

“Please support Syrian women”

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from Syria: 05 - 18 January 2026

21 January 2026

Understanding how aid actors are portrayed online is increasingly critical. Social media narratives shape community perceptions of humanitarian organisations and can influence operational access and staff safety. As online discourse becomes more central to how aid is understood and contested, monitoring these narratives is an important component for aid acceptance, security management, programming and communication with affected populations.

By tracking both emerging and entrenched narratives on social media, this briefing provides insight into how public sentiment towards aid actors is developing. It aims to support policymakers and humanitarian practitioners in strengthening community acceptance in a rapidly shifting aid environment.

This briefing is the first edition of a longer-term initiative for Syria to examine how aid agency acceptance or rejection is expressed on social media. The content is selected based on predefined lists of UN agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs and civil society organisations and general key words related to humanitarian and development assistance in Syria. Comments associated with posts that attracted the highest number of comments were analysed qualitatively to identify dominant narratives. This edition covers examples of

- the impact of sectarian sentiment on aid worker safety in Aleppo,
- how Syrians use social media to seek assistance and express frustration with aid efforts, and
- changing sentiment towards the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and UN agencies, which is more positive than during the Assad regime.

The selection does not represent the full scope of online discussions on aid in Syria but highlights the narratives that are most visible. Public sentiment towards the aid sector develops over time, shaped by how individuals interpret and connect social media content through the lens of personal experience and prior exposure. To build and sustain acceptance in digital spaces, policymakers and practitioners need strategies that respond with appropriately adapted communication to these shifting online sentiments as part of broader acceptance and security approaches.

Key Takeaways

Kurdish Red Crescent Aid Workers forcibly taken in Sheikh Maqsoud

On 11 January 2026, a Facebook post published by a Kurdish edited media outlet reported what it described as the “kidnapping” of three aid workers from the Kurdish Red Crescent by the ‘Interim Government’ in Sheikh Maqsoud, Aleppo. Until 11 January 2026, the neighbourhood of Sheikh Maqsoud was administered by the Kurdish-led local authorities aligned with the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) but the Kurdish non-state armed group Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) agreed to withdraw following an [agreement](#). The precise circumstances of this event remain unclear but the article published on facebook was commented upon by 16 users. **Of the 16 comments, 11 expressed negative attitudes toward the Kurdish Red Crescent rather than concern for the abducted staff.**

- One comment dismissed the incident as staged or fabricated, questioning whether it had actually occurred, describing it as a staged performance.

(“مسرحة الخطف بلشت يعني”) **“So the kidnapping play has started”**

- Some comments suggested that the forcibly taken staff were armed or affiliated with military activity, referring to them as “snipers” or combatants rather than humanitarian workers.

(“يخرب بيوتكم نسخه طبق الاصل عن النظام”) **“Damn you — you’re an exact copy of the regime”**

(“اعضائو قناصين”) **“Its members are snipers”**

- None of the recorded comments expressed concern for the safety of the missing aid workers or called for their release. Three comments used a hashtag calling for a free Kurdistan.

What This Tells Us

- Reporting on attacks against aid workers can prompt rapid delegitimisation, with some commenters shifting from protection concerns to accusations of militarisation or fabrication.
- Hostile framing reflects not only scepticism toward aid actors and hostility linked to the Kurdish identity of the organisation, but also the wider conflict context, including recent fighting, contested governance, and growing sectarian polarisation that shape how such incidents are interpreted online.
- Social media commentary on security incidents often precedes verified facts or official statements, influencing perceptions of aid worker vulnerability driven more by existing narratives than by verified information.

Social media users requesting direct support from aid agencies

The search from 29 December 2025 to 11 January 2026 identified 887 posts published by or mentioning the aid sector in Syria. 183 posts where people had left the highest number of comments were further analysed. Across the high-engagement posts analysed, 9 percent of comments explicitly requested assistance from aid actors. These comments were not confined to any single organisation or post type and appeared across content published by UN agencies, INGOs and local NGOs. Collectively, they illustrate how social media is being used as an informal access channel for humanitarian, development, and protection-related needs.

Common themes included:

- **Registration and access queries:** questions about how to register, and where distributions were taking place.

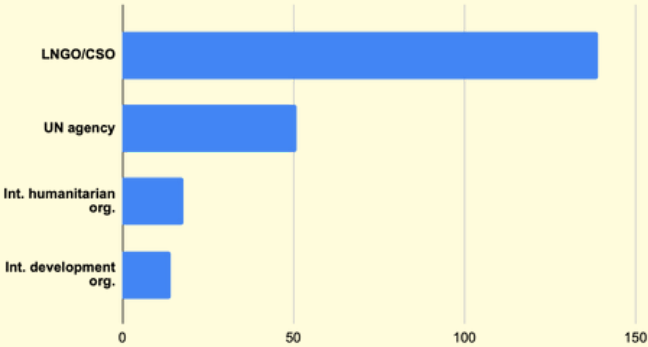
“Are you going to work in Aleppo?” “ايمت رح تعملو بـ حلب”

- **Basic assistance and emergency needs:** Requests for food, winter support, fuel, electricity repairs, and water.

