



Meta responses to Questions on Notice - Inquiry on Foreign Interference through Social Media - Tuesday 11 July 2023

Questions from Senator Chandler

Question 1:

When Meta receives a request to remove or restrict content by an Australian Government agency or regulator, does Meta undertake its own fact-checking and legal analysis to determine whether the regulator has accurately characterised the content and established that there is a breach of Australian law?

Meta response:

When something on Facebook or Instagram is reported to us as going against local law, but doesn't go against our Community Standards, we may restrict the content's availability in the country where it is alleged to be unlawful. However, before doing so, we undertake our own legal assessment that the content is unlawful prior to restricting availability of that content. More transparency about this process is available in this section of our Transparency Center.¹

Question 2:

Does Meta ever remove or restrict content from its platforms for all users, including Australian users, following a request from a foreign government agency, regulator or official, where the content is not a breach of local law?

Meta response:

All content restrictions are based on violations of our Community Standards or policies, or an assessment that content is unlawful.

¹ Please see: <https://transparency.fb.com/data/content-restrictions/content-violating-local-law/>

We make information transparently available relating to requests that we receive from all governments around the world for content restrictions or requests for user data.

All data on content restrictions is available at:

<https://transparency.fb.com/data/content-restrictions/>

All data on user requests is available at:

<https://transparency.fb.com/data/government-data-requests/>

An outline of how we assess reports of content violating local law is included in our Transparency Center.²

Question 2a:

Please provide a list of countries from which government officials, agencies or staff have contacted Meta to discuss content moderation or make requests for content moderation, where Meta determined that the content did not breach a local law but where Meta has subsequently removed the content discussed for being in breach of Meta’s policies (ie requests which are not covered by Meta’s transparency report on Content restrictions based on local law).

Meta response:

See response to Question 2.

Question 2b:

Does Meta ever remove or restrict content from its platform following a foreign government citing content as ‘misinformation’, in circumstances where the removal is not required by local law or by Meta’s content standards?

Meta response:

See response to Question 2.

Question 3:

Regardless of whether Meta platforms operate in those jurisdictions, has Meta ever acted on a request for content moderation on its platforms from the Russian Government, Chinese Government, Iranian Government, or any person connected with those regimes?

² *Id.*

Meta response:

All data on content restrictions - across all countries - is transparently available at:
<https://transparency.fb.com/data/content-restrictions/>

Question 4:

What is Meta's internal policy regarding how to assess and deal with content moderation requests from government officials, particularly those that occur through informal or semi-formal channels?

Meta response:

See response to Question 2.

Question 4a & b

Are Meta staff required to document any request for content moderation by any government official?

Does this include informal discussions between government officials and Meta staff?

Meta response:

All requests for content moderation, regardless of the person or organisation making the request, is routed via our content moderation systems.

Question 4c:

Has Meta ever identified any cases of foreign governments or persons connected to foreign governments attempting to cultivate personal relationships with Meta staff in order to access data or influence internal decisions?

Meta response:

Meta is aware that there are many different forms that cybersecurity threats can present themselves, including to our own staff and systems, and we have processes in place to combat these.

Question 4d:

How do Australians know whether information has been taken off Meta platforms as a result of a request from an official or person connected with a foreign government?

Meta response:

Across Facebook and Instagram, we tell people when we restrict something they posted based on a report that the content goes against local law, and we also tell people when they try to view something that is restricted in their country on the basis of a government takedown request. In the majority of cases, the notification also informs people as to which government authority sent the take down request resulting

in the restriction. We provide this notice except in limited instances where we are explicitly prohibited by applicable law from doing so.

The notification also provides a link to the Content Restrictions page³ in our Transparency Centre which explains how we review such content reported to us by regulators/governments.

Question 4e:

How do Australians know whether foreign governments or foreign government officials have discussed with Meta the restriction of certain types of content and topics?

Meta response:

All data on content restrictions - across all countries - is transparently available at: <https://transparency.fb.com/data/content-restrictions/>

Question 5:

In each country from which government officials make content moderation requests, do Opposition political parties and elected members have the same access to make requests for content moderation?

Meta response:

All requests from content moderation are routed through the same systems and processes.

Question 6:

How does Meta guard against the coordinated reporting of posts and content for the purposes of suppressing political debate and discussion on its platforms?

6a: Does Meta Australia track the sources of attempts to mass report political or public policy content from Australians to establish if they are being coordinated by foreign sources?

Meta response:

All content is reviewed and assessed consistent with our Community Standards and applicable law. This review can be triggered either by content being identified via our

³ See <https://transparency.fb.com/data/content-restrictions/content-violating-local-law/>

automated systems or from user reporting. On Facebook, these alerts are found in the Support Inbox.⁴ On Instagram, this information is found in the Account Status tool.⁵

Question 7:

How does an Australian user of Meta platforms know whether they have been ‘shadow banned’, visibility limited or in any way had the reach of their posts restricted?

Meta response:

We provide account transparency via a number of channels.

If someone shares content which violates our policies, we remove it and notify the person so they can better understand the reason behind the removal. Depending on what policy the content went against, and their history of previous violations, their account may also be restricted or disabled.

We also provide more details about account restrictions in our Transparency Center: <https://transparency.fb.com/en-gb/enforcement/taking-action/restricting-accounts/>

Question 8:

Does Meta ever restrict the reach or visibility of any Australian users:

- a. Without notifying the user?
- b. Where the user has not been found to have breached any community standard or relevant law?

Meta response:

The audience for any content shared on our services may have variable reach depending on a wide range of factors such as the volume or type of content being shared by other people, world events or specific festivals or holidays. It is not possible to notify people about all of these factors. However, our Content Distribution Guidelines and Recommendation Guidelines (referred to in response to Question 9 above) provide transparency about when that variability may be consistent with our policies.

Question 9:

What discussions, meetings or communications has Meta held with the Australian Government or Government officials, agencies or staff regarding the Voice Referendum?

⁴ See <https://www.facebook.com/help/195906499396292>

⁵ See <https://help.instagram.com/539126347315373>

Meta response:

Meta regularly engages with a wide range of Government, Opposition and other political stakeholders. In the course of these regular engagements, there have likely been questions about our services, policies, tools and programs in the context of the upcoming Voice referendum. At all times, Meta shares the same information and details with all parties.

Question 10:

Did Meta discuss its recently announced Voice referendum fact-checking policy with any Australian Government officials prior to its announcement?

- a. If so, which officials and on what dates?

Meta response:

Our partnerships with third-party fact-checkers is not new. We began a partnership with AFP in 2019, with AAP in 2020 and with RMIT in 2022. We discuss our fact-checking partnerships with Government officials and Members of Parliament from all sides regularly, including in the context of the Referendum.

Question 11:

How many requests has Meta received from Australian Government Departments, Government MPs or Senators, Ministerial offices and staff, or other government officials (excluding regulators making requests based on alleged breaches of Australian laws) to restrict, remove, label as misinformation (or to consider taking any of the aforementioned actions) since June 2022?

- a. How does this number compare to requests from foreign governments?
- b. What is the avenue or channel by which these requests by Australian Government officials were made? Please break down by communication method and Meta contact point.

Meta response:

Any user is able to report content to us on-platform. We receive occasional requests from a broad range of Government departments, Members of Parliament, journalists, academics and other stakeholders to review content for a range of possible harms, including misinformation. We have taken this approach especially with respect to harmful health misinformation over the last three years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We do not readily have data about the number of requests we have received relating specifically to misinformation that could be provided within the due date of these questions on notice.