

LEBANON SITUATION REPORT

A monthly situation report aimed at tackling COVID-19 rumors to debunk the "infodemic"

FEBRUARY 2023 | #11

ABOUT ROOTED IN TRUST

Rooted in Trust is collecting, analyzing, and responding to rumors in 13 countries with generous support from USAID's Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA). We focus on equipping journalists and humanitarian communicators with the tools they need in the languages they prefer, to combat rumors and misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

HOW WE DO IT

We identify and analyze rumors to help humanitarian actors and health workers better inform their Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) strategies.

SITUATION BY THE NUMBERS (WHO)

Covid-19 cases reported during February 2023	1650
Total number of deaths	10,825
Latest reported cases per day	139
Total vaccinated (As of 21 December 2022)	5,814,699
Persons vaccinated with at least one dose	2,740,227
Persons fully vaccinated	2,414,223

INTRODUCTION

In February 2023, the total number of COVID-19 cases decreased by 71% compared to the month of January 2023 (5,696). While health-related concerns continue to prevail on online social media platforms and within local communities in the north of Lebanon, the country continues to be plagued by an economic crisis that acts as a catalyst to a plethora of rumors. In the first half of the month, many people in Beirut and the northern areas of Lebanon were also affected by the 7.8 magnitude earthquake along the Turkey-Syria border. The earthquake and its aftershock led to a momentary halt in the collection of rumors by Internews' partner, Akkarouna.



DATA OVERVIEW

In February, a total of 173 rumors were collected of which 96 were online rumors and 77 were offline rumors. Following food insecurity concerns in Lebanon with the World Food Programme estimating that some 1.46 million Lebanese and 800,000 Syrian refugees will be affected by food insecurity by April 2023, RiT 2.0 Lebanon Internews Team decided to undertake a pilot collecting non-health-related rumors at the end of 2022. This has resulted in the RiT 2.0 Lebanon Internews Team officially adapting its online rumor methodology to include "Food Security" as a new theme with 14 additional sub-themes from February onwards.

More than three thirds (78%) of online rumors were collected under the theme of "Other Health Topic", followed by COVID-19 General (11%), Food Security (6%), and COVID-19 Vaccine (4%). Most rumors came from Ordinary People (68%) as previously seen in January.

Unlike previous months, the sub-theme of "Communicable Disease" is not top trending for February, instead the focus has shifted to the sub-themes of "Other" (19 rumors) and "Availability of Healthcare" (17 rumors), both of which are found under the theme of "Other Health Topic". The former set of rumors do not seem to share a common trend, but rather are diverse in nature ranging from the beneficial use of herbs in treating disorders to the effects of earthquakes and tremors on one's health. The latter set of rumors focus on corruption,

increased prices of medicine, shortages of medicine in pharmacies, and an overall decline in healthcare services.

With the new theme of Food Security (6 rumors), the most prevalent sub-themes were "Corruption" (2 rumors) and "Individual Access/Affordability" (2 rumors). These rumors contained misinformation around butchers selling expired meat or prices affecting affordability.

For the 77 offline rumors collected in February, more than half of the offline rumors were under the theme of "Other Health Topic" (51%) followed by "COVID-19 Vaccine" (25%), "COVID-19 General" (22%) and "Other Non-Health Non-COVID-19" (2%). These rumors were collected from Bab Al Ramel (34 rumors), Ras Maska (31 rumors), and Aarqa (12 rumors).

