



EUROPEAN  
**COMMISSION**

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# Social media guidelines for Commission staff



# Purpose

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Thinking of using your personal social media account to **post about EU matters**, but not sure about the rules?

As an institution, we would like to encourage and empower you to use social media to speak with the public about the EU, its policies, and their impact. The EU needs the advocacy of committed Europeans, and you have an important role to play. We hope many of you will act as **ambassadors for European policies and values**.

However, there are certain things you need to bear in mind, because the very nature of social media often makes it difficult to draw lines between professional and private use.

In addition, even when you use social media in your personal capacity, **you remain a member of Commission staff** and are bound by obligations in the Staff Regulations (in particular Articles 11, 11a, 12, 12b, 17, 17a), as set out below.

To help you comply with these obligations, these guidelines advise you on how to use your private social media accounts to communicate on EU matters in a way that is **appropriate and safe**.

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Although these guidelines do not cover your private use of social media on **issues not related to EU matters**, some of the rules and practical recommendations also apply (see Part 4).

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# Scope

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These Guidelines cover the **personal use of social media when communicating on EU matters**.

## 1 Who do the guidelines apply to?

- **statutory staff**  
(officials, temporary agents, contract agents, local staff, and special advisers)
- **seconded national experts**  
(see Article 7 of Commission Decision C (2008) 6866)
- **trainees**  
(point 5.3 of Commission Decision C(2005)458)

**Agents under national law, service providers and interim staff** should also use these guidelines as a point of reference when using social media in their personal capacity



These Guidelines **do not cover cases where staff are mandated to speak** or act on behalf of the Commission.

For example, Members of the College, spokespersons, Heads of Representation, press officers and European Semester Officers in Representations, or staff posting in a professional capacity on the social media profiles of an official Commission presence (such as corporate accounts, DGs, Representations or EU programmes).

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## 2 "Publications" and "outside activities" – special rules

Some advanced types of social media content and use (e.g., blogs, video channels, podcasts, activity as an “influencer” or content creator) may constitute either a “publication” or an “outside activity”, as defined in the **Staff Regulations** – when they go beyond the standard use of social media (see table below).

If so, the respective Staff Regulations rules apply – especially:

- for **publications**, the requirement to allow some time for your institution to check if any content in the publication might seriously damage the interests of the EU (Article 17a)
- for **outside activities**, the requirement to get prior approval from your institution (Article 12b).

### What makes something a publication or an outside activity?

- The main criteria to consider are:
  - length
  - frequency
  - permanence in time
  - the text itself
  - the audience





PUBLICATION	NOT A PUBLICATION
<p>Work-related opinions or opinions related to EU matters which go beyond a short appreciation and amount to a structured, stand-alone text.</p> <p>This tends to be more of a major single event, such as publishing a book, an article or a written interview published by a local newspaper.</p> <p>More information: <u><a href="https://european-council.europa.eu/media/1000000/1/Statement%20on%20the%20freedom%20of%20expression%20and%20information%20in%20the%20EU.pdf">Publication and Freedom of expression (europa.eu)</a></u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Short messages that consist merely of sharing pre-existing content.</li> <li>→ Opinions which consist of simply expressing a short appreciation (thoughts, beliefs, or feelings) of pre-existing content.</li> </ul>
OUTSIDE ACTIVITY	NOT AN OUTSIDE ACTIVITY
<p>Managing and regularly publishing entries in a blog.</p> <p>Running a podcast, YouTube channel or similar activity linked to regular publication of content (for example, a monthly programme)</p> <p>More information : <u><a href="https://european-council.europa.eu/media/1000000/1/Statement%20on%20the%20freedom%20of%20expression%20and%20information%20in%20the%20EU.pdf">Outside activity in active service (europa.eu)</a></u></p>	<p>Standard use of social media (commenting, posting, etc.). But see the definition of outside activity in this <u><a href="#">Commission Decision on outside activities</a></u></p>

**The difference between a publication and an outside activity is not always straightforward and might need to be assessed individually, based on the particular circumstances.**

For more details, see [Practical Guide to Staff Ethics and Conduct](#).

