



VVOB'S Communication Policy

Code of Conduct on Images & Messaging

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Introduction

This Code of Conduct on Images and Messages is to provide a framework upon which all colleagues can build when communicating about VVOB. The Code offers a set of guiding principles to assist us in our efforts to communicate VVOB's programmes and values in a truthful, ethical, coherent and balanced way. **Adhering to this code is obligatory.**

Signatories to this Code are acutely aware of the many challenges and difficulties entailed in conveying the injustice of inequality in education while striving to meet the ideals of the Code. Images and messages should seek to represent a complete picture of both internal and external assistance and the partnership that often results between local and international organisations like VVOB. The values of human dignity, respect and truthfulness as outlined in the Code, must underlie all communications.

The signatories to this Code are committed to these principles and to working constructively with others. By signing and promoting this Code, we strive to continue to keep the development agenda very much in our external communication and to look beyond the sound bite or single image to reflect the values espoused in this Code.



Reminder: Visit the [Communication library on SharePoint](#) for templates and resources.



Communication Policy on Images

Explanation of Policy

Throughout the policy, the word 'images' refers to both photography and film footage.

VVOB uses images and stories of our project participants in our communications materials, on our website and social media channels, in our reports, and through other channels.

In addition, we may provide photos, videos and stories to partners or donors for their communications about VVOB. On occasion, VVOB's communications assets have been used by partners as a means of promoting their relationship with us.

While the level of business risk may differ between use by VVOB and commercial use, the legal and ethical issues around ensuring that project participants are fully informed as to the planned purpose of materials that depict their likeness, and agree [consent] to these uses, are essentially the same.

This policy applies to all persons working for VVOB and includes any external consultants hired to produce images for VVOB.

Principles

Consent

All project participants, including children, must feel like an active participant in the image-making process and consent to their images being taken and used.

Consent must be informed. While legally, a signature or mark is important, the policy requires that all participants be told, in a clear manner, how any materials may be used in a way that ensures that they fully understand the implications. Written consent in the form of a signature or mark is the policy standard.

If the materials are to be used by a donor or partner, consent must also be documented. Documented consent is also always required if the participant is below the age of 18 (a Minor) or is considered vulnerable who, if their identity were revealed, could be subject to harassment, discrimination or other negative consequences.

In situations where under 18s are separated from their parents (for example if they are in school) you should seek consent from someone who is responsible for their well-being (for example the child's teacher or the school administration).

Consent forms must be shared with the in-country communication advisor or Head Office communication team for storage. VVOB has consent forms for all staff to use. In the case of illiteracy, the form must be explained clearly to the participant by the VVOB representative and the participant must mark (with an "X" or thumbprint) the consent form.

If a group of participants consent, each member of the group can either sign individually, or a representative of the group can sign, or mark (with an "X" or thumbprint), on the signature page. In the latter case, this must be supported by a note confirming group approval from the VVOB Staff or VVOB consultant gathering the stories and interviews [Interviewer] or photographer/videographer [Photographer]. Additional individual consent should be gathered for anyone interviewed individually or featured prominently in a film or photograph.



Reminder: Visit the [Communication department site on SharePoint](#) for consent forms and more resources.



Transparency

Transparency is essential for building trust with all stakeholders. VVOB ensures that individuals—including children, teachers, and community members—clearly understand the purpose of our activities and how their stories or images will be utilised. Emphasising clarity and consent promotes the collaborative values at the heart of VVOB's work.

When capturing images/stories:

- Do not hide the fact you're taking photos/videos. Make sure the person/people are aware that their image is being taken—show them your camera (and their image if they wish to see it).
- Introduce yourself and explain why you are taking the image.
- Explain how the images and stories that we collect will be used (across print, online, etc.).
- It must be made clear that the images could be used widely and internationally.
- Ask for their consent to take and share their image.
- Explain that consenting or not consenting to having their image recorded will in no way impact their involvement in VVOB's projects.
- All translations should be accurate and honest. When doing interviews and gathering communication content there is no 'right' answer that we want to hear - we simply want to document and record truthful stories. It should be explained to community members and project participants that they can be open and honest, and to partner staff and translators why it is important that we hear a full, truthful account.
- When people are interviewed on film, it is recommended a professional translator be used when the interviewer and interviewee do not speak the same language.
- When planning a communication visit, consider its impact on the country office, communities, and partners. Avoid raising expectations of additional work or funding beyond the project's current scope, especially if the visits purpose is solely to understand a specific issue.

