

“Don’t get your hopes up”

Tracking Aid Narratives on Social Media: Recent Observations from Syria

12 May 2026

This briefing by Insecurity Insight analyses public social media activity from 01-30 April in Syria.



Understanding how aid actors are portrayed and understood 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.

Between 01-30 April 2026, this briefing analysed **532 social media posts related to the aid sector in Syria**, reaching **10.8 million users and generating 7,552 comments**, down by 2574 from 10,126 comments in the previous reporting period. This lower volume does not necessarily indicate a decline in aid-related discussion overall. For this edition, the analysis focused on posts with higher engagement and stronger relevance to emerging narratives, rather than capturing all aid-related posts identified during the monitored period. The dataset includes publicly available posts published by or mentioning UN agencies, international NGOs, local NGOs and civil society organisations and general key words related to humanitarian and development assistance in Syria during the reporting period, providing a broad overview of aid-related conversations involving these actors on public social media platforms. 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 edition covers

- **Government restrictions affecting SARC and the Syrian Development Organisation draw limited public engagement**
- **UNHCR: Returnees’ frustration over communication gaps and unclear access to assistance**
- **Local NGO: Community centres with Directorate of Social Affairs and Labour in Aleppo (DoSAL) and UNHCR receive strongly positive engagement**
- **MSF: Medical engagement welcomed, with doubts over whether assessments will translate into assistance**

Past editions: “Tomorrow it will all be sold on the street stalls” (01-31 March); “They’re telling us there’s no registration”; (28 Jan-28 Feb); “The camera matters more than aid itself” (12-27 Jan); “Please support Syrian women” (29 Dec-11 Jan)

Government restrictions affecting SARC and the Syrian Development Organisation draw limited public engagement

Between 01–03 April, three posts reported new restrictions requiring UN agencies and international organisations to work through formal agreements with national authorities rather than direct cooperation arrangements. The Syrian government has also revoked the “national partner” status of Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) and the Syrian Development Organisation (SSSD), and required that agreements with international organisations would require prior approval from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The posts (two on X and one on Facebook) collectively reached **51,995 social media users**. The highest-reaching post was published by an edited media platform, while the other two were a government official Facebook page with 20,002 users, and an individual social media user post with 600 users. Despite the operational importance of the announcement, the three posts generated only seven comments (**57.1% were critical** and **42.9% were neutral**). Some comments worried it would increase bureaucracy and delay assistance. A few comments also repeated existing distrust narratives about espionage for the past

regime or foreign-funded organisations.

“The best decision is to treat these criminals—Al-Hilal Al-Asadi, Al-Ramadi, and the Shabiha—as direct subordinates of Asma Al-Assad; they remain, as it were, spies for Asma Al-Assad within relief organisations. Scum.” (افضل قرار هدول“)
مجرمين الهلال الاسدي كلون من الرمادية والشبيحة وتابعين مباشرة لأسماء الاسد لذلك بقاءون كأئون جواسيس لأسماء الاسد بمؤسسات الإغاثية اوباش

“International donors are intelligence agencies recruiting a fifth column. America and Britain have associations that receive foreign funding. I challenge you.” (امريكا بريطانيا فيها الجمعيات تتلقى تمويل خارجي“)
المانحين الدوليين استخبارات لتجنيد طابور .

What this tell us:

- Public engagement with bureaucratic requirements affecting the aid sector remains limited. Although these regulatory frameworks are often central to how aid agencies operate, nuanced and neutral explanations of such rules rarely attract significant attention on social media platforms.
- Narratives about aid organisations tend to be highly persistent: Even as contexts evolve, perceptions - once formed - can endure, meaning that associations with particular attitudes, practices, or ways of working may remain for a long time after.

Key Takeaways

UNHCR: Returnees’ frustration over communication gaps and unclear access to assistance

Across the April dataset, 937 comments mentioned UNHCR in general. Most of these comments appeared under posts addressing different topics. This section focuses on three Facebook posts that formed a clear shared discussion around returnees’ frustration, communication gaps, and access to assistance.

