

Countering Mis/Disinformation: Online Resource

A practical, values-first toolkit for organisations responding to hate, mis- and disinformation about migration.

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Introduction: Why This Guide?

The online environment has become increasingly hostile, with mis- and disinformation about migration spreading rapidly across social media and news feeds. These narratives often exploit fear, division, and stereotypes, targeting already vulnerable groups. Organisations on the frontline—whether charities, community groups, or public institutions—need tools to navigate this landscape safely and effectively.

Facts are an important but insufficient tool to combat online hate. While countering harmful narratives with accurate information is a key strategy, it's often more effective when combined with other methods like reporting to platforms and authorities, counter-speech that provides positive messages, and media literacy education to build resilience against hate speech. Directly fact-checking content, however, is not always effective, as factors like emotional appeal, repetition, and group identification often outweigh a message's realism.



Why facts alone may not work



Emotional and cognitive factors:

Disinformation thrives on factors beyond factual accuracy, such as its appeal to emotion, the perceived authority of the source, and the viewer's existing beliefs or state of mind.



Narrative appeal: Hate speech and disinformation are often embedded in compelling narratives that resonate with certain groups.



Speed and scale: Facts cannot always keep pace with the rapid spread of hateful content, which can travel across the web to a large audience very quickly.



Repetition: Repeated exposure to extreme viewpoints can shift individual perceptions and erode trust, making it difficult for facts to penetrate the established narratives.

More effective strategies when combined with facts

1. **Counter-speech:** Instead of directly engaging in arguments, promoting positive messages of support and sharing positive counternarratives can help fill the void and prevent harmful tropes from taking hold.
2. **Reporting and flagging:** Users should report hate speech to platforms to have accounts suspended or content removed, and report criminal content to the police.
3. **Platform moderation:** Technology companies must invest more in moderation procedures, potentially working with external experts and civil society organisations, to monitor and remove hate speech.
4. **Media literacy education:** Building media and information literacy helps people critically evaluate the content they encounter, including identifying misinformation, and builds resilience against hate speech.
5. **Support for vulnerable groups:** Charities and community groups can use data on online hate to provide better support to communities and individuals who are targeted.

This guide provides organisations with a structured toolkit to know when to engage, how to respond, and where to find reliable facts. It combines values-first communication, practical escalation protocols, and safeguarding approaches to help communities resist hate and misinformation while protecting staff and those with lived experience.

Decision Tree — When to Engage?

Responding to online content isn't always straightforward. This narrative decision tree helps guide whether to step in or step back:

First, check the tone of the comment. If it is abusive, racist, or inciting hate or violence, do not engage. Instead, capture evidence (screenshot, URL, timestamp), report or block the user, and escalate according to policy. Protecting people always comes before debating.

If they seem persuadable, consider: can we add value without harm? Do we have clear, relevant facts from a credible source that directly support our message? Is there a low risk of piling-on or drawing more attention to harmful content? If yes, use the structured response template: Values → Bridge → Message → Fact → Action. If not, acknowledge the concern and point to a resource or defer politely, without entering into argument.

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If it's not abusive, ask: is this person persuadable? Look for signals such as curiosity, a genuine question, or supportive voices around them. If you judge that they are not persuadable, don't waste energy debating. Instead, post a values-first response aimed at the wider audience who may be reading silently.

Finally, check for offline risks. If the comment includes doxxing, attempts to locate services, or calls for protests at accommodation sites, treat it as a red flag. Switch immediately to escalation mode: minimise identifiers, alert partners, and follow the safeguarding protocol.

This approach ensures that responses are intentional, protective, and focused on influencing the audiences who matter most.

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Principles for Effective Responses

These principles set the foundation for safe, consistent, and effective responses to online mis- and disinformation. They help organisations avoid harm, remain values-driven, and support both staff and communities.

1. Lead with values, then facts.

- a. Begin with widely shared values such as safety, fairness, or community.
- b. Add only the most relevant fact that directly supports the value.
- c. Avoid overwhelming with statistics; keep it simple and linked to people's lived experience.

2. Speak to the audience watching, not the troll.

- a. Most readers never comment; they quietly form impressions.
- b. Respond with these silent readers in mind rather than trying to change the mind of a hostile poster.
- c. Provide a single, values-led reply and move on.

3. Don't platform abuse.

- a. Never engage with abusive or racist content—remove, hide, or report instead.
- b. Preserve evidence (screenshots, URLs, timestamps) before removal for safeguarding and potential legal follow-up.

4. Safeguard people with lived experience.

- a. Ensure contributors know risks and have choice about anonymity.
- b. Never tag or expose them in hostile threads.

5. Protect staff.

- a. Create clear escalation routes so frontline staff know when to step back.
- b. Normalise debriefs and wellbeing support after exposure to harmful content.
- c. Reinforce that no one is obliged to reply to hostile content at the expense of their safety.

6. Measure impact.

- a. Look beyond likes and shares. Monitor tone shifts, amplification by allies, and reduction in harmful replies.
- b. Collect qualitative insights (screenshots of positive shifts, community feedback).
- c. Feed this learning into updated playbooks and training.

