“They Can Never Be Trusted": UNICEF Visit in Burkina Faso

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from the Sahel

25 June 2025

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses social media activity from 16-22 June 2025, assessing observed narratives based on 14 months of systematic social media monitoring in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.



SUMMARY: Between 16-22 June 2025, 279 social media posts related to the aid sector across Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso generated a total of **408 comments.** This represents a **17% increase** in engagement compared to the previous monitoring period (June 09-15). During the current period, negative sentiment primarily targeted UN agencies, particularly UNICEF in Burkina Faso following the visit of its executive director, and UNHCR in Niger.

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SPOTLIGHT: Burkina Faso - UNICEF visit and statement on school reopenings sparks backlash



Between 19 and 20 June, 126 public Facebook posts in Burkina Faso referenced the aid sector. Strikingly, 55 of these specifically mentioned UNICEF — a disproportionately high figure for the agency. The surge in attention followed the visit of UNICEF Executive Director to Ouagadougou, where she met with government officials. In a statement published by multiple local media outlets, the executive director praised the Burkinabè government’s efforts to reopen schools closed due to insecurity and reaffirmed UNICEF’s support for child protection, education, and health. **However, the online response to both the visit and the statement on schools was critical (50 percent of comments on the 34 posts analyzed were negative).**

Key findings

- While UNICEF was the immediate focus of attention, many users extended their criticism to international NGOs and the wider aid architecture. Some comments targeted the organisation directly— **“Down with Unicef” (“A bas l’UNICEF”),** and **“We don’t care about UNICEF”** (“On s'en fout de l'UNICEF”)—while others denounced the entire sector: **“All NGOs must leave.”** (“Toutes les ONG doivent partir”)
- Mistrust also extended to the broader UN system reinforcing perceptions of coordinated foreign agendas. One user remarked: **“The Ministry of Cooperation must work to drastically reduce the influence and funding of imperialist UN institutions in our country by 2025. Since 1945, they have not changed the face of Africa. It is as if they were created to keep Africa in its place.Let us be vigilant. Without infiltration, without international**

NGOs, without imperialist embassies, it is difficult for the enemies of sovereignty to destabilise the AES and Africa. Who would have imagined USAID? Who would have imagined the Red Cross in Niger? Let us not lower our guard. The time will come when each ministry will have to be evaluated in terms of its contribution to total sovereignty." ("Le ministère de la coopération doit travailler à réduire drastiquement de moitié à l'horizon 2025, l'influence et les financements de ses institutions onusiennes impérialistes, dans notre pays.Depuis 1945 , elle n'ont pas changé le visage de l'Afrique.Comme si elles sont créée pour entretenir une limite à l'Afrique.Soyons vigilants, sans infiltrations, sans ONG internationales, sans ambassades impérialistes, ils est difficile pour les ennemis de la souveraineté, de déstabiliser l'AES et l'Afrique.Qui aurait imaginer l'USAID ?Qui aurait imaginer la croix rouge au Niger ?Ne baissons pas la garde.Il viendra le moment où chaque ministère devra être évaluer par rapport à ses apports en souveraineté totale."). **Others linked UNICEF to western media organisations like RFI, and France 24 suggesting entrenched suspicion of Western-led organisations.**



- Many commenters viewed the statement on schools reopening from UNICEF not as support, but as unwelcome external interference. Common sentiments included, **"@AESinfos Be wary! We know what's best for our children. It's not someone who's going to leave there to come and congratulate us for doing what should be done as a matter of course."** (*"@AESinfos Méfiance !! Nous même nous savons ce qui est bien pour nos enfants. C'est pas quelqu'un qui va quitter la bas pour venir nous féliciter pour ce qui doit être fait en temps normal."*). **The emphasis was on national ownership, with praise from foreign actors seen as condescending.**
- Several users suggested that UNICEF had not contributed meaningfully during the height of insecurity and only returned to gain visibility after progress had been made: **"UNICEF must be cautious in dealing with the Burkinabe authorities, who have accepted all sacrifices to educate their children. When everything seems to have been resolved, UNICEF appears to be acting unjustly."** ("UNICEF doit prendre garde face aux autorités burkinabè qui ont accepté tout les sacrifices pour éduqué ses enfants quand tout semble résolu l'UNICEF apparaît c'est du l'injustice").

