

Code of Practice on
Disinformation – Report of
VOST EUROPE for the
period JAN2023 to
DEC2023

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Executive summary

VOST Europe constitutes a volunteer-driven of Virtual Operations Support teams, with a presence in Portugal, Spain, France, Germany, and Slovakia. Originally founded to fulfil the exigencies for instantaneous information dissemination and efficacious communication amidst emergencies, VOST Europe has expanded into a network committed to the provision of dependable and precise information to citizens, including raising awareness on disinformation narratives and content, as well as producing pedagogical content on its networks regarding disinformation narratives, and reporting those to the very large online platforms.

Amidst the escalating menace of disinformation, VOST Europe assumes a role in fostering trust and resilience, ensuring the availability of authentic and reliable information throughout crises, and raising awareness, both publicly and directly with the platforms, of content that deems to be against each platform's TOS and current legislation.

Over the preceding 12 months, VOST Europe has rendered assistance to European VOST in the surveillance and documentation of disinformation pertaining to COVID-19, Russian's invasion of Ukraine and national elections, as well as the earthquakes that affected Morocco, Turkey and Syria, the latter in close cooperation with the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission.

During this timeframe, VOST Europe has also reinforced the number of volunteers tasked with the monitoring, identification, and reporting of disinformation on all platforms where it has a presence.

As a participant in the EU-HYBNET network, VOST Europe has continued the dissemination of information to consortium partners, and network members, concerning disinformation narratives of relevance to the consortium and its partner network. It has also elucidated the various stakeholders the essence of the Code of Practice on Disinformation and its significance.

VOST Europe has engaged in the permanent task force established by the Code of Practice on Disinformation, assuming the co-chairmanship of the "Crisis Response Subgroup" and participating in additional sub-groups as an active contributor, namely the Elections Subgroup.

In the "Crisis Response Subgroup" VOST Europe developed a proposal for a "Crisis Response Centre", in alignment with other CSO and fact-checking signatories of the Code of Practice, that was presented to the Commission for further analysis.

VOST Europe also assumed the development of the new Transparency Centre, to be launched in 2024, that will fulfil the Code of Practice's vision and will make it more user friendly for both signatories and visitors, with a focus on open data for independent analysis.

VOST Europe is committed to continuing to fight disinformation and aiding national VOST initiatives towards cultivating a more informed and resilient society.

In conclusion, VOST Europe pledges to maintain its representation within the Task Force of the Code of Practice on Disinformation and to persist in the enhancement, training, and deployment of its teams for the identification and reporting of disinformation online.

Guidelines for filling out the report.

Reports are detailing how signatories have implemented their Commitments under the Code and signatories commit to provide regular reporting on Service Level Indicators (SLIs) and Qualitative Reporting Elements (QREs). The reports and data provided should allow for a thorough assessment of the extent of the implementation of the Code's Commitments and Measures by each signatory.

Reporting period

The reporting period to be covered in the reports is 12 months for signatories who are not offering very large online platform services. Signatories shall submit reports outlining policy updates and actions taken to implement the Commitments and Measures they signed up to under the Code. All data and policy updates should be reported for 12 months period from the submission of last reports.

Adjusting the reporting template

Signatories who are not offering very large online platform services can adapt the template to specific commitments and measures they subscribed to. This may include adapted wording for commitments, measures, QREs and SLIs. Relevant signatories will report only on commitments and measures they subscribed to and provide Member State-level data only if feasible.

Reporting per Service

When filling in a report for several services, use colour codes to clearly distinguish between services. At the beginning of the report, clarify what colour is used for which service.

Reporting in text form

Reporting in the form of written text is required for several parts of the report. Most of them are accompanied by a target character limit. Please stick to the target character limit as much as possible. We encourage you to use bullet points and short sentences. When providing information to the QRE, please make sure that your answer covers all the elements of the associated commitment and measure. Links should only be used to provide examples or to illustrate the point. They should not be used to replace explanations or to provide data in the forms. All relevant explanations and data must be included in the report directly, in written form.