It's good practice to make staff, partners and project participants aware of image-making needs at the beginning of the project and especially ahead of a project visit.

For example, clearly explain, how much time you need to set up, record and take down an interview. Better to overestimate than underestimate. If recording a video interview you may want to consider:

- **At least 1-2 hours for the interview** (setting up, testing sound, moving if you find there is too much noise, asking additional questions other than what you need, time for the interviewee to feel comfortable and relaxed, time for translation etc.)
- **An additional 2-3 hours for then shooting b-roll** to illustrate what was said in the interview. (For example, if the interviewee mentions they do farm work before going to school you would shoot them doing farm work and then packing their bag and getting ready to go to school, their journey to school, them at school, etc.)
- **What times are best for light** to achieve the best results. For example, golden hour at sunrise and golden hour before sunset usually offer the most visually appealing light for photography and video.
- You may also need to get **additional consent in specific circumstances** (if for instance, you are bringing in external photographers, film makers or journalists or for highly stigmatised populations).

It is not normally part of our policy to pay communities to take their images, particularly during short visits and where the time commitment of people is not more than a few hours. This should also be made clear to community members ahead of any visits.

Do no harm

As a human-driven organisation, we must do our utmost to ensure we treat all people with dignity and respect. Please refer to [our integrity policy](#) on this. This extends to all aspects of image gathering and reproduction. When working with children, a child's safety and well-being should always be our top priority and safeguarding and child protection policies must be strictly adhered to.

The gathering of images can cause harm if it is not carried out to a high ethical standard, and they can cause offence if they are intrusive or inappropriate. The use of images can also be counterproductive if they are reproduced inaccurately, with manipulation, or out of context. As an international organisation, we play a role in shaping perceptions of the countries in which we work. We must be mindful and self-reflective.



Reminder: *Integrity must always be at the core of work. [Read our policy.](#)*

Image Requirements

All those involved in gathering images, stories and related case studies must accurately document the conditions that they see. Images should only be taken of people's typical activities and the story that they describe in their interview. We must never imply that people are suffering from things they are not or doing things they are not for the sake of a story. We have an obligation to accurately represent the reality of a situation.

Information gathering and sharing

A range of basic information must always be gathered and uploaded with images where possible. This includes:

- Date
- Place (Name of location and name of school if applicable)
- Name of person depicted
- Age (if known)
- Profession (example: primary school teacher)
- Education situation (related to children in school. For example: grade 3 student)
- Any restrictions on use
- Name of project they're involved in
- Name of photographer
- Copyright holder

When interviews are recorded (video, audio, or note-taking):

- A full transcript or notes must be made available alongside the related images or video.
- Even if the full interview is not published, colleagues must be able to access all contextual information.
- Transcripts are only required in the language in which the interview was recorded.
- In some cases, a summary in an additional language may be needed to support broader use..



Reminder: Visit the [Communication department site on SharePoint](#) for transcript templates and training resources on how to and why to do transcripts.

Whilst it is important that we gather the correct data, we also need to ensure that how we publish this data is in line with both our integrity policy and data protection legislation. Data protection legislation will vary in each country and colleagues must ensure they keep up to date with their country context.

Captions and case study information about children or vulnerable populations can be limited to just a first name rather than a full name and as broad a geographical location as is reasonable .

The selection of the best photos and final video files should be uploaded to the [SharePoint photo database](#).



Reminder: Visit the [Communication library on SharePoint](#) to access the photo database and find guidelines on uploading photos.

Image-taking and representation

Ethics of accuracy, respect and dignity

Our goal should always be to tell rounded and truthful stories – which means showing a wide range of situations. VVOB strives to be a leader in the field by ensuring that those represented are always depicted with agency, accuracy and in a respectful and dignified way. We must consistently reflect on how we can avoid harmful stereotypes and tropes, respect an individual's privacy and be mindful of cultural sensitivities.

Our use of images may contribute to how the global public view international organisations like ours and how they view education in low- and middle-income countries. We must align with VVOB's Integrity Policy.

We do not want to perpetuate harmful stereotypes but instead want to reflect the reality of situations which is often complex. We do not wish to depict our project participants or education systems as without agency or helpless, or simply smiling recipients of our initiatives. Instead, a wide range of images that depict a reflection of the person and their everyday lives can create a more balanced representation.

