

"The Camera Matters more than Aid itself"

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from Syria
06 February 2026.

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 12 January - 27 January 2026 in Syria.



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.

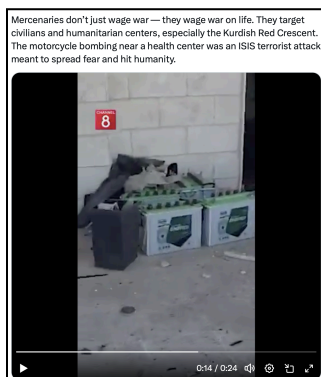
By tracking both emerging and entrenched narratives on social media, this briefing provides insight into how public sentiment towards aid actors in Syria is developing. It aims to support policymakers and humanitarian practitioners in strengthening community acceptance in a rapidly shifting aid environment.

This briefing is part 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 captured in Arabic. Comments associated with posts that attracted the highest number of comments were analysed qualitatively to identify dominant narratives. This edition covers examples of

- **Online narratives following the looting of the Kurdish Red Crescent facilities.**
- **how Syrians use social media to seek assistance and express frustration with aid efforts, and online responses to the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) winter assistance campaign.**
- **Reactions to Qatar's support for the IOM to facilitate voluntary return from Lebanon**

The selection does not represent the full scope of online discussions on aid in Syria but highlights the narratives that are most visible in Arabic but was not able to include discussions in Kurdish. 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: Looting of facilities and hostile online engagement

Between 19-21 January 2026, six social media posts, one Facebook and five on X, reported on the looting of Al-Arisha camp and the burning and looting of Kurdish Red Crescent (Heyva Sor) centre, where medical and logistical equipment were stolen. Collectively, the posts reached **12,065 social media users**. Syrian Media outlets published three of the six posts, individual users two others and a civil society organisation one. Only one post, published by an

individual influencer, a Kurdish journalist, with over 12,000 followers, triggered a public discussion of **38 comments**.

The posts described the looting of camp infrastructure and Kurdish Red Crescent offices, damage to medical and logistical equipment, and attacks near or against Kurdish Red Crescent facilities in Al-Arisha and Qamishli. Framing across posts attributed responsibility to different armed actors, including mercenaries or ISIS, and some positioned the incidents as deliberate attacks on humanitarian work.

Narratives

- **Justification and endorsement of looting:** Several comments framed the looting as deserved or legitimate, or presenting the destruction as rightful restitution. These comments portrayed the incident not as an attack on humanitarian infrastructure, but as a correction of past grievances.

“**They deserve it, you stole it for more than 10 years**” (”حَقْمِ اللِّي سَرَقْتُوهُ أَكْثَرُ مِنْ 10 سَنَوَاتٍ“)

“**It’s lawful/justified for them, and soon they will enslave you**” (”حَلَالٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَعَمَّا قَرِيبٍ سَيَسْبُونَكُمْ“)

- **Celebration of violence:** Some comments mocked the incident, framing the destruction of humanitarian facilities as entertainment or portraying it as a symbolic “victory”, reflecting rhetoric that celebrates violence against Kurdish communities.

“**We thank God, then our ancestors’ ancestors. They gave birth to us so we could step on your dry heads. The Syrian Arab Republic and its president, Ahmad al-Sharaa.**” (”نَشْكُرُ اللَّهَ ثُمَّ أَجْدَادَنَا“)
(”أَجْدَادُنَا. خَلَفُونَا مِشَان نَدْعَسْ عَلَى رِاسِكُمْ الْيَابِسِ . الْجُمْهُورِيَّةُ الْعَرَبِيَّةُ السُّورِيَّةُ وَرئِيسُهَا أَحْمَدُ الشَّرْع“)

- **Delegitimation of the Kurdish Red Crescent as a humanitarian actor:** A small number of comments accused the organisation of past wrongdoing, including allegations of weapon smuggling or political affiliation. This framing positioned the Kurdish Red Crescent as a military or partisan actor rather than a neutral humanitarian organisation.

