly. Instead, the phrase 'or (much) worse' is sometimes used. The thinking behind this choice of wording is that there's a risk that by using language that invokes horrific experiences, a moveable middle audience will tune out. If the rest of the messaging and broader debate makes clear to your audience that you're also talking about assaults, rapes and murders, you might not always need to spell it out for them explicitly. This is not to say that communicators should avoid expressly mentioning murder, rape and assault. Neither should communicators avoid telling stories that include these experiences. Rather, it's about being aware that your audience may find certain language and imagery too confrontational, which could cause them to disengage. And if through testing you find this to be the case, you should choose wording that will get your point across while not turning off your audience.

The sample narratives tend to refer to the same statistic repeatedly. Communicators should regard this as a placeholder and feel free to adjust the relevant statistics as appropriate. As noted in Part II, it's recommended to try to express the statistic in an easy-to-remember way and avoid using big numbers as these can be so large as to lose their meaning and overwhelm the audience.

While Part III explains a narrative has four steps, we also note that Step 4 may not always be relevant. Furthermore, a call to action is very specific to a given campaign, while a recollection of past successes is very specific to a particular cultural context. Because of this, the sample narratives will mostly include only the first three steps. However, to allow communicators to see what a full four part narrative looks like, the examples in section A will include all four steps. Communicators will notice that in practice, when we include Step 4, the call to action and recollection of past successes, this often gets fused into Step 3, the vision and solution. The call to action, recollection of past successes and campaign hashtag, are merely for purposes of illustration.

Communicators are given a variety of sample narratives. There are three purposes behind this. First, to give you examples that you can try out. Second, allow you to compare how different narratives perform. Third, inspire you to come up with some narratives of your own, even if it's just by altering the ones set out below.

Section A: Overarching narratives

Here are some examples of narratives that talk about violence against women and girls in the

round. Communicators might use this kind of narrative when they feel there is an opening to shift public thinking away from focusing on individual behaviour as the cause of (and punishment as the solution to) violence against women and girls, to recognise that there are different causes and layers to the problem, all of which have their own solutions.

As noted, if the narrative is being communicated through a statement, interview, press release, opinion piece or video, communicators also have the chance to unpack it in more detail. For example, by explaining how stereotypes get perpetuated and contribute to violence, or to explain why training for police and judges makes a difference or set out what kinds of services are needed in the short and long-term, such as shelters, financial support, physical and mental health care and support to find work and a new home. Examples of how to unpack these elements are given in later subsections, which set out sample messaging that is focused on talking about prevention, intervention and repair.

Below are two alternative narratives. One is more aspirational in tone, which emphasises how violence against women and girls can limit the potential of our dreams. It may be that this does not resonate with your audience because they feel that current economic

hardships mean that dreaming isn't something they feel they can afford - and so, they're less likely to support this for other people. To take this into account, the other narrative is more down-to-earth, instead emphasising how violence against women can stop us from having a 'normal' life.

Included are also two variations on the first narrative. One is phrased in a way that creates connection to the issue by reminding the

audience that they want safety and freedom for themselves, while pointing out that this should be the same for all women and men. The other variation creates connection between your audience and the issue by reminding them that they want safety and freedom for the women in their lives. It could be that the former works better for younger people without families, while the latter works better with certain audiences who have long-term partners, children or grandchildren.

INVOKING YOUR AUDIENCE'S SENSE OF CARE FOR LOVED ONES WHO ARE WOMEN AND GIRLS

Communicators may feel reticent about using a message that engages their audience's concern by reminding them that we want women and girls in our lives to feel safe for fear that this reinforces the patriarchal patterns that you are trying to dissolve. You should keep in mind two things.

First, the reason for engaging your audience's concern in this way is to bring the issue higher up their list of concerns. This is important because many other issues are competing for your audience's attention. It's unlikely that violence against women and girls will take priority, especially for a moveable middle audience, without reminding your audience that this affects their family and friends.

Second, as noted elsewhere in the guide, what makes a message effective or not is an empirical question that can be answered through testing. The guide suggests the approach of invoking the audience's sense of care for loved ones because this has proven effective in messaging in parallel fields, such as promoting access to abortion and marriage equality. It could be that this approach backfires with activists and very ardent supporters, but works OK with most of your supporters and well with the moveable middle. By testing the suggested messages, communicators will be able to establish whether they are effective or whether they should be modified or set aside, depending on the target audience.

Aspirational + care for loved ones

Most of us want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe and free to follow their dreams. Whether that's excelling at school or in a career, building meaningful friendships and relationships, spending quality time with family at home or going out with friends.

But today, one in three women and girls already have or will be stalked, groped, harassed, humiliated by sexual remarks, or worse. Someone you care about may be left with long-term physical and mental scars that take away their freedom and destroy their lust for life. All because women and men continue to feel trapped in outdated stereotypes that make this kind of violence more likely, our police and judges don't get the training they need to keep victims safe, and our leaders won't fund the services women and girls need to escape, recover and build a normal life.

It doesn't have to be this way. Just like in the past when we achieved paid parental leave, we can choose to make the changes we need to deliver a life where all our loved ones can feel safe and free to thrive, no matter whether they're women or men, girls or boys / no matter their gender. Show your support for women and girls to feel #SafeandFree by sharing this post.