If in doubt, contact the Commission's Ethical conduct team (HR.F.5) at: [HR-Ethics@ec.europa.eu](mailto:HR-Ethics@ec.europa.eu)

### **3 Advertising job vacancies**

If you would like to promote a job vacancy in the Commission via your social networks, make sure the vacancy is published on an official Commission external web page, and always post a link to the official announcement. Avoid sharing any insider tips for specific posts.



# Rules & practical recommendations

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## 1 Principle of freedom of expression

As a Commission staff member, **you can of course share or comment on EU-related content and topics when using social media in your own personal capacity.**

We encourage you to make full use of the opportunities offered by social media for this purpose – but you must **follow the principles in these guidelines.**

We also recommend that you **use official sources** to share content related to EU matters. One convenient option is the staff advocacy platform, which contains dozens of **interesting, ready-to-share stories.** Register and start sharing on your social media accounts.

More information on MyIntraComm > [Work Resources > Communication > Staff as Ambassador](#)



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You must also ensure that your personal use of social media does not mistakenly give the impression that you are speaking on behalf of the Commission.

For this purpose, it is recommended to use where appropriate a disclaimer (e.g. in the profile of your account) stating that you are speaking in a personal capacity (for example: This is a personal account, all views expressed are my own.).

While everyone is of course free to open a private social media account, you cannot create a **dedicated Commission account** (e.g. to communicate around projects) without the agreement of your social media team and DG COMM.

**Using dedicated accounts falls under the mandated use of social media, which is not covered by these guidelines.**

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## 2 Your duties resulting from the Staff Regulations

Whether you choose to state where you work or not on social media, be aware that you are at all times:

- bound by the Staff Regulations (especially Articles 11, 11a, 12, 12b, 17, 17a)
- **accountable for your actions**

At any time, even if you are using social media to communicate on EU matters in your personal capacity, you remain a member of Commission staff and your activity might be traced back to you and the Institution.

**Failure to comply with the Staff Regulations in the context of these guidelines may lead to disciplinary action.**

The core principles that apply are summarised below.

If in doubt, contact your manager and/or your communication unit/team.

If the question relates specifically to the application of ethics rules, contact the Commission's Ethical conduct team (HR.F.5) at:

[HR-Ethics@ec.europa.eu](mailto:HR-Ethics@ec.europa.eu)





## a. CIRCUMSPECTION

Exercise caution, care, moderation and a due sense of proportion and propriety (see also section “c” below).

### In practice:

- Think about your contributions to social media in the same way as you would if you communicated through other media or were speaking at meetings and conferences;
- Remain respectful at all times (never use offensive language or content);
- Take into account the political, economic and social context, to avoid your messages and images being misinterpreted or misused.
- Ignore provocation and be aware of the potential escalation of online conversation;
- Be aware that any online message (even if initially posted in a private forum) can become public and, once posted, is difficult to remove;
- Be aware that third parties may also perceive you as a Commission official and a representative of the European institutions, even if you have made a disclaimer.



## b. CONFIDENTIALITY

As a member of Commission staff, you have an obligation not to disclose, without authorisation, any information received as part of your work, unless that information has already been made public or is accessible to the public (see however section “c” below).

Unauthorised disclosure of information, intentionally or through negligence, to somebody who should not know about this information (at least before a certain “release date”), constitutes a leak that can be highly damaging to the interests of the Commission and could lead to disciplinary consequences.

### In practice:

- Internal documents such as drafts, data, notes, emails, content on collaborative spaces, etc. (and especially classified or sensitive non-classified information) can never be shared or referred to on social media;
- Do not disclose any information about the exact nature of your work that is not already publicly available; in particular, do not mention any reference to specific sensitive issues you may be working on;

- It is important when posting photos or videos to avoid accidentally releasing sensitive information by showing post-its, screenshots or documents in the background;

- Be very cautious when uploading photos and videos taken inside Commission premises. This can expose the Commission, its information and its staff to security risks:

→ For security reasons it is forbidden to film/photograph security staff, security installations (e.g., access gates, cameras) as well as secured Cabinets floors and reception areas).

