a practical guide on how to cover stories about trans people, or about issues which affect trans people, in a fair and respectful manner.
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Introduction

Transgender Europe’s Guide for Journalists is a practical guide on how to cover stories about trans people, or about issues which affect trans people, in a fair and respectful manner.

The aim of this guide is to act as a go-to resource for journalists who are interested in writing stories about trans people in a clear and understandable way. Unfortunately, language about trans issues can often come across as complicated, and difficult to comprehend. This leads to journalists resorting to over simplifications, sensationalist arguments, and stereotypes, often dehumanising the persons involved. For years, the few stories and reports about trans people in the media have focused on medical details about transitions and surgeries. While media outlets have started to challenge this, it remains a norm to overcome.

This guide brings together examples from other media reference guides and journalist guides. Of particular help and inspiration were guides from GLAAD, Transgender Equality Network Ireland, TransInterQueer e.V, Trans Media Watch, and Transgender Network Switzerland.
Using the guide

Section 1:
Glossary
provides a non-exhaustive list of words that are most often used in reporting about, or talking about trans persons.

Section 2:
Key Themes
briefly explains some key issues of relevance to trans people, and how they can be covered by journalists.

Section 3:
In Practice
takes a look at both good and bad practice from online press, with tips on writing headlines, choosing images, and interviewing trans persons.

Finally,
summaries from each section are included in the middle spread, which can be pulled out and kept aside for quick reference.
(Pages 11 – 14)
The terminology below can be used when covering trans stories. As a general rule the wishes of the individual being described should be prioritised and respected. **If you do not know how to refer to somebody, ask them.**

This list does not aim to be an exhaustive list of terminology used within the trans community. A glossary is available online at [www.tgeu.org/glossary](http://www.tgeu.org/glossary).
Core Terms

**Gender** traditionally refers to a social and cultural construct of being a man or a woman. However some people do not identify within the gender binary of man/woman. Gender exists independently of sex, and an individual’s gender does not always correspond with the sex assigned at birth.

(See: Gender Identity, Sex)

**Gender Identity** is a person’s inner sense of their gender. For trans people, their own internal gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people have a gender identity of man or woman (or boy or girl), but for some people it does not fit neatly into one of those two choices. Unlike gender expression, gender identity is not visible to others.

(See: Gender Expression, Transgender, Genderqueer)

**Sex** is the classification of people as male or female. At birth infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy. However a person’s sex, as defined by biology, is a combination of bodily characteristics including: chromosomes, hormones, internal and external reproductive organs, and secondary sex characteristics. Persons whose biological sex cannot be classified as either male or female are classified as intersex, however they may identify as intersex persons, male, female, trans persons, or other.

(See: Intersex)

**Transgender** or **Trans** is an umbrella term which includes those people who have a gender identity which is different to the gender assigned at birth, and those people who wish to portray their gender identity in a different way to the gender assigned at birth. Transgender includes those people who feel they have to, or prefer to, or choose to, whether by language, clothing, accessories, cosmetics or body modification, present themselves differently to the expectations of the gender role assigned to them at birth. This includes, among many others, transsexual and transgender people, transvestites, cross dressers, no gender, multigender, genderqueer people, intersex, and gender variant people who relate to or identify as any of the above.

n.b: do not use transgendered, and always use the descriptive terms preferred by the individual. Trans identity is not dependent upon medical procedures.
Other Terms

**Cisgender** or **Cis** is a term used to describe non-trans people. It is used in the same way as heterosexual is used to mean non-homosexual.8

**Depathologisation** of trans identities, means that being trans should no longer be viewed or characterised as psychologically abnormal. Currently, trans identities are listed as a mental disorder in the World Health Organisation’s International Classification of Diseases.

