



HUMANITARIAN BULLETIN #4

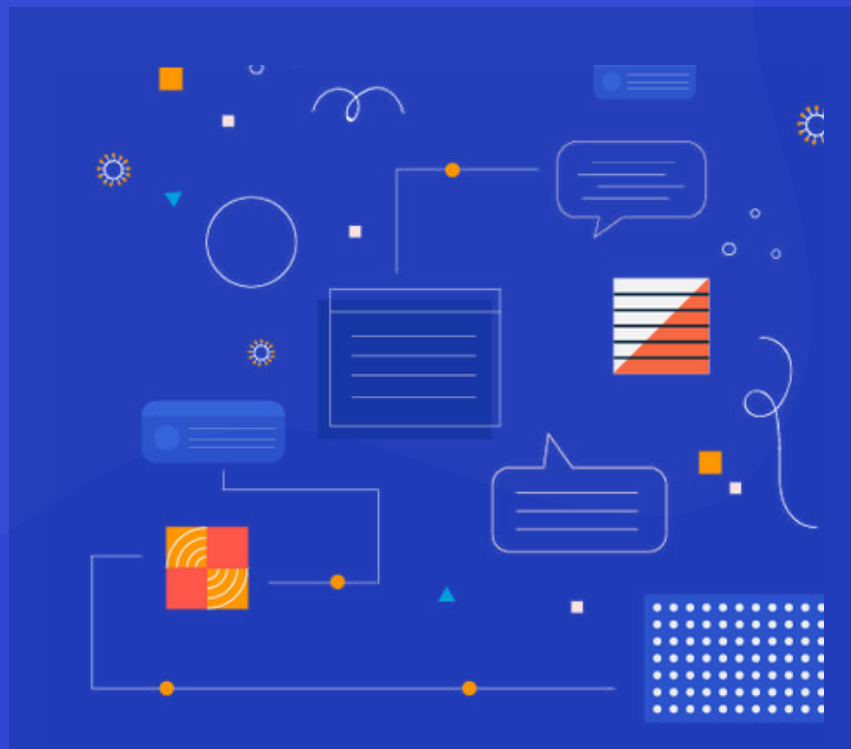
► Iraq April 2022

Project Manager

Sara Sofiwan
(ssofiwan@internews.org)

Project coordinator

Goran Khudhur
(gkhudhur@internews.org)



Introduction to Rooted in Trust

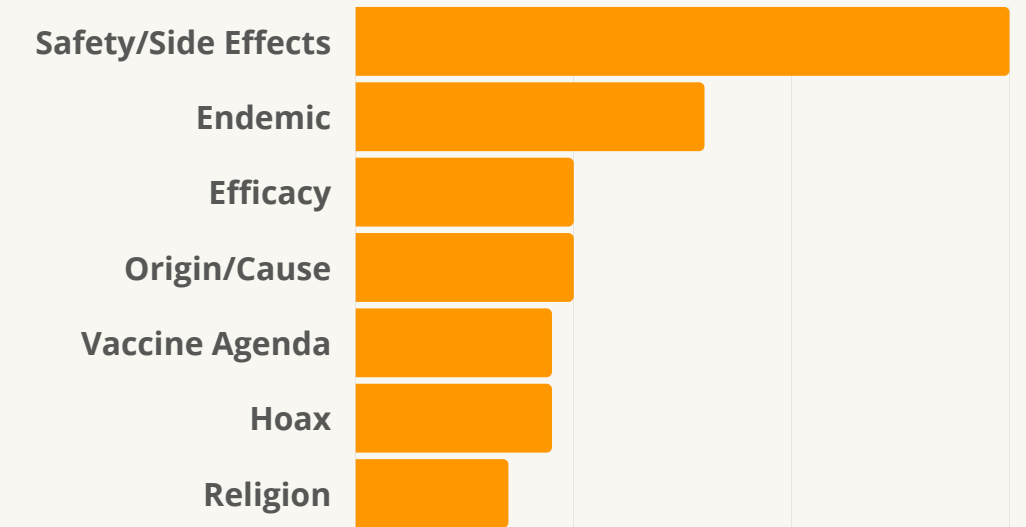
Rooted in Trust (RiT) is a USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA)-funded project by Internews that aims at countering the unprecedented scale and speed of the spread of rumors and misinformation on COVID-19 health response and COVID-19 vaccines among vulnerable populations affected by humanitarian crisis. In Iraq, Rooted in Trust works with media, community-based organizations, and health and humanitarian actors to build a healthier information ecosystem that is responsive to the needs of internally displaced populations in northern Iraq, with the goal of disrupting and mitigating the flow of misleading and inaccurate information.

