

## Facebook response to the European Commission Communication on Covid-19 Disinformation

### Report for February 2021

#### Executive Summary

**User Engagement with Authoritative Resources and Tools to Raise Awareness:** We continue to support the global public health community's work by connecting people to accurate, reliable, accessible and relevant sources of information.

- **Our COVID-19 Information Center** is available globally, including all 27 EU member states. More than 110 million people globally, including over 12 million people in the EU, visited the COVID-19 Information Center during the month of February 2021.
- **Reaching Billions of People With COVID-19 Vaccine Information:** We're running the largest worldwide campaign to promote authoritative information about COVID-19 vaccines by:
  - Helping people find where and when they can get vaccinated — similar to how we helped people find information about how to vote during elections
  - Giving \$120 million in ad credits to help health ministries, NGOs and UN agencies reach billions of people around the world with COVID-19 vaccine and preventive health information
  - Expanding our efforts to remove false claims on Facebook and Instagram about COVID-19 and vaccines
  - Providing data to inform effective vaccine delivery and educational efforts to build trust in COVID-19 vaccines

**Actions on Misinformation:** Stopping the spread of misinformation and harmful content about COVID-19 on our apps is critically important.

- **Applying our Community Standards:** In February, we published our [Community Standards Enforcement Report](#) (CSER) for the fourth quarter of 2020.
  - Under our **Regulated Goods** policy, we removed over 240 thousand pieces of content on Facebook and Instagram globally, including over 4.6 thousand pieces of content in the EU member states, related to COVID-19 and which violated our medical supply sales standards.
  - Under our **Hate Speech** policy:

Facebook: Content actioned increased from 22.1 million pieces of content in Q3 2020 to 26.9 million in Q4 2020, primarily due to improving our proactive detection technology for the Arabic and Spanish languages. We also expanded automation for the Portuguese language, which continued to drive enforcement in Q4. Our proactive rate increased from 94.7% to 97.1% for these same reasons.

Instagram: Content actioned and proactive rate remained similar across Q3 2020 and Q4 2020. We removed 6.6 million pieces of content in Q4 2020. 95.1% of content actioned were found and flagged before users reported it.

- Under our **Bullying and Harassment** policy:

Facebook: Content actioned increased from 3.5 million pieces of content in Q3 2020 to 6.3 million in Q4 2020. This was driven by increasing our automation abilities and improving our technology to detect and remove more English language comments, which helped our proactive rate increase from 26.4% to 48.8%, in addition to regaining some manual review capacity in Q3.

Instagram: Content actioned increased from 2.6 million pieces of content in Q3 2020 to 5 million in Q4 2020. This was driven by improving our technology to detect and remove more English language comments, which helped our proactive rate increase from 54.7% to 80%, in addition to regaining some manual review capacity in Q3.

- Under our **Misinformation and Harm** policy, we removed over [570](#) thousand pieces of content on Facebook and Instagram globally, including over 30 thousand pieces of content in the EU, for containing misinformation that may lead to imminent physical harm, such as content relating to fake preventative measures or exaggerated cures.
- **Removing More False Claims About COVID-19 and Vaccines:** Following consultations with leading health organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), we are expanding the list of false claims we will remove to include additional debunked claims about the coronavirus and vaccines. This includes claims such as:
  - COVID-19 is man-made or manufactured
  - Vaccines are not effective at preventing the disease they are meant to protect against
  - It's safer to get the disease than to get the vaccine
  - Vaccines are toxic, dangerous or cause autism.
- **Supporting Media Literacy in Europe:** In February, we launched an advertising campaign in the Netherlands ahead of the parliamentary election, sharing information on our efforts to protect the integrity of the election and offering resources on how to stop misinformation.

**Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior and Influence Operations:** In February 2021, we removed 5 CIB networks.