Aligned with VVOB's Gender Policy, images must avoid perpetuating gender-based stereotypes or biases and ensure diverse representation, including individuals from under-represented gender groups in non-stereotypical roles.

When photographing:

- **Avoid images where the camera looks down** on people. Ideally, images should be taken at the same level or looking up at the person photographed. This ensures we do not contribute to images that make people look vulnerable or powerless.
- **No nudity.** We will not reproduce images that show nudity. Even if it is culturally acceptable, we will not publish images of a child unclothed in any of our own publications. We should never use images that could in any way reduce people to objects of sexual desire or show them in a degrading way. We must also ensure that we respect people's privacy.
- **Be culturally sensitive.** We must show care and sensitivity when taking or using photographs and bear cultural contexts in mind. If in doubt, seek advice from local staff and partners.
- **Respect privacy.** Showing someone in emotional distress may violate their privacy. Care should be taken to give the person space and not infringe on their personal space.
- Remember to **ask for consent** and take note of the basic information required for photographs as listed above.

When editing:

- **Use authentic colour** only. Do not alter the colours of an image in a way that alters the reality of the image. Images should not be changed to duller or sepia tones to make a situation look worse than it is.
- **Be careful with cropping.** Cropping an image should always be done with care as it can greatly affect the meaning of an image and you can easily lose important context.
- **Don't manipulate.** Do not overuse AI or digital editing tools to alter the appearance of an image in a misleading way (such as the colour of skin tone, changing facial features, etc.)
- **Include metadata.** A good rule of practice is to edit your photos with photography editing software such as Adobe Lightroom and to add metadata to all. The basic information/notes you captured should be included in the metadata. Metadata can also be added when you upload to SharePoint photo database. Find more guidance in our [Communication department site on SharePoint](#) for what info you need to add.

Adobe programmes require a license. If you are looking for free or less expensive photo editing alternatives check out these: <https://daminion.net/articles/tools/image-tagging-software/>.

Rules for photography and videography assignments

- **All photos and videos must include metadata** such as project and participant details, location, and photographer name. This must be specified as a deliverable on all Terms of References for photography and video services.
- **Captions must be written** for selected/published photos to ensure proper context. This is a requirement of VVOB communication staff and **must be specified as a deliverable** on all Terms of References for photography services.
- For videos, **the videographer must transcribe and share all interviews fully before editing** begins. This **must be specified as a deliverable** on all Terms of References for videography services. It will be VVOB's responsibility to review the transcripts, identifying the key pieces of dialogue to keep in the video(s) and guide the videographer in their edits.
- Use only **licensed music and visuals** in post-production to maintain compliance with copyright laws. This must be clearly detailed in any Terms of Reference.

External visits

The following should be observed when planning communication trips that involve external visitors:

- **A briefing should take place** before the trip to go over our integrity policy and communication policy. At this briefing, VVOB staff must stress that adherence to the processes outlined is mandatory.
- Everyone going on a trip, whether VVOB staff, supporters or donors, **must read this policy** ahead of the trip. They must also sign any **child safeguarding policies or data protection policies** relevant to the country they're visiting which includes reference to image taking and use. The trip lead/organiser should ensure this is done as part of the travel preparations.
- Visitors should be reminded that posting images on their own social media channels constitutes 'publishing' and therefore **informed consent** must be gathered for all content shared in this way.

When we visit a community or schools with external visitors there may be an unequal power balance between us and the people we interview/photograph, therefore people may feel unable to say 'no' to our requests. For this reason, we must not ask anyone to do or say anything they would not normally feel comfortable doing or saying.

Social media

Social media serves as a critical tool for amplifying VVOB's impact and engaging diverse audiences. To maintain professional integrity, official VVOB accounts must adhere to organisational guidelines. Personal use of social media by staff should align with these values, avoiding the sharing of sensitive or confidential information. All content must prioritise consent, accuracy, and respect.

For staff or others posting images that they have taken themselves on their own social media: this still constitutes 'publishing' and therefore informed consent must be gathered for all content shared in this way.



Reminder: Visit the [Communication department site on SharePoint](#) for writing guidelines which include social media.

Ethical Storytelling

VVOB's storytelling practices are grounded in the principles of integrity and gender equity. This means:

- Ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of all stories, without embellishment or manipulation.
- Gaining informed consent for all stories and providing participants with the opportunity to review and approve the final content.
- Highlighting stories that reflect gender balance and challenge inequities, showcasing positive examples of transformation.