About this Bulletin

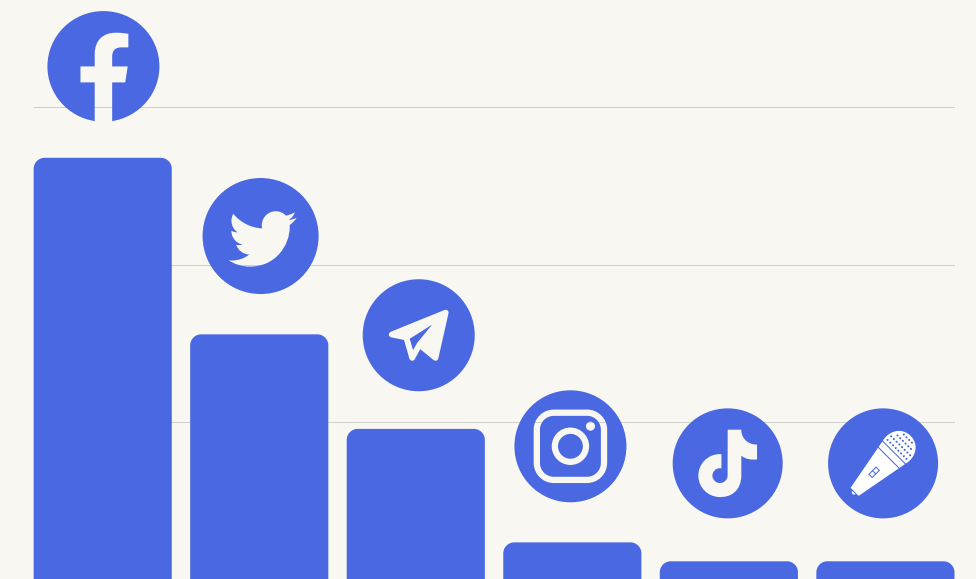
This bulletin provides humanitarian and health partners with the latest rumor data identified among internally displaced populations in northern Iraq. The aim is to guide and inform risk communication and community engagement efforts within the COVID-19 response. It profiles common rumors across social media in Iraq during April 2022. In total, 142 rumors have been collected. They have been categorized as 48 medium-risk, and 98 low-risk levels. Data were collected through various pages, groups, and accounts that have significant user engagement from Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms.

142 Rumors Collected

Top Themes



Data Sources



01.

Efficacy

“ *URGENT* The International Court of Justice rules the abolition of all forms of vaccination, manufacture, sale, and abolish the health protocol of the WHO OMS, and puts several personalities under international legal prosecution, including the director-general of Pfizer on charges of genocide, and Britain is the first country to initiate immediate implementation. ”



Posted in Arabic on a Facebook public account. It had a total of 466 engagements on Facebook (274 likes, 152 comments, and 40 shares)

What's behind the rumor?

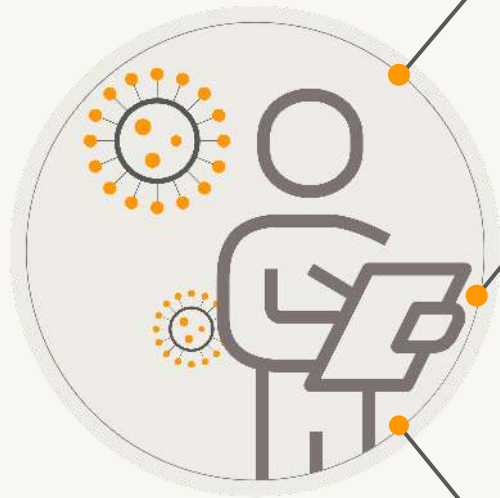
This rumor falsely claims that the International Court of Justice has banned vaccines and ruled against the World Health Organization (WHO). The link in the post directs users to an Australian website, commonlaw.earth, a conspiracy site hosting false claims about so-called 'sovereign citizens' and inaccurate legal information claiming that members are not subject to national laws.

The rumor mentions the International Court of Justice and "genocide", topics that are frequently used in Iraqi modern history. Both phrases are deeply rooted in the memory of Iraqi citizens due to the series of wars and mass killings that faced different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds; these terms may trigger anxiety and fear towards the vaccination process and create vaccine hesitancy.