What this tells us

- UNICEF's high visibility brings high scrutiny. With nearly half of all aid-related posts in Burkina Faso during the period referencing the agency, its public role is prominent — but this also makes it a focal point for criticism, especially in environments marked by political sensitivity and polarisation.
- There is widespread erosion of trust in international organisations. Even broadly supportive or apolitical messages are interpreted as disingenuous, self-serving, or part of a broader foreign agenda. Neutrality is no longer assumed.
- Over the past 12 months, UNICEF posts in Burkina Faso attract limited but generally positive engagement, except when addressing gender-related health topics, which tend to prompt pushback. The highly negative sentiment triggered by a high-profile visit by a foreign senior figure, followed critical comments in response to the arrival of the new country **representative**. This suggests that while high-profile visits remain diplomatically necessary, their impact on UNICEF's image in highly polarised contexts could depend on how they are communicated and the visuals shared publicly.
- Public diplomacy that works in one context may have the opposite effect elsewhere. Without strong local trust, even supportive statements risk being framed as intrusive or self-serving.

→ **Signs of a broader and possibly coordinated regional narrative.** The volume and tone of anti-UNICEF sentiment in Burkina Faso closely follow a wave of online hostility targeting the UN system in Mali in **early June** and in Burkina Faso following the arrival of the new UNICEF representative. In both cases, criticism focused not only on specific agencies or statements but on the legitimacy of international organisations in general. The similarity in language, framing, and timing suggests that these reactions may be part of a **rising and potentially coordinated narrative across the Sahel**.

Key Takeaways

WHO malaria campaign in Burkina Faso receives supportive online reactions

Between 18 and 21 June 2025, five public social media posts promoted a new malaria prevention campaign in Burkina Faso led by the WHO, in collaboration with national authorities. Four posts were published by official government sources and one by a media outlet. All featured photographs of government and military officials attending mosquito net distribution events.

The posts generated a total of 50 user comments—a relatively high level of engagement for technical health-related content. While some comments were administrative or neutral, the overall tone was largely positive. Only **7 of the 50 comments (14%)** were negative or critical in nature.

- **Supportive comments focused on national leadership:** Many users expressed appreciation for the campaign, noting the urgency of malaria prevention and congratulating both the health authorities and the government. Some linked their support directly to visible political leadership. Comments included: **"Thank you to the president and to the government"** ("Merci au président et au gouvernement"), and **"Let's eradicate malaria from the AES. Respect and full support for the government"** ("Ensemble boutons le paludisme hors de l'AES.Respect et soutien total au gouvernement")
- **Limited criticism centred on programme delivery and efficacy:** The few negative comments did not directly criticise WHO, but raised concerns about the practical impact of the campaign. These included references to perceived waste in previous distributions, doubts over mosquito net usage, and broader scepticism about recurring strategies. One user commented: **"These mosquito nets only combat the symptoms, not the causes. Focus on sanitation"** ("Ces moustiquaires juste pour lutter contre les symptômes mais pas contre les causes. Miser sur l'assainissement."). An isolated conspiracy-related comment referencing Bill Gates was noted but did not generate further engagement.
- **Government and military framing may influence tone of responses:** All five posts featured visible involvement of military or senior state actors. This may have influenced how users responded

What this tells us

- **Positive reactions were more common than usual for aid content.** Compared to typical engagement with health-focused posts this campaign drew a more supportive tone overall.
- **Framing matters.** The consistent presence of senior government and military figures may have contributed to the favourable response, although more data is needed to confirm this trend.
- **Criticism was limited and focused on implementation.** The few dissenting views focused on the utility and long-term effectiveness of mosquito net campaigns, rather than on WHO or the government's role.

Migrant tensions in Agadez spark surge in anti-UN sentiment beyond UNHCR

Between 17 and 21 June 2025, 29 social media posts addressed escalating tensions surrounding the humanitarian centre in Agadez, Niger. Of these, one media post generated **32 of the 38 total user comments** on the subject. The article reported on a violent confrontation between local youth and Nigerian migrants in the Tekazamte neighbourhood, followed by the destruction of 175 shelters and a

large-scale relocation operation involving UN agencies and NGOs. While the article was neutral in tone, user comments were overwhelmingly negative, reflecting both anti-migrant sentiment and deep distrust toward international organisations.