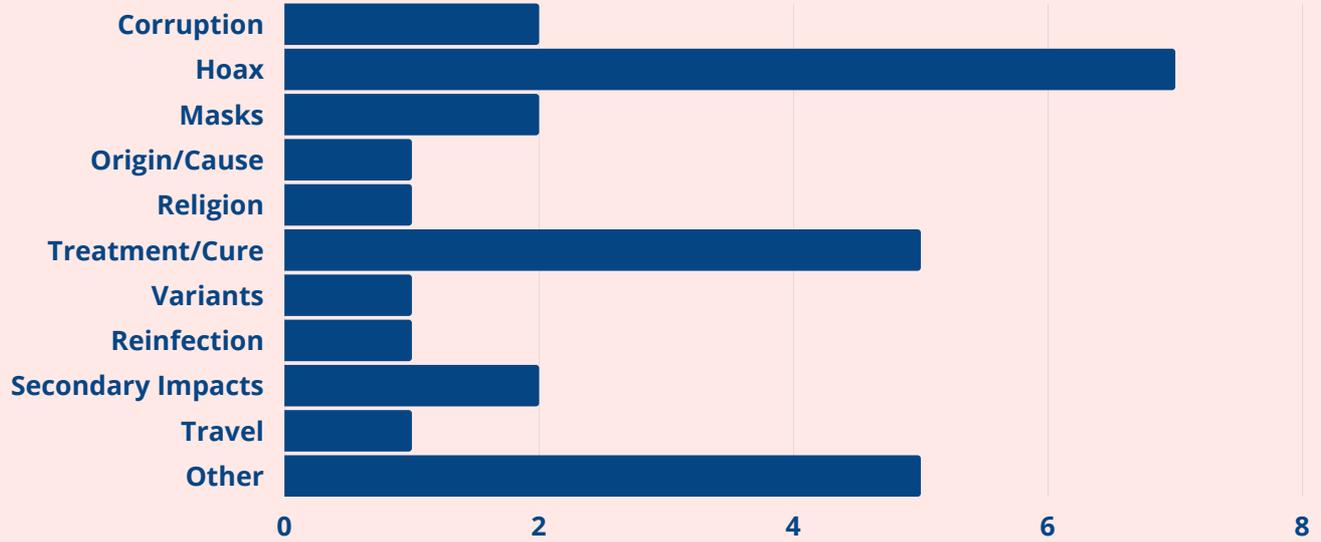
Of the "Other Health Topic" theme rumors, the top sub-themes were "Other" (14 rumors) and "Communicable Disease" (11 rumors). For the "Other" sub-theme rumors, most make reference to natural home remedies such as a spoonful of honey or the use of basil in treating various diseases. Then for the sub-theme of "Communicable Disease", one identified Medium Risk rumor blamed Syrian refugees for the increase in diseases in Lebanon, while others made reference to Chickenpox and Cholera-related rumors as previously identified in January.



THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

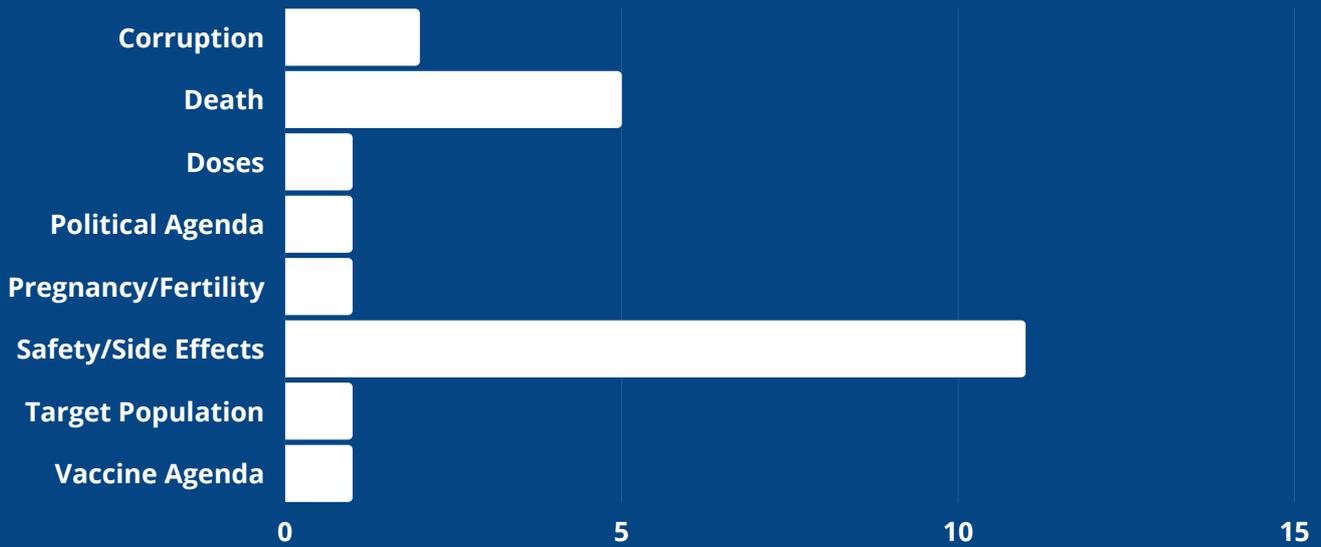
Theme: COVID-19 General

SUBTHEME:



