

#Tool 12



Criteria for creating impactful narratives

Objective

The purpose of this tool is to identify and define the main criteria to be taken into account when creating alternative and inclusive narratives relating to diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), capable of promoting recognition, a sense of belonging, equality and respect for LGBTIQ people and other forms of diversity within the community.

How to use the tool

- ✦ As a reference to consult before beginning the process of creating an inclusive narrative, to ensure that the key criteria for developing inclusive, coherent and credible narratives have been considered.
- ✦ This content can also be used for training purposes or to share with communications professionals who will ultimately play a key role in designing content and messages. Before launching a communications campaign, it is useful to review these criteria once more to avoid any unintended consequences.
- ✦ The first table outlines the various criteria to be taken into account when creating alternative narratives, whilst the second table serves as a checklist to verify that the narrative created does indeed incorporate these criteria.

Recommendations

- ✦ Share these criteria with everyone involved in the process of creating and disseminating the narrative in any way.
- ✦ Ensure that those responsible for content creation and social media management are familiar with these criteria, as they are often excluded from the process until the end, and, as a result, content on social media may not be consistent with the narrative framework.

1. Criteria for constructing alternative narratives

Criteria	What does this involve?	Example
Listening and understanding	- Actively listening to all voices – and especially those with the fewest opportunities to be heard – enables us to understand existing needs, fears, languages and mental frameworks, thereby preventing the creation of narratives that are disconnected from social reality. - It is essential to listen to communities discourses, ensuring that diverse experiences relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics are represented. - Particular attention should be paid to those voices that are often under-represented or less visible within LGBTIQ communities themselves, such as trans, non-binary, intersex, migrant, racialised, older or disabled people, LGBTIQ parents, parents of LGBTIQ persons. - Listen not only to experiences of discrimination, but also to stories of participation, well-being, living-together, resilience, leadership, community engagement, cultural expression, innovation, care and social contribution among LGBTIQ people.	Before designing a campaign, speak with LGBTIQ people from different backgrounds to understand the diversity of experiences, concerns and priorities.

Criteria	What does this involve?	Example
Using knowledge and evidence	- Effective narratives aim to be underpinned by rigorous and accessible information that contributes to a better understanding of the diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. - Incorporating knowledge about the history of LGBTIQ people, the processes of discrimination, invisibilisation and resistance, as well as advances in rights, allows us to contextualise current debates and challenge stereotypes or oversimplified narratives. - Highlighting diverse role models and the social, cultural, scientific and community contributions of LGBTIQ people enable to broaden frameworks for understanding diversity and foster social recognition. - This requires including information on the effects that discrimination, exclusion and hate speech have on the well-being, mental health, participation and exercise of rights of LGBTIQ people. - Information should be presented in a way that is easy to understand and linked to lived experiences, avoiding information overload and encouraging critical reflection.	Instead of simply saying that “LGBTIQ people face discrimination”, explain with accessible data and real experiences how discrimination affects participation, well-being and rights.

Criteria	What does this involve?	Example
Reframing the issue	- It is essential not to react to the discriminatory narrative framework by attempting to counter it from within its own framework. - Adopt a proactive, value-based approach grounded in freedom, equality, dignity, diversity, recognition, belonging and human rights. - Encourage that the chosen values are widely shared by society (equality, respect, freedom, living-together, dignity, well-being, participation and mutual care), so that different groups feel that these values speak to them.	Rather than arguing that “LGBTIQ people are not a threat”, communicate that everyone should be able to live freely and safely, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
Promoting inclusion and positivity	- Effective narratives are capable of engaging the social majority, particularly including people who are not yet aware of these issues or who hold ambiguous attitudes towards diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics. - The narrative should reflect diversity from an intersectional perspective, avoiding homogeneous or stereotypical representations of LGBTIQ people. - Highlighting LGBTIQ role models, experiences and contributions can contribute both to social recognition and to increasing awareness of SOGIESC diversity. - Efforts should be made to portray LGBTIQ people in everyday, diverse situations, far removed from stereotypes or representations exclusively linked to conflict, discrimination or commemorative dates.	Show an LGBTIQ family having an ordinary day at the park, alongside other families, rather than portraying LGBTIQ people only in situations of discrimination or conflict.