Between 11–21 April, three Facebook posts triggered strong reactions from Syrian refugees and returnees on social media. A public page run by Syrian refugees posted two posts, reaching about 18K social media users, on the growing frustration among Syrian returnees over difficulties contacting UNHCR and accessing information about assistance. A third post, reaching about 13K social media users, published by UNHCR Syria, described support provided to the Directorate of Social Affairs and Labour (DoSAL) in Deir-ez-Zor to enhance access to social services for returnees and vulnerable families. Collectively, the three posts generated 203 comments of which 51.7% were critical towards UNHCR, 47.8% were neutral, and only 0.5% were positive. This reflects a critical discussion in which users focused less on the content of the official project announcement and more on long-standing grievances related to communication, return assistance, eligibility, and perceived unequal access to support.

Critical reactions

- **Communication failures and inability to reach UNHCR:**

“I have been back for seven months. I called them and they said, ‘wait for a message.’ They sent me a WhatsApp message to fill in my information and said I was eligible, but it was all empty talk.”

(“صرلي 7 شهور راجع ودقيلهم قال انتظر رسالة... وبعثولي رسالة عالواتساب عبي معلومات وبستحق لكن كلو كلام فراغ“)

- **Perceived unfairness and unequal distribution:**

“Some people received it and some people don’t. We came down from Jordan eight months ago and have not seen anything.”

(“ناس استلمت وناس راحت عليها لنا 8 شهور نازلين من الاردن وماشفنا شي“)

- **Accusations of fraud, corruption, and theft:**

“UNHCR in Syria is a fraud.”

(“مفوضية سوريا نصابة”)

- **Return assistance expectations and debt pressure:**

“We came from Jordan with debts, even the bus fare is still a debt, because we thought that when we received the return assistance from UNHCR in Syria we would pay it back.”

(“أتينا وعلينا ديون حتى أجار الباص لحد الآن علينا دين على أساس لما تأخذ بدل عودة من المفوضية بسوريا تسدد”)

Other reactions

- **Blame directed at returnees and refugees:** Some users criticised refugees for relying on assistance, telling them to return to Syria and depend on themselves rather than waiting for UNHCR support.

“Depend on yourselves like the people living in Syria who did not leave their country and did not depend on UNHCR.”

(“اعتمدو عالكم مثل الناس اللي عايشه بسوريا وماتركو بلدهم ولا اعتمدو على المفوضية”)

- **Urgent vulnerability and protection needs:** Some comments included direct appeals for help from people describing hunger, debt, displacement, inability to pay rent, serious protection concerns, and the need for resettlement or urgent support.

“Please help us. Our situation is extremely difficult and we have no one but God.”

(“ارجو المساعدة... حالتنا يرثى لها ولا لنا أحد غير الله”)

What this tells us

- **Communication gaps are the main driver of critical sentiment.** Repeated references to unanswered calls, unclear contact channels, and waiting for information suggest that users are frustrated not only by lack of assistance, but by the absence of reliable follow-up.
- **Return assistance has become a major expectation.** When support is delayed or unclear, users interpret this as neglect, deception, or unfairness, especially when they returned with debts or damaged homes.
- **The tone of the discussion presents a reputational risk for UNHCR,** even without signs of coordination, because repeated personal complaints can reinforce wider narratives of inaccessibility and lack of transparency.

Local NGO: Community centres with Directorate of Social Affairs and Labour in Aleppo (DoSAL) and UNHCR receive strongly positive engagement

Between 22–29 April, three Facebook posts reported the opening of new community centres under the community protection project implemented by a local NGO in coordination with the Directorate of Social Affairs and Labour in Aleppo, and in partnership with UNHCR. Two posts were published by the local NGO official Facebook page, and a third post was published by an official government page for the Ministry/Directorate of Social Affairs and Labour in Syria. The posts described the centres as designed to strengthen community protection, social cohesion, and access to support for vulnerable groups. Collectively, the three posts reached 47,332 social media users and generated 119 comments. Comment sentiment was overwhelmingly positive, with **84.0% positive comments**, **13.4% neutral comments**, and **2.5% critical comments**. This indicates a high level of public acceptance of community-based programming when it is presented as practical, locally grounded, and focused on protection, wellbeing, and social support.