Reporting SLIs and data

Reporting on SLIs requires quantitative information to be reported on in this harmonised reporting template.

- Where relevant and feasible, SLIs should be reported on per Member State.
- If no data is available on Member State level, SLIs might, instead, be exceptionally reported on per language. (NB that signatories agreed to revisit this issue after the first reporting, to ensure harmonised and meaningful reporting.)
- Please report data in the format provided by the harmonised reporting template, not through external links. Please use the Member State/language template provided in the harmonised reporting template. Where the table asks for "Other relevant metrics", please name the metric that you would like to report on in addition to the ones already provided. You may include more than the number of additional fields provided where necessary; in that case, please adjust the table as needed.
- Please contextualize all data as much as possible, i.e. include baseline quantitative information that will help contextualize the SLIs (e.g. number of pieces of content labelled out of what volume of content).
- If there are no relevant metrics to report on, please leave the respective columns blank.

Reporting on TTPs

If subscribed to Commitment 14, Integrity of Services, we ask you to report on each identified TTP individually. The number of identified TTPs may vary per service. Where more than one TTP are reported under the same action, clarify the reasoning in the methodology. Where input is not provided, keep the placeholder for the relevant TTP and explain reasons and planned remedial action. Additionally, as with all other SLIs, data can be provided per Member State for each individual TTP.

Missing Data

In case that at the time of reporting there is no data available yet, the data is insufficient, or the methodology is lacking, please outline in the dedicated field (i.e. in the field about further implementation measures planned) how this will be addressed over the upcoming six months, being as specific as possible.

Signatories are encouraged to provide insights about the data/numbers they provide by inserting possible explanations in the boxes of the template "*Methodology of data measurement & insights on data provided*". This should aim to explain the why of what is being reported, for instance - *Are there trends or curiosities that could require or use contextual explanation? What may be driving the change or the difference in the number?* Please also indicate inconsistencies or gaps regarding methodology in the dedicated box.

Attachments

We ask you not to enclose any additional attachments to the harmonised reporting template.

Crisis and elections reporting template

Relevant signatories are asked to provide proportionate and appropriate information and data during a period of crisis and during an election. Reporting is a part of a special chapter at the end of the harmonised reporting template and should follow the guidelines:

- The reporting of signatories' actions should be as specific to the particular crisis or election reported on as possible. To this extent, the rows on "Specific Action[s]" should be filled in with actions that are either put in place specifically for a particular event (for example a media literacy campaign on disinformation related to the Ukraine war, an information panel for the European elections), or to explain in more detail how an action that forms part of the service's general approach to implementing the Code is implemented in the specific context of the crisis or election reported on (for example, what types of narratives in a particular election/crisis would fall into scope of a particular policy of the service, what forms of advertising are ineligible).
- Signatories who are not offering very large online platform services and who follow the invitation to report on their specific actions for a particular election or crisis may adapt the reporting template as follows:
 - They may remove the "Policies and Terms and Conditions" section of the template, or use it to report on any important changes in their internal rules applicable to a particular election or crisis (for example, a change in editorial guidelines for fact-checkers specific to the particular election or crisis)
 - They may remove any Chapter Section of the Reporting Template (Scrutiny of Ads Placement, Political Advertising, Integrity of Services etc.) that is not relevant to their activities
- The harmonised reporting template should be filled in by adding additional rows for each item reported on. This means that rather than combined/bulk reporting such as "Depending on severity of violation, we demote or remove content based on policies X, Y, Z", there should be individual rows stating for example "Under Policy X, content is demoted or removed based on severity", "Under Policy Y, content [...]" etc.
- The rows should be colour-coded to indicate which service is being reported on, using the same colour code as for the overall harmonised reporting template.

Reporting should be brief and to the point, with a suggested character limit entry of 2000 characters.