Aspirational without care for loved ones

No matter our gender / No matter whether we're a man or a woman most of us want to feel safe and free to follow our dreams. Whether that's excelling at school or in a career, building meaningful friendships and relationships, spending quality time with family at home or going out with friends.

But today, one in three women and girls already have or will be stalked, groped, harassed, humiliated by sexual remarks, or worse. Someone you care about may be left with long-term physical and mental scars that take away their freedom and destroy their lust for life. All because women and men continue to feel trapped in outdated stereotypes that make this kind of violence more likely, our police and judges don't get the training they need to keep victims safe, and our leaders won't fund the services women and girls need to escape, recover and build a normal life.

It doesn't have to be this way. Just like in the past when we achieved paid parental leave, we can choose to make the changes we need to deliver a life where all our loved ones can feel safe and free to thrive, no matter whether they're women or men, girls or boys / no matter their gender. Show your support for women and girls to feel #SafeandFree by sharing this post.

Normal life + care for loved ones

Most of us want the women and girls we care about to feel safe and free to live a normal life. Whether that's getting an education, holding down a job to support our families, being able to relax in your home or seeing friends.

But today, one in three women and girls already have or will be stalked, groped, harassed, humiliated by sexual remarks, or worse. Someone you care about may be left with long-term physical and mental scars that take away their freedom and lust for life, destroying their relationships and careers as a result. All because women and men continue to feel trapped in outdated stereotypes that make this kind of violence more likely, our police and judges don't get the training they need to keep victims safe, and our leaders won't fund the services women and girls need to escape, recover and build a normal life.

We don't need to keep choosing this. Just like in the past when we stopped letting employers pay women less than men for doing the same job, we can decide to make the changes we need to create a society where all our loved ones feel safe, so we are all free to get the qualifications, work the job and have the friendships we need to live a decent life, whether we're women or men, girls or boys / whatever our gender. Show your support for women and girls to feel #SafeandFree by sharing this post.

Section B: Narratives focusing on the root causes

Here are some examples of narratives that focus on the perpetuation of traditional gender stereotypes as one of the major root causes of violence against women. As noted, these sample narratives do not include Step 4 (the recollection of past successes and call to action). This is not to say that gender stereotypes are the sole root cause of violence against women and girls. Where communicators wish to talk about other root causes, use the example messages below for inspiration and adapt them as needed.

These example narratives have used a range of different values. All of them appeal to our desire for women and girls to be safe, even if this does appear in the values statement. Sometimes the values statement focuses on other values like wanting to be treated with respect, be healthy, free from harmful stereotypes and have the same opportunities in life.

These sample narratives don't talk about the desire to have 'dreams' or a 'normal life' like the overarching narratives above. The reason for this is that it felt more natural to talk about these long-term issues in the narratives that look at the repair dimension of violence against women, where we put emphasis on having support in place so people can (re)build their lives.

As noted, without public opinion research and testing, it's not possible to know which approach works best for which audiences, so communicators are encouraged to do some testing, even if that just means comparing how different messages perform with their audience.

Among other things, these sample narratives try to explain the link between the prevalence of gender stereotypes and violence against women. It's important not to direct blame at your audience, or they will tune out of your

message. So stereotypes are framed as an external and harmful constraint on women and men, which pressures us into certain behaviours and life choices. It's also probably important to explain why stereotypes get perpetuated - especially when public opinion research suggests large majorities disagree with them.²⁰ This is why the suggested messaging points to certain industries, political actors and religious institutions that perpetuate them and explains why.

STEREOTYPES AS CONSTRAINTS

The way that the narratives in this guide talk about stereotypes is based on research and testing from Australia. Campaigners trying to address the damage caused by masculine stereotypes found agreement among the moveable middle that people should be free to explore and develop who they are without pressure from gender stereotypes, and that what we value in a man is what we should value in all people, regardless of their gender. In testing, campaigners found that it was more effective to talk about the need to free men from traditional masculine stereotypes and point to the damage these stereotypes can cause, rather than talk about modernising masculinity to make it 'healthy' or broadening the idea of masculinity to recognise that there are many ways to be a man. The same research found that, additionally, referring to stereotypes as old-fashioned or outdated was effective for younger audiences. Several of the suggested narratives in this section draw from recommended messaging from this research. Communicators are encouraged to verify whether this way of talking about stereotypes is also persuasive in the countries they work in.²¹

Root causes: stereotypes general

Most of us want to feel safe and respected whether we're a man or a woman / no matter our gender. / Most of us want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe and respected.

20 For recent research on gender stereotypes in public opinion see: [European Commission, 'Gender Stereotypes', Special Eurobarometer 545, 2024.](#)

21 [Victoria Health Promotion Foundation, 'Framing masculinity: Message guide', 2020](#)

But the chances are, there's a woman or girl in your life who's been stalked or harassed, humiliated by catcalling or sexual jokes or worse. Even though most of us agree this is wrong, women and men still feel pressured to fit the outdated stereotypes that lead some people to think this kind of behaviour is OK, or even expected of them.

When we free women and men from harmful stereotypes, all of us can feel safe and respected / the people we care about can feel safe and be treated with respect.

Root causes: stereotypes that harm men & women (emphasis on men)

We all want the men in our lives to be respectful, caring and loving.