01.



Fact check



According to the official website of the **International Court of Justice**[1], there is no ruling against COVID-19 vaccines or vaccine manufacturers. The last judgment issued by the Court of Justice was on April 21st, 2022, regarding alleged violations of sovereign rights and spaces Navy in the Caribbean Sea.

It is not true that the United Kingdom has implemented the alleged decision and the government[2] continues encouraging people to comply with preventive measures and take vaccines to avoid infection with the virus. Similarly, WHO has not abolished any relevant health protocol.[3]

No charges have been brought against the executive president of Pfizer **Albert Bourla**.[4]

Why does it matter?

This rumor has a high engagement on Facebook, in which it has been shared 40 times. This indicates that people are taking the subject of the rumor seriously, believing it to be true. For the Iraqi community, any information that mentions the name of the International Court of Justice creates a significant point of view and it will be very widely spread among the people. People's responses on social media to this rumor really matter in terms of their trust in the COVID-19 vaccines and WHO; there are several comments stating that this is a catastrophe and genocide. Also, through other comments, people show their hesitancy towards taking the vaccines, and some of them feel thankful that they haven't taken the vaccines yet. Such kinds of rumors are not only encouraging people to avoid regulations for the COVID-19 and taking the vaccines, but also make people lose trust in any information that comes from the WHO regarding any health issues.

Recommendations



- Humanitarian and health workers should be aware of rumors that link personal beliefs to anti-vaccine sentiments, in which these rumors could eventually create vaccine hesitancy in communities. Health workers can work with trusted community members like doctors, religious leaders, and youth activists inside camps to dispel rumors.
- Respond to questions: local active partners can respond to misinformation around COVID-19 vaccines, online and offline, to address the most common questions and concerns regarding COVID-19.

02.

Safety/Side Effects

“ And it's no wonder that women man up but the feminization of men is strange. Oh girls, women, who have men, turn your attention to them, preserve him, and take care of him. You see, the latest update does not predict well, and on top of all this, he is vaccinated with three doses. ”



Posted in Arabic on a Twitter public account. It had a total of 333 engagements on Twitter (258 likes, 4 comments, and 71 retweets)

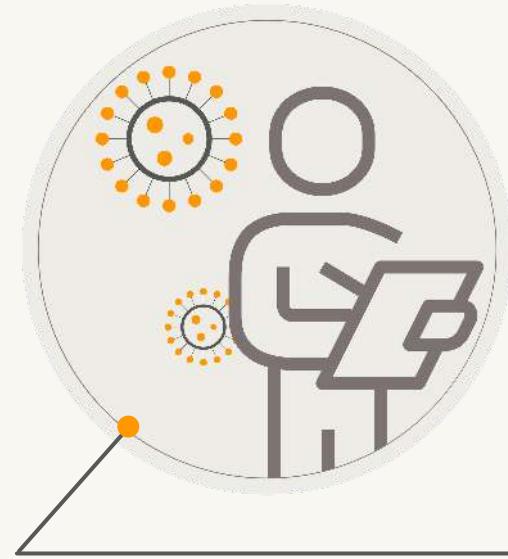
What's behind the rumor?

This rumor claims that COVID-19 vaccines cause gender confusion and affect peoples' bodies. The rumor aims to spread fear and scare people of getting vaccination through a very sensitive and socially taboo topic which is sexuality.

The LGBT+ community in Iraq faces discrimination, prejudice, denial of civil and human rights, harassment, family rejection, and regular threats. This rumor attempts to scare people into rejecting vaccines by associating them with taboos.



Fact check



There are no cases of hormonal changes in men as a result of COVID-19 vaccines, and no evidence that vaccines have any risk of making women 'man up' or men 'feminized'. A meta-study on the effects of COVID-19 and vaccines on men's sexual health found no association between vaccines and reproductive health.[5]

Why does it matter?

In Iraq, homosexuality and transgenderism are often considered shameful in traditional Muslim communities. The rumor claims that vaccines may cause homosexuality or issues related to gender identity are therefore dangerous amongst conservative Muslim communities.

The rumor has been retweeted 72 times, and most comments include religious quotes praying to be protected from the result that the rumor claimed. People also suggested that this is an agenda to destroy Muslim communities and spread immorality and indecency. Subsequently, such rumors become a high risk to the process of vaccination, and once more this will increase the number of infected people.