“**The Red Crescent that was smuggling weapons to the coast and to Suwayda** 🤔🤔” (”الهِلَالُ
الاحمر الي كان يهرب سلاح للساحل والسويدا“)

- **Ethnic and sectarian hate speech:** Some users used explicit insults, dehumanising language and hate speech towards different identity groups, Sunnis, Arabs and Kurds.

“**Sunni Arabs, ISIS types, are traitors, treacherous and criminal - thieves, highway robbers, gangs of looting and plunder [...]**” (”العرب السنة الدواعش خونة غدارين مجرمين ، حرامية قطاع الطرق عصابات[...]“)
(”النهب و السلب“)

- **Rejection of Kurdish identity in humanitarian space:** A small number of comments denied the legitimacy of a “Kurdish Red Crescent,” asserting that only the Syrian Arab Red Crescent should exist and framing Kurdish humanitarian structures as illegitimate or sectarian by definition.

“**You told me “Kurdish Red Crescent”???? Your howling will reach not Cyprus, but Mars—awoooo!**” (”قَتَلْتِي هَلَالِ احمر كردي؟؟؟؟؟ عوانكم سيصل مو لقبرص للمريخ اووووي“)

“**There is no Kurdish Red Crescent or Arab one. The only one that exists is the Syrian Arab Red Crescent—even here being sectarian**” (”لا يوجد هلال احمر كردي او عربي موجود الهلال الاحمر السوري“)
”حتى بهي طائفيين“

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

“Is it possible to find a job opening or any kind of work?” (“ممكن إذا بلاقي شاغر عمل او اي وظيفة”)

“May God give you strength. I’m in Salah al-Din and my house is rented—could you help us with this?”

(“يعطيكم العافيه أنا بصلاح الدين وبيتي أجار ممكن تساعدونا في هاد الشي”)

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

“In Tartous, I have three people with disabilities at home and I need medication and assistance.” (“في طرطوس”
“عندي 3 اشخاص بالمنزل اعاقاة واحتاج ادوية ومساعدة”)

- **Repeated requests from one user:** One anonymous user repeatedly posted requests for help, commenting **136 times** during the monitoring period. The comments focused on urgent and longer-term needs for displaced people and returnees, such as shelter, water, livelihoods, and basic services. The user mainly shared **Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC)** content on their Facebook profile. All of the comments are long and almost using the same opening word “**we ask for help/ we appeal**” (“ترجو”)

What this tells us

- The comments requesting assistance, across different organisations and post types, shows that these platforms are seen as informal entry points to humanitarian, development, and protection support. Many requests are clearly linked to the activities shown in posts, suggesting that visible aid actions raise expectations of inclusion. The repeated use of polite and collective language. The presence of repeated, detailed requests from the same users also points to limited alternative channels for assistance and ongoing unmet needs, particularly among displaced people and returnees.

Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC): High visibility and winter assistance under scrutiny

Between **12 and 27 January**, **165 social media posts**, **37 X** and **128 Facebook mentions** of the SARC reached an estimated **4.6 million social media users**. Of these posts, **107 were published by SARC official pages**, **24 by edited media outlets**, **10 by government official pages**, **15 by individual users**, and other types of pages.

Content during this period largely focused on emergency winter assistance, convoy movements, health service provision, legal support, mine risk education, and coordination with INGOs and UN agencies. Compared with the previous monitoring **period**, when engagement was predominantly positive and centred on participation and access, this period noted a slight **shift toward negative sentiment** mainly in response to the winter assistance managed by the agency.

Among the posts, four social media posts published between 14 and 23 January 2026, by the SARC focused on winter assistance for displaced and vulnerable families, including heating materials and winter relief items. Collectively, the four posts reached an estimated **125,000 social media users**.

These four posts generated a total of 338 comments. Of these, **27.8% expressed negative sentiment toward SARC**, 59.8% were neutral, and 12.4% expressed positive sentiment. While neutral engagement

dominated numerically, negative sentiment was highly visible and concentrated around perceptions of aid adequacy, fairness, and transparency.

Narratives

- **Aid insufficiency:** Winter items, especially heating-related support, were framed as too small in quantity to meaningfully reduce cold exposure.

