

## Ipas Code of Conduct for Ethical Storytelling

*Adapted from the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images & Messages. Dóchas is the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations.*

### Purpose

Images help us tell stories by promoting a deeper understanding and enhancing the emotional impact of our work via the voices, perspectives and experiences of the people and communities involved. This code of conduct outlines how all staff can be ethically and legally principled in their use of imagery in a way that is respectful to both the subjects in the image as well as the rights of the image creator (photographer, artist, etc.).

The images and messages we use to portray people, places and situations in the communities where we work can have an enormous impact on people’s perceptions and attitudes of both those in the image and the Ipas brand. Depending on the end use of an image, many people can have different opinions about what constitutes “acceptable” use. **Organizations use images and messages for many reasons, such as: to inform (media/education); to sell (marketing/fundraising); to convince (advocacy/policy); to account for (reporting).** Each of these is legitimate and worthwhile—this code of conduct applies to them all.

This code of conduct will assist you in your decision making when using images and messages. There won’t always be right or wrong answers to every situation. Instead, the code of conduct is a set of values and guiding principles. Opinions will differ between individuals, so it is important to remember to always adhere to the “spirit of the code.”

### Responsibilities

This code of conduct is only successful if everyone is involved in implementing it. Therefore, it is critical that all staff members are aware of the code; understand its underlying values and principles; and, most importantly, understand how to apply it to their daily work. Adherence to this code of conduct is EVERYONE’s responsibility—Communications is not the “police” of the code.

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## Definitions

**Images** include any visual representations of people, situations and places whether through photograph, picture, illustration, cartoon or video.

**Messages** include spoken or written communications—whether captions, headlines, sub headlines, case studies, articles, radio/television interviews, speaking in public fora, and advertisements representing people, situations and places.

**External audience:** Any audience outside of Ipas staff.

**Internal audience:** Ipas staff.

**Publish:** Any material shared with external audiences, including but not limited to printed publications, documents, reports, presentations and videos, in print, on [www.ipas.org](http://www.ipas.org) or our social media channels.

**Copyright:** Images are protected by copyright. The copyright owner has the rights to do and to authorize the following:

- Display the image in public
- Reproduce the image
- Prepare new images and other works based on the original image
- Distribute copies of the image to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease or lending.

**Lease:** In most cases, Ipas has negotiated a lease from photographers allowing us to display and reproduce their images, but we **do not** have the right to distribute copies to or share with other parties.

## Intellectual Property Rights

The Communications Image Library is a collection of photos that Ipas has negotiated rights to use with very specific licensing terms. In order to comply with these legal agreements, it is imperative that you:

- Credit photos as directed in the image's CREDIT line.
- Do not save images to your computer for future use because the image library evolves as lease terms end.
- Do not share images from our image library with partner or media organizations. This is a violation of contractual agreements with photographers. Communications can connect organizations to the photographer to arrange their own licensing terms.

- Do not use photos found on the internet without written permission from the copyright owner. This practice is illegal and unethical, and it infringes on photographers' intellectual property rights and livelihood.
- Photos from partner organizations should be submitted to Communications along with a signed *Photo and Video Licensing Agreement* verifying that the organization grants Ipas license to use the photos and that appropriate consent of the subjects was obtained.

## Guiding principles of image and message use

*The code of conduct's guiding principles are driven by the following values:*

- *Respect for the **dignity** of the people concerned*
- *Belief in the **equality** of all people*
- *Acceptance of the need to promote **fairness, solidarity and justice***

### **1. Choose images and related messages based on the values of respect, equality, solidarity and justice.**

**Respect:** This means that respect for the people who are being pictured or talked about should always be maintained; respect for people's privacy and dignity above all.

**Equality:** When capturing images and communicating messages, diversity and a commitment to non-discrimination must always be respected.

**Solidarity:** It is essential to communicate that we work in solidarity with the people where we work. Images and messages should not perpetuate an 'us and them' attitude but instead, foster Ipas's "interdependence" core value.