Images Checklist

When publishing images, key considerations should be made:

- ☐ Has consent been gathered?
Can you prove it?
- ☐ Does VVOB own the copyright to image to the image? Can you prove it?
- ☐ Does it accurately reflect what you want to portray?
- ☐ Does it truthfully represent the situation — both the immediate and wider context and will it improve understanding of the realities of our work?
- ☐ Does it reinforce any negative stereotypes? (If yes, don't publish)
- ☐ Is there anything that would allow a location or identity to be recognised, such as school logos or signs, road names, or names of clubs that may put someone — especially highly stigmatised people — at risk?
- ☐ Have you added contextual information with the photo either as caption or as descriptive text? We want our viewers to understand what is being depicted?

Notes

Communication Policy on Messages

Explanation of Policy

This section outlines VVOB's approach to crafting and delivering messages that uphold our values and strengthen our impact. It provides a framework for clear, consistent, ethical, and effective communication across all channels.

Why is consistent messaging important?

- Because a strong message makes a lasting impression.
- Because our messaging provides motivation and direction to our supporters.
- Because our messaging represents all of us and our commitment to VVOB's values and mission.
- Because, for over 40 years, VVOB has been improving the quality of education around the world and our messaging promotes recognition of this.

Messaging refers to our image, our writing, and much more in between. It is made up of a number of different components: the 'look' or visual identity, the way we communicate the work we do.

In a world full of competing messaging, it's critical that we develop ours so that it is recognised by our partners, our donors, the sector we operate in, and the public. While we work in many different countries, we are all part of the same organisation and how we communicate should reflect this. Our messaging must be strong, recognisable and consistent.

Our messaging must set us apart from other organisations who have similar goals and audiences. In a competitive sector, how we represent ourselves is key to helping us grow long and fruitful relationships with our supporters and wider audiences.

All of us who represent VVOB must be able to communicate what we do with ease and confidence. From our Board, to our Country Programmes Managers, and all our staff – we should all know

exactly how and what to communicate to ensure that VVOB's mission is as clear as crystal with public, partners, supporters and competitors.

Principles

Our writing guidelines inform the work of all communication colleagues but are a resource for all colleagues. In the guidelines, you will find everything you need to understand how we can develop consistent messaging and guidance on words you can use to describe VVOB and how to communicate our work in different circumstances to different audiences.

Our communication team in our head office works from a Global Communication and Transparency Strategy which details more on our principles and values in communication but the essentials are covered below.

Reflecting our values of quality, integrity, respect, commitment, and innovation, our messaging should always:

- Be consistent.
- Be truthful and transparent.
- Be reliable, on-topic and relevant.
- Be executed with integrity and respect.
- Be as inclusive as possible by honouring our policies (gender policy, integrity policy); writing for accessibility; designing for accessibility; and ensuring ethical, balanced representation.
- Be positive and constructive (solution-orientated).
- Highlight partnerships.
- Use evidence.
- Demonstrate impact.



Integrity in messaging

All messaging should reflect VVOB's commitment to transparency, honesty, and accountability as outlined in our Integrity Policy. Messaging must:

- Be accurate, fair, and free of exaggeration or unsubstantiated claims.
- Avoid content that compromises VVOB's reputation or violates local and international ethical standards.
- Represent the voices and experiences of all different groups (colleagues, partners, project participants and more) with respect and dignity.

Sustainability in messaging

VVOB's communication reflects its commitment to sustainability and environmental care. Where opportunities arise, messaging (internal and external) should:

- Highlight VVOB's role in promoting climate action and environmental sustainability.
- Communicate the key role of education programmes in tackling climate change and promoting environmental sustainability.
- Communicate internally for climate & environmental behaviour change.
- Where relevant, capitalise on the international days and events related to climate, the environment and education as identified in VVOB's communication strategy.
- Use language that aligns with VVOB's Climate Change & Environmental Sustainability Policy, emphasising equity, justice, and intergenerational responsibility.

Gender-aware messaging

Aligned with VVOB's Gender Policy, messaging must:

- Use gender-aware language and avoid harmful stereotypes.
- Showcase diverse perspectives, ensuring equitable representation of all genders in VVOB's communications.
- Challenge gender norms and stereotypes constructively, focusing on empowerment and equity.

Messaging Requirements

How To Use Our Name

In the first instance, we should write our name as VVOB – *education for development* and there after referring to ourselves as VVOB.

