

Sudan Humanitarian Flash Update #7



20 MARCH 2024

INTRODUCTION

Between **24 January** and **20 February 2024**, Internews collected **212 comments, perceptions, and rumors** in **Arabic** and **English** shared by people affected by conflict in Sudan on social media platforms, including **Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and LinkedIn**. In this edition of the Sudan Humanitarian Flash Update, we look at how the recent network blackout in the country is affecting individuals' access to information, which is resulting in new information needs as well as novel ways of sharing information. This flash update will also address treatment rumors for malaria and jaundice, and information gaps about refugee and asylum procedures.

TOP SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS, 24 JANUARY TO 20 FEBRUARY 2024

1. Food-based treatment rumors for jaundice and malaria.
2. Communication and internet access is mostly cut-off across Sudan.
3. Individuals look for people who have internet access amid a network blackout to deliver information to their loved ones.
4. Individuals ask about asylum and refugee procedures in Egypt.
5. Urgent appeals for information and assistance in finding missing and detained individuals.

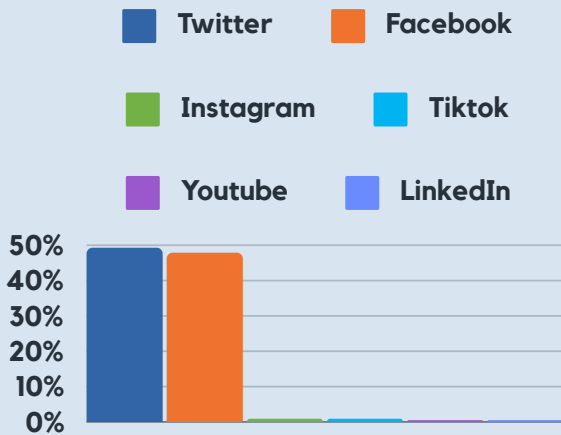
14

**posts collected from
private accounts/
groups**

198

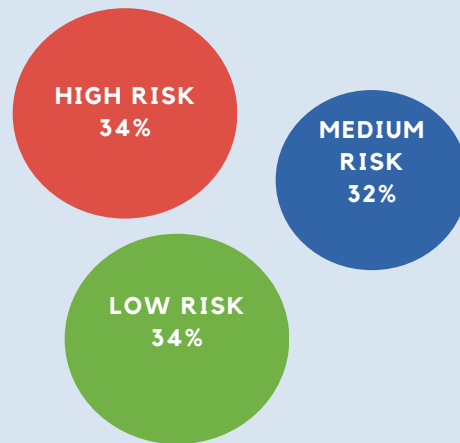
**Posts collected from
public accounts/
pages/groups**

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS BY PLATFORM



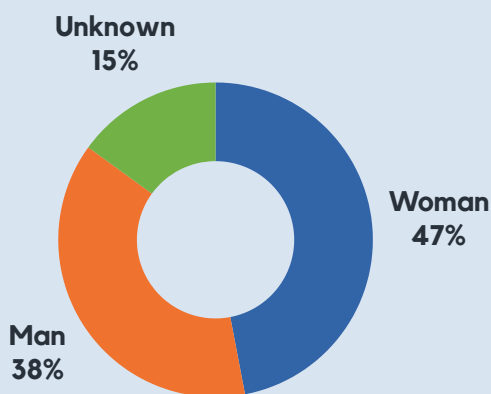
This is the breakdown of social media platforms for 212 posts collected between 24 January and 20 February, 2024.

POSTS BY RISK LEVEL

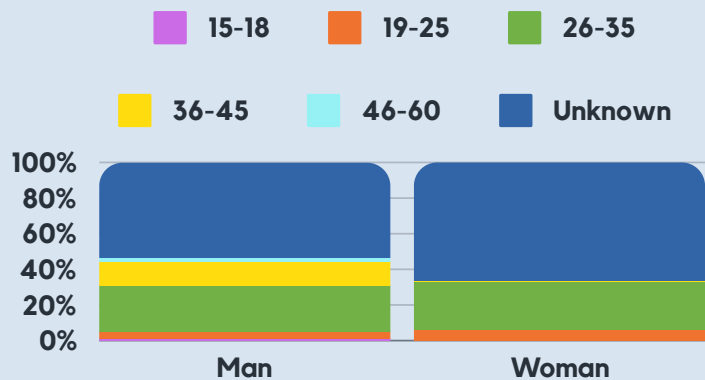


An example of a high risk post is the closure of community kitchens due to the internet blackout impacting funding, which increases the risk of food insecurity.

