

Reports on January actions - Fighting COVID-19 Disinformation Monitoring Programme

The reports published today confirm the commitment of the signatories of the Code of Practice on Disinformation to take action against COVID-19 vaccines disinformation, and to enhance the transparency regarding the measures taken to fight COVID-19 related disinformation.

Vice-President Jourová met the online platforms in February to stress the urgency of addressing coronavirus vaccines disinformation: *“The online platforms play a huge role in our public debate and need to take substantial steps to prevent harmful and dangerous disinformation, both domestic and foreign, from undermining our common fight against the virus, especially when it comes to vaccination. We are living in a global health emergency and information can save lives. We can only succeed by joining forces.”*

Today, we publish the reports of the COVID-19 disinformation monitoring programme set up under the 10 June 2020 Joint Communication “Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right” on actions taken by the platforms in January 2021. As the pandemic is still ongoing, we asked the signatories of the Code of Practice to prolong the transparency measures until June 2021. We also asked them to focus on the actions to limit disinformation around COVID-19 vaccines, in view of the crucial phase that we are facing regarding vaccination.

Together with the monthly reports of the other signatories, Mozilla has also provided a detailed report on the efforts done during the past 6 months related to COVID-19 disinformation.

Overall, the reports continue to provide a good overview of the evolution of the measures put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 disinformation.

Fighting COVID-19 vaccines disinformation

The reports provide updates on the measures taken by the platforms in January 2021 to fight disinformation on COVID-19 vaccines, which is key to ensuring that the vaccination campaigns of the Member States are not undermined by false or misleading information. Platforms report on their updated policies, which include labelling or removal of false claims and unsubstantiated rumours about COVID-19 vaccines. Also, they have put in place new tools to elevate authoritative information on vaccines, for example updated information panels that allow EU citizens to have timely and precise information about vaccines deployment and availability. Upon the request of the Commission, some signatories have started to provide more precise data about the impact of their policies, e.g. by providing data on user interaction with their COVID-19 information panels, and on additional measures taken to enhance collaboration with researchers. We very much welcome these developments, as such data is crucial to gain more insight about the effectiveness of the actions taken.

In particular:

- **Twitter** will remove the most harmful misleading information, and will label Tweets that contain potentially misleading information about vaccines. Moreover, a vaccine prompt, in partnership with national or federal public health agencies or the WHO, is currently available in Belgium, France Germany, Ireland, and Spain.
- **TikTok** has provided quantitative data on the new vaccine tag rolled out in December for all videos with words or hashtags related to COVID-19 vaccines. The tag has been applied to 5087 videos in the EU, of which 996 in Italy, 1179 in France, 119 in Spain and 273 in Germany.
- **Google** expanded its Google Search feature that provides information and a list of authorised vaccines in response to related searches in 23 EU member states. Also, on 12 January, Google announced the launch of a new \$3 million COVID-19 Vaccine Counter-Misinformation Open Fund which will focus on projects that aim to broaden the audience of fact checks.
- **Microsoft** co-sponsored the #VaxFacts campaign launched by NewsGuard on 3 February to counter hoaxes about COVID-19 vaccines and other healthcare misinformation.

Further reporting for January

The reports provide further information illustrating actions taken to fight COVID-19 related disinformation and the impact of these actions through January 2021. Some examples from the reports:

- **TikTok** started to provide aggregated data on EU wide numbers, which can be compared to the four biggest countries (Italy, Spain, France and Germany) they have been reporting on. In the month of January, page views and user views of the COVID Center Page across Italy, Spain, France and Germany are in line with the numbers of December, with total page views across the EU of 77.963.191 and user views 23.352.565.
- **Twitter** has launched on 26 January a new Academic Research tool in the Twitter API. Researchers have free access to the full history of public conversation and to the additional features on the Twitter developer platform, with enhanced and more efficient ways to access data.
- **Google** continues to elevate the work of fact-checkers in Google Search, Google News, and Google Images by signalling fact-checked articles in search results via dedicated tags and “rich snippets” that make it easy for users to understand what is being fact-checked and the fact-checker’s assessment. Fact checks published by fact-checking organizations from EU27 Member States appear in Google Search about 6m times a week on average, which adds up to more than 30m impressions generated from January 2020.
- **Microsoft** reports that In January 2021, on Bing, the panel “COVID experience” appearing when typing COVID-related searches, had 18.168.419 visitors globally, including 2.942.312 from EU countries.
- **Facebook**, in January 2021, removed over 13.000 pieces of content related to COVID-19 on Facebook and Instagram in the EU for containing misinformation that may lead to imminent physical harm, and over 9.000 pieces violating its medical supply sales standards.

Mozilla has expanded the work done on Pocket, Firefox Browser’s application to “read-it-later” news and information online. Pocket provides authoritative pandemic-related information and news directly in the browsers to users. Over the months, Mozilla has expanded Pocket’s curated collection, for example the one of science journalist Ed Yong’s Pandemic ‘must reads’, that focus on bringing authoritative information to the readers, which had 50.000 page views. More specifically, Pocked-curated authoritative content related to COVID-19 has gathered more than 5.800.000.000 impressions amongst Firefox users across the EU.

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Report / Study | 10 September 2020

Today, the Commission publishes the first set of reports provided by the online platform signatories of the Code of Practice as part of the COVID-19 monitoring and reporting programme set out in the Communication Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right.

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