**Gender Expression** is the external manifestations of gender, expressed through a person’s name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice or body characteristics. Society identifies these cues as masculine or feminine, although what is considered masculine and feminine changes over time and varies by culture. Genderqueer or Gender-fluid or Non-binary describe a person who does not identify with the male/female binary but somewhere outside or between. Some genderqueer people use neutral pronouns like “they” and “them”.8

The term **Intersex** refers to people born with bodies that do not fit the normative definitions of male or female.9 *(See: Sex)*

**Legal Gender Recognition** is the official procedure to change a trans person’s name and gender identifier in official registries and documents such as their birth certificate, ID card, passport or driving license. In some countries, it’s impossible to have your gender recognised by law. In other countries, the procedure is often long, difficult and humiliating. *(See: Section 2: Key Theme: Legal Gender Recognition)*

**Sexual Orientation** describes an individual’s enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same. For example, transgender people may be straight, lesbian, gay, or bisexual.6

**Transsexual** is an older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. The term is still preferred by some people who have permanently altered – or seek to alter – their bodies through medical interventions (including but not limited to hormones and/or surgeries). Unlike transgender or trans, transsexual is not an umbrella term. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers. If preferred, use as an adjective: transsexual woman or transsexual man.6

**Transgender Man** or **Trans Man** or **FTM** *(Female to Male)* are terms that may be used by people who were assigned female at birth but identify and live as men. Some may prefer to simply be called men, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.6
Transgender Woman or Trans Woman or MTF (Male to Female) are terms that may be used by people who were assigned male at birth but identify and live as women. Some may prefer to simply be called women, without any modifier. It is best to ask which term an individual prefers.  

Transition includes some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one’s family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person.  

Transphobia is a matrix of cultural and personal beliefs, opinions, attitudes and aggressive behaviours based on prejudice, disgust, fear and/or hatred directed against individuals or groups who do not conform to, or who transgress societal gender expectations and norms. Transphobia particularly affects individuals whose lived gender identity or gender expression differs from the gender role assigned to them at birth, and it manifests itself in various ways, e.g., as direct physical violence, transphobic speech and insulting, discriminatory media coverage, and social exclusion. Transphobia also includes institutionalized forms of discrimination such as criminalization, pathologization, or stigmatization of non-conforming gender identities and gender expressions.
The aim of this section is to briefly explain some key reoccurring themes which are of relevance to trans people, and give tips on how they can be covered by journalists. While this section only focuses on Legal Gender Recognition, Depathologisation & Health Care, and Transphobic Hate Crime & Discrimination, there are many other stories which can be, and are already, covered by journalists. These include profiles of trans persons from different backgrounds, positive recognition of support from allies, and an array of stories which give testimony to a diverse, resilient, and creative trans movement.

Not all stories of trans people in the media have managed to portray the real lives of trans people. Who, like others, can be activists, architects, artists, athletes, bisexual, business owners, children, (dis)abled, gay, lesbian, managers, migrants, parents, people of colour, researchers, sex workers, scientists, straight, and more. Yet, the continued media preoccupation with trans people’s surgeries and their medical procedures objectifies and dehumanises trans people. By highlighting only one area of a person’s life journalists reduce trans people’s realities into one single story, and reinforce stereotypes, including that surgery is necessary for a person to identify as trans.
Key Theme:

Legal Gender Recognition

Introduction
Many trans people face problems in daily life because the legal gender on their official identity document does not match their gender identity. The problems this creates are many, and may arise when picking up a parcel at the post office, applying for a job, boarding a plane, or lodging a harassment complaint.

These problems however are not simply administrative, but can become a repeated source of harassment, unfounded suspicion, and even violence.

The situation in Europe
Currently (as of December 2015), only 36 countries in Europe provide for legal gender recognition.10

Prerequisites require the individual to give up one or more human rights to gain another; the right to form a family, or being married must be traded for the protection of private life. Twenty countries in Europe require that trans people undergo sterilisation before their gender identity is recognised. Other requirements may include diagnosis of a mental disorder, medical treatment, invasive surgery, assessment of time lived in the new gender identity, and being single or divorced.11
Things to consider when writing about Legal Gender Recognition

• How does legal gender recognition in your country compare to the laws from other countries within the region?