- **Thailand:** We removed 77 Accounts, 72 Pages, 18 Groups and 18 Instagram accounts that originated in Thailand and targeted domestic audiences in the Southern provinces of Thailand.
- **Iran:** We removed 446 Facebook accounts, 4 Pages, 3 Groups and 2 Instagram accounts that originated in Iran and targeted primarily Iraq, and to a lesser extent Israel, the United Kingdom, and Afghanistan.

- **Iran:** We removed 7 Facebook accounts, 4 Pages and 16 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Iran and targeted both domestic audiences in Iran and also Lebanon, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates.
- **Morocco:** We removed 385 Facebook accounts, 6 Pages and 40 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Morocco and targeted domestic audiences.
- **Russia:** We removed 530 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Russia and targeted domestic audiences throughout the recent protests in support of Alexey Navalny, an anti-corruption activist and opposition politician in Russia.

**Advertising:** As the COVID-19 situation develops, we have adjusted our policies and enforcement protocols. For a full list of our Advertising Policies about COVID-19, see [here](#).

## 1. Introduction

This report builds off our previous reports to the European Commission, in response to the [Joint Communication](#) for tackling COVID-19 disinformation, and provides an overview of the policies, products, and processes we have deployed to combat COVID-19 misinformation and disinformation across Facebook and Instagram in February 2021.

## 2. User Engagement with Authoritative Resources and Tools to Raise Awareness

We continue to find new ways to connect people with accurate, reliable and authoritative information. This is a core component of our strategy to combat misinformation because we want to be able to provide our users with the means to decide what to read, trust and share.

We believe that informing people with accurate and authoritative information, as well as more context, is an approach that can be more impactful than the alternative of just removing content. If we simply removed all posts flagged by fact-checkers as false, for example, the content would still be available elsewhere on the internet, other social media platforms, or even discussed around the dinner table. By leaving this content up and surfacing research from fact-checkers or pointing people to reliable information, we're providing people with important information and context.

As noted by an international group of [human rights experts](#) (in relation to COVID-19): “it is essential that governments and internet companies address disinformation in the first instance by themselves providing reliable information... Resorting to other measures, such as content take-downs and censorship, may result in limiting access to important information for public health and should only be undertaken where they meet the standards of necessity and proportionality.”

During the coronavirus public health crisis, we have been supporting the global public health community's work to keep people safe and informed by connecting them to accurate, reliable, accessible and relevant sources of information about COVID-19. Our COVID-19 Information Center on Facebook provides people with the latest information from health authorities, news, resources, facts, and tips to stay healthy and safe. It is available globally, including all 27 EU member states. More than 110 million people globally, including over 12 million people in the EU, visited the COVID-19 Information Center during the month of February 2021.

## Reaching Billions of People With COVID-19 Vaccine Information

We're running the largest worldwide campaign to promote authoritative information about COVID-19 vaccines by:

- Helping people find where and when they can get vaccinated — similar to how we helped people find information about how to vote during elections
- Giving \$120 million in ad credits to help health ministries, NGOs and UN agencies reach billions of people around the world with COVID-19 vaccine and preventive health information
- Expanding our efforts to remove false claims on Facebook and Instagram about COVID-19 and vaccines
- Providing data to inform effective vaccine delivery and educational efforts to build trust in COVID-19 vaccines

A year ago, COVID-19 was declared a public health emergency and since then, we've helped health authorities reach billions of people with accurate information and supported health and economic relief efforts. We've connected over 2 billion people from 189 countries to reliable information about the coronavirus through our COVID-19 Information Center and informational messages, and we've removed more than 12 million pieces of content on Facebook and Instagram containing misinformation that could lead to imminent physical harm. We've partnered with governments in more than 120 countries, as well as multilateral organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, to deliver timely information about COVID-19, including through helplines on WhatsApp.

