European Fact-Checking Standards Network

Code of Conduct on Disinformation

Ad hoc report

Ceuta Enhanced Information Exchange and Cooperation Mechanism

October 2026

Executive summary

In late July 2026, an unprecedented surge of irregular migration from Morocco to the Spanish autonomous city of Ceuta gave rise to an irregular border crossing and information integrity event across multiple online platforms. Fact-checking organisations that are members of the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) began documenting crisis-related false and misleading content from 30–31 July 2026 onwards, and kept publishing debunks and investigations throughout August.

EFCSN members, in particular its Spanish members, mounted a sustained response: verifying viral footage, tracing coordinated calls for a new mass crossing on 15 August, and investigating narratives on migration, border control, public health and sovereignty. Arabic-language fact-checking capacity was discussed with member organisations from 6 August.

On 10 August 2026, an Enhanced Information Exchange and Cooperation Mechanism was established on an ad hoc and voluntary basis, bringing together the European Commission, fact-checkers (Spanish EFCSN Members and the EFCSN), Meta and TikTok. It allowed participating fact-checkers to surface reports of harmful disinformation connected to the Ceuta situation (content that could incite violence or endanger the safety of people involved) to named points of contact at the platforms. Participation was strictly opt-in for individual members.

The EFCSN set up a mechanism to facilitate the transmission of relevant fact-checked claims to the platforms.

As of 25 August 2026, 23 reports had been submitted through the mechanism. Only 14 could be forwarded to platforms, because only Meta and TikTok took part. Several reports concerned X.

Throughout the period EFCSN also provided regular monitoring updates to the public and various stakeholders including the European Commission, opened emergency funding for members affected by the crisis, and prepared a policy roundtable to draw lessons on what worked and what did not.

The cooperation mechanism contributed to information integrity concerning the crisis and the EFCSN welcomes its ad-hoc implementation. However, platforms participating in the mechanism also had the option to increase the volume of their fact-checking programs to counter the crisis. Neither TikTok nor Meta made use of this option despite the EFCSN's suggestion. The EFCSN holds the position that future crises or incident protocols should compel VLOPSEs to temporarily expand their fact-checking programs to better mitigate the negative effects of disinformation in crisis situations.

This ad hoc report is published as a voluntary contribution to transparency on crisis response under the Code of Conduct on Disinformation (the "Code"). It does not aim to report on all actions and engagements undertaken by EFCSN or its members in relation to the Ceuta crisis, but focuses on aspects relevant to the Code. Members' individual fact-checks remain the primary public record of their work.

1. Dominant and recurring narratives across the period

a. **Calls for a new mass crossing on 15 August.** The single most prominent thread of the whole period, according to EFCSN's analysis. It spread less through one viral post than through many small, interconnected WhatsApp and social media groups. Maldita.es tracked dozens of such groups from August 2nd and, on the 7th, published an investigation into 21 Facebook groups, together with the false claim that Spain would open the border for 15 hours. After August 15th passed without a mass crossing, old footage was relabelled as evidence of a "second wave" or a successful new crossing, including footage actually from 30 July and from Melilla.

b. **"Migration is chaos, crime and insecurity."** One of the most persistent narratives: migrants portrayed as violent or responsible for riots and looting. Some real incidents of violence and crime were documented during the crisis. However, this does not support presenting migrants as a group as violent or responsible for riots and looting. Numerous false and misleading claims about this topic circulated during the crisis, often using old or unrelated footage from Morocco, Belgium, Barcelona and earlier Ceuta episodes, as well as AI-generated dehumanising imagery. Examples debunked by Maldita include a church video from Ghent presented as India, men with machetes actually filmed in Ghana, and a dog "expelling" an immigrant in a video actually filmed in Murcia. EFCSN member Newtral geolocated videos of car burnings and unrest attributed to Ceuta and Melilla to unrelated disturbances in Nador, Morocco, on the other side of the border. They also traced images

from Libya dating back to 2023 that were being shared as a "mass wave of migrants" or an "invasion of Europe."

c. **"Spain is losing control of its borders / authorities are deliberately allowing migration."** Disinformation actors exploited the temporary loss of control of the border by the police to spread false claims implying that the police were overwhelmed or intentionally letting people through, sometimes alleging EU involvement, backed by misleading footage of earlier arrivals presented as new.

d. **"Migrants are a public health threat"** (from 12 August). Claims linking arrivals to tuberculosis, scabies and impetigo outbreaks, although no health emergency had been declared and some conditions predated the crisis. Maldita debunked related claims on 14 August and, on 20 August, claims about scabies among deployed soldiers, which the Ministry of Defence denied were migrant-linked.

e. **Sovereignty narratives – "Ceuta and Melilla are Moroccan territories to be liberated"** (from 12 August). #FreeCeuta and #FreeMelilla campaigns, misreadings of the Spanish Constitution, and claims of a secret Spanish–Moroccan agreement. Maldita investigated the "colonias españolas" narrative on X on 12 August and, on 28 August, fact-checked claims against the Treaty of Wad-Ras. Source verification with official bodies: Newtral contacted relevant authorities directly to confirm or deny disputed claims, including Interior Ministry sources and the Government Delegation in Ceuta (to confirm a fabricated official communiqué on migrant transfers was not authentic), the Guardia Civil, and humanitarian NGOs operating on the ground.