“Isn’t it shameful? You yourself came and brought with you 10 kilos of firewood. For God’s sake, have some shame. Ten kilos isn’t even enough for one night for the stove” (“مو عيب عليكم”) “جاي انت بذات نفسك وجايب معك 10 كيلو حطب بربك تستحي عدمك انت 10 كيلو مايكفو ليله وحدة للصوبه

“Why are you exhausting yourselves like this, man?” (“ليش معذبين حالكم ياخي”)

- **Aid performativity and dignity concerns:** Filming and publicising distributions was criticised as humiliating or visibility-driven rather than impact-driven.

“The Red Crescent is the biggest dishonest organization in the world, how wonderful were those organisations that used to give (aid) and steal.” (“اكدب منظمة بالعالم الهلال الحمر يا محلا منظمات اللي”) (“كانت تعطي وتسرق

“Come on—aren’t you ashamed? You brought a box with ten kilos of firewood, and you’re filming it and saying you ‘distributed’ it. They say, ‘If you have no shame, do whatever you want’—and you people clearly don’t have shame anymore.” (“بلاهي عليك مانك خجلان جايبين كرتوني فيها”) (“عشر كيلوات حطب وعم تصور وتقول وزعني تنفني قالو الثولين أن لام تستحي مصنع ماشئت وهاي انتم ماعاد ستحيتو

- **Unequal distribution and exclusion:** Some users claim that some camps/areas receive assistance while others are repeatedly overlooked.

“But many camps haven’t received any of this aid—it’s all empty talk, especially the Mashhad Rouhin camps” (“بس في كثير مخيمات ما شافو شي من هل مساعدات كلو حكي فاضي وخصوصي مخيمات مشهد روحين”)

- **Political framing:** limited number of comments linked SARC to prior authorities (Assad Regime).

“The Red Crescent organization was an arm of the deposed regime” (“منظمة الهلال كانت يد للنظام المخلوع”)

“You’re thugs/shabiha of the former regime” (“انتوشبيحة نظام سابق”)

- **High unmet needs and distress signalling:** Many comments functioned as urgent case referrals (orphans, widows, disability, chronic illness, inability to pay rent or buy fuel).

“Who can register for the assistance?” (“مين بيقدر يسجل ع المساعدات”)

- **Residual trust and support:** % of comments positively described SARC as credible and encouraged continuation, sometimes paired with calls for broader reach.

“May God give you strength and good health, empower you and protect you. Wishing you success always, God willing.” (“الله يعطيكم العافيه و يقويكم و يحميكم يارب بالتوفيق دائما ان شاء الله”)

What this tells us

- **Widely publicised winter assistance raises high expectations:** Frustration and disappointment can generate disproportionate criticism when expectations of adequacy are not met.
- **Communication that demonstrates delivery and impact must be authentic.** While visibility of activities is especially important during highly publicised campaigns, recipients respond negatively when they feel objectified or instrumentalised for communication purposes. This highlights the challenge of achieving nuanced, ethical, and authentic engagement on social media platforms.
- **Distribution equity remains a reputational fault line that can fuel sectarian narrative:** Persistent exclusion narratives (“we saw nothing”) are a primary driver of mistrust and anger.
- **Information gaps sustain neutral engagement and frustration:** High volumes of registration/location questions indicate strong demand and limited clarity on access pathways.
- **Criticism is loud, while approval is not absent but quieter :** The presence of supportive sentiment alongside harsh criticism is not necessarily representative of overall sentiment , suggesting that trust can be strengthened through clearer communication, transparency on quantities/coverage, and visibility.

IOM and Qatar: Support for voluntary return from Lebanon

Between 26 and 27 January 2026, 12 social media posts, 10 X and two Facebook, reported on a \$20 million Qatari project targeting 100,000 Syrian people who are refugees in Lebanon, this project to be implemented through the International Organization for Migration (IOM), to support the voluntary return of Syrians from Lebanon. The posts reached an estimated 500,000 social media users. Engagement with this content generated 32 comments. Five with negative sentiment, 23 neutral and four positive toward the project.

Narratives

- **Supporting and welcoming the project:** Few comments welcomed the contribution and described it as a positive step that could encourage voluntary return.