We've provided researchers and public health officials with real-time data and tools to help inform disease forecasting and understand the effectiveness of prevention measures. Through our Data for Good program, we've partnered with over 450 organizations in nearly 70 countries, the vast majority of which are leveraging our tools to support the COVID-19 response in their communities. And our publicly available datasets were downloaded over a million times in the last year by nonprofits, public health officials and researchers.

But there's still a long road ahead, and in 2021 we're focused on supporting health leaders and public officials in their work to vaccinate billions of people against COVID-19. Building trust and confidence in these vaccines is critical, so we're launching the largest worldwide campaign to help public health organizations share accurate information about COVID-19 vaccines and encourage people to get vaccinated as vaccines become available to them.

**Helping People Find Where and When They Can Get Vaccinated:** As public officials roll out information on COVID-19 vaccine availability, we'll help people find where and when they can get vaccinated — similar to how we helped people find information about where and when to vote during elections. Starting this week in the US, we'll feature links in the COVID-19 Information Center to local ministry of health websites to help people understand whether they're eligible to get vaccinated and how to do so. And in the coming weeks, as more information becomes available, we'll continue to expand this feature to more countries and improve it to make it easier for people to see where and when they can get vaccinated in just a few taps.

**Sharing Credible Information About COVID-19 Vaccines:** We're working with health organizations and community leaders to run campaigns on our platform promoting accurate information about COVID-19 vaccines and encouraging people to get vaccinated. We're giving

\$120 million in ad credits to help health ministries, NGOs and UN agencies reach billions of people around the world with COVID-19 vaccine and preventive health information. And we're providing training and marketing support to help governments and health organizations move quickly and reach the right people with the latest vaccine information.

We'll soon bring the COVID-19 Information Center to Instagram so people can access the latest information about COVID-19 vaccines across our apps. We're also helping health authorities and governments share timely vaccine information over WhatsApp and provide answers to people's questions. We partnered with the government in Indonesia to create a helpline on WhatsApp that shares information on vaccine availability first with medical workers, and eventually with the general public. In just 5 days, 500,000 medical workers — out of 1.3 million in the country — accessed the service. Other governments and health authorities, including the South Africa government and the WHO, are starting to create similar helplines to provide the latest vaccine information.

We're also working to amplify content that directly serves communities where vaccine intent and access may be lower. In the US, we're partnering with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to reach Native American communities, Black communities and Latinx communities, among others, with science and evidence-based content that addresses the questions and concerns these communities have. We're also working with AARP to reach Americans over 50 with educational content about COVID-19 vaccines, including Spanish-language content designed to reach Latinx and Hispanic communities.

This builds on the work we've done with health organizations over the past year to increase adoption of COVID-19 preventive behaviors, such as wearing a mask. We put reminders at the top of Facebook and Instagram to wear a mask. And we reached over 26 million people with our public figure campaign encouraging people to #WearAMask, resulting in a 7-point increase in people reporting that wearing a mask in public is very or extremely important. We'll use insights and best practices from this work to inform vaccine information campaigns and support health authorities in building confidence in COVID-19 vaccines.

**Combating Vaccine Misinformation:** In addition to sharing reliable information, we are expanding our efforts to remove false claims on Facebook and Instagram about COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccines and vaccines in general during the pandemic. Today, following consultations with leading health organizations, including the WHO, we're expanding the list of false claims we will remove to include additional debunked claims about COVID-19 and vaccines. Learn more about how we're [combating COVID-19 and vaccine misinformation](#). (see section 3 below for more information)

**Providing Data to Inform Effective Vaccine Delivery:** Last year, we began collaborating with Carnegie Mellon University Delphi Research Group and the University of Maryland on COVID-19 surveys about symptoms people are experiencing, mask wearing behaviors and access to care. These surveys are conducted by our academic partners and Facebook does not receive individual survey responses. With over 50 million responses to date, the survey program is one of the largest ever conducted and has helped health researchers better monitor and forecast the spread of COVID-19. It's also the only source of global data on mask wearing, which has helped public health officials around the world in their COVID-19 response efforts. The Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation used insights from the surveys to inform several mask mandates in countries such as Poland, which achieved a significant increase in mask wearing.