GENDER

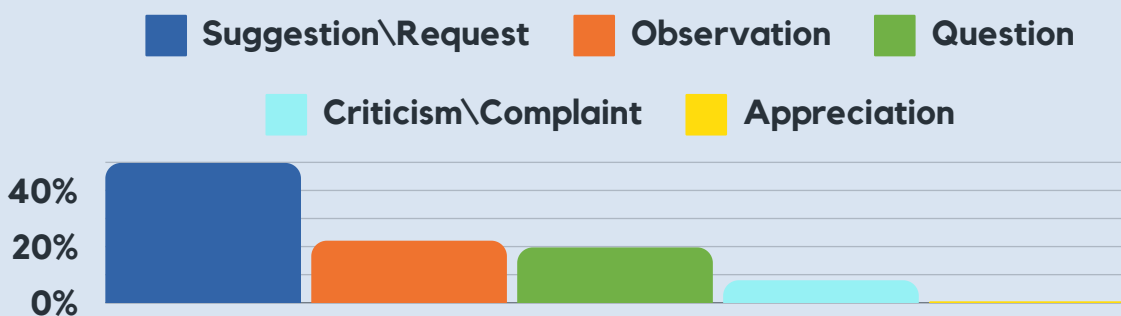


AGE VS GENDER



Although these charts illustrates the age and gender of those sharing social media posts, it may not accurately reflect the demographics of those who hold these concerns.

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS BY TYPE



INFORMATION ACCESS AMID COMMUNICATION BLACKOUT

A country-wide telecommunication blackout on February 7, 2024, has had severe implications for access to information and communications within the country. According to social media posts Internews collected and analyzed from Sudanese social media spaces, several key points emerge regarding the impact of this blackout on various aspects of Sudanese lives. The blackout impacted essential services and humanitarian efforts. Internews analysts note that social media activity from within Sudan has been reduced significantly because of this internet shutdown. A minority of individuals have posted on social media that they are joining via Starlink internet, but the majority of those within Sudan are completely offline. With the vacuum of social media posts coming out of Sudan, the Sudanese diaspora continues to highlight how the communication blackout is affecting people all around the country.

This post from Twitter highlights the humanitarian and health consequences for displaced people in Babanusa, West Kordofan due to the unavailability of communication networks.



“In the absence of the Sudani and Areeba networks, the humanitarian and health situation for the displaced people in Babanusa will deteriorate... It's worth noting that Zain network has been unavailable for more than 3 months”.

The blackout also obstructs the delivery of essential services, dissemination of information about safety, and the collection of donations for civilians' basic needs, such as food, medicine, and shelter.

“Communication services in Sudan have been completely disrupted, affecting:

- The provision and delivery of essential services to beneficiaries.
- The accurate dissemination of information about security situations in cities and conflict-affected areas.
- The collection and delivery of donations to citizens within Sudan to cover their needs, starting from food, medicine, and shelter.
- Reporting on various violations experienced by citizens, such as enforced disappearances, kidnapping of women and children, and trafficking.”

Woman, 26-35, Twitter



Sudanese online are using the hashtag **#Sudan_Out_of_Coverage** (**السودان_خارج_التغطية**) to highlight the critical impact of the communications blackout. The collapse of telecommunication networks obstructs the delivery of essential medical services. Despite efforts by doctors in the diaspora to utilize telemedicine, patients are now deprived of these necessary services due to the blackout.

"#Sudan_Out_of_Coverage after the collapse of the healthcare system. We, along with thousands of fellow doctors inside and outside Sudan, continue to provide what we can provide with telemedicine through phones and video, and even this now, the patient is deprived of it. Stop this crime"

Man, 46-60, Twitter

"...Due to the interruption of internet networks, more than 10 kitchens in Alkalakla stopped working, and more than 50,000 families were affected, needing shelter, food, and medicine..."

