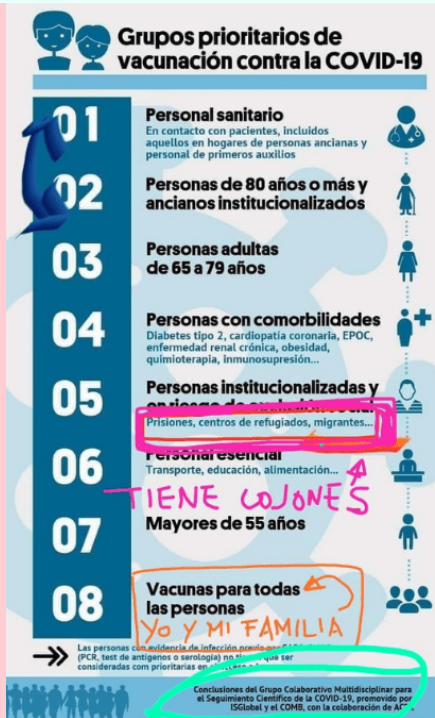# CASE STUDY 1

Priority groups for COVID 19 vaccination

This image circulated widely in social media in Spain in January 2021:

The headline is: Priority groups for COVID-19 vaccination. The table presents the order of priority for receiving COVID-19 vaccination as follows:

1 Healthcare workers

2 People aged over 80 and elderly people in residential care

3 Adults aged 65-79

4 People with co-morbidities (diabetes type 2, coronary heart disease, etc.)

5 People in institutions and people at risk of social exclusion (prisoners, refugee centres, migrants)

6 Essential workers (transport, education, food supply)

7 Adults aged over 55

8 Vaccines for everyone
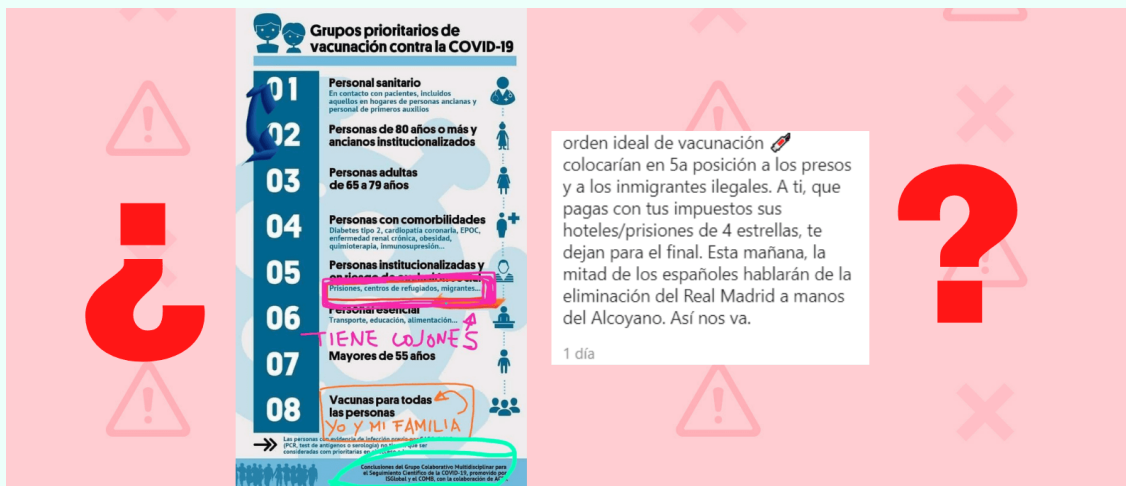
IMPORTANT POINTS

This is an example of **genuine information** (the table is from a trustworthy source) that has undergone some small **misinterpretations** that give it a new twist.