VVOB as an organisation is singular, so:

VVOB is ...

VVOB has ...

VVOB supports ...

VVOB promotes ...

Never:

VVOB are...

VVOB have...

Corporate identity and branding

Our corporate identity represents VVOB's mission, values, and professionalism. Consistently applying our visual and messaging standards across all communications strengthens our brand, builds trust, and ensures clarity in how we are recognised globally. Communication colleagues act as VVOB's brand guardians but all staff, as signatories of this Code, commit to upholding brand integrity by adhering to our visual identity guidelines and writing guidelines.

Important considerations:

- **Consistency across communication:** Ensure the brand identity and communication guidelines and strategy are consistently applied across all messaging to reflect VVOB's mission and professionalism.
- **Logo usage:** Always use the VVOB logo in its official format and colors. Ensure appropriate placement, size, and spacing in materials to maintain visibility and respect for branding standards.
- **Partnership acknowledgements:** When co-branding, ensure the VVOB logo is displayed proportionally and in line with partner logos, respecting mutual branding agreements.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure logos and other brand elements are used in a way that supports accessibility, including sufficient contrast for readability. If further guidance on this is needed, reach out to the communication team and/or access communication trainings available to all.

Writing

Language is subjective and like all good communicators, we adapt how we speak depending on who we are talking to, for what reason and through which channel. How you write in terms of style, tone, and even word-count, will depend on the type of piece you're writing, the platform you intend publishing on as well as the audience you're writing for. Despite this, it is possible to orientate all our written communication around one central tone of voice and a limited number of consistent messages. The more consistent we are, the more likely it is that people will recognise, understand, trust and like us.

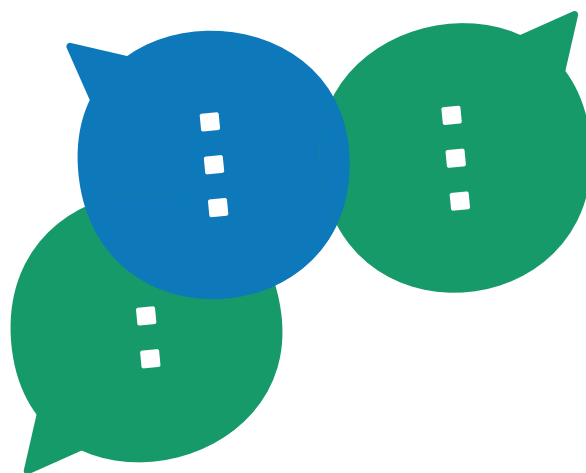
That said, here are a few guiding principles that can work for most audiences. In broad terms, as an organisation, we communicate a message about our work and our programme countries that is positive, and solution-orientated. While this can be articulated within a context of need, the core message places emphasis on achievement, potential, and the transformational impact that investment in education can have. If you have an in-country communication strategy, you can look to your key messages as a guide.

General guidelines

- **Be human:** Communicate with a natural and human tone of voice. Don't be too technical for an external public. Don't rely on ChatGPT or other AI too heavily either.
- **Cut the jargon:** Jargon can exclude others from outside our organisation or sector. Always keep your audience in mind.
- **Cut the acronyms:** Unless specifically required, it is safe to assume most readers don't know about the acronyms we use internally. Spell out full words and don't put acronyms in titles or headlines.
- **Give detail:** An article or post should always include who, where, what, when, and why. Preferably in the first paragraph also known as the lead. Be specific and explain things clearly to the reader, do not assume they already understand.
- **Be active, be real:** When writers use the active voice, their words are direct; they use concrete verbs and clearly state the action being performed by the subject.
- **Use quotes:** Include quotes from teachers, school leaders, learners, parents, community members, VVOB staff, partner organisations, and more.
- **Be respectful:** Use respectful and gender-sensitive language to describe our project participants.
- **Don't waffle:** Don't be excessively wordy. Why say something in four sentences that can be said in one? Write short sentences and avoid repetition in a story.
- **Call to action:** Always include a call to action. Offer a way for people to join us in supporting VVOB's mission. Learn more. Watch this video. Join our webinar.
- **Be confident:** We believe that education has the potential to transform lives. We know this from experience, and we have the evidence to back it up. When we speak about our work, we should do so with authority and confidence. Reassure the reader that we have the experience and knowledge to succeed.
- **Use evidence:** Every argument or claim should be backed up with key figures and facts from recent, reliable and non-biased sources.
- **Use British English:** Ensure your computer settings are set to British English, not American English. In British English, for example, we would spell organisation, not organization; marginalised, not marginalized. Be consistent with this.
- **Check your work:** Check, check, and check again! Before you share your work, check if you have followed the above guidelines where relevant. Run a spell check. Install Grammarly or another grammar app, check your grammar. Check your facts.



