

Harmful Speech in Sri Lanka

MONTHLY BULLETIN
JULY 2025

Key Trends

293

June
2025

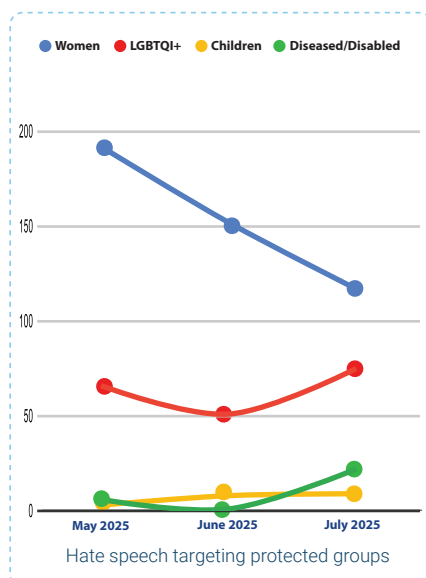
337

July 2025

In July 2025, social media monitors observed 337 incidents of harmful speech.

Compared to June, there was a 47.06% increase in the number of anti-LGBTQI+ content and a 12.5% increase in content targeting children. Monitors also observed a twenty-fold increase in content targeting diseased/disabled groups. By contrast, the month of July saw a 23.03% decrease in content targeting women compared to the previous month.

Key events in July that led to harmful speech



HATE SPEECH
INCIDENTS IN JULY

219

Disability-based discrimination against public figures

Social media monitoring identified discriminatory content targeting NPP MP Lakmali Hemachandra and cricketer Maheesh Theekshana. Both individuals were subjected to ableist hate speech based on malocclusion (dental misalignment), with MP Hemachandra also facing derogatory comments about her speech patterns. These incidents constitute disability-based discrimination in digital spaces and represent a violation of Sri Lanka's Constitution and of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Dissemination of non-consensual intimate content on TikTok

Despite an overall decrease in content targeting women, social media monitors noted a trend of TikTok users sharing non-consensual images of women accompanied by sexually explicit audio often containing misogynistic language. User comments further sexualised the individuals featured in these posts. These constitute image-based sexual abuse and violates international standards on digital rights, gender equality, and protection from technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

46.76%

June

64.99%

July

DISINFORMATION
INCIDENTS IN JULY

41

15.36%

June

12.16%

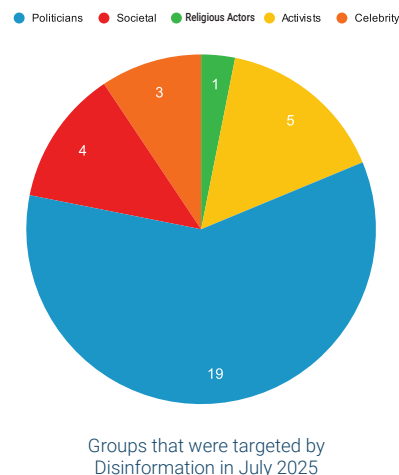
July

Continued disinformation through the use of credible news templates

Monitoring identified TikTok content (mis)using news templates to spread disinformation. One such video which used NewsHub branding falsely claimed that 19 ministers and deputy ministers received double fuel allowances. No official announcement of such allowance was made, and verifications confirmed the statement was false. Similarly, another post using Dinamina branding incorrectly claimed that Minister of Environment, Dhammika Patabendi, announced plans to build a large gold-plated statue in memory of the deceased elephant, Bhathiya. However, the Minister had not made such a statement, and there have been no reports about it on the Dinamina Facebook page.

Disinformation targeting critics of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Monitors observed social media activists K. P. Pathmanathan and Thayabaran, who recently criticised the LTTE, being harassed online, with disinformation narratives claiming they had passed away.



1. Harmful speech includes hate speech, dis/misinformation, harassment and incitement to or glorification of violence.

2. 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."

3. While there is no universally accepted definition of disinformation, the Report of the UN Secretary-General on [Countering Disinformation for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#) defines disinformation as, "information that is inaccurate, intended to deceive and shared in order to do serious harm".

RESPONSIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

July 2025

Key Observations

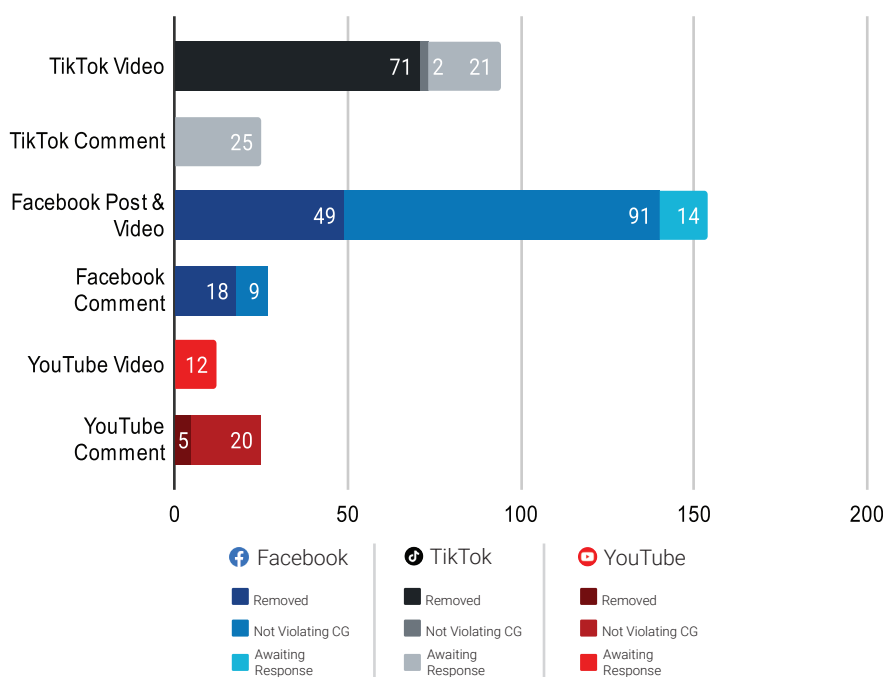
In July, 337 incidents of harmful speech were reported to social media platforms. Of these, 181 were reported to Facebook, 119 to TikTok, and 37 to YouTube. This month, TikTok had the highest removal rate at 59.66%, followed by Facebook at 37.01%. YouTube's removal rate was 13.51%.

