

COUNTERING RADIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR (RN) DISINFORMATION: THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY (IAEA) SECRETARIAT



BRIEFING NOTE | SEPTEMBER 2026

Disinformation can undermine trust in the IAEA by attacking its impartiality and technical authority. The GP WMD Counter Disinfo Initiative has developed targeted recommendations on countering disinformation for the IAEA Secretariat. Further information can be found at www.GPWMDCounterDisinfo.com.

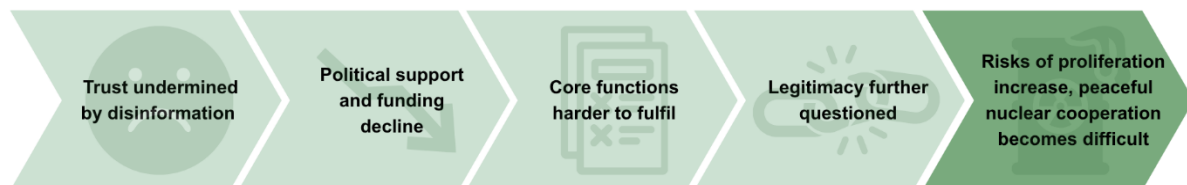
WHAT IS RN DISINFORMATION?

RN disinformation refers to **deliberately false or manipulated information** concerning radiological or nuclear technologies, materials and weapons. Its purpose is to influence perceptions and behaviour among target audiences. Unlike misinformation, disinformation is **intentionally** misleading and may originate from both non-state and state actors for financial or strategic gain.

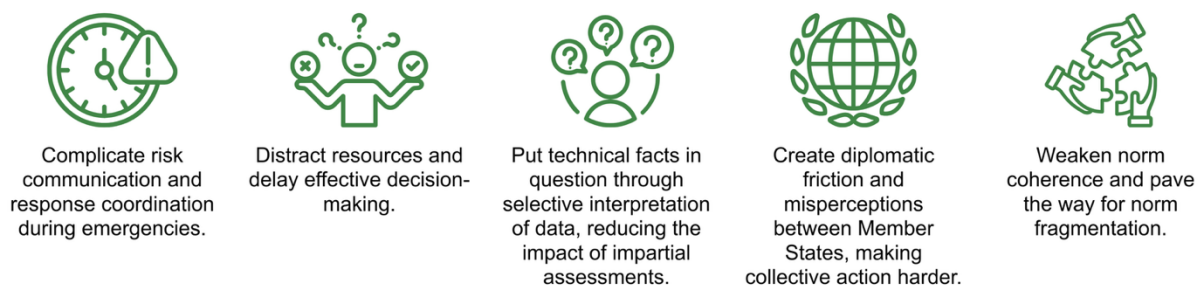
WHY IT MATTERS

RN disinformation can directly undermine the IAEA's ability to deliver on its mandate by delegitimising the sources of its authority: technical expertise, impartiality and international credibility. When the IAEA is portrayed as biased or ineffective, trust is eroded, which can lead to reduced political and financial support by Member States. At the organisational level, sustained attacks can lower staff morale and prompt overly cautious communication that can limit the IAEA's effectiveness. A constrained Secretariat is less able to deter proliferation and ensure nuclear safety, security and peaceful uses of nuclear technologies.

DISINFORMATION SPIRALING IMPACT ON THE IAEA



RN DISINFORMATION CREATES THE FOLLOWING RISKS:



HOW RN DISINFORMATION WORKS

Public perceptions of radiation, shaped by past nuclear incidents, can act as emotional triggers¹ that heighten sensitivity to alarming claims. Response to such triggers is one of many psychological vulnerabilities disinformation can exploit, alongside other cognitive biases,² that reduce critical assessment of information. The technical complexity of nuclear issues creates barriers to understanding and opens space for distortion. Potential manipulation may include reducing allegations to simplified good-versus-evil narratives and linking them to nationality, alliances or ideology. Such linkages trigger biases, encouraging audiences to interpret technical claims through pre-existing views and identities.

HOW RN DISINFORMATION SPREADS

- **Formal diplomatic channels** (plenary statements, notes verbales, etc.)
- **Informal diplomatic channels** (corridor diplomacy, staff conversations, conferences)
- **Media channels** (press briefings, interviews, traditional and social media, etc.)

NARRATIVES THE SECRETARIAT CAN FACE

 Impartiality framed as political alignment	Actors exploit: The IAEA's obligation to stay impartial and grounding in verifiable evidence. Disinformation approach: Reframing neutrality as political alignment with dominant powers or selective blindness to violations.
 Mandate constraints framed as inaction	Actors exploit: The IAEA's need to satisfy Member States and inability to attribute blame. Disinformation approach: Portraying mandate limitations as a decision not to act or institutional weakness.
 Cooperation framed as risky or biased	Actors exploit: The IAEA's support for peaceful use of nuclear technology via technical cooperation. Disinformation approach: Framing assistance as favouritism or enabling military programmes.
 Scientific due diligence framed as cover-ups	Actors exploit: The time required for IAEA inspections, verification and technical assessment. Disinformation approach: Framing slow, deliberate processes as concealment or collusion.
 Uncertainty framed as incompetence or concealment	Actors exploit: The Secretariat's cautious, probabilistic language. Disinformation approach: Reframing scientific uncertainty and evidentiary limits as incompetence or intentional concealment.
 Personal backgrounds framed as institutional bias	Actors exploit: National origin, past affiliations or perceived biases of IAEA staff. Disinformation approach: Alleging personal bias to discredit institutional outputs.

BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE

 Awareness • Integrate RN disinformation into institutional risk and preparedness processes (<i>leadership/management</i>). • Train relevant staff to recognise, escalate and respond to RN disinformation (<i>management/OPIC</i>). • Incorporate lessons from past RN disinformation incidents into guidance and exercises (<i>OPIC/technical departments</i>). • Maintain links with relevant expert, fact-checking and platform networks (<i>OPIC/analysts</i>).	 Monitoring • Establish a system for monitoring of RN narratives (<i>leadership/OPIC</i>). • Use digital tools to support detection and analysis (<i>OPIC</i>). • Remain vigilant and report suspected disinformation to an OPIC focal point (<i>all</i>). • Identify narratives targeting IAEA mandate, activities, findings or staff (<i>OPIC</i>). • Escalate significant cases affecting IAEA to the leadership (<i>OPIC</i>). • Track the reach of specific narratives (<i>OPIC</i>).	 Assessment • Escalate significant cases to the leadership (<i>OPIC</i>). • Define response thresholds based on reach, potential harm and risks to inadvertently amplify (<i>OPIC/leadership</i>). • Establish and activate a process for assessing significant cases, including through trusted expert networks (<i>OPIC</i>). • Recommend whether to monitor, clarify, correct or escalate (<i>OPIC</i>).	 Response • Maintain adaptable pre-approved response language (<i>OPIC/technical departments</i>). • Tailor responses to the audience, platform and level of risk (<i>OPIC</i>). • Use trusted partners or experts where external amplification adds credibility (<i>OPIC/leadership</i>). • Support staff targeted by disinformation or harassment (<i>OPIC/management</i>). • Track response effectiveness and recurring claims (<i>OPIC</i>).
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Member States look to the IAEA as the trusted source of impartial information. Disinformation risks must be anticipated to strengthen this role and demonstrate foresight and proactive stances



Scan QR code for references.