- While criticism of the Agadez centre has circulated for months—mostly from a small set of migrant accounts and advocates—it usually does not generate more than a handful of comments. Public comments called for mass expulsions, accused humanitarian agencies of enabling disorder, and framed migrants as a direct threat to local security and social cohesion.
- Historically, online frustration has focused on UNHCR. This time, however, users named or criticised IOM, WHO, WFP, UNICEF, and Amnesty International, indicating a broadening of blame. Statements like **"It's the IOM that must be kicked out"** ("C'est l'OIM qu'il faut chasser du Niger") suggest that multiple agencies are now perceived as contributing to a problem previously linked to a single actor.
- Many comments expressed aggressive or dehumanising views toward migrants, including calls for forced removal and even violence. One user wrote: **"They are criminals, they should all be rounded up and chased away. They should be treated badly, like Algeria does. Then they will understand that they are not in their own messy country, Nigeria."** ("C'est des criminels ils doivent etre tous acheminer chassés de là Il faut les maltraiter comme le fait l'Algérie. Ils comprendront qu'ils sont pas dans leur pays désordonné qu'est le Nigeria."), another stated : **"Young people must burn down the remaining huts of these criminals. If they are not mistreated, these weaklings will not return home."** ("Les jeunes doivent brûler le restant des hangars de ces criminels S'ils sont pas maltraités ils retourneront pas chez eux ces mîables".) As in previous months, migrant users continued to post about their prolonged stay at the Agadez centre, describing the situation as psychological torture and demanding relocation. However, these posts remained low in visibility and engagement, failing to attract broader support despite sustained messaging.

What this tells us

- **Media coverage can dramatically increase visibility and activate public sentiment.** One post by a local media outlet triggered the majority of online reactions, demonstrating that humanitarian issues at the Agadez centre can move from niche to broader public concern when framed around security and social tension.
- **Criticism of international organisations is expanding.** While UNHCR has long been the main target of discontent, other agencies are now being explicitly blamed — even when their roles are peripheral.
- **Migrant voices remain largely isolated.** Despite consistent advocacy from affected individuals, these messages have not penetrated wider local discourse and remain disconnected from public empathy or mobilisation.
- **Monitoring is needed as narratives harden.** While current engagement is still limited in scale, the shift in tone and the expanding target of criticism point to a hardening of attitudes and **increased reputational risk for humanitarian actors in Niger** and increasingly protection risks for Sudanese refugees.

OBSERVATION: Low-engagement posts featuring military presence hint at possible anti-UN influence campaign

- In addition to the backlash surrounding UNICEF's visit, 14 public posts in Burkina Faso between 18 and 21 June referenced at least six different international NGOs and UN agencies. All nine featured images of Burkinabè military personnel, uniformed officials, or prominent government representatives attending aid-related events or donation ceremonies.

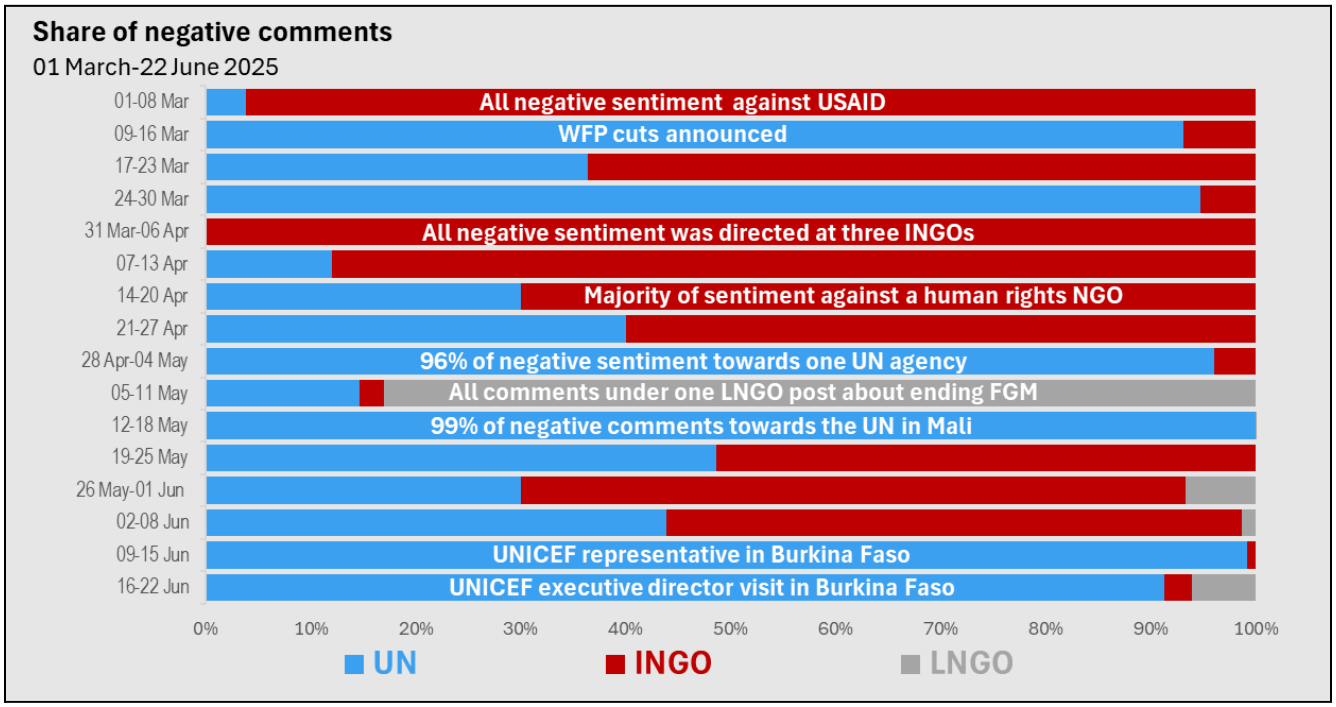
- Despite the typically polarising nature of international aid content, these posts generated either no comments or minimal engagement, with the few reactions mostly limited to expressions of support or official gratitude.
- This pattern may suggest that **the visible presence of military or state actors can influence how audiences engage with aid-related messaging**. It is unclear whether this stems from public support for military-backed governance, online self-censorship, or a broader strategic alignment between aid communication and state legitimacy.
- The sample remains limited, and causality cannot yet be confirmed. Further monitoring is needed to determine whether these dynamics reflect spontaneous public reactions or are part of an emerging pattern of strategic communication in contexts where military governments exert strong influence over public discourse.