THEME: COVID-19 Vaccine

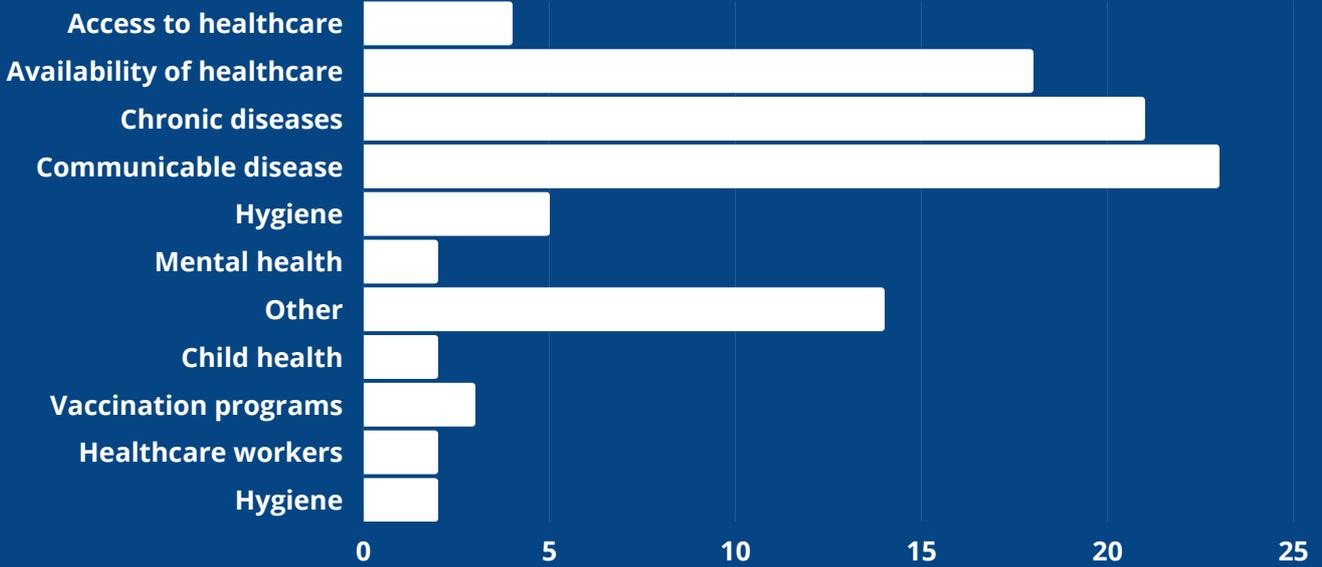
SUBTHEME:



THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

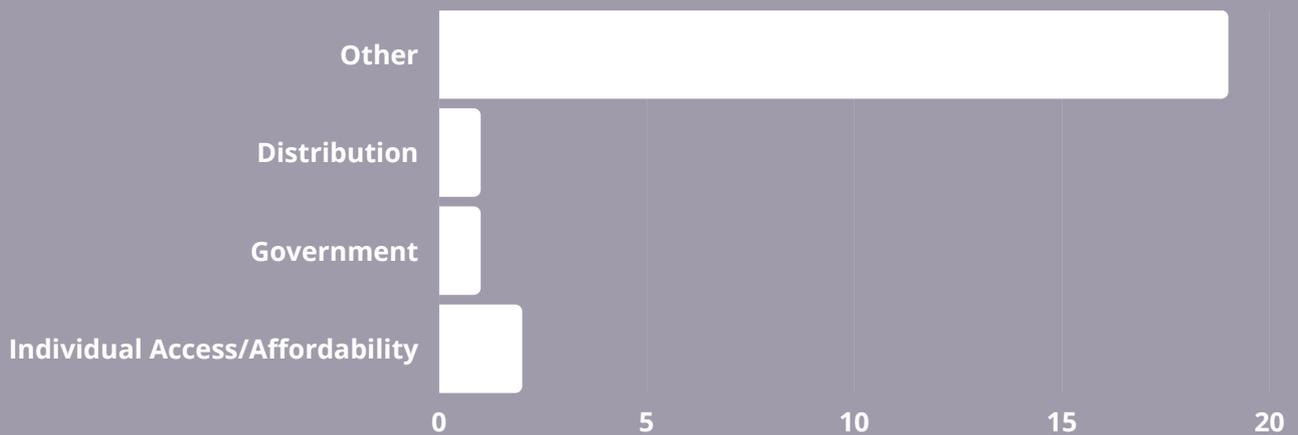
THEME: Other Health Topic

SUBTHEME:

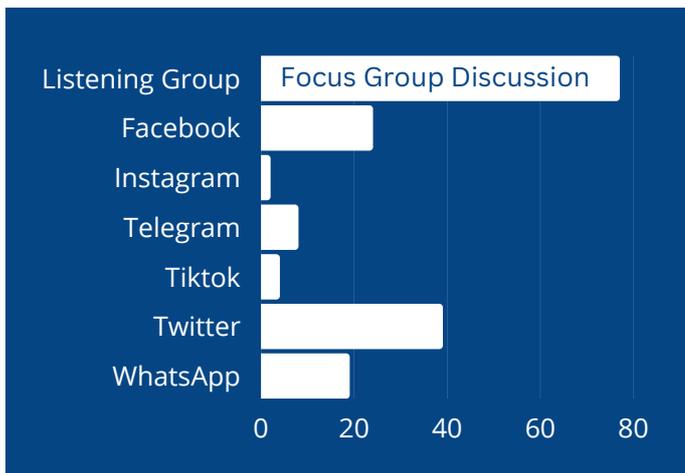


THEME: Food Security

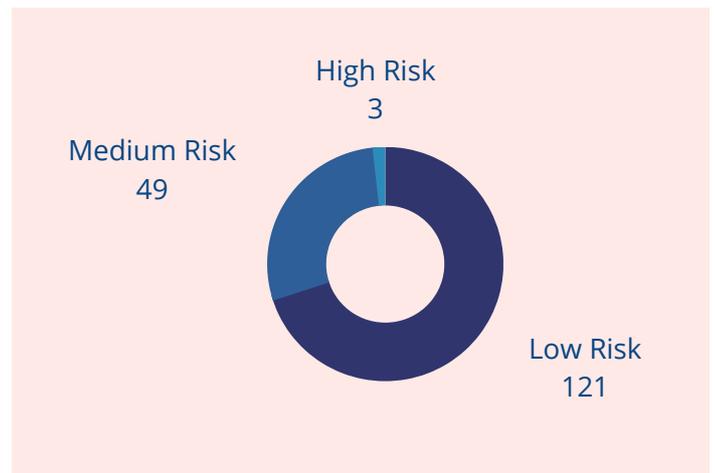
SUBTHEME:



CHANNELS



RISK LEVELS



ANALYSIS

In February, Lebanon's official currency rate was devalued by 90% to 15,000 Lebanese Pounds to the US Dollar - a rate that has remained unchanged for 25 years. The socio-economic situation remains dire with most people's attention being redirected away from health-related rumors to the creation of rumors that align more closely with their day-to-day realities. This coupled with the earthquake along the Turkey-Syria border has resulted in a decrease in the total number of rumors collected for the month.

With the black market rate at approximately 81,000 Lebanon Pounds to the US Dollar, it is not surprising that February saw a stark increase in the number of online rumors for the theme of "Other Health Topic" with the sub-theme of "Availability of Healthcare" (17 rumors).

With a rise in costs, people's access to healthcare is decreasing, as well as their overall purchasing power in multiple categories, including food. In the upcoming months, RiT 2.0 Lebanon is hoping to capture more rumors under the theme of "Food Security" to more accurately represent the trending rumors.

As seen in January, offline rumors continue to make reference to Chickenpox, Scabies, and Cholera under the sub-theme of "Communicable Diseases". A slight increase in rumors under the sub-theme of "Chronic Diseases" (8 rumors) was observed with most making reference to Cancer only killing the elderly or it being a hoax. Tensions between Syrian refugees and the vulnerable Lebanese community were also noted with one Medium Risk rumor blaming Syrian refugees for the increase in diseases.

CONTACT

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For more information on the project, visit
- <https://internews.org/resource/rooted-trust-rumor-bulletins-lebanon/>
- <https://rootedintrust.org/countries/lebanon/>