Recommendations



- Explain to men and religious leaders that COVID-19 may have decreased testosterone levels during infection (see this study) but that there is no evidence that vaccines have any effect on hormones.
- Partners and humanitarian actors should encourage people to consult with doctors and health workers inside camps whenever they have a concern regarding the vaccine and its side effects.

03.

Safety/Side Effects

“ They are all vaccinated with COVI-19, Liver cell damage in a mysterious way that has not been a so far. ”



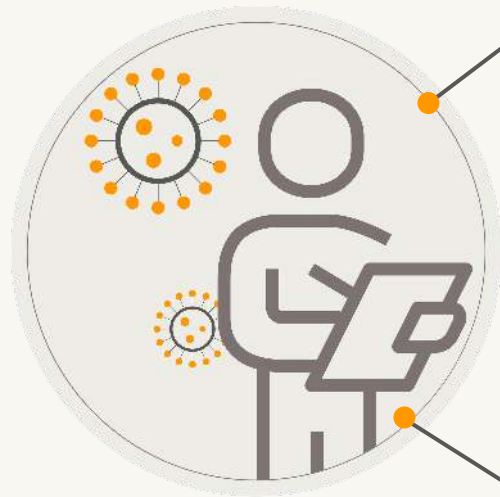
Posted in Arabic on a Telegram public Channel. It had a total of 8496 engagements on Telegram (56 likes, 23 comments, and 8420 views).

What's behind the rumor?

The rumor claims that COVID-19 vaccines are harmful and cause liver damage. Along with its caption, the rumor contains a screenshot of a Twitter post by a famous social media influencer stating that children in the US and Europe are coming down with mysterious liver damage. And the rumor claimed that the reason behind this liver damage is because of taking the COVID-19 vaccines. It was circulated in the contribution of conspiracy theory that the vaccine was created originally to reduce the population on the earth, especially children, and to sow fear in the hearts of parents in the Iraqi community. This is by claiming that what the World Health Organization informs people is only “pinnacle of charlatanism and banging the drum for vaccinating children is a crime”. The caption of the rumor is also supported by a comment of the person who posted the rumor stating, “he is a charlatan [referring to the social media influencer that claimed the children are all not vaccinated].” The term “charlatan” has a very strong connotation, socially and religiously, among the communities in Iraq. Since the rumor is posted by a person who introduces himself as an immunology expert, people undoubtedly believe in his statements. Therefore, such kinds of rumors lead to increase mistrust and vaccine hesitancy among the Iraqi communities and result in increasing risks eventually.



Fact check



There is no link regarding claims that the cases are connected to COVID-19 vaccination, CDC spokesperson Kristen Nordlund said: "The ages for the cases ranged from 11 months to five years and 9 months, most of which are not eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination."[6]

The World Health Organization (WHO) issued a notice on the topic on April 23, which dismissed the hypothesis that the illness could be a side effect of COVID-19 vaccines because "the vast majority of affected children did not receive COVID-19 vaccination."[7]

Why does it matter?

This rumor has been posted on a Telegram channel, in which the channel has more than 24k members. This rumor received high engagement as it has been viewed 9.5k times. The channel mainly posts rumors and misinformation on the COVID-19 virus and its vaccines. It always supports its states with other false information from unreliable sources. Since the rumor points to a high risk on one of the most significant organs of the human body, it creates great and deep fear for the people who took the vaccine. Also, the rumor encourages the belief of those people who have not taken the vaccines yet due to trust issues. This kind of rumor appears to be effective at decreasing the rate of vaccination in Iraq, in which by the end of April 2022, the vaccination rate is 17.7%.

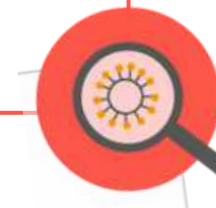
Recommendations



- Keeping people informed by sharing medium and long-term impacts of COVID-19 and vaccines is important to decrease vaccine hesitancy.
- Organize community events in different communities by inviting trusted health professionals and community leaders to shed light and give examples of why some people experience more severe side effects post COVID-19 and how the vaccine will save you from potential high-risk effects of the virus.