The survey data shows that people's willingness to get a COVID-19 vaccine varies widely across the world, with over 90% of people in Denmark saying they would take a COVID-19 vaccine compared to 71% in Argentina and 62% in the Philippines. And in the US, less than 60% of Black or African American people reported they would be likely to get a COVID-19 vaccine. So to help guide the effective delivery of COVID-19 vaccines, the survey data will provide a better understanding of [trends in vaccine intent](#) across sociodemographics, race, geography and more. The scale of the survey will also allow for faster updates on changes in trends, such as whether vaccine intent is going up or down in California in a given week and better insights on how vaccine intent varies at a local level. We'll share these new insights including [vaccine attitudes at a county level](#) in the US as well as [globally](#).

Data has proved critical in informing the fight against COVID-19. In 2020, we launched new datasets, maps and tools to support researchers, nonprofits and governments in their COVID-19 response, and in 2021, we'll continue to provide helpful data and insights to understand vaccine attitudes, build trust in vaccines through reliable information and support vaccination efforts.

For more information about how we're providing data to aid in the fight against COVID-19, check out our [2020 Data for Good Annual Report](#). And to learn more about how we're supporting COVID-19 relief efforts and keeping people informed, visit our [COVID-19 action page](#).

### 3. Actions on Misinformation

Our goal is to create a place for expression and give people a voice. Building community and bringing the world closer together depends on people's ability to share diverse views, experiences, ideas and information. Our commitment to expression is paramount, but we recognise that the internet creates new and increased opportunities for abuse. When considering whether to provide more context, allow, reduce distribution, or remove misinformation, we do it in service of one or more of our [Community Standards Values](#): voice, authenticity, safety, privacy, and dignity.

We define misinformation as content that is false or misleading. We enforce on misinformation by looking at content or behaviors that violate our Community Standards or content that may be reviewed by our third-party fact-checking partners. We define disinformation as coordinated efforts to manipulate public debate for a strategic goal.

#### Removing More False Claims About COVID-19 and Vaccines

We have expanded our efforts to remove false claims on Facebook and Instagram about COVID-19, COVID-19 vaccines and vaccines in general during the pandemic. Since December, we've [removed false claims](#) about COVID-19 vaccines that have been debunked by public health experts. Following consultations with leading health organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO), we are expanding the list of false claims we will remove to include [additional debunked claims](#) about the coronavirus and vaccines. This includes claims such as:

- COVID-19 is man-made or manufactured
- Vaccines are not effective at preventing the disease they are meant to protect against
- It's safer to get the disease than to get the vaccine
- Vaccines are toxic, dangerous or cause autism

The full list of claims is available [here](#), and we already [prohibit these claims](#) in ads. These new policies will help us continue to take aggressive action against misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines.

We have begun enforcing this policy immediately, with a particular focus on Pages, groups and accounts that violate these rules, and we'll continue to expand our enforcement over the coming weeks. Groups, Pages and accounts on Facebook and Instagram that repeatedly share these debunked claims may be removed altogether. We are also requiring some admins for groups with admins or members who have violated our COVID-19 policies to temporarily approve all posts within their group. Claims about COVID-19 or vaccines that do not violate these policies will still be eligible for review by our third-party fact-checkers, and if they are rated false, they will be labeled and demoted.

Finally, we are continuing to improve Search results on our platforms. When people search for vaccine or COVID-19 related content on Facebook, we promote relevant, authoritative results and provide third-party resources to connect people to expert information about vaccines. On Instagram, in addition to surfacing authoritative results in Search, we're making it harder to find accounts in search that discourage people from getting vaccinated.