But masculine stereotypes pressure men into feeling that they have to be strong, bottle up their emotions, be successful and always be in charge. These old-fashioned ideas have contributed to men's high rates of suicide, depression and anxiety as well as violence against women.

When we free boys and young men from damaging and outdated stereotypes and show them that being a good man is really just about being a good person, they can live happy and fulfilled lives, and be caring and respectful in relationships with women.

Root causes: stereotypes that harm men & women

Most of us think that women and men should live free from harmful old-fashioned stereotypes.

But certain corporations in the entertainment industry / advertising industry / social media companies / politicians / religious institutions continue to push these outdated ideas for profit / to sell products / to whip up ultra conservative voters / to reclaim their lost influence. These dangerous stereotypes contribute to depression, anxiety and suicide among men, and make women more likely to be attacked, stalked or harassed, and stay trapped in abusive relationships.

When we reject these unhealthy stereotypes and regulate the entertainment industry / social media companies / the advertising industry / when we reject the extremist ideas of certain politicians / religious institutions, all of us get to enjoy a safer, happier life, no matter our gender.

Root causes: stereotypes that harm and limit

Overwhelmingly, most of us want our children to have the same opportunities in life, and to be safe and healthy, no matter whether they're a girl or a boy.

But our kids grow up feeling pressured to fit into outdated, harmful and limiting stereotypes. From the toys they play with, to the pet names they're given, to the slogans on their clothes and the role models they see on TV. Boys grow up thinking they must be strong, aggressive, successful, in charge and not show their emotions. Girls grow up thinking that they are less smart, judged by their beauty, that they are meant to be in the home or can only do a limited range of jobs. As adults, the same set of outdated ideas contribute to depression, anxiety and suicide among men, and make women more likely to be attacked, stalked or harassed and stay trapped in abusive relationships.

By raising our children as equals we can free them from these damaging, old-fashioned stereotypes, so they can develop their own interests, skills and aspirations, and feel safe no matter their gender.

Root causes: stereotypes that harm women

We all want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe and be treated with respect, whether they're at home, at work or out with friends.

But today, outdated stereotypes continue to put people we care about in danger. Most of us reject the old-fashioned gender stereotypes that contribute to stalking, harassment and attacks against women and girls. But it's hard to free ourselves from these harmful ideas because certain corporations in the entertainment industry / advertising industry / social media companies / politicians / religious institutions continue to push these outdated ideas for profit / to sell products / to whip up ultra conservative voters / to reclaim their lost influence.

When we regulate the entertainment industry / social media companies / the advertising industry and reject their unhealthy stereotypes / when we reject the extreme ideas of certain politicians / religious institutions, we make sure the women and girls we love can feel safe and be treated with dignity.

Root causes: stereotypes, parents and education

We all want our children to grow up into healthy adults who feel safe, whether they're a boy or a girl / no matter their gender.

But they still grow up feeling pressured to fit into outdated stereotypes. These harmful ideas contribute to depression, anxiety and suicide among men, and lead some men to think that they're not only entitled to dominate women, but that we expect it of them. And too many use violence to maintain that control.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can choose to raise our children as equals at school and in the home. Whether it's letting all children play with both trucks and dolls or teaching them about respectful relationships. When we free our children from harmful stereotypes, they grow up to be safer, healthier adults.

THINGS IN THESE NARRATIVES THAT MIGHT NEED EXTRA EXPLANATION FOR YOUR AUDIENCE.

Depending on how well your audience understands the subject, you may need to elaborate on certain parts of your chosen narrative. For example, your audience might not understand the link between the prevalence of stereotypes in society and levels of violence against women. Or they might not understand how certain industries or social media companies perpetuate stereotypes. Or they might not even realise that the things they do, say, see or buy confirm these stereotypes.

There are different ways to address this. If you are using a format where you have room for explanation, like a blog, speech or press release, you could simply elaborate on this in the part of your narrative where you explain the problem. You can also anticipate being asked questions that require you to elaborate on these things, for example, in an interview or debate. And when developing content for social media, you can also dedicate specific assets to explaining the problem in more detail as part of your package of campaign materials.

The connection between gender stereotypes and violence against women and girls

Most of us reject outdated stereotypes. But some people still believe in them. Research shows that people who still agree with old-fashioned gender stereotypes about the different things that women and men are supposed to be and do are more likely to think it's no big deal if a woman is harassed, stalked, attacked or humiliated by sexist comments. This is a problem because when women experience violence, they usually turn first to friends and family for help, rather than the authorities. If they don't get the support they need from those around them, women find it harder to escape dangerous situations.

In extreme cases, these ideas make men feel like it's OK to use violence or control or harass or humiliate women. This can be because they feel pressured to act this way to show they are a 'real' man, or because they have never learnt to express their emotions in other ways, or to compensate for not being able to live up to restrictive masculine stereotypes, or as a way of punishing a woman or girl for not sticking to feminine stereotypes.

The connection between gender stereotypes and inequality of opportunity between women and men.