“We want the area between Bab al-Ra’i and Azaz.” “بدنا مي للمنطقة بين الباب والراعي واعزاز”

- **Livelihoods and employment:** Appeals for jobs, agricultural support, or interest-free loans and grants.

Comments requesting support by type of organisation (December 29, 2025 - January 11, 2026)



“Can you help me with a permanent job?” “ممکن مساعدة بوظيفة دائمة”

- **Education and disability services:** Requests to reopen centres, expand training, or provide specialised support for children with disabilities.

“Why didn’t you tell me? My son has a disability. Where is the place, please?” “ليش ما حكيتو انا ابني ذو اعاقة وين المكان لو سمحتو”

Many comments were lengthy and specific, naming villages, neighbourhoods, phone numbers, and proposed project designs. This indicates that commenters also view aid organisations’ social media pages as a legitimate venue for needs articulation, referral-seeking, and informal accountability, rather than solely as channels for information or visibility.

What this tells us

- With 77% of the population with a cellular connection, Syrians increasingly expect to access information and engage with aid actors through social media platforms. In such environments, a robust social media communication strategy is not optional but operationally relevant to manage perceptions. For the aid sector, this means that social media functions for many affected communities as a de facto access and accountability channel, requiring proactive communication, clear expectation management particularly in relation to requests that exceed organisational mandates or capacity.

Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) : High-visibility service delivery with limited negative sentiment

Between 29 December 2025 and 11 January 2026, **54 posts** mentioned or published by the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) reached **1.2 million social media users**. **41** posts were published by SARC official pages, **four** by edited media, and the remaining posts were published by INGOs in the context of **joint activities and coordination**. Across the 54 posts, **840 comments** were recorded. **Only 22 comments** expressed negative sentiment toward SARC, indicating predominantly supportive or neutral engagement relative to the volume of content. Content during this period emphasised routine humanitarian service delivery and preparedness / capacity-building, including school-based health awareness activities in Sweida, volunteer training (including community health and first aid), relief distributions (e.g., bread and water support in Aleppo), and infrastructure-linked humanitarian work undertaken in coordination with partners (including water-related interventions to sustain emergency supply).

- **Strong approval** : Most engagement consisted of praise, emojis, and short supportive messages reinforcing SARC as a trusted local responder.

“Thank you for your continued humanitarian efforts.” (“شكرا لجهودكم الإنسانية المتواصلة”)

- **High demand for access and participation:** A noticeable share of comments were practical questions on how to register, how to apply, or how to volunteer, alongside requests for specific assistance
“Where are they distributing it?” (“وين عم يوز عوا؟”)
- Negative comments focused mainly on perceived gaps in distribution, claims of unequal access, and accusations that activities are “for visibility” rather than impact.

“You’re good at lying and taking photos to make yourselves look good.” (“شاطرين بالكذب وصورني ما احلاني”)

Suwayda displacement and constraints on humanitarian access: One X post published on 31 December 2025 by a local edited media platform described worsening conditions for displaced families in shelters in Suwayda province, alongside allegations that administrative and security restrictions were limiting humanitarian access, including for the SARC. Engagement with the post included a small number of comments that reflected polarisation rather than humanitarian evaluation. One comment dismissed the issue by questioning the relevance of older images, while another mocked claims that return was being prevented, attributing responsibility sarcastically to the “National Guard”.

What This Tells Us

- Within the high-engagement content analysed for this period, SARC-related posts attracted a high volume of supportive engagement. Many social media users treated posts as an access point to assistance, volunteering, and referrals, highlighting both reach and expectations that SARC can respond to diverse needs beyond the specific activity shown.
- Critical narratives were present but not dominant: where distrust appeared, it was tied primarily to distribution fairness and responsiveness rather than rejection of SARC’s humanitarian role. Following earlier **periods** of high online criticism linked to perceived corruption and politicisation, SARC adjusted its social media communication to emphasise routine service delivery, preparedness, and visible community-level activities, since its change in leadership in **December 2024**, which coincided with a marked reduction in negative sentiment, previously only typical for government controlled areas like Tartus province.