[As we noted](#) in response to guidance from the Oversight Board, we are committed to providing more transparency around these policies. You can read the detailed updates in Facebook's [Community Standards](#) and in our [Help Center](#). As the situation evolves, we'll continue to review content on our platforms, assess trends in language and engage with experts to provide additional policy guidance to keep people safe during this crisis.

### **Our Third-Party Fact-Checking Program**

For misinformation that does not lead to real world harm, but undermines the authenticity and integrity of our platform, we continue to work with our growing [network of independent third party fact-checking partners](#). We partner with over [80 fact-checking organizations](#) around the world, covering over 60 languages. In the EU and greater Europe, we partner with 35 fact-checking organizations, covering 26 languages.

### **Supporting Media Literacy in Europe**

We want to give people the tools to make more informed decisions about the information they choose to consume and share online. In February, we launched an advertising campaign in the Netherlands ahead of the parliamentary election, sharing information on our efforts to protect the integrity of the election and offering resources on how to stop misinformation.

### **Applying Community Standards to COVID-19 Content**

As people around the world confront this unprecedented public health emergency, we want to make sure that our [Community Standards](#) protect people from harmful content and new types of abuse related to COVID-19. We're working to remove content that has the potential to contribute to offline harm, including through our policies prohibiting the coordination of harm, the sale of medical masks and related goods, hate speech, bullying and harassment, and misinformation that contributes to the risk of imminent violence or physical harm. Oftentimes, misinformation can cut across different types of abuse areas; for example, a racial slur could be coupled with a false claim about a group of people and we'd remove it for violating our hate speech policy. So in addition to

our misinformation policies, we have a number of other ways we might combat COVID-19 misinformation such as:

- Under our **Regulated Goods** policy, we've taken steps to protect against exploitation of this crisis for financial gain by banning content that attempts to sell or trade medical masks, hand sanitizer, surface disinfecting wipes and COVID-19 test kits. We also prohibit influencers from promoting these sales through branded content. During the month of February, we removed over 240 thousand pieces of content on Facebook and Instagram globally, including over 4.6 thousand pieces of content in the EU member states, related to COVID-19 and which violated our medical supply sales standards.
- Under our **Hate Speech** policy, we are removing content that states that people who share a protected characteristic such as race or religion have the virus, created the virus or are spreading the virus. This does not apply to claims about people based on national origin because we want to allow discussion focused on national-level responses and effects (e.g., "X number of Italians have COVID-19"). We also remove content that mocks people who share a protected characteristic such as race or religion for having COVID-19. As reported in our [Community Standards Enforcement Report](#) (CSER):
  - **Facebook**: Content actioned increased from 22.1 million pieces of content in Q3 2020 to 26.9 million in Q4 2020, primarily due to improving our proactive detection technology for the Arabic and Spanish languages. We also expanded automation for the Portuguese language, which continued to drive enforcement in Q4. Our proactive rate increased from 94.7% to 97.1% for these same reasons. Prevalence of hate speech content was between 0.07% and 0.08% of views in Q4 2020, which marks a decrease from Q3. This was due to ranking changes to personalize content for users and reduce problematic content in News Feed.
  - **Instagram**: Content actioned and proactive rate remained similar across Q3 2020 and Q4 2020. We removed 6.6 million pieces of content in Q4 2020. 95.1% of content actioned were found and flagged before users reported it
- Under our **Bullying and Harassment** policy, we remove content that targets people maliciously, including content that claims that a private individual has COVID-19, unless that person has self-declared or information about their health status is publicly available. As reported in our [Community Standards Enforcement Report](#) (CSER):
  - **Facebook**: Content actioned increased from 3.5 million pieces of content in Q3 2020 to 6.3 million in Q4 2020. This was driven by increasing our automation abilities and improving our technology to detect and remove more English language comments, which helped our proactive rate increase from 26.4% to 48.8%, in addition to regaining some manual review capacity in Q3.
  - **Instagram**: Content actioned increased from 2.6 million pieces of content in Q3 2020 to 5 million in Q4 2020. This was driven by improving our technology to detect and remove more English language comments, which helped our proactive rate increase from 54.7% to 80%, in addition to regaining some manual review capacity in Q3.