Reminder: *Our writing guidelines detail when, how and what to write about.*



E-mail

All VVOB employees worldwide use a @vvob.org address, which can be consulted through the online portal of Microsoft Office 365 or through a locally installed Office package.

Before using VVOB's e-mail, the employee must set the standardised VVOB e-mail signature with their correct function title and contact data. The template can be found in the [Communication Templates and Resources library on SharePoint](#).

Do not add anything extra to your signature such as motivational quotes or religious references. We are a secular organisation.

Information gathering and sharing

When creating messages, ensure all information gathered is accurate, complete, and properly documented. Transcripts of interviews, including metadata for associated photos, audio, and videos, should be stored in VVOB's designated repositories. Refer to the [transcription checklist and templates](#) for guidance.

Messaging Requirements

- Align content with VVOB's mission and project objectives.
- Ensure all messaging is reviewed and approved by the appropriate communication leads to ensure alignment with communication strategy and guidelines.
- Ensure project messaging is approved by relevant project staff to ensure fact-checking is done.
- Communication should be well thought-out and not just for the sake of it. Don't communicate if there's nothing to say. Quality over quantity of messaging.

Video post-production standards

- Ensure all published videos include proofread captions or subtitles to meet accessibility standards.
- Subtitles and captions must adhere to VVOB's writing guidelines.

Crisis communication

For sensitive or crisis-related messaging, refer to our crisis communication strategy ([stored on our Communication department site on SharePoint](#)) and escalate to the designated staff for review and approval. Ensure messaging remains empathetic, balanced, and aligned with VVOB's values.

Crisis-Specific Messaging

- Follow approved holding statements and adapt them to the specific context, ensuring empathy and accuracy.
- Avoid speculation or unverified information in all external communications.
- Consult the Global Crisis Communications Manager for messaging approvals during crises.

Collaboration with partners and the media

VVOB encourages co-developing messages with partners to ensure authenticity and relevance. All joint messages must be reviewed and mutually agreed upon before dissemination.

All requests from media/journalists must first be directed to the communications team, who will coordinate the response.

- **In-country:** official spokespeople are the Country Programme Manager or Strategic Education Advisors, depending on the subject.
- **At the global level:** spokespersons include members of the Global Leadership Team (the General Director, Global Director of Programmes, Global Director of Engagement & Communication) or a Global Strategic Partnerships Advisor.
- **In the case of a crisis/sensitive topic:** please refer to the [crisis communication strategy](#) before responding.

As the media is not a primary target audience of our communications, spokespersons will vary depending on the topic and context.

Social Media Policy

Our organisation regards it as positive that its employees use social media, but such use also entails responsibilities. The speed with which information spreads on social media and its public nature can have a huge impact on the organisation, and hence too on its employees.

This policy sets out the guidelines that employees of our organisation must adhere to when using social media professionally and personally. It is part of the policy regarding the use and monitoring of the Internet, social media and email. All employees are expected to know and comply with it.

What are social media channels?

Social media channels are online tools and platforms on which people are in constant contact with each other and where they determine the content themselves. People use social media to share insights and experiences, information and activities. Social media can take various forms. For example, there are:

- Online networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Micro-blogs such as X, TikTok and Instagram Threads.
- File- and location-sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr.

What place does social media have in our organisation?

Our organisation chooses to use social media in various areas. We are active on various social media channels, among other purposes to get in touch with our target audience groups and potential employees; make our activities known to the wider public; and to share knowledge and information among employees and with external partners.

Official communication from our organisation only



Reminder: Looking for something to say or share? Check [the content repository in our global communication strategy workbook](#).

takes place through the official accounts. Of course, social media is evolving all the time, so the possibility cannot be ruled out that channels or accounts will be added in the future, or that some channels may disappear. Official communication through these accounts is a matter for the exclusive responsibility of the communication team, who alone has access to the accounts.

All other social media communication is a matter for the exclusive responsibility of the employee in question. This means: private communication that takes place (exclusively) via an employee's personal social media account (e.g. a personal Facebook page in the employee's own name).