AlKalakla Emergency Room, Facebook, Khartoum

The communication blackout has exacerbated food insecurity issues in Khartoum. Multiple Emergency Response Rooms have announced the suspension of community kitchens, which provide vital food support to hundreds of thousands of families. The Emergency Rooms rely on regular donations to keep humanitarian services running, which have been interrupted due to lack of access to electronic banking.

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"...we convey to our people the news of the suspension of all communal kitchens operating in the city of Bahri. The interruption of communication services, which facilitated the coordination of aid, along with the scarcity and lack of food supplies, made it impossible to provide them in the complete darkness of communication ..."

Bahri Emergency Response Room, Twitter, Bahri - Khartoum

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"Shutting down communications was devastating...Three central kitchens that were operating in Wad Balloul, AlAssal and Taiba have stopped, and five kitchens that were set to be established in the neighborhoods of southern Jebel unit and eastern unit (Ummushar, Abdros, and Ummrabah) were closed, along with a center for distributing food baskets in AlShagalab and another center that was set to be established next to Jebel Awliya Market which would cover the villages of Ummarda, and the Southern and Eastern Units... "

Jebel Awliya Emergency Room, Facebook, Jebel Awliya - Khartoum



It is worth noting that the internet shutdown has also reduced the frequency of appeals, such as appeals for medicine, food, and shelter. The data highlights a significant shift in appeals shared on Sudanese social media platforms. With the communication blackout, the focus has shifted towards seeking individuals with Starlink internet access to deliver critical information. Appeals range from urgent messages about births, deaths, and medical emergencies to practical needs like visa delivery and communication with loved ones. This shift underscores the resourcefulness and solidarity of the Sudanese online communities amidst the blackout, relying on each other to bridge the communication gap created by the outage.

"We need someone in Shendi who has internet access. We have news of a death that we need to convey."

Man, 36-45, Facebook

Moreover, the blackout hinders reporting on the humanitarian situation in areas affected by conflict. With the communication networks down, it has become challenging for individuals to report incidents and seek information, such as posts about missing people, and protection of civilian property. This information blackout may enhance the vulnerability of the population and limit accountability mechanisms.

The communication blackout also disrupts personal communication and access to vital information. Individuals are resorting to desperate measures, such as traveling long distances to access internet connectivity, or relying on internet access from neighboring countries, and using satellite communication methods such as Elon Musk's Starlink services to reassure loved ones of their safety or convey urgent messages. Some have gone so far to relying on handwritten letters to share some news with their loved ones.

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“My uncle sent us a voice message using Starlink he had to go 20 minutes from their house to get access. It was just a 30 second voice message telling us that he and his family are okay. Alhamdulillah”

Woman, Twitter

“The situation in Sudan today, in the twenty-first century, communication is done through handwritten letters just like in the old days, in the Middle Ages, by carrier pigeon. May God be with you, Sudan. #Sudan_Out_of_Coverage”

Man, Twitter

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“My father walked to the border in Halfa and got internet from someone who has an Egyptian SIM card just to send me a message that they're okay. ❤️”

Woman, 26-35, Twitter

The blackout compounds existing economic challenges. The inability to conduct financial transactions via online banking services such as mBok/Bankak worsens the economic hardship already experienced by people affected by conflict and displacement. In addition, the inflated cost of satellite internet access in some areas further burdens individuals trying to reach their loved ones, receiving cash support, or conducting business activity.



"I spoke tonight with one of the guys in our neighborhood. He told me that no one can buy anything because Bankak is not working, there is no cash, and an hour of Starlink costs 3,000 pounds and it is crowded! This is in addition to the people who are unable to buy medicine and who communication with has been cut off for the purpose of delivering medicine. Ten months and every day the forms of suffering for the Sudanese citizen are renewed and multiplied"

Woman, 26-35, Twitter



Despite these challenges, individuals come together to support one another, with volunteers helping deliver messages and essential services. Social media continues to be an effective tool for coordinating these efforts and reaching out for assistance when people can access it.

"Dear friends of mine who have a company in Port Sudan and have internet access, they have set up a booth for two individuals in Port Sudan who can come with their phones or laptops and sit from morning till evening to assist people with their appeals like visas, tickets, etc. and all the other essential needs of our people because some twisted individuals in Port Sudan are exploiting people's needs in such circumstances. Our need is:

1- Only two volunteers.