→ When you want to post a photo or video with colleagues, even if only a screenshot/frame of an online meeting, make sure that you have all participants’ consent.

If in doubt about security aspects, consult DG HR’s Security Directorate.

See also point 4b with respect to copyright and personal data.

## C. OBJECTIVITY, IMPARTIALITY AND LOYALTY TO YOUR INSTITUTION

While you are entitled to exercise your freedom of expression, you need to pay due respect to the limits resulting from the Staff Regulations and especially the principles of **objectivity, loyalty and impartiality**.

Follow the **corporate guidance related to the use of apps** and other services in order to avoid potential cybersecurity threats, both when using **corporate mobile devices and personal devices enrolled in the Commission mobile device services**.

**Be careful to avoid** any act or behaviour which might **reflect adversely on your position** or the Commission (cf. Article 12 of the Staff Regulations), e.g., sharing content which could have a negative impact on the Commission's reputation and/or could pose a security risk to the Commission's assets, particularly when you identify yourself as a staff member of the Commission or when the context might lead to that conclusion.

When sharing content, always take into account your position and field of expertise. If public content relates to your precise area of work, it could have a greater impact on the audience you decide to share it with.

Before sharing such content, you should pay extra attention to the sensitivity of the issue (unless an official Commission account has already promoted the same content in social media previously). If in doubt, consult your communication team and/or your line manager before taking any action.

In some instances, even **commenting on public information or targeting a specific audience when sharing content could be seen a breach of impartiality** by the Commission (especially if related to investigations or calls for tender).



## In practice:

- Only share correct information; be aware of the evolving media landscape where everyone can post information, as well as of the growing presence of disinformation
- Think twice before you share content on your private social media platforms. Remember, information should only be taken from reliable and trusted sources: if you would not trust the information or the news source normally, do not trust it or share it!
- Three simple steps can help you to spot fake news:
  - check the source (are you being deceived by fake sources?);
  - check the story (is it covered by more than one news source?);
  - check the intention (has the story been pushed by bots?)
- Never post content on social media which could have a negative impact on the Commission's reputation and/or could pose a security risk to the Commission's assets
- Fully anonymous use of social media (i.e. with "dummy" untraceable accounts) is not recommended
- Do not express opinions that could impair your ability to be seen as performing your duties in an objective or impartial manner
- Pay particular attention not to be seen as speaking on behalf of the Commission when the content relates to your area of work



### **3 Personal use of Commission ICT services/equipment**

When using Commission's ICT (information and communication technology) services or equipment to post on social media in your personal capacity, follow the guidance:

- [guidelines on using ICT services](#)
- [personal use of ICT services page](#)

You are allowed to post on your private social media account while using corporate IT equipment, if this usage is limited and reasonable (similar to, for example, personal use of professional e-mail or telephone in the office).

To avoid potential cybersecurity threats, you must follow the corporate guidance related to the use of apps and other services – both when using corporate mobile devices and personal devices enrolled in the Commission mobile device services. Security developments of social media platforms are kept under constant review, therefore be vigilant to respect any further rules announced on My IntraComm.



## 4 General advice when using social media

### a. BE AWARE OF PRIVACY SETTINGS

Content on a social media platform can be shared and made available to different audiences, depending on the platform and/or settings chosen by the user (e.g. to everyone or only to friends or friends of friends). You may also be able to control whether content you post can be re-shared by others.

Make sure you carefully read the privacy policies and learn to manage the privacy and data protection settings of the different platforms where you are active.

### In practice:

- Be aware of the risks linked to content you have previously published or threads where you intervened but which you do not control because they can be publicly shared
- Always be aware that any detail of your personal life you disclose could be misused by third parties, e.g., to harm you or the Commission and other EU institutions
- We recommend you minimise the availability of key personal data such as your date and place of birth.