Private or professional use?

The distinction between private and professional use of social media is sometimes difficult to make, but it is important, as once your followers and friends know that you work for our organisation, you may receive comments from them about this. Any statements you make may therefore be taken as statements from our organisation. In short, anything you post on social media may have an impact on your and the organisation's professional reputation. The basic principles and dos and don'ts listed will ensure that communication on social media is safe.

Basic principles

As an employee of our organisation, we ask that you keep the following basic principles in mind when using social media (professionally and privately):

- You bear sole responsibility for content you post.
- Be aware that as an employee you are also an ambassador for our organisation.
- Watch what you say: whatever you post on social media can always be found on the Internet anywhere in the world (even if you have deleted it).
- What you share on social media is public information and is not protected by privacy legislation.
- Use respectful language and imagery that reflects VVOB's values.
- Do not share or promote content that reinforces harmful stereotypes or biases.

Most important dos

For professional communication:

- Always follow the organisation's general **rules of conduct** as well as the communication policy.
- Follow the rules of VVOB's house style of writing. Don't forget to do a spellcheck.
- Use a **high quality photo** for your profile.
- Protect your account with a secure password.
- Don't associate the organisation's logo with inappropriate content.
- Use social media not just for information-sharing but also for **interaction and dialogue**. **Participate in discussions** on social networks about the latest developments in your field.
- Think before you post something online: add value, be positive and watch your language.
- **Respect copyright**, don't use material from others without permission, and acknowledge any sources.
- Admit mistakes and apologise if necessary.
- Use your privacy settings: select your 'friends' wisely, don't share everything with everyone, don't get tagged without checking first, etc. Respect the privacy of others and **speak with respect** about other people, cultures and values.
- Use common sense, and be honest and accurate.
- Contact the communication team if you have any doubt whether something is suitable to publish.
- Always check the source and content of information carefully for reliability, completeness and accuracy before sharing it with others.
- Follow our guidelines on responsible use of AI.

For personal communication:

- Speak with respect about other people, cultures and values.
- Use common sense, and be honest and accurate.
- Feel free to mention in your biography where you work and what your interests are, but make it clear that you are posting on your own account. Use 'I' in what you write.
- Adjust your profile where necessary and remove references to our organisation when you are no longer employed by VVOB.

Most important don'ts

For professional communication:

- **Don't create accounts in the name of the organisation** without the employer's permission.
- Don't act as a spokesperson for the organisation: this is the task of the communication team.
- Don't quote colleagues or use their material without permission.
- Don't publish any communication that is in violation of our organisational code of conduct (see Integrity policy and HR handbook.) This includes: ensuring your conduct does not bring VVOB into disrepute; and not engaging in the use of, or depicting yourself or colleagues under the influence of, alcohol or drugs, or be in possession of, illegal substances on VVOB premises, accommodation or during working hours (this extends to staff retreats).
- Don't speak badly of associated and partner organisations, members, employees, etc.
- Don't spam.
- Don't immediately respond to negative statements about the organisation, legal issues or crisis situations, but inform your manager or the communication team.

For personal communication:

- Don't distribute internal or confidential information.
- Don't spread defamatory messages about the organisation or other messages that could harm the organisation.
- Don't criticise or speak badly of colleagues, other co-workers (interns, consultants, etc.), members, users, associated and/or partner organisations.
- Never use the organisation's name or logo in your profile name or photo.
- Don't act as spokesperson for your employer.
- Don't engage in prohibited social media uses (see Integrity policy and HR handbook).

Use of AI in Communication

VVOB recognises the growing role and potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in communications and commits to using AI ethically, transparently, and responsibly.

VVOB encourages the responsible use of AI tools to support communication tasks when human insight leads, and AI supports. AI can be helpful when you know what you want to say, but may need help with structure, clarity, or tone. However, AI must never replace the human judgment, ethics, and context that define VVOB's communication approach.

Remember, you are responsible for everything you publish, whether AI helped you or not. Human oversight is non-negotiable, all content must be reviewed, verified, and aligned with VVOB's values and policies.

General Guidelines

You may use AI tools for communication tasks when:

- You have ideas, key messages, or bullet points and want help structuring them into a clear narrative (e.g. blog outline, social post, presentation script).
- You need help simplifying or rephrasing text for a broader audience.
- You want to improve grammar, clarity, or tone without changing the original meaning.
- You're summarising longer texts (e.g. turning a detailed report into key messages).
- You're brainstorming ideas for headlines, hashtags, calls to action, or campaign angles.