Of the content reported to Facebook, 55.25% was found not

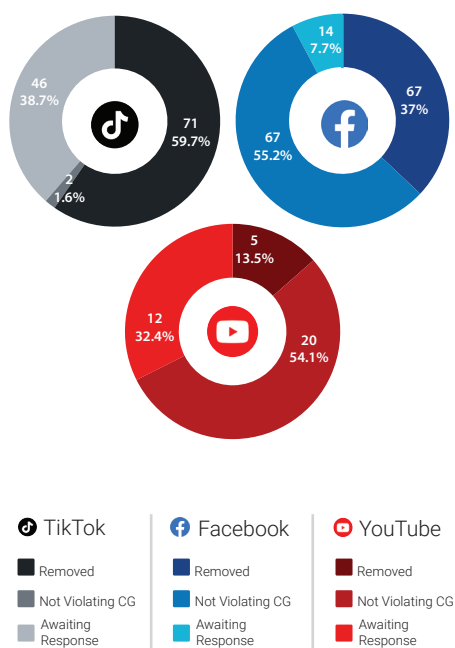
to violate its community guidelines.

Facebook and TikTok responded to all content within a week of escalation. YouTube, however, took more than a week to respond to 67.57% of the escalated content.

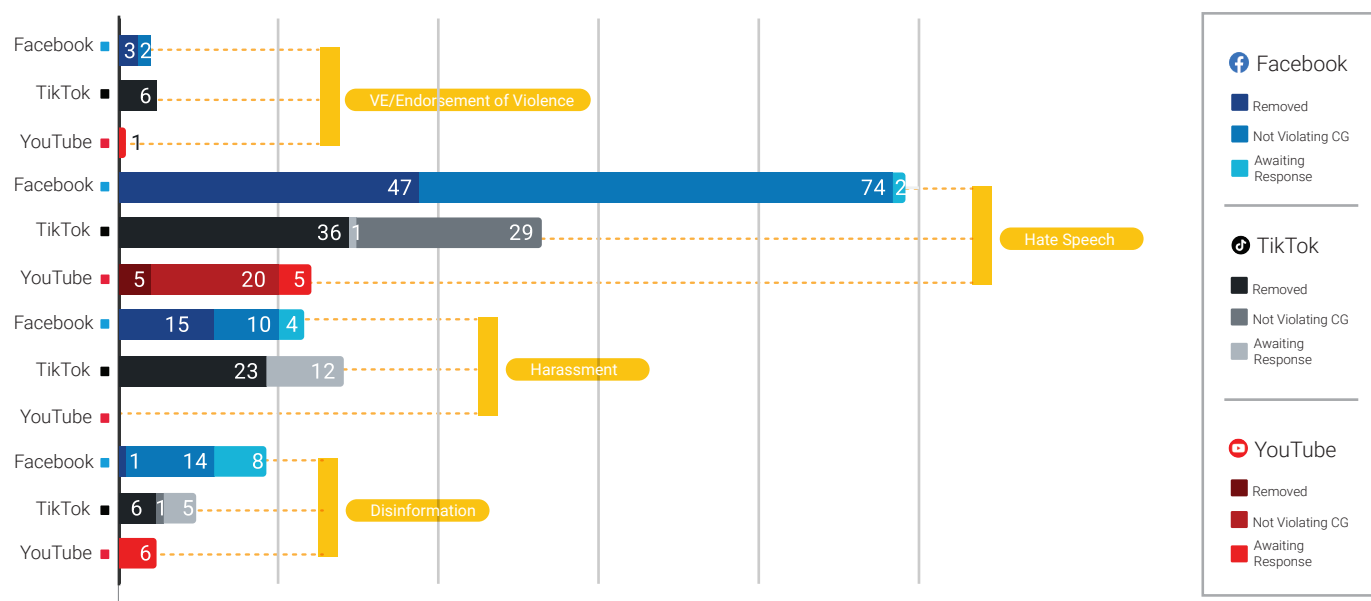
RESPONSE BY THE PLATFORM FOR EACH TYPE OF CONTENT



OVERALL RESPONSE BY PLATFORMS



RESPONSE BY CATEGORY



4. The ability to monitor Facebook was negatively impacted by the retirement of Meta's CrowdTangle tool on 14 August 2024.

5. 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.