Manipulation techniques observed, in order of frequency:

1. Recycled or out-of-context old videos and images which was by far the most common technique, reflected in dozens of "this isn't Ceuta" debunks published every day of the period.
2. Fabricated claims and false announcements attributed to authorities (e.g. the false 15-hour border opening).
3. AI-generated or manipulated visuals, altered subtitles, manipulated audio and deepfakes (e.g. an AI-generated image of floating shoes, and later fabrications such as flags at the Assembly Palace, a man with a dead cat, and a yacht seafood image).

2. EFCSN's early monitoring and internal response

2.1 Early detection

EFCSN's Spanish members were publishing crisis-related fact-checks from 31 July 2026. EFCSN followed these publications through its network and through its own monitoring of member output.

2.2 Monitoring updates

At the Commission's request, EFCSN first provided monitoring updates every two days and, from 10 August, daily. An internal team drafted daily update emails, sent each evening from

Monday to Friday (10–14 August), summarising what member organisations had published that day. Updates were also published on the EFCSN's LinkedIn page. As the situation calmed, the updates were discontinued from 17 August, and the Commission was informed.

2.3 Emergency funding

On 10 August, EFCSN opened emergency support grant and micro-grant calls for applications related to the situation, bringing forward a call originally planned for later in the month. EFCSN received one application for each grant and both were approved under the consortium's standard procedures.

3. Fact-checking mobilisation

EFCSN members published fact-checks and investigations on the Ceuta 'crisis' throughout the period, led by Spanish members such as Maldita.es, Newtral, EFE Verifica and AFP Spain. Members also covered the Arabic-language information space as far as capacity allowed.

EFCSN's analysis of member output found that the most prominent thread was the call for a new mass crossing on 15 August, followed by narratives on crime and insecurity, border control, public health and sovereignty. Fact-checkers across the network observed the same patterns daily.

Fact-checkers' independence was maintained throughout. Fact-checkers monitor information spaces, verify claims and inform the public. They do not take action on content. Decisions about moderating, labelling or removing content rest with platforms.

4. The Enhanced Information Exchange and Cooperation Mechanism

4.1 Establishment and scope

On 6 August 2026, the Commission approached EFCSN about a cooperation mechanism it was already discussing with platforms. After consultation with Spanish members on 7 and 10 August the mechanism was set up on 10 August 2026. It was:

- **Ad hoc:** established specifically in response to the Ceuta 'crisis';
- **Voluntary and opt-in:** each fact-checking organisation decided for itself whether to participate;
- **Narrow in scope:** reports were limited to harmful disinformation connected to the Ceuta situation that could incite violence or endanger the safety of people involved; and
- **Time-limited:** active until the end of August 2026.

The EFCSN set up a submission system on 10 August for reports from members, and the first call with the Commission and platforms took place that afternoon, at which points of

contact were exchanged and EFCSN restated the scope of the mechanism. Maldita was also present.

4.2 Purpose and functioning

The purpose of the mechanism was to allow fact-checkers to surface reports of harmful disinformation to named points of contact at participating platforms.

Further coordination calls with the Commission and platforms took place on 13 August, 15 August and on 18 August.

The mechanism was limited in scope. It was not a content moderation decision-making body and did not alter or override platforms' policies or members' editorial independence.EFCSN provided the Commission with general summaries of what had been submitted and how many reports had been received.

4.3 Reports submitted through the mechanism

As of 25 August 2026, **23 reports** had been submitted through the mechanism's submission system. Each report typically contained more than one piece of content or link, and some also pointed to broader trends that members were observing, including narratives or claims that recurred across multiple fact-checks or platforms.

Of the 23 reports, **14 were forwarded to platforms**, because only Meta and TikTok participated. **Most reports concerned X**, which did not take part.

EFCSN does not hold information on enforcement outcomes for reports forwarded to platforms, since decisions on content rest entirely with the platforms.

EFCSN will report further, as appropriate, in its regular reporting under the Code covering the second half of 2026.