The outdated stereotypes that children grow up with limit how girls and boys think about themselves and each other, what they think is important and what they think they can achieve now and later in life. Already in primary schools, girls start to judge themselves as less smart than boys, feel less comfortable with technical subjects, think they are weaker and value themselves according to their looks. Later in life, women are less likely to pursue certain studies or careers like science, maths, technology or engineering. Those who don't avoid these careers then face the prejudices of their male employers. Instead, women lean towards working in sectors that involve caring for people or bringing up children, like hospitality, nursing, teaching, and social care. Jobs in these sectors are, in turn, worse-paid and less secure. Women also feel more pressure than men to do household chores and bring up children, and usually have no choice but to take bigger career breaks when they have children because fathers get so little paid parental leave. Which means women can accumulate less employment experience in general than men, making it harder to get a job or a promotion over a man. All this means that women often aren't able to support themselves and their children, putting them in danger if they are dependent on an abusive partner or need to leave an abusive relationship.

The reason negative stereotypes get perpetuated, even when most of us disagree with them

The entertainment industry produces films, music, video games and TV shows / the advertising industry makes ads that push outdated stereotypes. A lot of us still feel pressure to act in line with them, even though most people don't even agree. This is happening because often the big decisions at the top of these industries are mostly still taken by a few men who don't see the problem with stereotypes.

The reason social media companies allow negative stereotypes and harmful content to spread

Social media companies like TikTok, YouTube, X and Facebook allow influencers who push outdated gender stereotypes, including hateful ideas against women, to spread their message on their channels, because these companies make their money from selling advertising space on these influencers' pages.

How stereotypes get passed on to children

We treat girls and boys differently very early on. From the names we call them (soft names like ‘sweetie’ and ‘cupcake’ are reserved for girls while ‘dude’, ‘mate’ or ‘trouble’ tend to be for boys), to their clothes (emphasising the importance of beauty for girls and heroism, action or mischief for boys), to their toys (caring and nurturing toys like cuddly animals and dolls for girls and action or technical toys for boys like guns and lego), to the way the women and men are portrayed in entertainment (roles like heroes, scientists, leaders are more likely to be male), to the way we expect them to act (we correct girls when they’re not being soft or nurturing but we tell boys to be tough and tolerate it more when they’re angry and aggressive) and the way we act at home (women still do more of the chores, men are still primary breadwinners). Most of the time, we don’t even realise it. It’s hard to break out of these stereotypes because they are constantly repeated by influential industries like film, music, video games and TV shows, clothing and toy companies and by the advertising industry, as well as certain politicians and religious institutions.

Section C: Narratives focusing on intervention and repair

Below are some suggested narratives that focus on talking to your audience about the intervention or repair dimensions of eliminating violence against women. Those narratives covering intervention invoke the value of safety, since intervention is primarily about removing a victim from a dangerous situation. In the first example, you will see explicit reference to murder, violent attack and rape. The thinking here is that this message is focused on the protection of women and girls through

the intervention of the criminal justice system. Although the imagery is confrontational, the risk that your audience might tune out is balanced by the message offering them a solution that will meet their desire for perpetrators to be punished. Having said this, communicators should test the assumption.

Communicators should also check whether, when talking about economic factors such as low income, they are inadvertently perpetuating a misperception that violence against women and girls does not happen across all socio-economic levels of society and adjust their messaging accordingly.

Intervention: police & judges

We all want to feel safe, whether we’re online, at work, in our homes, or taking the bus across town. It shouldn’t matter whether we’re a man or a woman.

But today, one in three women and girls already have or will be stalked, groped, harassed, humiliated by sexual remarks, violently attacked, raped or even murdered. Even though these are crimes, our police forces and judges don't have the right training or powers to step in and keep victims safe after an attack.

We can choose to do things differently. For example, hiring more female police officers would mean that more of these crimes get investigated because women who are victims of attacks are more likely to report them to a woman officer. By implementing common sense solutions, we can make sure that we can all be safe, no matter whether we're a man or a woman.

Intervention: shelters

We all want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe, whether we're online, at work, in our homes, or taking the bus across town.

But today, thousands of women, often with children, find themselves trapped in a relationship with an abusive partner. They can't get themselves and their kids to safety because it would mean having to pay for a new place to live while also moving jobs. And our leaders have decided not to fund enough places in shelters to give women in this situation somewhere temporary to stay.

It doesn't have to be this way. By demanding that our government fund more homes that can provide a safe place for a woman and her children when they are in danger, we can make sure that some day, someone we love can have a route to safety if they need it.

Intervention: employment equality

Most of us want the women we care about to feel safe and be able to walk away if their partner turns out to be dangerous.

But thousands of women end up trapped in an abusive relationship because their job doesn't pay them enough to support themselves or their children if they leave. Our government allows the people we rely on to teach our children, clean our offices, care for our sick and older relatives and serve our lunches be paid too little to make ends meet. These jobs are mostly worked by women.

It doesn't have to be this way. By making sure everyone is paid fairly for a day's work, we can make sure that the women in our lives are able to protect themselves and their children.

Intervention: cyberviolence

We rely on technology to keep us connected with our friends and family. Social media is a big part of our lives, and we want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe when they use it.

But today one in ten women has been a victim of online stalking, harassment, revenge porn or worse. Greedy social media companies like X and Facebook want to make their profits as big as possible and refuse to do anything that could put that at risk, like making their own platforms safe. And governments are doing too little to force them.

It doesn't have to be this way. When our leaders create and enforce the right rules and standards, we can make the internet a safe place where we can stay connected with our loved ones.