Criteria	What does this involve?	Example
Ensuring consistency and complementarity	- The narrative is intended to be consistent with the actual actions, policies and practices promoted by the actors involved in its creation, avoiding contradiction and hypocrisy. - The narrative complements these specific practices, which pursue the same objectives and reinforce one another.	If a Municipality promotes a message about LGBTIQ inclusion, it should also ensure that its public services have inclusive policies and staff trained to support LGBTIQ people.
Building cooperation	- The narrative will be more powerful if it involves and attracts a wide range of stakeholders by identifying shared values and objectives. - Involving a wide range of social stakeholders (such as education, health, the media, sport and culture) increases the narrative's legitimacy, reach and sustainability. - It is advisable to actively involve LGBTIQ people and organisations specialising in diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics, in the processes of designing, validating and disseminating the narratives.	A campaign promoting respectful schools could bring together schools, families, youth organisations, LGBTIQ organisations, sports clubs and local authorities.
Defining objectives and target audiences	- Based on the assessment, define specific objectives and identify the audiences the narrative is intended to reach, adapting it to each audience and context. - Without well-defined objectives and audiences, the narrative is likely to lose focus and impact.	A campaign aimed at parents might focus on family support and well-being, while a campaign aimed at young people could focus on respect, belonging and peer support.

Criteria	What does this involve?	Example
Designing strategic content	▪ The content is expected to be clear, emotionally meaningful, based on real experiences and rigorous information, and capable of translating complex concepts into understandable messages. ▪ Encourage empathy and critical thinking; highlight the common elements that unite the chosen target audience and raise awareness of the diversity of experiences, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics present within LGBTIQ communities. ▪ Incorporating positive, everyday role models can help to strengthen recognition, legitimacy and a sense of belonging amongst LGBTIQ people.	A short video could tell the story of an LGBTIQ teenager being supported by a friend, followed by a simple message about the importance of creating spaces where everyone feels they belong.
Planning dissemination	▪ Focus on a diverse range of credible actors and profiles who can help disseminate the narrative to reach diverse audiences. ▪ Combine various communication channels and platforms, including more qualitative and intensive community-level initiatives alongside broader, more general awareness campaigns. ▪ It is also recommended to diversify the profiles featured in the narrative, ensuring that representation does not always fall on the same profiles or experiences within LGBTIQ communities. ▪ Before sharing personal testimonies, assess the potential risks associated with public visibility and obtain the informed consent of the concerned parties.	Combine social media content with workshops in schools and community activities, involving teachers, young people, families and LGBTIQ organisations as trusted voices.

Criteria	What does this involve?	Example
Repeating and reinforcing key messages	Consistent repetition of messages in diverse formats and contexts is key to building familiarity and consolidating narrative frameworks.	Use the same core message: “Everyone deserves to feel safe, respected and able to be themselves”, across posters, social media, events and educational materials.
Evaluating and adapting	- Testing, measuring impact, gathering feedback and adjusting the narrative allows it to evolve and adapt to the social context, whilst maintaining its relevance and effectiveness over time. - Evaluation may incorporate aspects such as the degree of identification generated, the perception of recognition, the ability to foster a sense of belonging, general awareness, or improvements in attitudes towards LGBTIQ persons.	After a campaign, ask different audiences whether they feel more supportive of LGBTIQ inclusion and use their feedback to improve the messages and formats used.

2. Checklist for creating an alternative narrative

1. Listening and understanding

- ☐ Has a process of active listening been carried out with LGBTIQ people?
- ☐ Has attention been paid to under-represented groups?

List the groups you have involved:

- ☐ Have experiences of discrimination, as well as experiences of well-being, resilience and social contribution, been incorporated?
- ☐ Does the assessment reflect real needs, fears, language and ways of thinking?

2. Using knowledge and evidence

- ☐ Is the narrative based on rigorous and accessible information?
- ☐ Are historical elements relating to the LGBTIQ communities included?
- ☐ Are processes of discrimination, resistance and progress in rights put into context?

- ☐ Are diverse role models and their contributions highlighted?
- ☐ Are the impacts of discrimination on well-being and rights explained?
- ☐ Is the information understandable and linked to lived experiences?
- ☐ Is information overload avoided?

3. Reframing the issue

- ☐ Does the narrative avoid reacting to the existing discriminatory framework?
- ☐ Has it been developed from a proactive approach?
- ☐ Is it based on values such as equality, freedom, dignity, diversity and human rights?
- ☐ Are the chosen values widely shared within society?
- ☐ Does the narrative engage diverse audiences through these values?