• Is there the intention to change the legal gender recognition procedure in the near future, if no, why not?

• Who are the activists, and/or organisations who are lobbying for changes in the law? Why do they want these changes?

• Who are the activists and/or organisations who have successfully lobbied for legal change? What are their next challenges?

• Why is it important to the trans community that legal gender recognition is accessible?

• What countries have changed their law for the better, and how has this changed things for the trans community?

• How has a lack of transparent and accessible gender recognition legislation affected the day to day lives of trans people? Or How has the change in procedure affected the day to day lives of trans people?

For more information:


• TGEU’s work on Legal Gender Recognition http://tgeu.org/issues/legal-gender-recognition/

• “34 Countries in Europe Make This Nightmare a Reality” (TGEU, 2015) http://tgeu.org/nightmare/
Gender
Gender is a social and cultural construct of being male, female, or another gender. An individual’s gender does not always correspond with the sex assigned at birth.

Legal Gender Recognition
Legal Gender Recognition is the official procedure to change a trans person’s name and gender identifier in official registries and documents such as their birth certificate, ID card, passport or driving license.

Transgender or Trans
Transgender or Trans is an umbrella term which includes those people who have a gender identity which is different to the gender assigned at birth, and those people who wish to portray their gender identity in a different way to the gender assigned at birth.

Transphobia
Transphobia is a matrix of cultural and personal beliefs, opinions, attitudes and aggressive behaviours based on prejudice, disgust, fear and/or hatred directed against individuals or groups who do not conform to, or who transgress societal gender expectations and norms.
Style Guidelines

Pronouns
Respect the individual’s wishes around their portrayal, and ask them what pronoun to use in referring to them. If it is not possible to ask, use pronouns which most closely match the presentation of the person, or seek out accurate information from other sources. Remember that some trans people might not use gendered pronouns, but choose to use gender neutral pronouns like ‘they/them’.

Names
Never reveal or use a trans person’s birth name without their explicit consent. It does not matter if a trans person has not had their chosen name legally recognised or not, using their chosen name respects them as an individual, and their privacy.

Derogatory Language
Some words or phrases should never be used when writing about trans people, and can be considered derogatory or defamatory.

Terms to avoid:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tranny</th>
<th>Post-op</th>
<th>Gender expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HeShe</td>
<td>Shemale</td>
<td>Deceptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex change/swap</td>
<td>Trapped in the wrong body</td>
<td>Born a boy/girl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Headlines
It is often necessary to save space and simplify, but headlines can ruin a story. Online news gives the additional benefit of allowing for longer headlines. Sensational headlines which use phrases like “sex change”, “born a man”, “became a man” should be avoided.

Stories
- Don’t ask about someone’s medical transition process
- Don’t use outdated or dehumanising language
- Don’t only focus on a person’s trans identity, find out what makes them live, love, fight, and cry
- Don’t resort to the coming out narrative which frames stories as “I was a man, now I’m a woman”
Illustrating the story

When choosing images to accompany your story avoid

- Before and after photos of a trans person
- Clichéd images that focus on a trans woman applying make-up, or a trans man shaving
- Photos of famous trans people, or a film character, unless the article refers to them

Consider

- Photos of activists at a trans march
- Transgender flag
- Portrait of the trans person themselves.
Key Themes

Legal Gender Recognition
Many trans people face problems in daily life because the legal gender on their official identity document does not match their gender identity.

*Journalists can ask:*
- Why is it important for the trans community that legal gender recognition is accessible?

Depathologisation & Health Care
Being trans is not an illness, yet some medical guidelines and professionals still consider it to be a mental disorder.

*Journalists can ask:*
- Why is being trans still considered a mental disorder?