ONLINE VIOLENCE

The guide has tended to focus its messages on violence in the physical world, but communicators can tweak some of the narratives to work for talking about cyberviolence. Talking about cyber-violence adds a layer to the narrative that relates to a) talking about what our online environment should be like and b) the reasons why Big Tech companies allow or stimulate the spread of hateful content. This can be done in the following way.

First, for Step 1, communicators should think about what it is that we want from the online world that is put in jeopardy by cyber-violence. The example narrative on cyberviolence talks about how we want technology to help us stay connected with friends and family. But communicators could think of other things, such as how we all want to stay informed and have our say about the issues of the day or share ideas, debate and learn from each other.

Second, for Step 2, communicators should think about how they characterise the problem. Is this about Big Tech allowing hateful influencers to spread harmful messages that encourage violence against women, because it generates more advertising revenue for them? Is it about Big Tech designing algorithms in a way that promotes popular content even when it's hateful because it generates more advertising revenue? Is it about law enforcement and data protection authorities having too few resources to enforce existing rules that would protect victims of abuse? Is it about people feeling like it's OK to behave differently online than in real life?

Third, for Step 3, if talking about cyberviolence, part of your solution probably has to include the need for structural changes to the way Big Tech companies operate. In particular, removing the financial incentives for allowing platforms to spread harmful content. In this regard, communicators may want to collaborate with civil society organisations specialising in this field since certain measures that are often put forward to stem the spread of hateful content carry risks of censoring legitimate free speech and don't involve rethinking the damaging business model on which social media platforms are based.

Repair: Full life

We all want the women and girls we care about to live a full life, whether that's excelling at school, having a job they love, building great friendships or bringing up a family of their own.

But every year, thousands of women are attacked, raped, harassed or psychologically abused. Even after they get to safety, they can be left with long-term physical and mental health problems, which make it hard to rebuild and live a normal life. And too often, they can't get the care they need.

We can do things differently. By funding the physical and mental health care victims need to recover and supporting them to find a job and be independent, we can make sure that the people we love can get back on their feet.

Repair: Care

We all want the women and girls in our lives to get the care they need if something bad happens to them.

But every year, thousands of women are attacked, raped, harassed or psychologically abused. Even after they get to safety, they can be left with long-term physical and mental health problems, which make it hard to rebuild and live a normal life. And too often, they can't get the care they need.

It doesn't have to be like this. By funding the physical and mental health care victims need to recover, we can make sure that someone we love will get support if they need it someday.

INSTITUTIONAL VIOLENCE

The examples in this guide focus on interpersonal, rather than institutional violence. However, communicators wishing to talk about institutional violence can apply the same approach. Here are some factors to consider in your messaging if you wish to talk about institutional violence, illustrated with reference to violence in the healthcare system.

1. Take into account that you are probably using ‘violence’ in a much broader sense than your audience. For example, if you talk about gender-based violence in the health care system, most people are likely to think that you’re talking about physical assaults by staff in hospitals. Whereas you may be referring to denied or poor quality care for women and girls or more general health strategies that are built around the needs of men to the exclusion of women. You should try to be as specific and tangible as you can so that your audience understands the shape of the problem you’re addressing.
2. When explaining why the problem is happening, or when considering whether to point to a ‘villain’, consider that it may not be helpful to point the finger at doctors and nurses - even if part of the reason that healthcare professionals are failing to deliver proper care is that they hold prejudices or negative stereotypes. This is for two reasons. First, it’s likely that your audience sees health care professionals in a positive light because they see them as people who take care of them and their loved ones when they get sick. So they’re more likely to reject your message. Second, by focusing on health care professionals, you’re likely to reinforce the idea that problems are caused by individuals, rather than a system or structures. It’s probably better to explain that the problem is caused by things like the way that we train healthcare professionals, which is based on outdated stereotypes instead of scientific evidence, or the kind of medical research that is prioritised, which is heavily influenced by male leaders since comparatively fewer women are promoted to leadership positions.

Section D: Responding to misinformation

As discussed, as communicators you should generally avoid directly contradicting your opponent's messages, even if this is to correct misinformation. To contradict a claim you need to repeat it, and repetition makes information stick in the brain. The emotive words carry more weight and the words you use to negate the false claim ('no', 'not', 'no one', 'nothing') get forgotten. For example, saying that 'feminism has not gone too far' or 'we are not asking for privileges for women' will just tend to entrench the original damaging frame that feminism is unfair or harmful.

If you're only talking to your supporters, they are aligned with your views and fixed in their opinions. So direct contradictions or myth-busting are less likely to backfire. But you should still think twice about responding to misinformation in this way even if you're addressing supporters directly, for two reasons. First, you rely on your supporters to persuade the moveable middle by repeating your messages. You don't want them to be primarily repeating your contradiction-based messages. Second, if you choose to directly contradict your opponent's messages, you are keeping public debate on the topics that they have chosen, rather than focusing attention on the things you want to talk about.

To neutralise your opponent's messaging, you can either reframe the topic on which you're being attacked, or use a 'truth sandwich'. A truth sandwich reframes the topic, but it has an additional layer, which is to expose your

opponent's ulterior motives in using misinformation. A truth sandwich follows the same structure as a normal narrative or message, as set out in Part III of the guide.