Key numbers:

Social media is a fast-moving space, requiring analysis to be focused on clearly identified subjects and questions. The figures below describe how a much larger online communication was reduced to a manageable sample of comments by focusing on posts with the highest engagement around topics that contribute to shaping public perceptions of aid actors. Because social media connects local experiences with external audiences, comment language is a key indicator of how local and external narratives interact. The distribution of comments by organisation type reflects the complex structure of the aid sector, in which UN agencies, international organisations, and local civil society operate with different mandates and levels of visibility, and are therefore perceived in distinct ways. Negative sentiment is highlighted separately because, even when limited in volume, it can play an outsized role in generating harmful narratives, including misinformation, delegitimisation, and disinformation, with implications for acceptance, access, and staff safety.

Scale of analysis

- **High-engagement posts analysed:** 183 (out of 887 identified)
- **Estimated total reach:** 1,949,785 users
- **Total comments analysed:** 2,435

Comment language

- **Arabic:** 1,744 comments (71.6%)
- **English:** 55 comments (2.3%)
- **Emojis / no text:** 636 comments (26.1%)

Comment distribution by organisation type

- **Local NGOs / CSOs:** 67.6%
- **UN agencies:** 22.1%
- **International development actors:** 7.7%
- **International humanitarian actors:** 2.5%
- **UN system (general):** 0.1%

Negative sentiment

- **Negative comments:** ~4% of all comments (104 comments out of 2,435)
- **Distribution of negative comments by actor type:**
- **Local NGOs / CSOs:** 75% (Of these, 43% in response to SARC and Kurdish Red Crescent)
- **UN agencies:** 19%
- **International development actors:** 5%

The table reflects the subset of posts with identifiable regional IP addresses, which provides an indicative — but partial — picture of where online discussions are most active, as location data can be obscured by VPN use.

Area	Posts
Rif-dimashq	331
Aleppo	77
Latakia	35
Homs	34
Al-Hasakah	33
Dimashq	33
Idlib	29
Hama	24
As-Suwayda	21
Tartus	10

The social media monitoring platform identified 887 posts originating from Syria using aid related keywords, of which this table includes only the smaller subset with identifiable regional IP addresses. Source: *Insecurity Insight / Topics (Powered by Radarly)*

UN agencies: high engagement characterised by praise, unmet needs, and frustration

Between 29 December 2025 and 11 January 2026, 34 high-engagement posts, reaching 232K social media users, published by or mentioning UN agencies generated 539 comments. Most engagement took the form of short blessings, expressions of gratitude, emojis, and encouragement directed at UN staff and programmes. Only four percent of comments were negative. These included complaints about slow or inaccessible procedures, and allegations of corruption, and broader expressions of anger about unmet promises or perceived inequality in assistance.

- **UN visibility is treated as an access point, not just communication:** Comment sections are used to request aid, jobs, registration, protection, or resettlement, often unrelated to the post itself.

“Help us with permanent jobs at the United Nations.”” ساعدونا بوظائف دائمة بالأمم المتحدة comment in response to UNDP

- **Negative comments on process:** comments focus on delays, and perceived opaque procedures.

“I registered my son's name because of his communication skills, but we haven't received a response yet. We've been waiting for a month since registering.” مسجلة اسم ابني كرمال مهارات تواصل ولهلا مافي رد صرلنا من شهر ٩ مسجلين دور comment in response to UNHCR

- **Protection and resettlement expectations:** Some users share detailed personal protection cases or request relocation, reflecting expectations that exceed realistic mandate or capacity.

“[...] In 2025 I was subjected to rape and physical abuse for the second time unfortunately, the UN offices in sayria did not help me or take action regarding my situation, I am now asking for support and protection from the international UN agencies outside sayria I am in urgent need of safety psychological support and possibly resettlement to safe country please hear my voice [...]” - comment written in english in response to UNHCR

- **High expectations extend beyond relief to structural solutions:** Many comments call for housing, livelihoods, water systems, and return support, positioning UN agencies as responsible for long-term recovery outcomes.

“Why don't you work on securing homes and ending displacement and life in camps? People are fed up with tents, blankets, and mattresses. People need safe homes first.” لماذا لا تعملون على تأمين بيوت وإنهاء حالة النزوح والعيش بالمخيمات ؟ الناس شبعت من الخيم و البطانيات والفرشات comment in response to UNHCR
” . والناس بحاجة للبيت الآمن أولا

What this tells us

- Within the high-engagement sample analysed, UN agencies are generally perceived as legitimate actors, reflected in the predominance of supportive commentary. However, visibility consistently generates high expectations, with comment sections functioning as informal access points for assistance, employment, protection, and resettlement-related requests.
- Social media users increasingly share sensitive personal experiences, including accounts of sexual violence, openly when seeking support online. This willingness to disclose reflects a shift in social attitudes, in which sexual violence is becoming recognised as a serious harm that demands attention rather than as a source of shame for survivors. Public disclosure can function as a way of reclaiming agency, challenging silence and stigma, and signalling a belief that concealment often protects perpetrators rather than victims.
- Negative sentiment, though limited, centres on process-related frustrations such as delays, eligibility, lack of follow-up, and perceived misuse of resources, rather than ideological opposition to the UN. If left unaddressed, these frustrations can circulate more widely and shape broader public narratives against aid agencies. Suppressing or deleting such comments is rarely effective, as users can reframe moderation as evidence of silencing or misconduct on other platforms, reinforcing hostile narratives and further undermining aid efforts.