Transphobic Hate Crime & Discrimination
Discrimination & hate crimes have a deep impact not only on the victim but on the whole group or community. Trans people are still disproportionally affected by discrimination in all areas of life. Between 2008 and 2015, there were over 1933 murders of trans people reported globally.

*Journalists can ask:*
- How are communities affected by hate crime & discrimination?
- What laws or policies are in place to protect trans persons from discrimination & hate crime? Are these being enforced?
Key Theme:

Depathologisation & Health Care

Introduction
Writing about health in relation to trans people should not be limited to covering surgeries, and there are many issues which affect trans people accessing health care. One main issue is that being trans is considered a mental illness by the World Health Organisation, who declassified homosexuality as a mental disorder over 25 years ago.

Trans people also face discrimination when accessing health care, they may not see a doctor because they fear discrimination, lack health insurance or economic means, and/or do not know where to turn to. Some trans people might wish to access trans-specific healthcare, including hormonal, surgical, psychological, or other medical treatment.

Things to consider when writing about Depathologisation & Health Care
• What are the obstacles which trans people face in accessing general health care?
• What are the standards of trans specific health care in your country? Are these accessible?
• What are the effects of listing trans identities as a mental illness?
• Which countries ignore the World Health Organisation’s International Classification of Diseases when granting legal gender recognition?

For more information:
• TGEU’s work on Health & Depathologisation http://tgeu.org/issues/health_and_depathologisation/
• The International Day of Action for Trans Depathologisation http://stp2012.info/old/en

Key Theme:

Transphobic Hate Crime & Discrimination

Introduction
A transphobic hate crime is a crime or incident in which an aggressor is motivated by prejudice, hostility or hatred toward persons who transgress or do not conform to societal gender expectations and norms. Individuals whose lived gender identity or gender expression differs from the gender role assigned to them at birth are particularly affected by hate crimes.

Trans people in many parts of the world have for a long time been victims of serious and repetitive gender-based violence, including beatings, mutilation, rape, murder, and other forms of disrespect and maltreatment. Between 2008 and 2015, over 1,933 reported killings of gender-variant/trans people in 62 countries have been documented, including 90 in 13 European countries.12
Furthermore, trans people are still disproportionately affected by discrimination in all areas of life, for example in education, employment, public transportation or access to goods and services. Discrimination & hate crimes have a deep impact not only on the victim but on the whole group or community.

The situation in Europe
Overall, being discriminated against or harassed because of being trans affects a person’s quality of life. In 2014 the Fundamental Rights Agency’s EU LGBT survey found that “half of trans respondents avoid places or locations, notably public transport, for fear of assault, threat or harassment.” While discrimination was present in all areas, but particularly in employment where 37% felt discriminated against because of being trans when looking for a job.

Although one in two trans persons is attacked or targeted through violence, threats or insults, only less than a quarter of hate-motivated incidents are reported to the police or other organisations.

Things to consider when reporting on Trans Hate Crimes & Discrimination
- Are there protections that make it illegal to discriminate against a person because of their gender identity or gender expression in your country?
- How does explicit protection of trans people affect their daily lives?
- Are there any unsolved cases of discrimination in employment, education, good and services?
- Has the systematic recording of discrimination helped to improve the situation for trans people?
- Do the police and local governments have their own methods of reporting hate crime?
- How is the trans community affected after trans hate crimes?

For more information:
- Transrespect versus Transphobia
  Worldwide, Trans Murder Monitoring
- TGEU’s work on Non-Discrimination
  http://tgeu.org/issues/discrimination/
- TGEU’s guides on EU Law
  http://tgeu.org/tgeu-guides-eu-law/
- ProTrans “Protecting Transgender people from Violence project”
  http://tgeu.org/pro-trans/
- The Trans Crossroads – Trans People’s EU Employment Rights and National gender Recognition Laws toolkit
Since TIME magazine published the cover story “The Transgender Tipping Point” featuring trans actress and activist Laverne Cox, app developer Teagan Widmer, and high-school student Aston Lee in June 2014, the media coverage and awareness of trans issues has entered a new landscape. Some editorial style guides of newspapers have changed or been updated to include proper reference to the term ‘transgender’, as well as allowing for the use of the neutral pronoun they/them in stories. More in-depth coverage of trans stories have been published, and awareness of trans issues is slowly increasing.
However, not all headlines are as good, or iconic as “The Transgender Tipping Point”, and many still depend on being sensational. Using the correct pronouns also remains a confusion for many, and not all invasive, or stereotypical interview questions have disappeared from reporting.