You should not use AI when:

- You're trying to generate content about people, partners, or projects you're unfamiliar with.
- You can't personally review and take responsibility for the result.
- You want to simulate real quotes or personal experiences.
- You are unsure whether the use of AI aligns with a partner's expectations, consent agreements, or local sensitivities.

AI in Written Text

Good uses include:

- Structuring ideas for articles or social media posts.
- Drafting versions of content that you will later rewrite and approve.
- Rephrasing or proofreading your own writing.
- Suggesting titles, captions, and calls to action.

Not allowed:

- Publishing AI-generated content without human editing.
- Using AI to create quotes, fake interviews, or imagined stories.
- Letting AI set the narrative without clear direction from you.

Suggestions:

- There's no need to disclose when AI is used to correct grammar or punctuation; suggest synonyms or improve flow; or help structure ideas that you or your team already developed.
- Disclose when AI generates original content especially when it introduces new ideas, phrases, or full paragraphs that go beyond your input.
- Use common sense: if it's your thinking in your words, there's no need to mention AI. If AI shaped the message or wording in a way you wouldn't have written yourself, be transparent.
- To disclose the use of generative AI, you can use a simple line such as "This article was written with support from AI tools and reviewed by the VVOB team."
- Avoid common "AI giveaways" in writing like:
 - Overuse of em dashes (—)
 - Generic or inflated phrases. For example, "fostered", "nurtured impactful synergies", "leveraged holistic approaches."
 - Overuse of emojis especially as bullets or before sentences (this also is an accessibility issue).
- Use your own judgment, voice, and facts. Your reader will notice the difference.

AI in Audio, Subtitles and Transcription

Allowed:

- Using AI tools for transcribing interviews or adding subtitles.
- Using AI for draft translations of subtitles but always reviewed by a human.

Not allowed:

- Publishing auto-generated subtitles without checking them.

AI in Visuals and Images

AI-generated imagery should never mislead or create the illusion of real people or contexts that do not exist. Trust in our visual communication depends on authenticity.

Allowed:

- Stylised illustrations (non-photo-realistic) for visual support if clearly labeled as AI-generated. But, this must be checked carefully.
- Conceptual artwork that complements real storytelling (For example, icons and abstract designs).

Not allowed:

- AI-generated photo-realistic images of people, classrooms, or communities that represent real VVOB projects or partners.
- Using AI visuals to replace actual photos from our work, especially when depicting learners, educators, or schools.

Always:

- Label AI-generated visuals clearly.
- Request approval from the Head Office Communications Team before publishing any AI-generated imagery.
- Use your judgment to avoid racial or gender bias, stereotyping, or cultural insensitivity.

Other Considerations

Data Protection and Privacy

Never input personal or sensitive data (e.g. unpublished reports, donor data, identifiable stories, or images of children) into AI tools unless:

- You have clear consent or legal grounds.
- You're using a secure tool approved for this use. If you're unsure, check with VVOB's IT Advisor.
- You've anonymised the data where needed such as removing names, locations, partner identifiers.

Environmental Impact

AI tools are energy-intensive. Be intentional:

- Use AI when it adds value. Don't use it out of habit.
- Learn how to prompt effectively so you get clearer results with fewer iterations.
- Prefer lighter tools for simple tasks (For example, search engines for facts rather than AI chat for lists).

When using AI in meetings

- Have all participants including external partners clearly agreed to AI being used?
- Is the meeting covering sensitive or strategic content?
- Where will the notes be stored, and who has access?
- Would manual notes serve the same purpose and offer better control?

When using AI in internal communication:

- Do I understand and take responsibility for what the AI has generated?
- Have I edited the output to match VVOB's tone and voice?
- Could this message be misunderstood if an AI tool shaped too much of it?

General questions to ask yourself:

- Does using AI here add value?
- Will this save time without compromising quality or ownership?
- Would I feel comfortable explaining this process to colleagues, managers, or partners?
- Would I feel confident explaining how I used AI and why, if a colleague or partner asked me about it?

Notes



VVOB - *education for development*

**Julien Dillensplein 1 bus 2A
1060 Brussels
Belgium**

**+32 (0)2 209 07 99
info@vvob.org**

www.vvob.org



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