

Guide

ICM Midwifery Terminology: Reference Guide for Standardised Spanish and French Translations

2026

Background

Following the publication of key global documents on midwifery models of care in English, which ICM collaborated on together with WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF, we recognised the need to streamline how midwifery related concepts and terms are translated and used across different languages and contexts.

The release of the [Midwifery Models of Care Position Paper](#) in 2024 and its accompanying [Implementation Guide](#) in 2025 highlighted the importance of establishing a common understanding of midwifery-related terminology beyond English. As these publications were translated, it became clear that key terms were being rendered in multiple ways across organisations, and in some cases even within ICM's own resources, creating inconsistency, reducing clarity, and making it more difficult to locate, align and use related resources across documents, languages and regions.

Because *midwifery models of care* is not a commonly used concept in many non-English-speaking contexts, particularly in Spanish- and French-speaking settings, we identified the need for a more coordinated approach to terminology, working in collaboration with WHO and UNFPA. This included addressing variations in how core terms such as *midwife*, *midwifery* and *models of care* were being translated, to ensure greater consistency across languages.

The Consultation Process

To address these challenges, ICM led a structured consultation process to agree on the most appropriate translations of key midwifery terminology. This process was designed to ensure that the terminology adopted would be clear, relevant and usable across different contexts, while remaining aligned with the intent of the original English-language documents.

Consultations were conducted separately for Spanish and French, recognising the linguistic, cultural and professional diversity across regions and the need to adapt the

process to different intercontinental and national realities. Participants included midwives with experience in policy, education, practice and translation, bringing a broad range of perspectives to the discussion.

The consultations focused on identifying areas of divergence in existing translations, discussing the implications of different terminology choices, and reaching agreement on preferred terms. The outcome of this process was a set of agreed translations for use in the Spanish- and French-language versions of the *Midwifery Models of Care* publications and related resources. **While these terms were agreed for use in global translations, we recognise that regional and national terminology will continue to be used in different contexts, and that the agreed terms do not necessarily reflect the terminology currently used in all settings.**

From Consultation to Standards

To support continuity and streamline the way we speak and write about midwives and midwifery, ICM has decided to adopt the outcomes of these consultations as the standard terminology for its Spanish- and French-language publications moving forward.

This means that the agreed translations are now considered the reference standard for:

- ICM documents and resources
- ICM digital (website) content

Standardising terminology helps ensure that resources are easier to find, understand and use, while strengthening coherence across global and regional communications.

Balancing Global Consistency and Local Terminology

Alongside the adoption of standard terminology, ICM has decided to systematically include language and terminology disclaimers in its Spanish- and French-language publications. These disclaimers acknowledge the diversity of terms used to describe the midwifery profession across different countries and contexts, while clearly explaining the terminology choices made by ICM for consistency at the global level.

Including these disclaimers helps:

- Recognise and respect national, cultural and linguistic differences
- Avoid confusion or misinterpretation of terminology
- Provide transparency around institutional language choices
- Support inclusive communication, including the use of the generic feminine form in gendered languages

By pairing standardised terminology with clear disclaimers, ICM aims to balance global consistency with respect for local realities.

Beyond English, Spanish and French

Translations of ICM documents in any language face similar challenges. While this guidance is intended for ICM's official languages, English, Spanish and French, it also serves as a broader example of the importance of reaching consensus on key professional terminology *before* translating technical and policy documents in other languages.

Establishing agreed terminology early helps prevent inconsistencies, supports accurate translation, and strengthens shared understanding across languages and contexts. It can also support alignment between curricula, legislation, policy, and Global Standards.

English Term	Agreed term
Midwife	Matrona
Midwifery	Matronería
Midwifery care	Atención en Matronería
Continuity of midwife care	Continuidad de la atención en matronería
Midwifery programme	Programa de matronería
Midwifery models of care	Modelos de atención en matronería
Continuity of midwife care models	Modelos de continuidad de la atención en matronería
Midwife-led birth centres	Centros de nacimiento dirigidos por matronas
Grammatical gender for “midwife”	Generic female

Agreed Terminology

This section sets out the agreed terminology resulting from the Spanish and French consultations. For each language, the reference disclaimer and instructions for use are presented first, followed by the corresponding terminology tables. A comparative overview is included at the end to support understanding across languages. We invite stakeholders doing translations in other languages to consider using a similar approach in deciding their agreed terminology.

