Humanitarian Assistance and the Digital Information Space

Disinformation, AI, and Trust in Crises

Human itarian Congress Vienna

Season 2026/27

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Ukraine Russian-driven disinformation undermining humanitarian neutrality

In Ukraine, misinformation exploits existing concerns about corruption, governance and the distribution of aid. While demands for transparency and independent oversight are legitimate, misleading narratives can turn these concerns into broader distrust of humanitarian organisations. People Ground Truth Solution spoke to want to see greater transparency on the part of the government and international institutions over how humanitarian assistance is distributed. People call for proper monitoring and control systems, external verification, independent oversight, and international involvement in how aid is distributed.

Since the start of the Ukraine conflict in 2022, false and strategically amplified claims have portrayed the Red Cross as politically aligned or implicated in activities contrary to its humanitarian mandate. For example, after misleading narratives surrounding the ICRC's engagement with both sides of the conflict, staff were attacked at checkpoints, leading some to stop wearing the Red Cross vest altogether. As well as putting staff at risk, such misinformation has challenged perceptions of neutrality, and obstructed the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Spain Fake news targeting the Spanish Red Cross in the wake of the 2024 floods

In late October 2024, Valencia was struck by one of Spain's deadliest floods in recent history. Intense rain spread over several hours, overwhelming infrastructure, devastating communities, and leaving 236 people dead. Harmful information against the Spanish Red Cross spread on social media – in November and December, social media mentions rose by 5000 %, with 75 % of those being negative messages. The Spanish Red Cross replied to false messages and contacted experts to analyse fake news, at the same time filtering out genuine requests for help by affected people. While a lot of attacks against the organisation came from anonymous accounts, some political parties and groups who do not support the Red Cross seized the opportunity to amplify posts against the Red Cross. The episode shows how disinformation can exploit a disaster to undermine trust in humanitarian responders, divert attention from people's needs, and threaten the acceptance on which effective humanitarian action depends.

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Gaza and Lebanon
Misinformation putting people in harm's way

In Gaza and Lebanon, conflict has severely disrupted access to reliable information, leaving people increasingly dependent on word of mouth, messaging apps and social media channels often saturated with rumours, contradictory claims and disinformation.

In Gaza, where official sources are compromised and local radio stations have been destroyed, only 10% of people Ground Truth Solutions spoke with reported accessing information about assistance available through humanitarian actors or the UN. In Lebanon, politically influenced media coverage and conflicting reports about attacks, ceasefires and security have further eroded trust. As one displaced woman in Beirut explained: ***"All the information is contradictory: one station says there's a truce and a ceasefire, whilst another says the war is escalating and the enemy is now in the country."*** Beyond fuelling fear and anxiety, misinformation has tangible consequences: refugee families have delayed or rushed returns to Syria based on unverified social media rumours about border closures and UN compensation packages.

Misinformation also fuels social tensions and scapegoating. In Lebanon, rumours circulating in WhatsApp groups have reinforced perceptions that refugees receive preferential treatment while host communities are neglected. These narratives are amplified by a media landscape dominated by politically affiliated outlets, some of which have previously spread hostility towards displaced populations. Yet almost two thirds of people Ground Truth Solutions spoke with described relations within their communities positively, highlighting the gap between people's lived experiences and politically driven narratives. These findings underscore how disinformation can undermine trust, distort critical decisions and inflame tensions, reinforcing the need for reliable, accessible accessible information grounded in people's experiences.

Democratic Republic of the Congo
Misinformation fuelling Ebola scepticism

Misinformation is particularly harmful in public health emergencies, where accurate information is a matter of life and death. 60% of people Ground Truth Solutions spoke to said that there are people in their communities who do not believe in the Ebola outbreak, which has so far killed over 4,000 people. More than one third believe the government had fabricated the disease for financial gain; others see it as a means to exert control in the population. Some even dispute the deaths are real, with one 26-year-old man reporting ***"They are burying empty coffins with no one inside"***.

Trust in humanitarians responding to the crisis remains a challenge - only one third named health providers as their most trusted source of information, and just 12 % named humanitarian organisations. Rumours and suspicion contributed to violence against Red Cross teams, requiring significant investments in community engagement. The Red Cross found that acknowledging uncertainty and developing responses with communities helped rebuild trust.

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