

# COUNTER DISINFORMATION TOOLKIT: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF MIS- AND DISINFORMATION

In response to the spread of mis- and disinformation across the United Kingdom, the government developed the RESIST Counter Disinformation Toolkit to help civil servants and communications professionals identify and respond to disinformation. The first version of the toolkit was released in 2019, and an updated version published in 2021.

## Challenge

Government communicators are confronted with unprecedented competition for the public's attention, in an environment of decreasing trust and of targeted campaigns designed to mislead and confuse people. The toolkit aims to help build public officials' understanding of the threats they face, as well as help ensure that governments can supply accurate and credible information. It also provides definitions of information threats to help public officials think about who is spreading such content and why, and guidance on how to respond effectively.

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● **Theme**

Government Architecture and Initiatives

● **Keyword**

Strategies, guidelines and communication plans | Strategic communication | Understanding of information space | Training of public officials

● **Country**

United Kingdom

## Government action

The aim of the toolkit is to reduce the impact of false, misleading, and manipulated information, in line with democratic values. The first toolkit was published in 2019 and was used to train over 500 civil servants and communications professionals, both in the United Kingdom and internationally.

In response to the rapid development of techniques for spreading disinformation, the United Kingdom Government developed an updated version of the toolkit in 2021. The RESIST 2 Counter Disinformation Toolkit reflects new challenges to communication and information integrity and addresses how to combat the spread of false and misleading information, with expanded information on tactics that civil servants can use to recognise mis- and disinformation. For example, as the number of stakeholders working to combat mis- and disinformation increases, including independent media organisations, civil society and academic institutions, the RESIST 2 toolkit includes strategies that help build inter-institutional partnerships to maintain a healthy information environment.

The toolkit clarifies definitions related to the information threats communicators face. It also provides a six-part framework for communicators to use in addressing the relevant threats. The framework focuses on helping officials: 1) better recognise false and misleading information; 2) check for early warning signals for threats to the information environment; 3) address threats to information integrity; 4) analyse the threat of false information; 5) develop communication strategies that address mis- and disinformation; and 6) measure the effectiveness of these strategies.

## Relevance for policymakers

- In 2020, less than 40% of OECD governments had drafted documents to help guide public officials' response to mis- and disinformation: this toolkit is thus highly relevant for other countries as they develop and use similar documents.
- Clarifying definitions of the various information threats they face helps public officials analyse the source of, and motivation for, the spread of such content. Only around half of centres of government in OECD countries have developed or adopted such definitions, making the RESIST 2 toolkit a useful example for other governments to follow.
- The framework of action outlined in the toolkit provides a practical basis for building the capacity of public officials – notably, only 40% of OECD countries have developed and implemented training specifically related to countering disinformation.
- Better understanding of how to measure the effectiveness of interventions is one of the main focus areas for this work moving forward. The OECD has found that monitoring the impact of

government responses to disinformation is not a widespread priority, and this toolkit is a helpful contribution to this important aspect of countering disinformation.

## Further information

[RESIST 2 Counter Disinformation Toolkit - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](https://www.gcs.gov.uk/resist-2-counter-disinformation-toolkit)

## OECD resources

OECD (forthcoming), Good Practice Principles for Public Communication Responses to Mis- and Disinformation, <https://www.oecd.org/gov/open-government/good-practice-principles-public-communication-responses-to-mis-and-disinformation.pdf> .

OECD (2021), *OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/22f8031c-en>.

Matasick, C., C. Alfonsi and A. Bellantoni (2020), "Governance responses to disinformation: How open government principles can inform policy options", *OECD Working Papers on Public Governance*, No. 39, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d6237c85-en>.