1. **Values:** rather than directly contradicting your opponents, begin by reminding your audience why they find the cause you are promoting important. Instead of directing attention to your opponents' message and letting them set the agenda, this allows you to bring your own cause back into focus.
2. **Explain the problem:** expose your opponents' malign agenda; why are they attacking your organisation, the causes you promote or the groups you work with? Allude to your opponent's lies but don't repeat them.
3. **Your vision and solution:** return to the cause you are promoting by talking about how we can bring the situation into line with the values you outlined in the first step.
4. If this is part of a campaign, remind your audience of past successes and ask them to do something to show their support. This was explained further in Part III of the guide.

Reframing works by a) avoiding repeating the misinformation and b) giving your audience your alternative frame as a different way of understanding the issue. In a 'truth sandwich' the audience is, in addition, c) also prompted to let go of the misinformation by the revelation that the source of that misinformation is not trustworthy.

Depending on the context, the space you have available and whether you need to pay attention to political sensibilities, you may choose a short reframe, a longer reframe or a truth sandwich. For example, those working for institutions might feel unable to call out a government or political party and expose its motives for using misinformation, even in softer language. In the context of an interview or a debate, you may

respond to misinformation with a truth sandwich, and then use a short reframe to rebut a follow-up attack.

Below are some examples of what short reframes, long reframes and truth sandwiches can look like in response to common attacks or misinformation relating to your work to eliminate violence against women.

CHEAT SHEET:

In this box you will find a list of different reasons you can copy or use for inspiration when you want to use a truth sandwich. You would use these texts in the second part of your narrative, when you're explaining why your organisation, the cause you're working on or a group you work with is being attacked / having misinformation spread about it.

- If you're being attacked by politicians:

Certain politicians / extremist politicians are attacking us / pointing the finger at us / blaming us for hard times / spreading lies to / against giving women and men the same opportunities in life / building a safer future for the women and girls we care about / freeing us from harmful stereotypes because they want to...

- *Distract citizens from the real problems that the government hasn't solved / has caused / that their party doesn't have answers to (e.g. cost of living crisis);*
- *Win votes / mobilise people with extreme views who are most likely to vote for them / mobilise their supporters to make their minority view look popular;*
- *Divide citizens against each other by inventing problems to focus public debate away from issues they don't want in the spotlight (e.g. scandals, corruption, bad economic figures);*
- *Intimidate us / destroy public trust / silence us / pave the way for taking away our funding or powers because we're helping people organise / go to court / calling out government to protect [insert the particular good thing you're being attacked for];*

- *Because they are cooperating with dictators and religious extremists in Russia and the USA to spread division and instability.*

Here's an example of how you could use softer language:

Certain politicians are making irresponsible / inaccurate / misleading statements that risk...

dividing people against each other / spreading hatred / turning people against the progress that is giving everyone the same opportunities and chances to do well or be safe / putting people in danger...

for political gain.

- If you're being attacked by religious institutions:

Certain ultra orthodox / extremist / people with outdated ideas are attacking us / pointing the finger at us / blaming us for hard times / spreading lies / are against giving women and men the same opportunities in life / building a safer future for the women and girls we care about / are against freeing us from harmful stereotypes because they want to...

- *... claim back the influence over our lives that they have lost;*
- *... rebuild their lost power and influence by helping certain politicians get into power;*
- *... because they are cooperating with dictators and religious extremists in Russia and the USA to spread division and instability.*

- If you're being attacked by certain media outlets:

Certain newspaper / TV bosses with outdated ideas are attacking us / pointing the finger at us / blaming us for hard times / spreading lies / are against giving women and men the same opportunities in life / building a safer future for the women and girls we care about / are against freeing us from harmful stereotypes because they want to...

- *... help certain politicians get into power to give them more influence and money.*
- *... because they are cooperating with dictators and religious extremists in Russia and the USA to spread division and instability.*

Attack: Feminism has gone too far. You can't even give a woman a compliment nowadays without being accused of abuse.

Short reframe 1: We all want the women and girls in our lives to be treated with dignity and respect. It's nice to get a compliment, but there's no place for sexual remarks that make us feel humiliated or uncomfortable.

Short reframe 2: Most people want men to be respectful, caring and loving above all else. It's nice to get a compliment, but there's no place for sexual remarks that make us feel humiliated or uncomfortable.

Longer reframe: The vast majority of us agree that we want our wives, daughters and women friends to be treated with dignity and respect, and not be made to feel uncomfortable by unwanted sexual remarks. / Most people want men to be respectful, caring and loving above all else.

But today, people still feel pressured by outdated stereotypes about masculinity and femininity that can make some men feel like they're not just allowed but even expected to make humiliating sexual comments. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: Certain politicians who don't agree that people should be treated with respect are spreading lies because they want to mobilise a minority of people with extreme views to come out and vote for them.]

When we free women and men from these old-fashioned ideas, we can all get treated with the respect and dignity we deserve. / When we free men from these old-fashioned ideas, we can all have respectful relationships.

Attack: If violent attacks, harassment and stalking of women is a problem in this country, it's because of [insert ethnic or religious minority group / people who migrate / transgender people].

All of us want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe.