Positive reactions

- **Recognition of staff and local teams:** Several comments praised the efforts of teams in specific locations, especially Maaret al-Numan, reflecting local pride and recognition of field staff.

“The great Maaret al-Numan team, may God give you strength for your huge efforts.”

(“فريق معرة النعمان الفخم يعطيكم العافية على جهودكم الجبارة”)

- **Interest in volunteering and employment:** Some users asked about vacancies or expressed interest in returning to work or volunteering with the organisation, suggesting that the centre openings were also understood as potential opportunities for local engagement.

“I used to be one of the association’s volunteers in Aleppo. I wish I could come back and work with them now in my city, Maaret al-Numan.”

(“أنا كنت من متطوعي الجمعية في حلب ياريت هلق احسن ارجع واشتغل فيها بمدينة معرة النعمان”)

What this tells us

- Community-based protection programming is highly accepted when framed around safe spaces, local services, and support for vulnerable groups.
- Positive engagement was driven by trust in the local NGO, recognition of local teams, and the practical nature of the services described.
- Neutral comments asking for addresses and locations show that social media posts can create direct demand for service information.
- The few critical comments were mostly not about the project itself. One questioned priorities, while others raised separate access-related complaints, showing that positive posts can still attract frustrations about other social services.

Posts driving critical content analysis

Between 29 December 2025 and 23 January 2026, seven posts directly critical of aid actors in Syria were identified: six on X and one on Facebook. These posts represented **0.67%** of the 1,050 posts monitored during the period, indicating that direct critical content remained limited in volume. Together, they reached

24,852 social media users. Individual social media users posted six posts, while one post was published by an edited media page. The posts focused on SARC, the United Nations, and wider UN-linked organisations. The main narratives included alleged misuse of the Red Crescent emblem, claims that SARC was being used in forced displacement, accusations that the UN ignores violations, and broader allegations of corruption, sectarian bias, and complicity.

- The interim government is exploiting the humanitarian cover to force civilians in Deir Hafer to leave.
- The interim government is seeking to exploit the humanitarian situation in the city of Deir Hafer, through what is called a “safe passage” and by using the Syrian Red Crescent, to force civilians to leave towards the city of Aleppo. This step comes in parallel with violent and indiscriminate shelling and targeting of residential neighborhoods and infrastructure, which exacerbates the state of fear and pushes the people to forced displacement.

Individual social media accounts amplifying distrust in aid actors

→ **SARC framed as part of forced displacement:** One verified edited media page reported that the interim government was using a “safe corridor” and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent “SARC” to pressure civilians in Deir Hafar to leave towards Aleppo. The media page has around 370,000 followers and an 86% recommendation rate in its review section. This media agency was founded by Kurdish journalists in Belgium. The post reached 24,182 users and generated 22 comments, which were mainly unrelated to the SARC.

→ **Alleged misuse of the Red Crescent emblem:** One verified individual account alleged that vehicles carrying the Red

Crescent emblem had been used to transport weapons and ammunition to an armed actor during the early years of the Syrian conflict. The account has around 8,000 followers and mainly posts political content related to Syria. The post reached 567 users and generated no comments.

→ **Sectarian criticism of the United Nations:** One individual account accused the United Nations of only caring about specific sectarian groups and locations. The account was unverified but appeared to use a real name and profile picture, with around 300 followers and mixed content on music, art and politics. The post reached only 24 users and generated no comments, suggesting very limited traction.

→ **UN accused of silence over child recruitment:** Two posts by the same unverified individual account accused the United Nations and human rights organisations of ignoring the alleged recruitment of Syrian children by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The two posts together reached only 12 social media users. The profile had around 100 followers, no clear personal information, though no signs of post automation. Each post reached only six users and generated no comments, indicating minimal visibility.