Sources

1. <https://www.icj-cij.org/en>
2. <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
3. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance>
4. <https://t4p.co/article/2022-04-23-international-court-of-justice>
5. Effects of SARS CoV-2, COVID-19, and its vaccines on male sexual health and reproduction: where do we stand? | International Journal of Impotence Research (nature.com)
6. هل يؤثر لقاح فيروس كورونا على هرمونات الجنس البشري؟ (t4p.co)
7. <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.329J2TA>
8. Multi-Country – Acute, severe hepatitis of unknown origin in children (who.int)



USAID



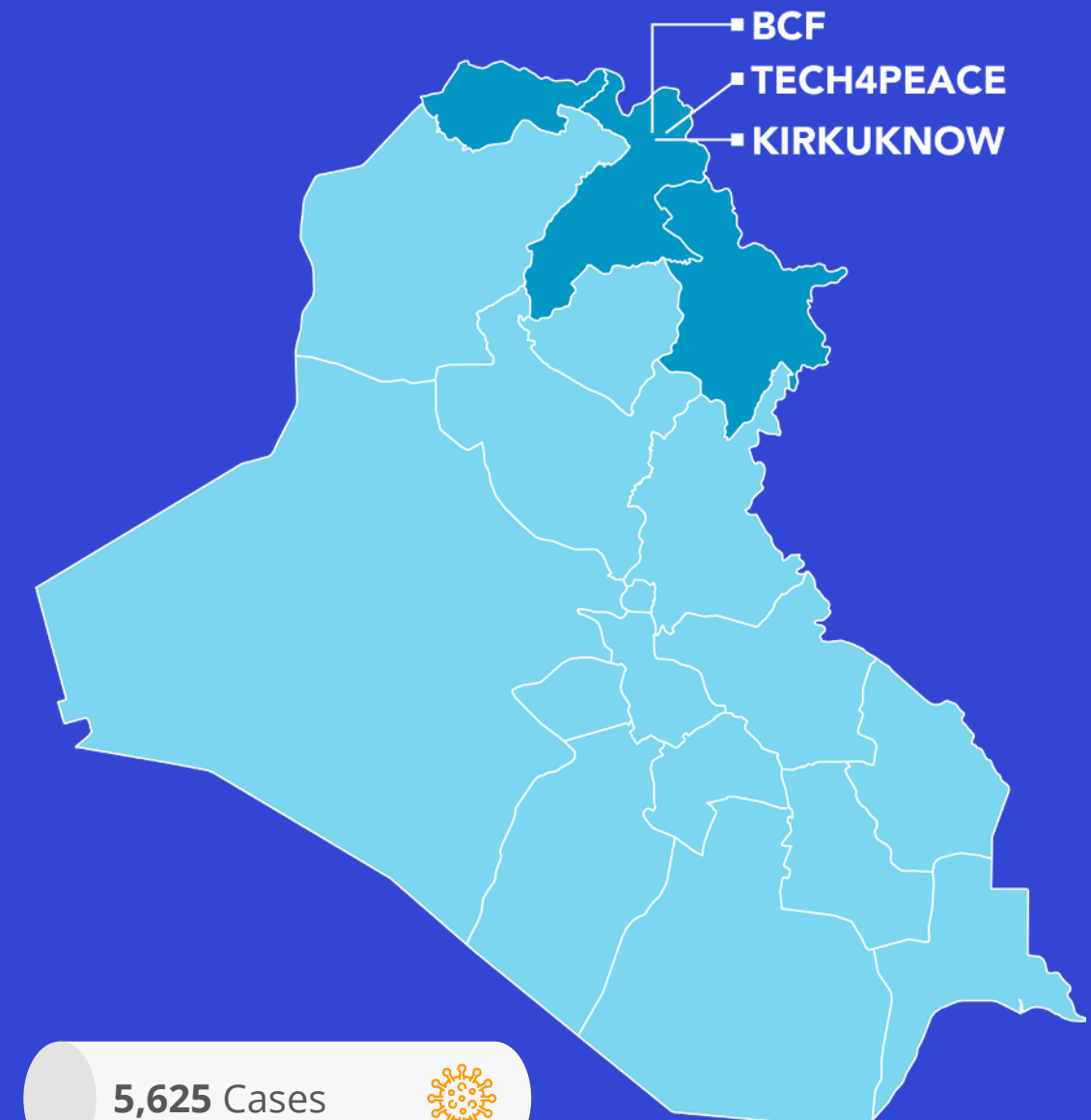
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Covid-19 Snapshot IRAQ



5,625 Cases



48 Deaths



18,118,688 Doses