**Justice:** Underlying the selection of images and messages, there is a need to always strive toward justice for those being portrayed.

### **2. Truthfully represent any image or depicted situation both in its immediate and in its wider context so as to improve public understanding of the realities and complexities of development work.**

Every story has a background and context. It is important to take special care that images and messages are framed to convey and support that background information.

- Avoid image crops that can distort the truth (for example, cropping a picture of a child from a photo of the child with a parent).
- Do not create a false context with inaccurate messages. If your image selection follows best practice but your messaging and communications do not reinforce this, the product, as a whole, will not be appropriate.
- Take care to ensure that "respect for dignity of people" does not result in a simplistic positive versus negative image debate. Some positive images do not truthfully reflect the complexity of the context of development work and the use of "positive" images can

also result in false narratives (for example, that smiling refugees are content in a camp setting).

**3. Avoid images and messages that potentially stereotype, sensationalize or discriminate against people, situations or places.**

While we must accurately represent the extreme levels of distress caused by poverty, we also have a responsibility to uphold the values of human dignity, respect and equality. The code of conduct acknowledges that achieving this balance is not always easy and delivering our messages in the context of fairness, solidarity and justice can be challenging for even the most experienced communications professional. It is important to note that this code of conduct is not a prescriptive check-list of “correct” and “incorrect.” Instead, it is a set of guiding principles that seeks to create a mindset and ethos within our organizations about how we represent the stories and situations of others.

While we recognize that we have a responsibility to move away from the prevailing “negative” images and messages, simply replacing the image of the “poor unhappy person” with a “smiling happy person” does an equal disservice to the context of many situations. In order to accurately portray the lives of people living in extreme poverty or humanitarian distress, we cannot ignore images truthfully representing these contexts. And it is entirely possible to communicate negative stories accurately while still adhering to the values and principles of this code of conduct.

**4. Use images, messages and case studies with the full understanding, participation and permission of the subjects (or subjects’ parents/guardian).**

Before taking an image or researching a story, it is important to ensure that you have the full informed consent of the subject. People whose story is told or image is taken must be aware of where and how these will be used. This may not be possible in all situations (in large crowds, for example) but, in all cases, the guiding values should be considered and applied.

**Guidelines for taking photos and researching stories (applicable to interpreters, photographers, journalists, media people, staff members and people on field trips)**

**Preparation:**

- Be considerate of our issue and aware of the legal status, as well of a country’s cultural sensitivities of abortion. Talk to your in-country colleagues to learn about the views of photography in that culture, and show extreme care and sensitivity when photographing stigmatized populations.
- Prepare your consent forms ahead of time in the local language of the area you will be visiting. If you are unable to prepare written consent forms in the local language, orally translate the consent form to your photo subjects. Use an interpreter if necessary.

- If possible, send communications and consent forms in advance of activities. Make it a best practice to include a consent form in workshop and training documents.

**While onsite:**

- Ensure that interpreters and consultants have read and understand the spirit of the code of conduct and that they are clear on the potential outputs of their work.
- Establish a relationship before you start taking photos. When you approach photo subjects in the field, briefly introduce yourself, be courteous and explain the purpose of your visit or the reason you want to take photos. In clinical contexts, speak with the clinical director before you begin photographing health workers or clients. For example: *“I am taking photos for Ipas, an NGO working to improve women’s health in [your country]. Do I have your permission to take your photo for use in educational media and in our publications?”*
- Explain that these photos may be used in publications, online, videos, social media, trainings, workshops, presentations, etc. If the person has no frame of reference for these media, use the Communications Image Example Handout to show them resources where photos are used, and ask if they would feel comfortable if their photo were to be used in the same way.
- While written consent is always preferable, refer to the chart below on when verbal consent is permissible. **Ipas staff are required to fill out a consent form in all cases.** This form will either include a signature (written consent) or a description of the consent discussion (verbal consent).
- Always ask for the correct names of the subject(s) and locality. Ask the subject or interpreter to spell the person’s name and locality to ensure proper spelling. If the subject gives written permission, make sure this information is legible.
- Capture an accurate and representative story. If there is no interpreter available, ensure at least names, locality and permission is established.
- To keep track of your subject’s information, jot a note with their description on the consent form (e.g., ‘purple scarf and glasses’). Even better, take a picture of them holding their name printed on a consent form or other paper.
- Share the Image Consent Contact Card with your contact information so they can reach out with questions or changes with their consent.