→ **Corruption allegations involving UN-linked organisations and SARC:** One individual account used external reports to accuse UN-linked organisations in Syria of corruption, procurement abuses, and links to former regime-linked figures. The post also claimed that SARC still includes individuals connected to former regime structures. The account appeared organic, using a real profile picture and posting mixed content on Syria, with around 400 followers.

→ **Broad accusation of UN complicity:** One individual account accused the UN of complicity in global terrorism and claimed that people had lost trust in the organisation. The account did not use a real name or profile photo and appeared to be based outside Syria. The post had very limited reach and did not appear linked to a specific Syria programme or incident.

Risk assessment

- **Risk of amplification:** Most posts had low reach and little or no engagement, suggesting limited immediate amplification.
- **Impact:** The most sensitive narratives are those linking SARC to conflict activity, forced displacement, or misuse of the humanitarian emblem, as these directly affect perceptions of neutrality and acceptance. The posts did not show signs of coordinated targeting, but the narratives touch on politically sensitive issues, including sectarianism, child recruitment, corruption, forced displacement and alleged links to former regime structures.

MSF: Medical engagement welcomed, with doubts over whether assessments will translate into assistance

Between 28–29 April, two Facebook posts reported MSF engagement with health facilities and authorities in Syria. The Hama Health Directorate posted about an official meeting between MSF and the Hama Director of Health to discuss cooperation, support for medical services, and ways to improve the governorate's health sector, reaching 7,200 users. A local media page also reported an MSF field visit to Ain Issa Hospital as an assessment mission, where the team reviewed the health situation, the hospital capacity and service needs with its director, reaching 2,611 users. Together, the posts generated 119 comments. Sentiment was mixed: 47.9% neutral, 46.2% positive, and 5.9% critical. Overall, MSF's presence was generally welcomed, though users wanted practical outcomes rather than meetings or assessments alone.

Positive reactions

- **Support for cooperation and health sector improvement:** Many comments welcomed the meetings and expressed hope that MSF's engagement would improve medical services.

“Wishing you success, God willing.”

(“بالتوفيق إن شاء الله”)

- **Recognition of MSF staff:** Some users thanked MSF teams and logistics staff, reflecting acceptance of the organisation’s medical role.

“Words and action without borders. We thank the logistics staff and workers in the organisation.”

(“قول وفعل بلا حدود نشكر اللوجستين والعاملين بالمنظمة”)

Critical reactions

- **Frustration with visits and meetings that do not lead to visible assistance:** Some comments questioned the value of assessment missions and coordination meetings when they are not followed by direct support or clear next steps. Users framed these activities as symbolic rather than practical, reflecting fatigue with announcements that do not quickly translate into improvements.

“A successful visit and zero achievement.”

(“زيارة ناجحة وصفر انجاز”)

“Organisations have no good left in them. Even if they come to the hospital every day, they will not provide support.”

(“المنظمات ماضل بيها خير اذا كل نهار يجون ع المشفى مراح ايقدمون دعم”)

- **Complaints about the condition of health facilities:** Some negative comments used the posts to highlight poor hospital conditions, weak emergency response, and frustration with staff performance, suggesting that expectations for medical support are shaped by difficult experiences in local facilities.

“The hospital is trash, and the staff are trash.”

(“مشفى زباله والكادر زباله”)