Local NGO- Winter Assistance and Community Reactions

Two posts published by an LNGOs official Facebook account on 31 December 2025 and 10 January 2026 focused on winter assistance to vulnerable families. Together, the posts reached 4,762 social media users and generated 113 comments. Of these, 16 comments expressed negative sentiment toward the organisation.

- Predominantly positive moral framing: Most comments expressed gratitude for supporting families.
“May God reward you and compensate everyone who contributed.” (”الله يجزيكم الخير ويعوض ع كل من ساهم يارب”)
- Requests for access and inclusion: Many commenters asked how to register, and benefit from assistance, indicating that posts functioned as an entry point for both aid-seeking and community engagement.
“There's a young man who needs winter clothes—please try to provide them for him.” (”فيه شب يلزمه ملابس شتوية ياريت تأمنوله”)
- Limited but recurrent criticism around fairness and transparency: Negative comments questioned whether assistance was genuinely delivered, accused the organisation of prioritising media visibility, or alleged favouritism, particularly perceptions that aid was restricted to specific localities or social networks.

“They help some people and not others, and anyone who truly wants to do good doesn’t film it—‘look at us, people,’ it’s a farce.” (“على ناس وناس هي شغلة والشغلة التانية يلي بدوا يعمل خير مابصور وشوفونا ياناس مسخرة”)

What this tells us

- Critical narratives focused less on rejecting humanitarian action and more on concerns about distribution equity, visibility-driven aid, and geographic exclusion.
- The comments reflect perceptions of unmet needs, suggesting reputational risk may arise when visibility of assistance outpaces beneficiaries' perceptions of access or fairness.

Disclaimer: This is the first edition of a long-term initiative to monitor social media perceptions of the aid sector in Syria. As a foundational release, the methodology, scope, and presentation will continue to evolve. Feedback on format or content is welcomed at info@insecurityinsight.org

Other resources

Public online narratives are reshaping the operating environment of the aid sector in the Sahel. The Shrinking Humanitarian Space on Social Media in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger focuses on the risks and harms posed by harmful public narratives that frame aid as illegitimate, politicised or foreign controlled. These narratives are steadily shrinking the humanitarian space. As online and offline threats increasingly converge, the report argues that safeguarding digital legitimacy is no longer optional - it is essential to the continuation of principled, neutral, and effective humanitarian action. In [English](#) and [French](#).



Public digital narratives about humanitarian operations shape access, safety, and legitimacy for aid agencies and their partners in Myanmar. Learning from Social Media Narratives in Myanmar [explores](#) the implications of online narratives for communication strategies, policy decisions, and accountability to aid beneficiaries in one of the world's most restrictive and polarised digital environments. Drawing on seven months of public social media monitoring, the report highlights how narratives around aid delivery, health care, displacement, and access blockades intersect with conflict dynamics. The findings are designed to offer contextualised, actionable insights for humanitarian actors seeking to safeguard the principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality while navigating Myanmar's contested information space.



Humanitarian action in the DRC is increasingly shaped by public digital narratives that the aid sector cannot afford to ignore. The distorted nature of some online discussions about aid can at times feel shocking or uncomfortable. While they may be dismissed as expressing the views of marginal voices, their growing reach and impact make it essential to understand the motivation behind them. The Humanitarian Space on Social Media: Learning from Social Media Narratives in the DRC shares findings from social media sentiment monitoring in the DRC, with the intention of helping aid organisations to better understand and track emerging narratives and shifts in sentiment. By monitoring online discourse on the humanitarian space that go beyond the brand name of individual aid agencies, aid actors can anticipate local attitudes, build community acceptance and adapt to a rapidly evolving operational environment. In [English](#) and [French](#).



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. This document is published by Insecurity Insight - a Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) organisation committed to the Humanitarian Principles.

We welcome questions and feedback. Share what you're observing both on the ground and online. Your insights help us keep the analysis accurate and up-to-date. Email: info@insecurityinsight.org. Join our efforts to protect humanitarian space. Subscribe to our Social Media Monitoring mailing list. Find more resources at the Social Media Monitoring website. Help support our work by sharing this resource. Please copy and paste this link: <https://bit.ly/29Dec2025-11Jan2026SyriaSMMBrief>

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