In analytical terms, this is **"misleading content"**, that is, genuine content that has been taken out of context and used in a misleading way to frame the situation. The message is politically loaded against the government and against migrants.
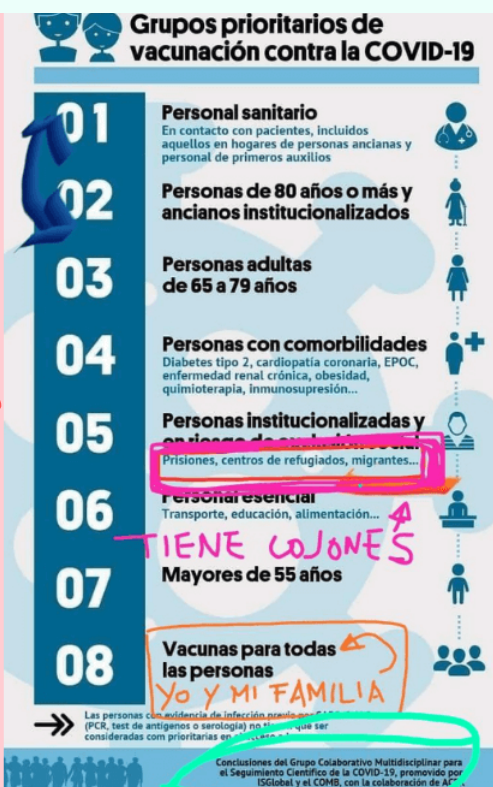
Regarding the features of the message itself, we can observe several important aspects concerning the attribution of source, the interpretation of specific terms, and the visual presentation.

MISLEADING ATTRIBUTION OF SOURCE

It is presented as coming from "the authorities" (although this is not explicitly stated, the comment on the right implies that the message is from the government).

This was NOT published by the official Spanish Health Ministry. The GCMSC is a group of independent researchers based in Barcelona. At the time this image was circulating (January 2021), the Health Ministry was still organising the vaccination of healthcare workers and people in residential care, and had announced that the next population group to be vaccinated would be the over-80s.

The "handwritten" notes on the table draw attention to points 5 and 8. Point 5, circled in pink, comes with the comment "tiene cojones" (literally, "it has got balls", which means something like "what a cheek!"). Point 8, circled in orange, situates the reader: "me and my family".

The comment on the right states as follows:

> Ideal order of vaccination. They would put prisoners and illegal immigrants in fifth position. You are paying for their four star hotels/prisons, and you get left to the end. This morning, half of the Spanish population is talking about how Alcoyano threw Real Madrid out of the championship. That's how it goes.

The source of the table is also circled in green. This source is a study published on 23 November 2020 by the "Grupo Colaborativo Multidisciplinar para el Seguimiento Científico de la COVID-19 (GCMSC)", a research group led by the Instituto de Salud Global de Barcelona (ISGlobal), the Colegio de Médicos de Barcelona (COMB) and the Asociación de Entidades de Investigación de Cataluña (ACER).

MISLEADING INTERPRETATION OF SPECIFIC WORDS

It is presented as **favouring "migrants" above "ordinary people"**.

One particular source of confusion was the term "migrants". Silvia Sanjosé, a spokesperson for the GCMSC interviewed by the main independent fact-checking site Maldita, explained that category 5 was designed to target people who had difficulty keeping to social distancing restrictions (hence prisons and refugee camps). In particular, the word "migrants" was meant to indicate "migrant workers": in Spain, certain groups of people travel from one province to another picking fruit or helping with the harvest, and they were regarded as high risk for two reasons:

1) they often live in cramped conditions (there had been a serious COVID-19 outbreak among migrant farmworkers in Lleida);
2) they have to travel from one autonomous community to another (the Spanish lockdown currently prohibited travel to other autonomous communities without special authorisation, in order to contain the virus).

VISUAL PRESENTATION

We should note that the use of a table produced by a scientific institution appears to give this information great authority.

SUMMARY

The combination of the table, the attribution to a scientific institution, the comments in colours and the comment on the right suggesting that the information represents government policy may easily lead readers to assume that migrants are being given preferential treatment over and above "people like us" who pay taxes.