2- Volunteers to deliver people's needs in Port Sudan...

Note:

Individuals and families who want to communicate with their families by phone calls over the internet. Contact xxx, he will book appointments for you and show you the call schedule. You can come to the company during your call time. Call times for families are from 5 pm to 7 pm daily"

Man, 36-45, Facebook



"Another friend in Port Sudan donated internet from his office in Port Sudan Market and also provided 2 gallons of gasoline daily for the volunteers who deliver people's needs and messages to homes in Port Sudan..."

Man, 36-45, Facebook



SEEKING HEALTH ADVICE ONLINE

Social media in Sudan reveals a worrying trend as people are looking for traditional remedies for serious illnesses like malaria and jaundice, painting a concerning picture of healthcare challenges in the country. The limited access to formal healthcare may increase the spread of misinformation about treatments on social media.



“Guys, I still suffer from malaria. I took injections and I'm still suffering. Also, I took 12 pills and I'm still suffering. What's the solution?”

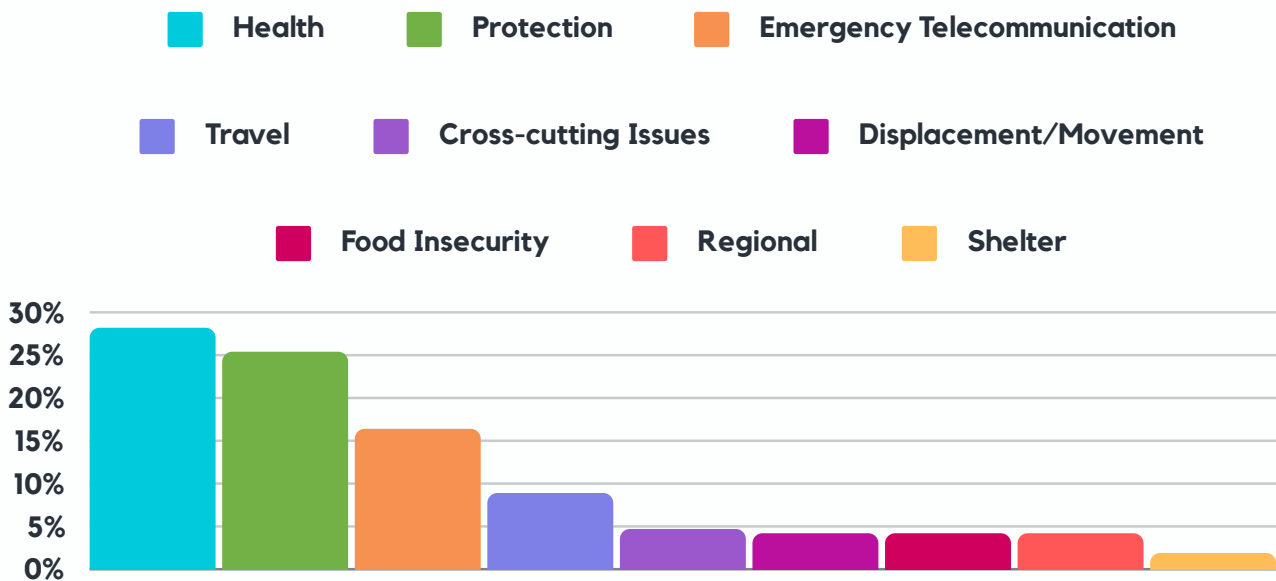
Woman, Facebook, AlHaj Yousif - Khartoum

“Peace be upon you; I am asking for remedies for jaundice. I'm in a hurry”

Woman, Facebook, AlKamleen - AlGezira



BREAKDOWN OF SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS BY THEME



Cross-cutting issues were reported in the data such as an alarming post about miscarriages among displaced women in North Darfur as reported by Abu Shouk Health Camp Emergency Initiative. The theme “Regional” refers to social media posts seeking information about living conditions and legal procedures in neighboring countries, such as posts about life and asylum procedures in Egypt and Uganda.