Spanish terminology

Disclaimer (Spanish):

En sus documentos y contenidos en español, la Confederación Internacional de

Matronas (ICM) utiliza los términos matrona y matronería para traducir midwife y midwifery, con el fin de facilitar la identificación de recursos asociados a la profesión y el diálogo a nivel internacional. Reconocemos que en el ámbito hispanohablante existen otros términos válidos según el contexto local, como partera/partería, obstetra/obstetricia y comadrona. Asimismo, la ICM utiliza el femenino genérico para referirse a la profesión, en reconocimiento de que la mayoría de las personas que la ejercen son mujeres, sin excluir a los hombres, cuya contribución es reconocida y valorada.

English translation (for reference only):

In its Spanish-language documents and content, the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) uses the terms matrona and matronería to translate midwife and midwifery in order to facilitate the identification of resources associated with the profession and to support dialogue at the global level. We recognise that across Spanish-speaking contexts, other valid terms are used depending on local norms, such as partera/partería, obstetra/obstetricia and comadrona. In Spanish, ICM uses the generic feminine form to refer to the profession, reflecting the fact that the majority of people practising as midwives are women, without excluding men, whose contribution to the profession is recognised and valued.

French terminology

English Term	Agreed term
Midwife	Sage-femme
Midwifery	Maïeutique/pratique sage-femme
Midwifery care /Care provided by midwives	Soins assurés par les sages-femmes

Continuity of midwife care	Continuité des soins assurés par les sages-femmes
Midwifery programme	Programme de formation des sages-femmes
Midwifery models of care	Modèles de soins assurés par les sages-femmes
Continuity of midwife care models	Continuité des soins assurés par les sages-femmes
Birth centres	Maisons de naissance
Midwife-led birth centres	Maisons de naissance dirigées par des sages-femmes
Grammatical gender for “midwife”	Generic female

Disclaimer (French):

Dans ses documents et contenus en français, la Confédération internationale des sages-femmes (ICM) utilise les termes sage-femme et maïeutique / pratique sage-femme pour désigner la profession et sa pratique, afin de faciliter l'identification des ressources associées à la profession et de soutenir le dialogue à l'échelle internationale. Nous reconnaissons que, selon les contextes nationaux et locaux, d'autres usages terminologiques peuvent être employés de manière appropriée au sein de cadres linguistiques, culturels et professionnels spécifiques. De plus, l'ICM utilise le féminin générique pour désigner la profession, reconnaissant ainsi que la majorité des personnes exerçant la profession de sage-femme sont des femmes. Cet usage n'exclut pas les hommes au sein de la profession, dont la contribution est pleinement reconnue et valorisée.

English translation (for reference only):

In its French-language documents and content, the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) uses the terms sage-femme and maïeutique / pratique sage-femme to refer to the profession and its practice, in order to facilitate the identification of

resources associated with the profession and to support dialogue at the global level. We recognise that, depending on national and local contexts, other terminological usages may be appropriately employed within specific linguistic, cultural and professional frameworks. ICM uses the generic feminine form to refer to the profession, reflecting the fact that the majority of people practising as midwives are women. This usage does not exclude men within the profession, whose contribution is fully recognised and valued.

Comparative Overview of Agreed Terminology

The table below provides a comparative overview of the agreed Spanish and French terminology, using English as the reference language.

English	Spanish	French
Midwife	Matrona	Sage-femme
Midwifery	Matronería	Maïeutique/pratique sage-femme
Midwifery care /Care provided by midwives	Atención en Matronería	Soins assurés par les sages-femmes
Continuity of midwife care	Continuidad de la atención en matronería	Continuité des soins assurés par les sages-femmes
Midwifery programme	Programa de matronería	Programme de formation des sages-femmes
Midwifery models of care	Modelos de atención en matronería	Modèles de soins assurés par les sages-femmes

Continuity of midwife care models	Modelos de continuidad de la atención en matronería	Continuité des soins assurés par les sages-femmes
Birth centres	Centros de nacimiento	Maisons de naissance
Midwife-led birth centres	Centros de nacimiento dirigidos por matronas	Maisons de naissance dirigées par des sages-femmes
Grammatical gender for “midwife”	Generic female	Generic female