- Under our **Misinformation and Harm** policy, we remove misinformation that contributes to the risk of imminent violence or physical harm. We have applied this policy to harmful misinformation about COVID-19 since January. During the month of February, we removed over [570](#) thousand pieces of content on Facebook and Instagram globally, including over [30](#) thousand pieces of content in the EU, for containing misinformation that may lead to imminent physical harm, such as content relating to fake preventative measures or exaggerated cures.

We recently also updated our Community Standards. Under our [Coordinating Harm policy](#), we prohibit content that:

- Coordinates, depicts, admits to, or promotes the active and deliberate spread of communicable diseases.

We now also prohibit (when we have additional information and/or context to identify it):

- Content coordinating in-person events or gatherings when participation involves or encourages people who have COVID-19 to join.
- Content coordinating interference with the administration of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Content calling to action, advocating, or promoting that others not get the COVID-19 vaccine.

As the situation evolves, we are continuing to look at content on the platform, assess speech trends and engage with experts, and will provide additional policy guidance to our Community Standards when appropriate to keep the members of our community safe during this crisis. These policies, as well as the additional policies listed in our [Community Standards](#) apply to content on both Facebook and Instagram, including surfaces such as Groups and Pages.

## Community Standards Enforcement Report

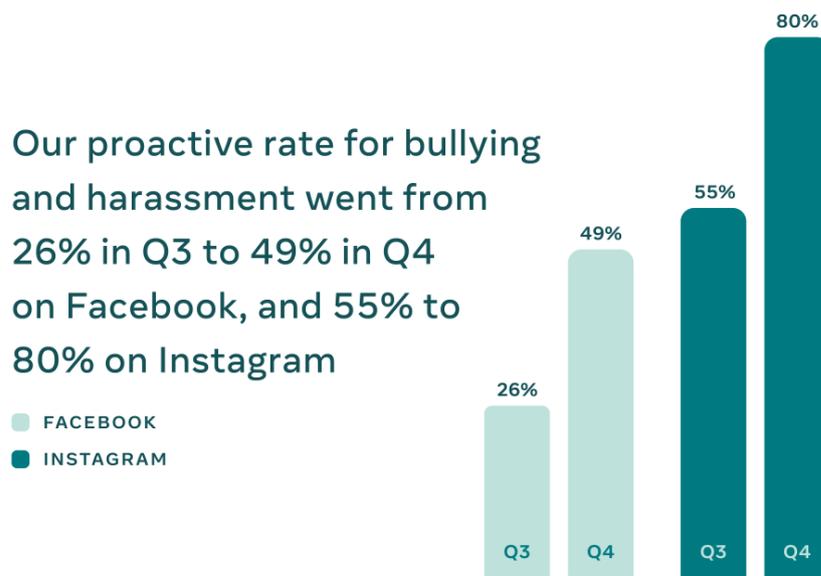
In February, we published our [Community Standards Enforcement Report](#) (CSER) for the fourth quarter of 2020. This report provides metrics on how we enforced our policies globally from October through December and includes metrics across 12 policies on Facebook and 10 policies on Instagram, including [Adult Nudity and Sexual Activity](#), [Bullying and Harassment](#), [Child Nudity and Sexual Exploitation of Children](#), [Dangerous Organizations: Terrorism and Organized Hate](#), [Fake Accounts](#), [Hate Speech](#), [Regulated Goods: Drugs and Firearms](#), [Spam](#), [Suicide and Self-Injury](#), and [Violent and Graphic Content](#).

