

Sri Lanka pharmaceuticals (2022-014-FB-MR)

November 10, 2022

Case referred by Meta

Submit public comments [here](#).

In April 2022, a Facebook user posted in English on the Facebook page of a medical organization in Sri Lanka, stating that people could donate pharmaceutical drugs and other medical goods to the country, and providing a link for them to do so. The post has been viewed over 80,000 times, shared fewer than 1,000 times, and has not been reported by anyone. At the time it was posted, Sri Lanka was in the midst of a financial crisis, limiting its ability to import pharmaceutical drugs. There were reports of local hospitals running out of medical supplies, including drugs.

Meta’s Restricted Goods and Services policy prohibits content that “[a]ttempts to donate or gift pharmaceutical drugs.” Meta says the content would ordinarily have been removed under that provision. However, due to the situation in Sri Lanka, Meta chose to make a temporary “spirit of the policy” exception and allow the content, “as well as other content seeking to donate, gift, or ask for pharmaceutical drugs in Sri Lanka.” Meta makes “spirit of the policy” exceptions when a strict application is producing results that are inconsistent with the policy’s objectives. Exceptions are rarely communicated publicly. In this case, the exception was both temporary and limited to the Sri Lankan situation. It has been renewed multiple times. If a user reports content after an exception has expired, the usual rules apply, and it would be removed if found violating.

Meta referred the case to the Board, stating that it is difficult, as it involves balancing the competing values of “Safety” and “Voice,” and significant, as it concerns the Sri Lankan financial crisis, which could lead to preventable deaths due to a lack of medical drugs. Meta has asked the Board to evaluate how the company makes temporary, region-specific “spirit of the policy” exceptions to its Restricted Goods and Services policy, particularly during crisis or conflict situations.

The Board would appreciate public comments that address:

- *The economic and political situation in Sri Lanka and how it is affecting medical services, the provision of pharmaceutical drugs, and the general public’s access to health.*

- *How the work of organizations attempting to collect and distribute pharmaceutical drugs in Sri Lanka is affected by Meta’s general prohibition on seeking to donate, gift, or ask for pharmaceutical drugs.*
- *How Meta’s Restricted Goods and Services policy should treat content seeking to donate, gift, or ask for pharmaceutical drugs in general.*
- *Whether Meta should publicly communicate when and how it allows temporary “spirit of the policy” exceptions to its Community Standards in crisis situations.*
- *What the objective criteria should be for deciding when to apply “spirit of the policy” exceptions in crisis situations, as well as how long such exceptions should last and when they should end.*

In its decisions, the Board can issue policy recommendations to Meta. While recommendations are not binding, Meta must respond to them within 60 days. As such, the Board welcomes public comments proposing recommendations that are relevant to this case.

Public comments

If you or your organization feel that you can contribute valuable perspectives that can help with reaching a decision on the case announced today, you can submit your contributions using the link above. The public comment window is open for 14 days, closing at 16:00 UTC, Thursday 1 December.

What's next

Over the next few weeks, Board members will be deliberating this case. Once they have reached their final decision, we will post it on the Oversight Board [website](#).

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