Uploading data to the Transparency Centre

The reports should be submitted to the Commission in the form of the pdf via e-mail to the address CNECT COP TASK FORCE CNECT-COP-TASK-FORCE@ec.europa.eu within the agreed deadline. Signatories will upload all data from the harmonised reporting template to the Transparency Centre, allowing easy data access and filtering within the agreed deadline. It is the responsibility of the signatories to ensure that the uploading takes place and is executed on time. Signatories are also responsible to ensure that the Transparency Centre is operational and functional by the time of the reports' submission that the data from the reports are uploaded and made accessible in the Transparency Centre within the above deadline, and that users are able to read, search, filter and download data as needed in a user-friendly way and format.

V. Empowering Users

Commitment 17

In light of the European Commission's initiatives in the area of media literacy, including the new Digital Education Action Plan, Relevant Signatories commit to continue and strengthen their efforts in the area of media literacy and critical thinking, also with the aim to include vulnerable groups. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 17.1	[insert wording if adapted]				
QRE 17.1.1 [insert wording if adapted]	VOST Europe, in collaboration with national VOST teams, orchestrated disinformation awareness initiatives and elevated the dissemination of content originating from independent researchers and fact-checkers across its social media platforms. This concerted effort aims to enhance citizen awareness regarding disinformation narratives and equip them with the necessary skills to discern such misinformation.				
SLI 17.1.1 - actions enforcing policies above [change wording if adapted]	Metrics were obtained using the VLOP's own analytics tools				
	Total count of the tool's impressions	Interactions/ engagement with the tool	Other relevant metrics	Other relevant metrics	
Data	1.7M		N/A		
Measure 17.2	[insert wording if adapted]				
QRE 17.2.1 [insert wording if adapted]	Outline relevant actions [suggested character limit: 2000 characters]				
SLI 17.2.1 - actions enforcing policies above [change wording if adapted]	Metrics were obtained using the VLOP's own analytics tools				
	Nr of media literacy/ awareness raising activities organised/ participated in	Reach of campaigns	Nr of participants	Nr of interactions with online assets	Nr of participants (etc)
Data	21	3.4M	5	N/A	N/A
Measure 17.3	[insert wording if adapted]				
QRE 17.3.1 [insert wording if adapted]	Outline relevant actions [suggested character limit: 2000 characters]				

VI. Empowering the research community

Commitment 29

Relevant Signatories commit to conduct research based on transparent methodology and ethical standards, as well as to share datasets, research findings and methodologies with relevant audiences. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 29.1	[insert wording if adapted]
QRE 29.1.1 [insert wording if adapted]	In this period VOST Europe did not conduct any research, taking a more operational stance
QRE 29.1.2 [insert wording if adapted]	In this period VOST Europe did not conduct any research, taking a more operational stance
QRE 29.1.3 [insert wording if adapted]	In this period VOST Europe did not conduct any research, taking a more operational stance
SLI 29.1.1 - reach of stakeholders or citizens informed about the outcome of research projects [change wording if adapted]	Methodology of data measurement [suggested character limit: 500 characters]
	Reach of stakeholders or citizens informed about the project
Data	N/A

VIII. Transparency Centre

Commitment 34

To ensure transparency and accountability around the implementation of this Code, Relevant Signatories commit to set up and maintain a publicly available common Transparency Centre website. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 34.1	VOST Europe is leading the evolution of a new iteration of the Transparency Centre, focusing on enhancing its accessibility and utility for both users and signatories. This initiative will see VOST Europe providing technical expertise and informational support to signatories, facilitating the development of a more user-friendly and signatory-oriented Transparency Centre. During the reporting period VOST Europe setup a dedicated team to help signatories overcome issues with the upload of the reports in the current Transparency Centre.
Measure 34.2	VOST Europe has allocated human and technological resources in order to fulfil this commitment.
Measure 34.3	N/A
Measure 34.4	VOST Europe made a proposal for the development of the new iteration of the Transparency Centre that was accepted by all signatories.
Measure 34.5	VOST Europe actively participated in the discussions of new iteration of the Transparency Centre, collecting signatories' and end-users feedback during this reporting period.