“May God reward you with goodness.” (”الله يجزيكم الخير“)

“Okay, fine—enough. Everyone makes a thousand excuses so they don’t go back. Thank you, Qatar, an excellent contribution, and surely this will encourage people to return; it’s a suitable opportunity.” (”او ك تمام حاج“
”كل واحد يعمل الف حجة من شان ماينزلشكرا قطر مساهمة ممتازة واكيد هالشي رح يشجع الناس عالعودة فرصة مناسبة“)

- **Questions about access and credibility:** Several comments asked how people could register or verify the information. The absence of clear links, phone numbers, or official instructions led some users to question whether the initiative was real or actionable.

“Where is the main source? I’m ready—but if there’s no source, no link, and no phone number, then it’s all lies on top of lies.” (”وين المصدر الاساسيانا جاهز اذا لافي مصدر ولا في لينك ولا في رقم تلفونكلو كذب بكذب“)

- **Politicised rejection:** A limited number of comments rejected the initiative altogether, framing Qatar’s role through past political grievances and questioning its intentions.

“Qatar, Sheikha Moza: they kill you and then walk in your funeral 🤔🤔 They ignited the war alongside Erdoğan, funded the purchase of weapons and mercenaries to kill Syrians, and after displacing them across

قطر الشبيخة موزة: تقتلك و تمشي في جنازتك 🤔🤔 اشعلوا قتيلا” [...]“ (” اشعلوا قتيلا“) [...]“ يلبسون لباس الملائكة الحرب رفقة اردوغان ، دعموا بالمال لشراء الأسلحة و المرتزقة لقتل السوريين ، وبعد أن شردوهم في ربوع كوكب الأرض ، هاهم اليوم [...]“)

- **Concern about financial sufficiency inside Syria:** A few comments noted that financial support alone would not be enough to make return sustainable, given the ongoing economic situation and poor living conditions.

“So that means 150 dollars per person 😊 when just the cost of transportation by car is 300 dollars.” (” يعني لكل“) (”شخص 150 دولار 😊 اذا فقط اجرة نقل السيارة 300 دولار“)

What this tells us

- Even limited discussion around return generates strong scrutiny. Return is discussed as both a humanitarian and political issue, influenced by wider perceptions of responsibility and accountability.
- Effective communication including phone number or website link, should be provided to verify the project’s credibility.
- Financial support is judged against real costs, not symbolic value.
- Perceptions of international donors and actors influence online reactions to programmes.

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.

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	572
Dimashq	100
Al-Hasakah	97
Aleppo	95
Homs	89
Idlib	58
Latakia	53
As-Suwayda	31
Hama	30

The social media monitoring platform identified 761 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)*

Scale of analysis

- **Number of posts:** 761 posts
- **Estimated total reach:** 16.5 million social media users
- **Total comments analysed:** 8,747 comments

Comment distribution by organisation type

- **LNGOs/CSOs :** 4,148 comments (47.4%)
- **UN agencies:** 2,963 comments (33.9%)
- **International humanitarian actor:** 1,250 comments (14.3%)
- **International development actors:** 250 comments (2.9%)
- **Donors:** 171 comments (2.0%)

Distribution of negative comments by actor type:

- **Local NGOs / CSOs:** 59% (of these, **95.8%** in response to **SARC and Kurdish Red Crescent**)
- **UN agencies:** 3.8%
- **International development actors:** 3.8%
- **Donors:** 2.9%

Negative sentiment

- **Negative comments:** 439 comments (5.0% of all comments)

Comment language

- **Arabic:** 6,665 comments (76.2 %)
- **English:** 207 comments (2.4%)
- **Emojis / no text:** 1,858 comments (21.3%)
- **Other Languages:** 12 comments (0.1%)

The platform used does not support the use of Kurdish.

More resources

Social media sentiment analysis towards the aid sector in Syria: Insecurity Insight regularly examines key discussions around aid activities driven by information posted by IP addresses in Syria. 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. [Past editions](#)

Data Use and Data Privacy

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.

Disclaimer: This briefing is part 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

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/12-27Jan2026SYRSMMBrief>

Suggested citation: Insecurity Insight. 2026. Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Emerging Trends in Syria, 12-27 January 2026, Switzerland: Insecurity Insight. <https://bit.ly/12-27Jan2026SYRSMMBrief>