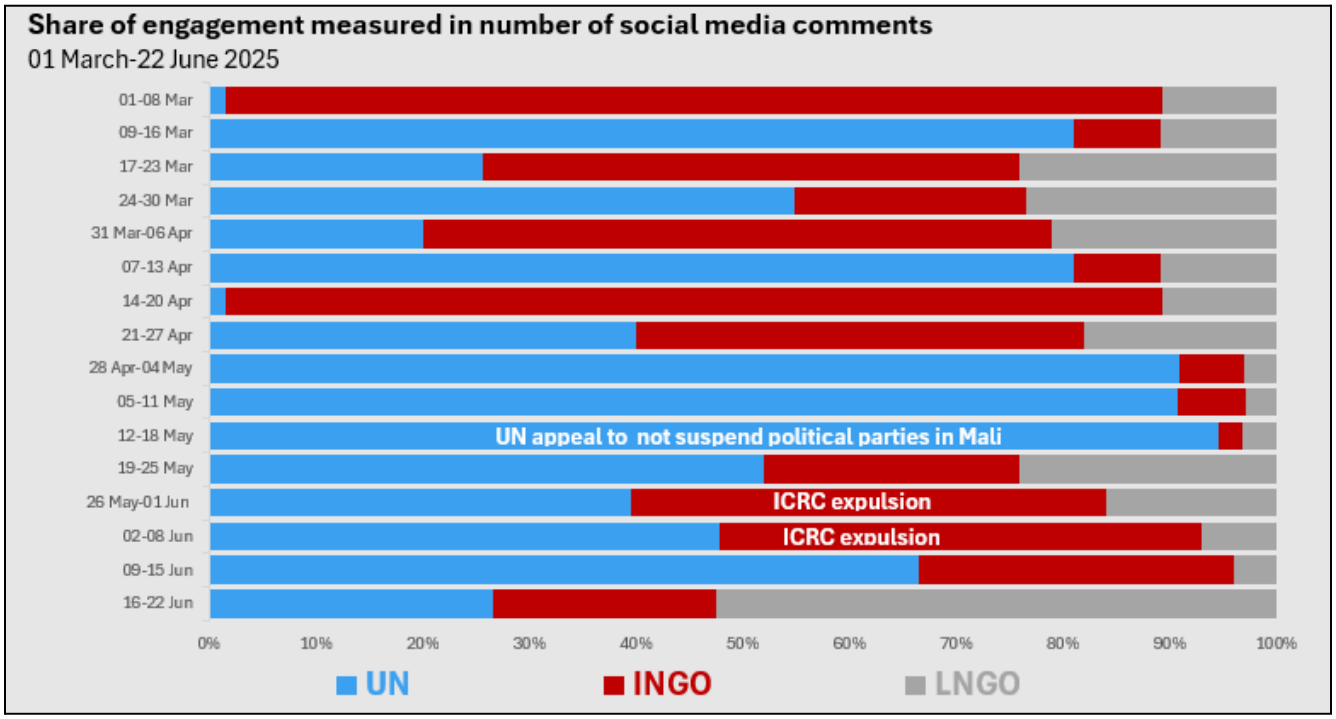
Patterns of aid narratives on social media continued

In the most recent monitoring periods, engagement around aid actors remained high, with continued shifts in both volume and sentiment across categories. The trend seen in early June — of heightened scrutiny toward UN agencies — intensified, while **criticism of INGOs declined**, and **LNGO mentions increased modestly**.[1]