But harmful outdated stereotypes about masculinity across our society make it more likely that women and girls are attacked, stalked, raped or humiliated. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: Certain politicians continue to push these old-fashioned ideas to please their voters. And when we demand change, they try to distract us by spreading lies and blaming transgender people / people who were not born here / black and brown people. We reject their attempts to divide us.]

When we bring boys and girls up as equals, we free them from damaging stereotypes and give them a safer future.

Or going a step further, you could decide on a response that calls out the broader strategy of using fear and hate against various marginalised groups to divide and distract the public for political gain. This narrative takes the form of a truth sandwich.

No matter where we were born, the colour of our skin or our genders, most of us want similar things: enough pay to support our families and cover the rent, decent hospitals to care for our sick relatives and good schools to give our children the best start in life.

But today, certain politicians are trying to win support by making us fear each other. They hope to distract us from their failure to build enough homes, fund the teachers, doctors and nurses we need, and keep salaries fair by blaming people who migrate, people from ethnic minority groups or trans-gender people for our problems.

We reject their attempts to divide us. By joining together across our differences, we can demand that our leaders focus on delivering the homes, services and jobs we all need to thrive - no exceptions.

Attack: If you care so much about keeping women safe, then why don't you stand up for women in other parts of the world / conflicts?

Short reframe: We want women and girls to be safe and protected from violence, whether they're friends and family, living next door or living on the other side of the world.

Longer reframe: We all want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe.

But outdated stereotypes about masculinity and femininity are contributing to women and girls being harassed, stalked, raped or even killed. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: And now certain politicians are trying to block the changes we need to keep our loved ones safe by distracting and dividing us against each other. All to please the people with extreme views who vote for them].

When we come together, we can demand that we free everyone from old-fashioned, harmful stereotypes, so the women and girls we care about have a safer future.

Attack: When a woman accuses her male boss of abuse, she destroys his reputation and his life, without even needing any evidence. What about the presumption of innocence?

Short reframe 1: Most of us want our wives, daughters or female friends to feel safe at work, so we need rules that protect them if they get abused, harassed or stalked. Just like we have rules to stop people stealing or driving dangerously.

Short reframe 2: Businesses have a responsibility to make sure their workplaces are safe places for women to work - free from sexual harassment.

Short reframe 3: When I think of my wife / daughter / sister / friend going to work every day, I want to know that she's not going to be stalked, bullied, fired or passed up for a promotion because she said no to a sleazy boss.

Longer reframe: Most of us want our wives, daughters or female friends to feel safe at work.

But often women get harassed, stalked or abused at work because of outdated ideas about gender. These harmful stereotypes lead some men to think that they're not only entitled to treat women badly, but that we expect it of them. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: And now certain media bosses are trying to divide us so that we don't demand the changes we need.]

We can do better and change the rules so that work is a place where all of us can feel safe.

Attack: Why are we talking about violence against women when most victims of violence are men?

Short reframe: There are kinds of violence like rape, sexual harassment and stalking where the victims are mostly women, and they're attacked because they are women. If we want the women and girls we love to feel safe, then we need to talk about how to make that happen.

Longer reframe: We're talking about women because all of us have women and girls in our lives, and we want them to feel safe whether they're online, at home, at work, on the bus or walking down the street.

But right now it's very likely that a woman or girl you care about has been or will be stalked, harassed, humiliated with sexual jokes or even raped or attacked. And the vast majority of these incidents target women. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: And certain politicians are trying to distract us from getting the changes we need to make our loved ones safer, because it goes down well with their more extreme supporters.]

It doesn't have to be this way. We know the changes that we need to make, and we won't be distracted from demanding them so that the women and girls we care for feel safe.

Attack: We shouldn't be focusing on violence against women. We should just be trying to get rid of violence full stop. Focusing on women is sexist.

Short reframe: If we want to get rid of violence, we've got to look at what kinds of violence affect which people. Today we're talking about stalking, harassment, rape, and sexual abuse. And they overwhelmingly affect women.

Longer reframe: We all want to look out for friends and family, whether they're men or women.

The vast majority of victims of stalking, harassment, rape, domestic violence and humiliation with sexual jokes are women. And the chances are that there's a woman or girl in your life who has been or will go through something like this. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: And certain politicians with extremist agendas want to distract us so we don't demand the changes we need to keep the people we love safe.]

If we want our wives, daughters, sisters and female friends to be safe, we've got to talk about how we tackle the problems that affect them.

Attack: respectful relationships education is gender ideology harming the mental health of boys by making them feel ashamed and inferior.

Short reframe: Respectful relationships education helps students question outdated gender stereotypes.

Longer reframe: We all want the men in our lives to be respectful, caring and loving.

But old ideas about masculinity have contributed to men's high rates of suicide, depression and anxiety as well as violence against women. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: And while most of us think we should free ourselves from gender stereotypes, a handful of politicians want to keep us in the past just to please their more extreme voters.]

We're not buying it. Respectful relationships education helps us to free boys and young men from damaging and outdated stereotypes so they can live happy and fulfilled lives and be caring and respectful in relationships with women.

Attack: transgender persons are a threat to women's safety

Note: *it's probably best to avoid responding to this by saying that the real threat to women's safety is men, because this is essentially the same as your opponent's argument (that men are able to attack women by pretending to be women). Communicators are advised to instead draw on the narratives about stereotypes lying at the root of violence against women and girls. Below is an example.*

Short reframe: Most people don't buy this. We know the causes behind why women get attacked, and it's mostly connected to the outdated gender stereotypes that women and men are forced into. We can't lose focus on that.

