

10 Tips to Minimize the Sharing of Misinformation via Social Media Channels

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Many UNHCR operations already have established active social media channels connecting with persons of concern¹, community-groups and partners – these can be leveraged to strengthen Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using social media enables UNHCR and partners to rapidly share text, audio, image and video content with wide audiences – even when face-to-face communication may not be possible.

Sharing consistent, accurate and engaging content for targeted audiences is key in Risk Communications but knowing what to share via these channels can be challenging. Access to accurate information allows people to make informed decisions to protect themselves and their families. **It is critical that we share factual and informative content and play an active role in minimizing the sharing of misinformation, and disinformation², through these channels.**

If you play a role in sharing information via social media to persons of concern – either individuals or groups – consider these **10 Tips to reduce the risk of sharing incorrect and potentially dangerous information:**

- 1. Press pause:** The speed of social media means we're often compelled to quickly hit 'forward' and share the message we've just received. It's critical to stop, pause and reflect before sharing – we cannot risk individuals or families altering their behaviors in ways that can be harmful. Misinformation spreads far-and-wide, and corrections often gain very little traction.
- 2. Check the source:** Do you know the sender? Are these their words or something they have forwarded to you? If there is no obvious source of information, go back to the sender and ask for clarification. When sharing information to others always try to include the source (and the link to an official website if feasible). There are a number of online fact checking resources - eg. [Snopes](#), with dedicated COVID-19 content.
- 3. Can you verify?** Can the information being shared be corroborated on the official website of the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) and the national Government in your location? If the information is specific to UNHCR, can you cross-reference within your operation? If you're not able to verify, don't share.
- 4. Is the information useful?** The sheer volume of content currently being shared on COVID-19 is deafening. Consider if the information you want to forward is useful and actionable for persons of concern – does it provide advice and guidance on prevention measures and will it inform decision making?
- 5. Have you responsibly considered the emotional impact of the content?** Individuals' perceptions of risk are highly subjective and complex. Information that we forward 'en-masse' via social media may be seemingly harmless but may highlight specific

¹ Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and stateless persons

² 'Misinformation' and 'disinformation' in the media is sometimes referred to collectively as 'fake news'. This term has become highly politicized in recent years and we recommend colleagues avoid using it.

risks for certain groups (e.g. individuals above a certain age). Consider if forwarding the content will only raise more questions and how you can target specific groups with tailored messages and minimize anxiety. Many UNHCR operations and partners will not have the capacity to answer individual messages, in real-time, if concerns are raised.

- 6. Don't mistake duplication for verification:** Receiving the same information from multiple senders is not source verification. The viral nature of misinformation and disinformation sometimes makes it seem true because everyone is sharing; with such messages it's critical to fact check (as above).
- 7. Do you understand the data?** During the COVID-19 pandemic, a plethora of graphs and data visualizations are circulating – many have been 'cut and pasted' from their original context. Without labels or a legend this data is often meaningless and confusing – avoid forwarding this kind of message as you're only contributing to the 'data noise'.
- 8. Does the message use criminalizing or dehumanizing terminology?** Such content assigns blame to those coping with the disease and feeds [stigma](#), potentially leading to an unwillingness of individuals to seek healthcare, opt for testing or adhere to quarantine procedures. Avoid sharing content which speaks of 'plagues' or uses victimizing language – this is particularly important in contexts where refugees/asylum-seekers are being labelled as 'infectious' or as 'guilty of spreading' COVID-19.
- 9. Are there telling signs it's a hoax?** Often hoax messages will encourage onward sharing (e.g. "please share to everyone you know"). They often contain spelling mistakes and the sender may claim to be affiliated with the social media platform. If you're suspicious, it's better not to send.
- 10. Does the message recycle images (pictures or graphs)?** Often, content claiming to be 'breaking news' repackages dated content, for example using 'stock images'. If you're suspicious, consider running a 'reverse' image-search on your browser to determine if and when the image has been previously posted. This COVID-19 pandemic is evolving rapidly, be sure to share only the latest accurate and verified information – avoid recycled content.

Finally: Information shared via social media will never reach everyone in a community and should only be adopted by one of the channels of communication as part of a comprehensive RCCE strategy. Digital divides will result in information disparity if complementary channels are not adopted.

Useful References

For further tips and information on the COVID-19 response, please see the following guidance compiled by some of the main social media platforms:

<https://about.fb.com/news/2020/03/coronavirus/>
<https://about.instagram.com/politics>
<https://www.facebook.com/gpa/blog/messenger-101>

<https://www.whatsapp.com/coronavirus>
<https://www.messenger.com/coronavirus>

Useful Contacts

You can also contact UNHCR colleagues for additional support, questions and feedback:

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