How to Challenge Misinformation

This playbook is a practical tool for staff and volunteers to use when responding to myths, misinformation, or misleading narratives. It is not suitable for abusive or threatening content, which should instead be reported and escalated.

- **Influence the audience, not the troll:** Most people reading hostile comments do not post. The playbook helps you reach this silent majority.
- **Anchor facts in shared values:** Messages land more effectively when they appeal to community values like fairness, safety, and belonging.
- **Maintain consistency across teams:** A shared structure reduces the risk of reactive or off-message replies.
- **Reduce harm and escalation:** Short, calm, and structured responses prevent drawn-out arguments and protect staff wellbeing.

When to use it

- When the comment shows curiosity, misunderstanding, or misinformation rather than outright hostility.
- When a wider audience is likely to be watching and could be swayed by your response.
- When you have a reliable fact or resource that directly supports your message.
- When you can respond safely, with organisational backing.

How to use it

A. Values-first openers (choose 1):

- “Everyone should feel safe and welcome in our community.”
- “Fairness means making sure schools and services work for everyone.”

B. Bridge (choose 1):

- “That’s an important concern, but here’s the fuller picture...”
- “I get why that feels worrying, however what we’re seeing is...”

C. Message → Proof → Action

- Message: concise point aligned to values.
- Proof: one relevant fact or stat with plain-language source.
- Action: invite constructive step (learn more, volunteer, contact service).

D. Tone: calm, specific, non-sarcastic; avoid repeating the myth in full.

Worked Examples

Comment: “What about our homeless? Charity begins at home.”

Response: “We all want everyone here to have a safe place to live. The real issue is fixing a system that leaves too many without support. Councils are funded to help both local people and new arrivals. When housing is planned properly, everyone benefits. Here’s how support actually works locally: [\[link to local explainer\]](#).”

Comment: “They get free housing, phones, benefits and we get nothing!”

Response: “Fairness matters. People seeking asylum receive a small allowance while their case is decided and have no choice about housing. Local services prioritise need, not nationality. If you want the details and sources, see our facts card here: [\[facts card link\]](#).”

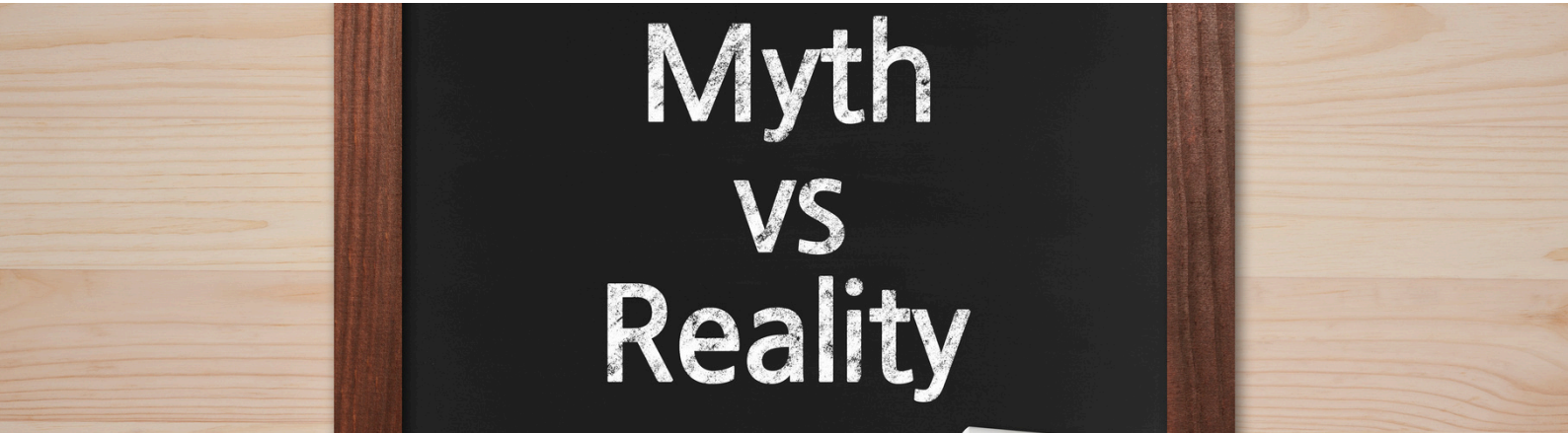
Comment: “We don’t know who these people are. They could be criminals.”

Response: “Safety comes first. People go through multiple checks before they’re granted refugee status. Most came here to find safety, work, and rebuild. If you have concerns, here’s how background checks and safeguarding actually work: [\[process explainer\]](#).”

Tip: Reply once, pin the values-based answer, and uplift supportive voices. Don’t get dragged into back-and-forth.

Myth → Reality Card Template (Facts Hub)

The Myth → Reality cards are designed as quick, shareable resources that give staff, volunteers, and community partners clear talking points. Each card should balance brevity with credibility: short enough to share on social media, but grounded in trusted sources.