There are many things to keep in mind when writing stories about trans people, or issues which affect trans people. This section aims to give quick pointers and tips on how journalists can stop making these mistakes and how to ensure their writing and coverage is respectful.
In general:

- Don’t ask about someone’s medical transition process
- Don’t use outdated or dehumanising language
- Don’t only focus on a person’s trans identity, find out what makes them live, love, fight, and cry
- Don’t resort to the coming out narrative which frames stories as “I was a man, now I’m a woman”
- Use the trans person’s chosen name and pronouns

Names, Pronouns, & Language

The simple rule is to respect the individual’s wishes around their portrayal, and ask them what name and pronoun they use, or would like to be portrayed in the media. If it is not possible to ask (for example, when writing about hate crime), use pronouns which most closely match the presentation of the person, to know which is the right name to use, seek out accurate information from other sources. Derogatory or offensive language or terms, as well as inaccurate usage should be avoided altogether.

Never reveal or use a trans person’s birth name without their explicit consent. Many cis people may assume that a person’s real name is the one given at birth, however this is problematic for many reasons, including the fact that it does not respect a trans person’s privacy.

Some trans people might not use gendered pronouns, ‘he/him’ or ‘she/her’, and might use the gender neutral singular pronoun ‘they/them’. Similarly, some trans people might not use gendered honorifics like Mr., Ms., or Mrs., but the netural Mx. (pronounced mix). If being trans is not relevant to the story, and especially if a person wants their trans identity to remain private, it should not be revealed.

Best Practice

Since November 2015, The Washington Post now allows reporters to use the singular ‘they’ as a pronoun, not only to avoid default male pronouns, but also “useful in references to people who identify as neither male nor female”. While the New York Times used the gender-neutral honorific “Mx”. in a story.

Pronoun avoidance

“It was challenging to write that way [without pronouns] without it being awkward”

Avoiding pronouns altogether may seem tempting but is not an easy way out. For New York Times journalist Dashka Slater this proved a linguistic challenge, as the newspaper does not recognise gender neutral pronouns, Slater had to rewrite an article originally written with chosen neutral pronouns, and avoid using pronouns altogether.
Derogatory or Offensive Language & Inaccurate Usage
Never use the following terms when writing about trans people:
• Tranny
• Transgenders
• Post-op
• Pre-op
• HeShe
• Shemale
• Deceptive
• Pretending
• Sex change/ sex swap (Assumes that a trans person requires surgery to be considered trans, emphasises a gender binary (male/female))

Take care to not make the following errors:
• Transgendered/ a transgender/ a transsexual
• Born a man/ Born a woman/ Trapped in the wrong body

Read more about problematic terms: http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender

Headlines
It is often necessary to save space and simplify, but headlines can ruin a story. Online news gives the additional benefit of allowing for longer headlines. Sensational headlines which use phrases like “sex change”, “born a man”, “became a man” should be avoided.

Sensational headlines:
• “Meet The Couple Who Stayed Together When The Husband Became A Woman - Then Invited A Third Lover To Join Them”17
• “Goodbye breasts, but I’m saving my lady bits for babies.”18
• “Meet Caitlyn (Formerly Bruce) Jenner”19
• “Boy starts hormone treatment at TWELVE after realising he was trapped in girl’s body aged 18 MONTHS.”20

Headlines which almost get it right:
• “First transgender elected is tired but upbeat”21

Good Headlines:
• “What it’s like to be a Trans Activist in the Most Liberal Country on Earth”22
• “Trans TV: From Transparent to Boy meets Girl and EastEnders, this was a year in transition”23
• “The transgender woman fighting for the right to see her son”24
Illustrating the story

Once the story is finished and ready to be published, one of the major challenges that remains is how to illustrate it with photos or images.