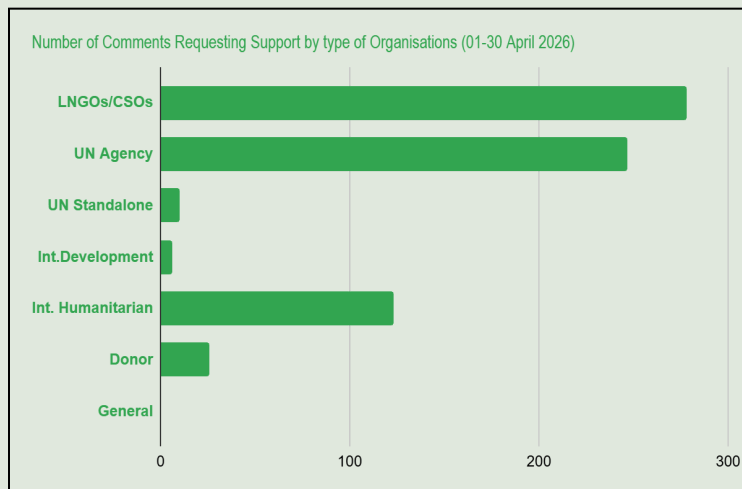
What this tells us

- MSF’s presence is generally welcomed, especially when linked to improving medical services and cooperation with health authorities.
- Users are supportive but cautious: assessment visits and meetings create expectations, but social media users want visible assistance and service improvements.
- Health-related posts quickly become spaces for wider complaints about hospitals, medicines, ambulances, and specialised care gaps.
- Clear communication on the purpose of visits, whether assistance is confirmed, and what steps may follow can help manage expectations and reduce frustration.

Social media users requesting direct support from aid agencies

Monitoring between 01–30 April 2026 identified 7,552 comments across the analysed posts. Of these, 690 comments requested assistance from aid actors, representing 9.1% of all comments. April comments showed strong continuity with earlier monitoring periods; March, February, January and December editions: users again treated comment sections as informal access channels for registration, follow-up, contact information, food, cash, medical, disability, and return-related support.

The main difference in April was the stronger presence of recovery-oriented requests, including infrastructure repair, public services, rural livelihoods, volunteering, and refugee protection concerns.



“We returned from Lebanon to Syria, registered with the UN and with organisations, and no one helped us. I have five small children and we are sitting in the streets in western rural Deir-ez-Zor.”

(“رجعنا البلد سوريا سجلنا بالأمم وسجلنا بالمنظمات ولا أحد ساعدنا وعندي خمس أطفال صغار... وقاعدین بالشوارع بريف دير الزور الغربي”)

“The transformer burned 20 days ago and there is still no replacement.”

(“المحولة احترقت من ٢٠ يوم ولا بديل لتاريخه”)

- **One account linked to SARC, which had also been noted in the previous report, remained active:** since January 2026, it posted 1,993 near identical comments (indicating likely copy-paste or automation behavior) under SARC-related posts, appealing for support for women, children, rural communities, medical services, livelihoods, and infrastructure. The profile mainly shares SARC-related content, including job opportunities and activity updates, but provides limited personal information (beyond seemingly authentic name and profile picture). The comments are not critical of the SARC, but their repetition shows how public comment sections are also used to amplify local needs beyond direct household appeals.

What this tells us: Requests for assistance remain a consistent feature of aid-related social media in Syria, but April comments show a stronger focus on recovery, services, livelihoods, and protection, alongside the recurring demand for clearer registration and follow-up channels.

Key numbers

Scale of analysis

- **Number of posts:** 532 posts
- **Estimated total reach:** 10.8 Million social media users
- **Total comments analysed:** 7552 comments

Comment distribution by organisation type

- **LNGOs/CSOs:** 3,168 comments (41.95%)
- **UN agencies:** 2,869 comments (37.99%)
- **International humanitarian actor:** 1,176 comments (15.57%)
- **International development actors:** 99 comments (1.31%)
- **Donors:** 240 comments (3.18%)

Distribution of negative comments by actor type:

- **Local NGOs / CSOs:** 28.37%
- **UN agencies:** 58.68%
- **International humanitarian actors:** 10.74%
- **International development actors:** 0.00%
- **Donors:** 2.20%

Negative sentiment

- **Negative comments:** 363 comments (4.81% of all comments, dropped from 7.32% in the previous report)

Comment language

- **Arabic:** 5,295 comments (70.1%)
- **English:** 102 comments (1.4%)
- **Emojis / no text:** 2,152 comments (28.5%)
- **Other Languages:** 3 comments (0.04%)

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	678
Aleppo	74
Dimashq (Damascus)	65
Al-Hasakah	48
Hama	45
Homs	40
Latakia	38
Idlib	32
Sweida	31
Tartus	18
Quneitra	8
Ar-Raqqa	7
Deir ez-Zor	5
Daraa	4

The social media monitoring platform identified 532 high- engagement 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)*

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

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