4. Promoting inclusion and positivity

- ☐ Does the narrative appeal to the movable middle)?
- ☐ Does it include people who are not yet aware of these issues or who hold ambiguous views (commonly referred to as the 'movable middle')?
- ☐ Does it reflect diversity from an intersectional perspective?
- ☐ Does it avoid stereotypes and one-dimensional portrayals?
- ☐ Does it highlight positive role models and contributions?
- ☐ Does it depict every day and diverse situations?

5. Ensuring consistency and complementarity

- ☐ Is the narrative consistent with the implementing institution's/organisation's actual actions?
- ☐ Are contradictions or inconsistencies avoided?
- ☐ Does the communication reinforce existing policies and inclusive practices?

6. Building cooperation

- ☐ Have a variety of strategic partnerships been identified?
- ☐ Are different sectors (education, health, culture, media, sport) involved?
- ☐ Have LGBTIQ people been involved in the process and decision-making?
- ☐ Is there collaboration with specialist organisations?
- ☐ Does the narrative reinforce common objectives?

7. Defining objectives and target audiences

- ☐ Are the campaign's objectives defined?
- ☐ Have specific audiences been identified?

- ☐ Is the narrative tailored to each audience and context?
- ☐ Is there consistency between the objectives and the messages?

8. Designing strategic content

- ☐ Is the content clear and understandable?
- ☐ Does it have emotional resonance?
- ☐ Is it based on real experiences?
- ☐ Does it incorporate accurate information?
- ☐ Does it encourage empathy and critical thinking?
- ☐ Does it highlight a diversity of identities and experiences?
- ☐ Does it include positive, everyday role models?
- ☐ Does it reinforce a sense of recognition and belonging?

9. Planning dissemination

- ☐ Have credible profiles been identified to disseminate the narrative?
- ☐ Are multiple communication channels being used?
- ☐ Are community-based initiatives combined with wider campaigns?
- ☐ Are the leading voices diversified?
- ☐ Is over-exposure of the same profiles avoided?

10. Repeating and reinforcing key messages

- ☐ Are the key messages clearly defined?
- ☐ Are they consistently repeated across different formats?
- ☐ Are they consistent across all channels?
- ☐ Are they reinforced over time to build familiarity?

11. Evaluating and adapting

- ☐ Have evaluation indicators been defined?
- ☐ Is the campaign's impact being measured?
- ☐ Is feedback collected from audiences?
- ☐ Is the level of identification generated assessed?
- ☐ Is the perception of recognition and belonging analysed?
- ☐ Is the change in knowledge and attitudes being measured?
- ☐ Is the narrative adjusted according to results and context?

Reminder

Alternative narratives do not merely seek to counter rumours or discriminatory discourse. Their primary purpose is to broaden the frameworks through which reality is understood by promoting narratives that recognise diversity, strengthen mutual recognition, foster a sense of belonging and contribute to more inclusive and cohesive communities. To this end, it is important that LGBTIQ people are represented in all their diversity and portrayed as an integral part of everyday life, rather than appearing only in the context of discrimination, advocacy or awareness-raising.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author(s). Views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union or the Council of Europe.

This document was drafted in the framework of the EU/CoE joint project “Combating anti-LGBTIQ violence and hate speech and strengthening awareness raising and fact-based narratives about LGBTIQ persons”.

The reproduction of extracts (up to 500 words) is authorised, except for commercial purposes, as long as the integrity of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used out of context, does not provide incomplete information or does not otherwise mislead the reader as to the nature, scope or content of the text.

The source text must always be acknowledged as follows “© Council of Europe, 2026. All rights reserved. Licensed to the European Union under conditions”. All other requests concerning the reproduction/translation of all or part of the document should be addressed to the Publications and Visual Identity Division, Council of Europe (F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.int).

All other correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to the Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics Unit of the Council of Europe’s Equal rights and Hate Prevention Division, Council of Europe, F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, E-mail: sogi@coe.int

This publication has not been copyedited by the PVID Editorial Unit to correct typographical and grammatical errors.

Cover and layout: Diversit

© Council of Europe, October 2026. All rights reserved. Licensed to the European Union under conditions.