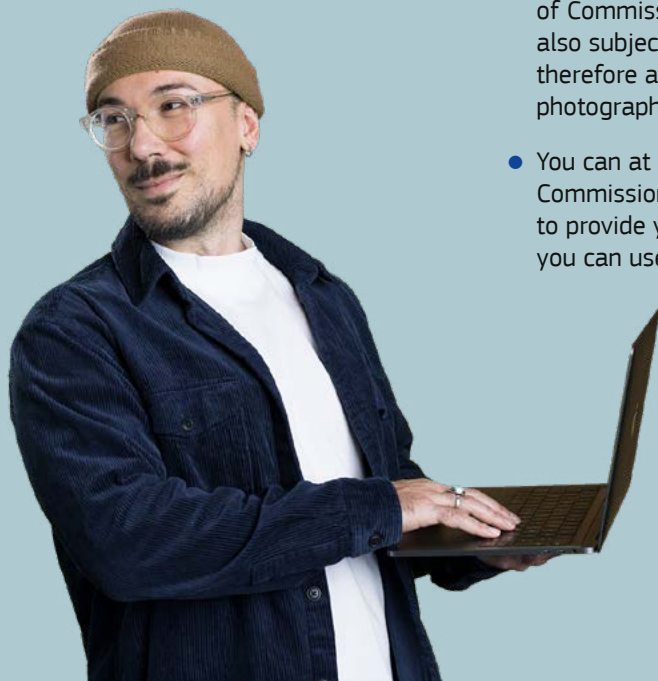
## **b. RESPECT COPYRIGHT AND PERSONAL DATA**

If you want to use content such as texts, pictures, videos or music that belongs to third parties in social media, you must be aware that this content may be protected by copyright.

You can only use someone else's photo (or any other copyrighted material) if the copyright owner gives you written permission specifically to use the content in social media (generic permission to use the content on the web is not sufficient).

## **In practice:**

- Unless explicitly stated, any picture you find on the internet could be copyrighted
- Check the licence of every image before using it on social media. If you are not sure about the rights/ownership, do not use that picture. Please note that widely used licences (for instance, Creative Commons) are often not compatible with most social media's terms of use
- Also respect the privacy of people depicted in photos and videos, and don't post a person's image without their consent
- Artworks exhibited in the interior of Commission buildings are also subject to copyright and it is therefore advisable not to film/photograph them
- You can at any time ask the Commission's communication units to provide you with material that you can use on social media





## C. MAINTAIN STRONG SECURITY FOR YOUR ACCOUNTS

### In practice:

- If you use social media mostly for personal use, use your private e-mail address rather than your Commission e-mail
- Be aware that fake social media messages or profiles are often used for phishing and to hack your account. If possible, use a different channel to verify the authenticity of an account – such as a website, the Outlook address book or a mutual contact person
- Be cautious of suspicious links and always make sure you're on the site of the social media platform before you enter your login information
- Choose strong passwords – different from your passwords at work – and change them regularly
- Use a dedicated password for each social media channel and don't recycle same passwords
- Use any additional security options, such as two-factor authentication, to add an extra layer of protection to your accounts from phishing and hacking. Typically, a smartphone is used as second factor
- You should only install trusted apps on your smartphone, to reduce the risk of malware that could compromise your accounts
- If you suspect your account has been hacked:
  - reset your password immediately
  - make sure the e-mail address connected to the account is secure
  - revoke connections to third party applications
  - update the passwords in your trusted third-party applications
  - check and delete any unwanted activity on your accounts (e.g., tweets, likes, retweets, comments, etc.)
  - scan your computers for viruses and malware – if unauthorised account behaviours continue to be posted after you've changed the password





**d. IF YOU HAVE MADE A MISTAKE,  
CORRECT IT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE**

**In practice:**

- On Twitter, post a new tweet stating it is a correction of a previous one and delete the one with the error;
- On other platforms, edit the post in question (if possible);
- If your attention is drawn to the problem by someone else, thank them for letting you know and inform them you have made the correction.

If there is a security-related incident and it may harm the Commission or yourself, report it immediately to the HR Security Directorate.



# Revision

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The effectiveness of these guidelines will be evaluated 3 years after they are adopted, or earlier if necessary, and may be revised.

These guidelines replace the information contained in Administrative Notice N° 4-2019 / 08.01.2019 on Social Media Guidelines for staff.



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