

RISK 6

DISINFORMATION AND DENIAL OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

WHAT ACTS OR SITUATIONS CONSTITUTE THE PRESENCE OF THE RISK?

This protection risk refers to all situations when information is used or denied with the consequence of causing harm to the population. Disinformation takes place when false information and statements are disseminated intentionally to cause serious social harm. Disinformation misleads the population and, as a side effect, interferes with the public’s right to know and the right of individuals to seek, receive, and impart information. The denial of access to information manifests in all situations where the freedom to ‘receive and impart’ information is impaired in such a manner and to such a degree that it hinders the capacity of the population to enjoy basic rights and fulfil basic needs. Harmful acts, measures and tactics on the use or denial of information may be driven by means of polarization – an intended act of dividing people or opinions in opposing groups – or on the basis of social constructs – concepts or beliefs based on views of a society (gender, age, disability, sexuality, race, political, philosophical and religious). With the current proliferation of social media, this protection risk can manifest in the digital sphere or spread through a combination of both online and offline mechanisms.

WHAT FACTORS MUST BE IDENTIFIED FOR MONITORING?

Disinformation may be related with incorrect information spread by people without the intent to deceive, for example, through a misunderstanding or false information disseminated unknowingly (misinformation) or genuine information that is shared to cause harm (malinformation) or unverified information passed from person to person (rumours). It can aim at deterring women for participating in the public sphere (gendered and sexualized disinformation), or intentionally looking into producing conflict by belittling, challenging, provoking, maliciously teasing or explicitly threatening people or groups through offensive, hate and dangerous speech (statements going against). It is fundamental to monitor all situations where disinformation is taking place, and particularly when it has been shown to target particular groups in society – such as certain ethnic groups – and is designed to incite violence, discrimination or hostility which may result in physical harm or even loss of life. Limitations to people with disability and elder persons to seek, receive and impart information during displacement can result in high risk of harm and loss of life. Understanding state authorities’ responsibility in such acts, for instance to identify whether there is an official propaganda or agenda, along with their responsibility in ensuring that population have all means and opportunities to access to rightful information, are essential components in understanding the breadth and impact of this protection risks on the population.

WHAT INFORMATION & DATA CAN ILLUSTRATE THE PRESENCE OF THE RISK?

The identification of this protection risk requires the correlation of different sources, including regulations, media and possibly online outlets and social networks. Factors and information that can support include hate speech laws and policies, laws regulating misinformation, harmful information, data related threats such as surveillance and monitoring, political advertisement, threats leading to violence against children, existing psychosocial/emotional harm, exclusion of certain groups from public affairs, radicalization, recruitment, intensified perception of threats, harmful social norms, political distrust and polarization, institutional or formal censorship, and laws of media. Specific situations may represent windows for the possible presence of this specific protection risk: social unrest, riots, war, coup d’état, military or authoritarian regimes, elections and political campaigns, cultural celebrations and religious festival, viral acts of violence, politically salient anniversaries, public health crisis, and international disputes.