As a simple guideline, it is often unnecessary to show before or after photos of a trans person. Cliché images that portray superficial ideas of trans people should also be avoided. These are those photos which focus on trans women dressing up, putting on make-up, close up shots of high heels, and a person looking at the mirror.

Also avoid using photos of famous trans people when illustrating stories which are not about them. Similarly avoid using photos of trans characters in films, if the article is not about the film.

Photos of trans activists at a trans march, or of the transgender flag can be used.
Data & Fact Checking

When looking for data to corroborate a story there are many places to start. Trans, LGBTQI, and human rights organisations, as well as organisations like the Council of Europe, and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights have published research on trans people. Finally, don’t discount getting in touch with local organisations

- www.transrespect.org by Transgender Europe offers interactive maps with comprehensive data of the legal, health, social situation of Trans and Gender Diverse persons in the world. As well as data on reported trans murders worldwide since 2008.

- www.rainbow-europe.org by ILGA Europe offers a comprehensive overview of the human rights of LGBTI people in Europe.


- The 2015 Eurobarometer on Discrimination in the EU http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2077

- Open Society Foundation’s briefing papers on Trans Children and Youth, and Forced Sterilisation https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/license-be-yourself

- The Council of Europe’s guide on Protecting Human Rights of Transgender Persons https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680492119

- A list of TGEU’s member organisations in Europe: www.tgeu.org/about
END NOTES

1. **GLAAD** is an organisation that works with the media to tackle issues and shape narratives that lead to cultural change in the United States of America. See GLAAD’s Transgender Media Program [www.glaad.org/transgender](http://www.glaad.org/transgender)

2. **Transgender Equality Network Ireland (TENI)** seeks to improve conditions and advance the rights and equality of trans people and their families in Ireland. TENI is a member organisation of Transgender Europe. See: [TENI’s Media Style Guidelines](http://www.teni.ie)

3. **TransInterQueer e.V. (TriQ)** is a Berlin based organisation which offers educational and awareness training, and community events, for trans, intersex, and queer people. TriQ is a member organisation of Transgender Europe. See: [TRiQ’s “Trans in den medien – Informationen für Journalist_innen”](http://www.transinterqueer.org/unsere-publikationen) (Available in German only)

4. **Trans Media Watch** is an organisation which aims to improve media coverage of trans and intersex issues. Trans Media Watch is a member organisation of Transgender Europe. See: [Trans Media Watch’s style guide, approaches and other information for the media](http://www.transmediawatch.org/)

5. **Transgender Network Switzerland (TGNS)**, is the Swiss organisation for Transgender persons which raises awareness of trans issues, and does lobby work. TGNS is a member organisation of Transgender Europe. See: “Medienguide” by TGNS (Available in German only) on [www.transgender-network.ch/medien/medienguide/](http://www.transgender-network.ch/medien/medienguide/)


7. Definitions adapted from the Transrespect versus Transphobia Worldwide research project. See: [www.transrespect.org](http://www.transrespect.org)

8. Adapted from TENI Media Style Guidelines [http://www.teni.ie/attachments/03b3edc9-7f31-4c8c-a7f7d-202c3d8cb238.PDF](http://www.teni.ie/attachments/03b3edc9-7f31-4c8c-a7f7d-202c3d8cb238.PDF)

9. Definition from [Organisation International Intersex (OII) Europe](http://oiieurope.org/)


11. Watch: **34 Countries in Europe Make This Nightmare a Reality.** This video depicts the requirements trans people need to satisfy in order to change their name and registered gender in most European countries. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZlpyDeu4jY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZlpyDeu4jY)


