

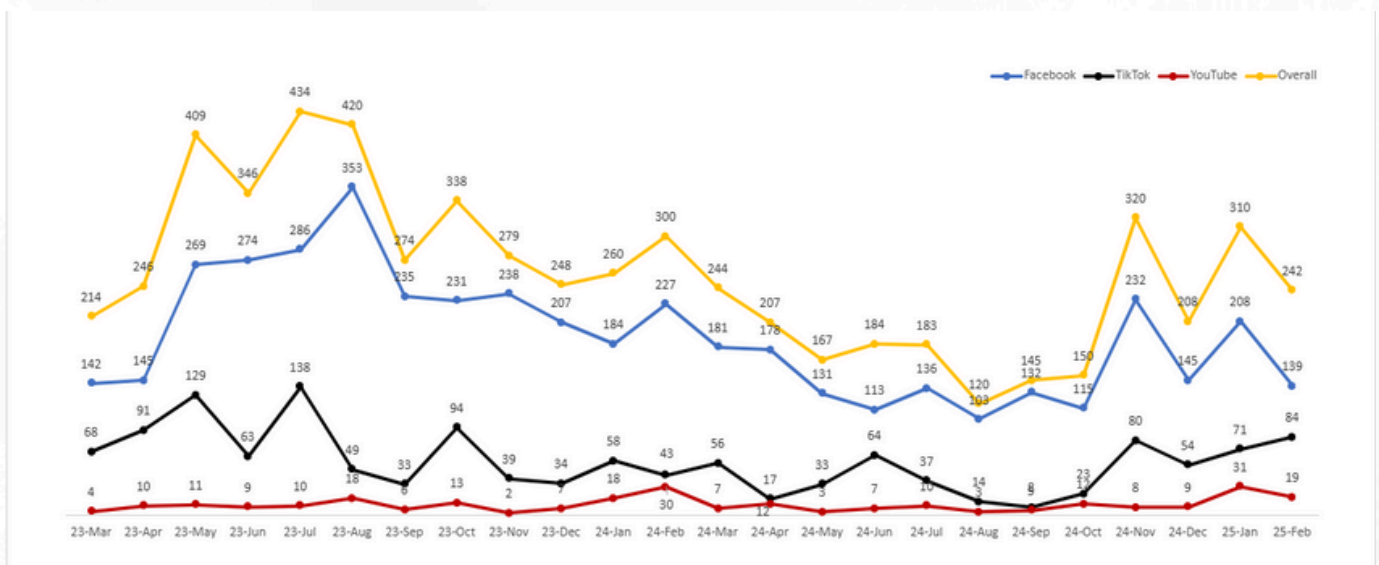
Harmful Speech in Sri Lanka

March 2025

“Hate speech may be used against women, refugees, migrants, gender-diverse and trans people, and minorities. It is massively amplified by the power of digital platforms and tools that enable it to spread across borders and cultures. States have an obligation under international law to prevent and combat incitement to hatred and to promote diversity, mutual understanding, and solidarity.”

UN Secretary General António Guterres

HARMFUL SPEECH TRENDS¹



Breakdown of identified month-on-month harmful speech by Social Media Platform.²

Incidents of online harmful speech **increased by nearly 50% in January 2025** (310 cases) compared to December 2024 (208 cases). This increase was driven primarily by:

- Disinformation related to the spread of the [hMPV virus](#),
- Hate speech,³ disinformation⁴ and calls for exclusion [targeting the Rohingya refugees](#) who arrived in Sri Lanka in December 2024, and
- Misogyny and anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric online linked to [executive orders](#) issued in the United States.

Consequently, January saw **the highest number of videos containing harmful speech on YouTube recorded in a month** (31) since monitoring began in May 2022.

Despite a 22% decrease in overall harmful speech in February (242 cases) compared to January, **gender-based harmful speech remained elevated**, accounting for 46% of the total recorded content.

RESPONSIVENESS BY PLATFORMS TO REPORTED HARMFUL SPEECH

The responsiveness of all three platforms monitored (Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok) in removing reported harmful content **decreased in the first two months of 2025**.

Notably, TikTok - at the time of writing - had **not removed any of the 84 videos reported** to the platform in February.

The significant decrease in the removal rate by platforms coincided with the announcement of **major changes to content (moderation) policy by Meta**, which was discussed in the January 2025 edition of this [bulletin](#).

1. Harmful speech includes hate speech, dis/misinformation, harassment and incitement to or glorification of violence.
2. The ability to comprehensively monitor Facebook was negatively impacted by the retirement of Meta's CrowdTangle tool on 14 August 2024.
3. The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech defines hate speech as, "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor."
4. The UN in Sri Lanka relies on trusted external fact-checkers to independently monitor dis- and misinformation. Actual levels of dis- and misinformation may be higher than reported due to monitoring capacity constraints. While there is no universally accepted definition of disinformation, it is commonly understood as information that is not only inaccurate, but is also intended to deceive and is spread in order to inflict harm.

UN SRI LANKA LAUNCHES “UNDO DOESN'T WORK IN REAL LIFE” CAMPAIGN TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF **HARMFUL SPEECH**

The United Nations in Sri Lanka on 28 March 2025 launched the “[UNDO Doesn't Work in Real Life](#)” media campaign, a collaborative effort by UN Sri Lanka and the Ministry of Health and Mass Media jointly implemented by UNDP and UNICEF Sri Lanka, with support from the UN Sri Lanka SDG Fund, to tackle the challenges of Harmful Speech in Sri Lanka.

The campaign aims to foster empathy, accountability, and responsible storytelling while encouraging everyone to think before they share.

The centrepiece of the campaign is a series of short videos based on actual examples of harmful speech in Sri Lanka's online and offline spaces. These stories reflect the very real consequences of harmful speech for individuals and communities, especially women, youth, and marginalised groups.

The campaign, which is running on mainstream media and digital outlets, aims to spark a national conversation, build digital literacy, and encourage responsible storytelling, with media professionals playing a central role in carrying the message to the public.

Access the full video series and campaign toolkit via this link: <https://cantundo.lk/>



(L-R): Mr. Marc-André Franche, Resident Coordinator, United Nations in Sri Lanka; Hon. Dr. Hansaka Wijemuni, Deputy Minister of Health and Mass Media; Ms. Azusa Kubota, Resident Representative, UNDP Sri Lanka; and Mr. Christian Skoog, Representative, UNICEF Sri Lanka, officially launch the media campaign

HOW TO RESPOND TO **HARMFUL SPEECH**



DISENGAGE when you know it's false and/or harmful to someone else



VERIFY authenticity before you share



AMPLIFY facts, call out mis/disinformation, and #UniteAgainstHate



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