Last quarter, we shared the [prevalence of hate speech](#) on Facebook for the first time to show the percentage of times people see this type of content on our platform. This quarter, hate speech prevalence dropped from 0.10-0.11% to 0.07-0.08% (or 7 to 8 views of hate speech for every 10,000 views of content). The prevalence of violent and graphic content also dropped from 0.07% to 0.05% and adult nudity content dropped from 0.05-0.06% to 0.03-0.04%.

Our improvements in prevalence are mainly due to changes we made to reduce problematic content in News Feed. Each post is ranked by processes that take into account a combination of integrity signals, such as how likely a piece of content is to violate our policies, as well as signals we receive from people, such as from surveys or actions they take on our platform like hiding or reporting posts. Improving how we use these signals helps tailor News Feed to each individual's

preferences, and also reduces the number of times we display posts that later may be determined to violate our policies.

Our proactive rate, the percentage of content we took action on that we found before a user reported it to us, improved in certain problem areas, most notably bullying and harassment. Our proactive rate for bullying and harassment went from 26% in Q3 to 49% in Q4 on Facebook, and 55% to 80% on Instagram. [Improvements to our AI](#) in areas where nuance and context are essential, such as hate speech or bullying and harassment, helped us better scale our efforts to keep people safe.



We’re slowly continuing to regain our content review workforce globally, though we anticipate our ability to review content will be impacted by COVID-19 until a vaccine is widely available. With limited capacity, we prioritize the most harmful content for our teams to review, such as suicide and self-injury content.

On Facebook in Q4 we took action on:

- 6.3 million pieces of bullying and harassment content, up from 3.5 million in Q3 due in part to updates in our technology to detect comments
- 6.4 million pieces of organized hate content, up from 4 million in Q3
- 26.9 million pieces of hate speech content, up from 22.1 million in Q3 due in part to updates in our technology in Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese
- 2.5 million pieces of suicide and self-injury content, up from 1.3 million in Q3 due to increased reviewer capacity

On Instagram in Q4 we took action on:

- 5 million pieces of bullying and harassment content, up from 2.6 million in Q3 due in part to updates in our technology to detect comments
- 308,000 pieces of organized hate content, up from 224,000 in Q3
- 6.6 million pieces of hate speech content, up from 6.5 million in Q3
- 3.4 million pieces of suicide and self-injury content, up from 1.3 million in Q3 due to increased reviewer capacity

For 2021, we plan to share additional metrics on Instagram and add new policy categories on Facebook in our Community Standards Enforcement Report. We're also working to make our enforcement data easier for people to understand by making these reports more interactive. Our goal is to lead the technology industry in transparency, and we'll continue to share more enforcement metrics as part of this effort.

We also believe that no company should grade its own homework. Last year, we committed to [undertaking](#) an independent, third-party audit of our content moderation systems to validate the numbers we publish, and we'll begin this process this year.

We will continue building on this progress and improving our technology and enforcement efforts to keep harmful content off of our apps.

#### **4. Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB) and Influence Operations**

We know that people looking to mislead others - whether through phishing, scams, or influence operations - try to leverage crises in order to advance their goals, and the COVID-19 pandemic is no different. As the situation evolves, we are actively working to find and stop coordinated campaigns that seek to manipulate public debate across our platforms.

Our approach to Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB), and Influence Operations (IO) more broadly, is grounded on behavior- and actor-based enforcement. This means that we are looking for specific violating behaviours exhibited by violating actors, rather than violating content (which is predicated on other specific violations of our Community Standards, such as [misinformation](#) and hate speech). Therefore, when CIB networks are taken down, it is based on their behavior, not the content they posted. For a comprehensive overview of our approach, see [here](#).

To date, we have not found evidence of influence operations created to focus specifically on COVID-19. What we have seen is that people behind campaigns opportunistically use coronavirus-related posts among many other topics to build an audience and drive people to their Pages or off-platform sites.