Long reframe: Most of us want the people we love to feel safe, whatever their genders.

But masculine stereotypes pressure men into feeling that they have to be strong, bottle up their emotions, be successful and always be in charge. These old-fashioned ideas have contributed to men's high rates of suicide, depression and anxiety, as well as violence against women. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: And instead of making the changes we need to fix the problem, certain politicians and media bosses are trying to distract us by spreading lies. We're not going to fall for it.]

When we free men from outdated stereotypes, we can make sure that the people we care for are well, whether they're men or women.

Attack: the Istanbul Convention is promoting harmful gender ideology / will break up families / is an attack on our culture / will make boys and men ashamed of who they are / is a foreign imposition.

Note: *Communicators could probably draw on any of the sample narratives in subsections a, b and c to talk about the Istanbul Convention, whether responding to attacks or not. You just need to add a line about how the Convention gives you the tools to deliver the vision you've outlined. For illustrative purposes, here are some examples.*

Short reframe: We all want the women in our lives to feel safe. The Istanbul Convention gives us the tools we need to make that happen.

Short reframe: The Istanbul Convention allows us to develop our potential free from the outdated limits imposed by gender stereotypes / allows us to question gender stereotypes that limit who we become and what we can do.

Short reframe: We can use the Istanbul Convention to free people from the harmful stereotypes that contribute to depression, anxiety and even suicide among men and lead to violence against women.

Longer reframe: Most of us want the women and girls in our lives to feel safe and free to follow their dreams. Whether that's excelling at school or in a career, building meaningful friendships and relationships, spending quality time with family at home or going out with friends.

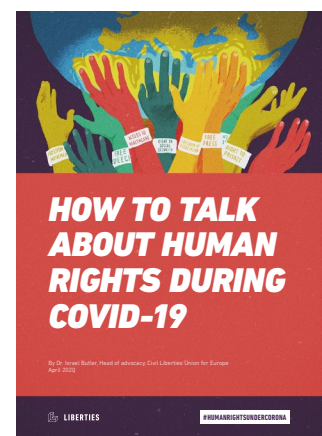
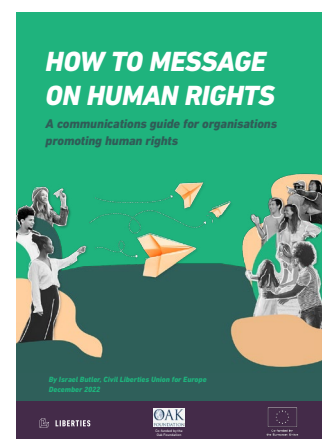
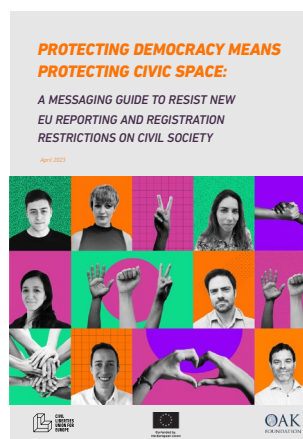
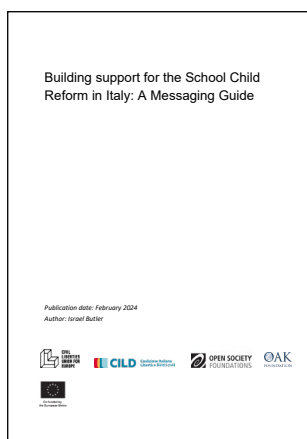
But today, one in three women and girls already have or will be stalked, groped, harassed, humiliated by sexual remarks, or worse. Someone you care about may be left with long-term physical and mental scars that take away their freedom and destroy their lust for life. [Add relevant sentence(s) from the cheat sheet for a truth sandwich e.g.: And instead of making the changes we need to solve the problem, certain politicians are spreading lies about the Istanbul Convention. They want to spread fear and division to please a minority of voters with extremist views.]

We reject their lies. When we ratify the Istanbul Convention we will have the tools we need to force / demand that our leaders deliver a life of safety and opportunity for the women and girls we care about.

Further information:

If you're interested in taking e-learning courses in framing for progressive causes, visit Liberties e-learning platform, knowledge hub, where you can do a range of free, online courses : <https://knowledgehub.liberties.eu/>.

Check out our messaging guides on other topics:



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For further resources produced by EIGE including an overview of policy and legal interpretations of gender and gender equality see: [EIGE, 'The EU's evolving legal and policy approaches to Gender Equality', 2022](#). For recent research on violence against women, please consult [Gender-based violence | European Institute for Gender Equality](#). For other sources see:

[Ferrer-Pérez, V., 'Beliefs and Attitudes about intimate partner violence against women in Spain', 31 Psicothema \(2019\) 38](#)

[Anrows: National Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women Survey](#)

[The Scottish Government: Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2014. Attitudes to Violence against Women in Scotland \(2015\).](#)

Contact

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a non-governmental organisation promoting the civil liberties of everyone in the European Union. We are headquartered in Berlin and have a presence in Brussels. Liberties is built on a network of 21 national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU.

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