VIII. Transparency Centre

Commitment 35

Signatories commit to ensure that the Transparency Centre contains all the relevant information related to the implementation of the Code's Commitments and Measures and that this information is presented in an easy-to-understand manner, per service, and is easily searchable. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 35.6	After two reporting periods, and user / signatory feedback, VOST Europe proposed to developed a new iteration of the Transparency Centre, in order to make it more user and signatory friendly, and in order to fulfil all the requirements set in the Code of Practice on Disinformation regarding the Transparency Centre platform.
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VIII. Transparency Centre

Commitment 36

Signatories commit to updating the relevant information contained in the Transparency Centre in a timely and complete manner. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 36.1	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 36.2	[insert wording if adapted]
Measure 36.3	[insert wording if adapted]
QRE 36.1.1 (for the Commitments 34-36) [insert wording if adapted]	Outline relevant actions [suggested character limit: 2000 characters]
QRE 36.1.2 (for the Commitments 34-36) [insert wording if adapted]	Outline relevant actions [suggested character limit: 2000 characters]
SLI 36.1.1 - (for Measures 34 and 36) meaningful quantitative information on the usage of the Transparency Centre, such as the average monthly visits of the webpage [change wording if adapted]	Methodology of data measurement [suggested character limit: 500 characters]
	For the relevant reporting period, the Transparency Centre was accessed by more than 83000 unique visitors, that interacted with the content of the Transparency Centre 226000 times. The Transparency Centre also measured 19000 report downloads according to the data available on the analytics of the Transparency Centre.
Data	

IX. Permanent Task-Force

Commitment 37

Signatories commit to participate in the permanent Task-force. The Task-force includes the Signatories of the Code and representatives from EDMO and ERGA. It is chaired by the European Commission, and includes representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The Task-force can also invite relevant experts as observers to support its work. Decisions of the Task-force are made by consensus. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 37.1	VOST Europe continued its participation in the Task Force, maintaining a regular presence and participation in the Crisis Response Subgroup, Transparency Centre Subgroup, Elections Subgroup, and in the Outreach Subgroup.
Measure 37.2	The work on establishing a risk assessment methodology and a rapid response system to be used in special situations, like elections or crisis, continued within the Crisis Response subgroup. VOST Europe prepared a proposal for a "Crisis Response Centre", that included methodology and a working solution, that could be in the future integrated with the Transparency Centre.
Measure 37.3	N/A
Measure 37.4	VOST Europe was part of the setup of subgroups dedicated to the specific issues related to the implementation and revision of the Code with the participation of the relevant Signatories. VOST Europe also continued to co-chair the Crisis Response subgroup and help other signatories in the chairing of their respective subgroups.
Measure 37.5	VOST Europe has used its presence in other initiatives to promote, discuss and clarify other entities – of different profiles and backgrounds – on the Code of Practice's objectives-
Measure 37.6	VOST Europe co-chaired the Crisis Response subgroup and took an active part on the Outreach subgroup, in the Transparency Centre subgroup, as well as in the Elections subgroup. The Crisis Response subgroup focused, and discussed, possible solutions for the Rapid Response System, that stems from the Code of Practice. The work done in the Outreach subgroup involved analysing proposals for new signatories. The work done in the Transparency Center subgroup focused on supporting all signatories and starting to design the new information architecture of next iteration of the Transparency Centre.
QRE 37.6.1 [insert wording if adapted]	Outline relevant actions [suggested character limit: 2000 characters]

X. Monitoring of Code

Commitment 40

Signatories commit to provide regular reporting on Service Level Indicators (SLIs) and Qualitative Reporting Elements (QREs). The reports and data provided should allow for a thorough assessment of the extent of the implementation of the Code's Commitments and Measures by each Signatory, service and at Member State level. [change wording if adapted]

Measure 40.1	VOST Europe has sent the second baseline report describing the implementation of its commitments of the Code of Practice
Measure 40.3	VOST Europe has uploaded this report, and made it available on the Transparency Centre for this reporting period
Measure 40.4	VOST Europe participated in the discussions that led to the development of the new harmonised reporting templates.