##### **February 2021 Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior Report**

Our teams continue to focus on finding and removing deceptive campaigns around the world — whether they are foreign or domestic. In February, we removed five networks from Thailand, Iran, Morocco and Russia. Two Iranian networks primarily targeted people outside of Iran, and three others — from Thailand, Morocco and Russia — focused on domestic audiences in their respective countries. We have shared information about our findings with industry partners, researchers and policymakers.

In addition to these five networks, in February we also detected and removed attempts to reestablish a presence on Facebook by the military-linked networks we had previously removed for coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) in Myanmar. These repeat violations over the past few years and continuous attempts to circumvent our CIB enforcement were among the factors that led to our broader decision to ban the Myanmar military from Facebook and Instagram, which we had [shared](#).

Much of the CIB activity we removed worldwide in February was consistent with what we've seen from various threat actors over the past 3 years, including the prevalence of domestic targeting. The Russia-based network, however, was an interesting example of tactics we often see from spam and financially motivated actors being deployed to mislead people during civic protests. In an attempt to drown out relevant information, this network used hundreds of accounts and mass-posted content with the same hashtags and location tags used by people posting about the protests against the arrest of Alexey Navalny, an anti-corruption activist and politician. These accounts were automatically detected by our systems and then disabled as fake.

We know that influence operations will keep evolving in response to our enforcement, and new deceptive behaviors will emerge. We will continue to refine our enforcement and share our findings publicly. We are making progress rooting out this abuse, but as we've said before – it's an ongoing effort. We're committed to continually improving to stay ahead. That means building better technology, hiring more people and working closely with law enforcement, security experts and other companies.

Here are the numbers of removed assets as part of the five CIB networks:

- Total number of Facebook accounts removed: 915
- Total number of Instagram accounts removed: 606
- Total number of Pages removed: 86
- Total number of Groups removed: 21

Networks removed in February 2021:

- **Thailand:** We removed 77 Accounts, 72 Pages, 18 Groups and 18 Instagram accounts that originated in Thailand and targeted domestic audiences in the Southern provinces of Thailand. Our investigation found links to the Thai Military's Internal Security Operations Command. We found this network as part of our internal investigation into suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior in the region.
- **Iran:** We removed 446 Facebook accounts, 4 Pages, 3 Groups and 2 Instagram accounts that originated in Iran and targeted primarily Iraq, and to a lesser extent Israel, the United Kingdom, and Afghanistan. Our investigation found links to individuals in Tehran. We found this network after reviewing public reporting about a handful of its accounts focused on Israel. Our internal investigation uncovered the broader network.
- **Iran:** We removed 7 Facebook accounts, 4 Pages and 16 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Iran and targeted both domestic audiences in Iran and also Lebanon, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates. Our investigation found links to individuals in Iran with academic backgrounds. We found this network as part of our internal investigation into suspected coordinated inauthentic behavior in the region.
- **Morocco:** We removed 385 Facebook accounts, 6 Pages and 40 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Morocco and targeted domestic audiences. We found this network after reviewing information about a small portion of this activity in the region shared by Amnesty International.

- **Russia:** We removed 530 Instagram accounts that originated primarily in Russia and targeted domestic audiences throughout the recent protests in support of Alexey Navalny, an anti-corruption activist and opposition politician in Russia. We detected and disabled the vast majority of these accounts, including through automation, as they began posting.

A detailed report of the networks taken down and examples of content they posted can be found [here](#). Previous reports can be found [here](#).

## 5. Advertising

As the COVID-19 situation develops, we have implemented a variety of measures to prevent ads from being used to spread misinformation; to prevent ads from promoting content that could contribute to physical harm; to prohibit exploitative or deceptive ads; and provide transparency on ads about health issues. We have applied our [Advertising Policies](#) to new types of abuse that we're seeing on the platform. We have made adjustments to our enforcement protocols to prevent people from exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic, and continue adapting or removing temporary bans on specific products as the situation stabilizes.

For a full list of our Advertising Policies about COVID-19, see [here](#).