Myth VS Reality

How to build a card

- **Myth (headline):** State the myth simply, in a way that people will recognise. Avoid repeating offensive language or unnecessary detail.
- **Reality (one sentence):** Provide a values-aligned, plain-language correction that sets the record straight.
- **What we know:** List 2–3 concise facts that are backed by credible sources. Facts should directly counter the myth or put it into context.
- **What we don't know:** Be transparent about uncertainty—naming what is unclear can actually build trust.
- **Why it matters:** Link the facts back to community values like fairness, safety, and shared wellbeing. This shows why the issue is relevant to everyone.
- **Further reading:** Share 2–3 reputable sources for those who want to go deeper.

Resource Library: Migration & Disinformation

A curated set of external resources to use alongside this toolkit for fact-checking, myth-busting, and deeper research.

- Calderdale Refugee Myth-Buster:
<https://calderdale.cityofsanctuary.org/resources/refugee-myth-buster-facts-sources>
- Migration Observatory Briefings:
<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/>
- Pew Research – Immigration to the UK:
<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/fact-sheet/unauthorized-immigrants-in-the-united-kingdom/>
- MİRre Project – Irregular migration trends:
<https://irregularmigration.eu/>
- Asylum Aid (2024) – Criminalisation of asylum seekers report:
<https://asylumaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-11/Criminalisation%20Report%20A%20Executive%20Summary%20%282%29.pdf>
- Parliament UK briefing – Foreign national offenders in prison:
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04334/SN04334.pdf>
- Guardian analysis – Debunking claims on migration & crime:
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/aug/05/disputed-or-debunked-claims-about-migration-and-crime-uk>

- Guardian analysis – Irregular migration trends in Europe:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/07/irregular-migration-into-uk-and-large-european-countries-is-same-as-2008-research-shows>

Additional Resources for Migration / Disinformation / Myth-Busting

Name	Description / Why Useful	URL
World Migration Fact-Checkers' Toolkit (IOM / UN migration report)	A toolset for fact-checkers globally on migration-related claims and disinformation. World Migration Report+1	https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd1691/files/2021-11/Fact-Checkers-Toolkit-Final-ENG.pdf
Migration myth-busting (University of Birmingham / Citizens UK)	Local UK-based myth-busting project that centres community engagement and avoids reinforcing myths. University of Birmingham+1	https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/projects/migration-myth-busting
Myth-Buster Resources – North East Migration Partnership (UK)	Regional fact-sheet resource, with printable “Z-card” and simplified versions. North East Migration Partnership	https://www.nemp.org.uk/hubs/asylum-hub/key-asylum-information/myth-buster-resources/
Myth-Busting FAQs – Voices in Exile (UK)	Focused on common myths about refugees, asylum seekers, migrants in the UK, with clear counterpoints. Voices In Exile	https://www.voicesinexile.org/resource/myth-busting-faqs/
Refugee & Asylum Seeker Myth Busters – The Children's Society (UK)	Myths and misconceptions especially about children and young refugees; useful for youth / education contexts. The Children's Society	https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work/young-refugees-migrants/mythbusters
“11 myths and misconceptions about refugees debunked” – IRC UK	A recent, accessible article debunking common myths in the UK context. Front page - US	https://www.rescue.org/uk/article/11-myths-and-misconceptions-about-refugees-debunked
Disinformation on Migration – Migration Policy Institute	Analysis of how disinformation about migration spreads and evolves globally. migrationpolicy.org	https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/how-disinformation-fake-news-migration-spreads

Name	Description / Why Useful	URL
Public Discourse on Migration & Misinformation – JRC / EU	Case studies and recommendations on migration narratives, public opinion, and messaging in Europe. EU Science Hub	https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/public-discourse-migration-shaped-misinformation-and-conspiracy-theories-2025-06-05_en
EDMO: Disinformation on Immigration (Monthly Brief)	Fact-checking network report documenting trends in migration disinformation (Europe). edmo.eu	https://edmo.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/EDMO-39-Horizontal.pdf
EDMO / European Digital Media Observatory (general)	Broader resource network of European fact-checkers (misinformation ecosystem) edmo.eu+1	https://edmo.eu/
EIS – “Myths of Immigration” booklets (UK, education focus)	Booklets for teachers / students aimed at challenging myths in classrooms. eis.org.uk	https://www.eis.org.uk/Anti-Racism/MythsofImmigration
IOM Educator Toolkit – Module 9: Disinformation about migration	A ready-made teaching module with case studies, scenario work, definitions, useful for training. World Migration Toolkit	https://wmr-educatorstoolkit.iom.int/module-9-disinformation-about-migration-resources
SolidariTee Mythbusters	Visual / campaign-style myth-busting with graphics suitable for social media sharing. SolidariTee	https://www.solidaritee.org.uk/mythbusters
The Global Disinformation Index	A broader disinformation monitoring org—can help with context about misinformation ecosystems (beyond migration). disinformationindex.org	https://www.disinformationindex.org/
The Centre for Countering Digital Hate	‘Don’t Feed the Trolls’ A guide to countering social media hate	https://counterhate.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Don-t-Feed-the-Trolls.pdf



Telling the human story of migration

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