**Different situations & circumstances:**

When to obtain verbal consent	When written consent is encouraged	When consent is not needed
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<p><b>All individuals in all settings when possible</b></p> <p>Parents, guardians or teachers of children</p> <p>Directors/managers of clinics or other service programs.</p> <p>lpas staff</p>	<p>Recognizable providers and clients in clinical settings</p> <p>Recognizable or non-recognizable individuals in any setting where personal, private information is exposed in the photo or documented in the corresponding caption, such as:</p> <p><b>Health status</b> (for example, abortion history, HIV status, persons living with AIDS/STIs, TB, diarrhea, disease, etc.)</p> <p><b>Health behavior</b> (for example, contraceptive use, sex workers, sexual orientation, alcohol and drug use)</p> <p><b>Victims</b> (for example, survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV), rape, exploitation or abuse)</p> <p><b>Criminal behavior</b> (for example, perpetrator of GBV or violence, etc.)</p>	<p>Non-recognizable individuals in public (faces and all identifying features are obscured)</p> <p>Public figures in public (for example, celebrities' campaign launches)</p> <p>Crowds in public (for example, an audience at an outdoor concert; demonstrations) or war and war-like situations where it could mean more harm for the photographer and/or the photographed person to ask than just take the picture.</p>
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**5. Establish and record whether the subjects wish to be named or identifiable and always act accordingly.**

It may often be the case that the people in the photos or story do not wish to be named or identified for security reasons. This should be respected at all times. It is also important to consider whether or not it is appropriate to identify children, especially if they are conveying a sensitive story (gender-based violence, for example). While respecting the dignity of those relaying their stories, the protection of vulnerable people should also be considered.

**6. Try to ensure those whose situation is being represented have the opportunity to communicate their stories themselves.**

Where possible, ask the people to tell their own story; the story-collector's impression or perception of the situation does not necessarily represent the truth. In publications, stories should, where possible, be told in the first person. This gives people a real voice and opportunity to tell their own story. Telling someone's story for them is disempowering and shifts the balance of power to the storyteller. This should, when feasible, be avoided.

**7. Conform to the highest standards in relation to human rights and protection of vulnerable people.**

As a photographer, editor or graphic designer, you should take steps beyond informed consent to protect the privacy of human photo subjects when they are portrayed in vulnerable situations. Photographing and using photos of vulnerable populations requires extreme care and sensitivity.

- Use a model in a clinical setting, rather than an actual patient, and obtain a written release from the model.

- To protect the identity of individuals who may be put at risk of reprisal, violence or rejection in their communities as a result of telling their story, it may be necessary to leave out detailed personal information. In such cases, use pseudonyms or no names for subjects in high-risk situations.
- When necessary, alter photo content to protect subjects.

### **Ipas photo disclaimer**

Publications with photographs or illustrations where the subject is **not** identified by name should include one of the following written disclaimers:

- *For photos or video images used in typical Ipas publications:* The photographs used in this publication are for illustrative purposes only; they do not imply any particular attitudes, behaviors or actions on the part of any person who appears in the photographs.
- *For illustrations or for photographs used in conjunction with works of fiction:* The photographs and/or illustrations used in this publication are for illustrative purposes only. No similarity to any actual person, living or dead, is intended.

Exceptions may apply based on space or format constraints and should be approved by the Communications Team. Instances where a photographic subject is identified by name do not require this disclaimer.

### **Policy resources**