- **UN agencies** remained the primary focus of online discussion, accounting for **78.7% of all comments**, up from 66.5% the previous week. Negative sentiment toward the UN remained high, at **91.2%** — only slightly below the previous peak of 99.1%. This sustained engagement follows weeks of criticism linked to geopolitical narratives and local grievances, particularly in Niger and Burkina Faso.
- **INGOs** saw a significant drop in both volume and negative sentiment. Their share of comments fell from 29.5% to **6.1%**, and their share of negative sentiment declined to just **2.6%** — down from 55% two weeks prior. This represents the lowest level of criticism toward INGOs since early March and suggests that attention has temporarily shifted away from them, likely displaced by the more dominant UN-related controversies.
- **LNGOs** regained visibility after a period of low engagement. They accounted for **15.2% of all comments**, up from 4% the previous week. Negative sentiment rose slightly to **6.1%**, after registering 0% the week before, but remains low overall.
    - It is also possible that the seven negative comments attributed to LNGOs during this monitoring period may in fact have been directed at INGOs. These comments appeared under posts about a job forum and opportunities in the aid sector in Mali, where no distinction was made between local and international organisations. They were provisionally coded as LNGO-related due to the nature of the accounts posting them and the context in which they appeared—but this attribution remains uncertain.

[1] For the purpose of these social media monitoring analysis ICRC, USAID and any other international human rights and development organisation is included in the INGO category


Share of negative comments
01 March-22 June 2025
01-08 Mar
09-16 Mar
17-23 Mar
24-30 Mar
31 Mar-06 Apr
07-13 Apr
14-20 Apr
21-27 Apr
28 Apr-04 May
05-11 May
12-18 May
19-25 May
26 May-01 Jun
02-08 Jun
09-15 Jun
16-22 Jun
All negative sentiment against USAID
WFP cuts announced
All negative sentiment was directed at three INGOs
Majority of sentiment against a human rights NGO
96% of negative sentiment towards one UN agency
All comments under one LNGO post about ending FGM
99% of negative comments towards the UN in Mali
UNICEF representative in Burkina Faso
UNICEF executive director visit in Burkina Faso
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
UN
INGO
LNGO

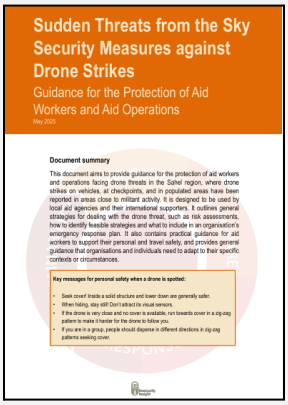

Share of engagement measured in number of social media comments
01 March-22 June 2025
01-08 Mar
09-16 Mar
17-23 Mar
24-30 Mar
31 Mar-06 Apr
07-13 Apr
14-20 Apr
21-27 Apr
28 Apr-04 May
05-11 May
12-18 May
19-25 May
26 May-01 Jun
02-08 Jun
09-15 Jun
16-22 Jun
UN appeal to not suspend political parties in Mali
ICRC expulsion
ICRC expulsion
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
UN
INGO
LNGO

Sudden Threats from the Sky Security Measures against Drone Strikes

Armed drones are an escalating threat in humanitarian settings, with their use expected to grow. Once rare, they are now a defining feature in conflicts across Ukraine, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Sudan, and Myanmar. Their appeal is clear: drones are low cost, easy to operate, widely available, and carry no pilot risk. But for humanitarians on the ground, they represent a deadly challenge – particularly when aid efforts take place near suspected insurgents.

Adapting to the growing threat of drones means rethinking security risk measures in high-risk contexts. Insecurity Insight has published a practical guide that brings together current best practice, available in English and French. See also:

- Personal safety: Outside when a drone is spotted: English | French
- Personal safety: Inside a building during a drone attack: English | French
- Guidance on approaching a landed drone: English | French
- Preparing travel: English | French
- General guidance prepared for local partners across the Sahel: English | French
- Security Incident Information Management (SIIM) can be used to collect and use information related to safety and security-related incidents to support and improve staff safety and security and improve access to affected populations: Arabic | English | French | Spanish



Data Use and Privacy Disclaimer

This report includes analysis of publicly available social media content collected from open platforms. All data has been anonymised to remove or obscure identifying details, and no content from closed groups was used. The analysis was conducted in the public interest and in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), under a legitimate interest basis. The purpose of this analysis is to support humanitarian dialogue, inform policy, protect aid workers and those they help, and contribute to public interest research.

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