Social media platforms have become breeding grounds for unverified claims and dangerous practices promoting these unproven remedies. Some mention treatments such as Kawal* for both malaria and jaundice and Tamarindus for malaria. Additionally, the alarming practice of cauterizing skin for jaundice has been shared online, echoing similar practices observed in Sudan before the outbreak of conflict in April 2023 for dengue treatment as highlighted in Internews’ [Humanitarian Rumor Bulletin](#). Such rumors and unsubstantiated practices pose serious health risks, especially for vulnerable populations.

“I was cauterized with fire, and I started to eat sweet food only and you can eat boiled eggs without salt”
Woman, Facebook

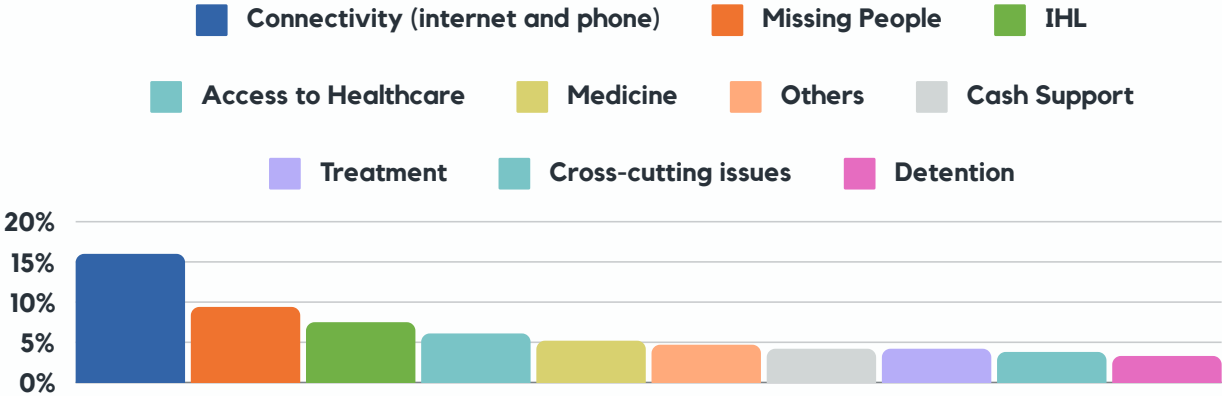
“Drinking concentrated tamarind, I have experienced that.”
Woman, Facebook

“I had it and I treated it with Kawal*, so I drank it in the morning on an empty stomach with yogurt. Sorry for saying this, I was directly vomiting the jaundice that was in my stomach and all the yellow things were coming out.”
Woman, Facebook

**Kawal are fermented leaves that are protein-rich and are cooked into stew.*

Further hindering access to healthcare is the recent looting and attacks on hospitals reported in Sharg Alneel, Khartoum and AlGezira state which have instilled fear and distrust. This deters individuals from seeking formal medical attention.

KEY SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS



Individuals on social media continue to look for information about the whereabouts of detainees and missing people. Some also turn to social media to seek cash support to pay for healthcare, such as urgent care for an injured child.

Social media data also reveals people actively searching for doctors, medical tests, and medications beyond their immediate vicinity. This highlights the need for improved information access and resource distribution to bridge the gap between patients and effective healthcare.

“People of wasif lai, if anyone has any information about Soba Hospital, if they have a working MRI or any center inside Khartoum, help me please.”
Woman, Facebook, Soba - Khartoum

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“○ Is there an oncology center currently operating in Madani?
Man, Twitter, Madani - AlGezira

“Urgent need
Searching for verapamil 40mg in Port Sudan is necessary.
Woman, 26-35, Twitter, Port Sudan - Red Sea

“I want someone who can send me diabetes meds to Tambool”
Woman, Twitter, Tambool - AlGezira

“Peace be upon you, I want a center or hospital with a diabetes specialist in Karrari???? ”
Woman, Facebook, Karrari - Khartoum

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Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese families have chosen Egypt as their temporary home due to the ongoing conflict. While adjusting to a new life brings many opportunities, navigating healthcare in a new setting can be challenging. The following Facebook post highlights a difference in child vaccination schedules between Egypt and Sudan. This difference can be confusing and potentially lead to missed or delayed vaccinations for Sudanese children in Egypt.

“...Regarding the vaccination for children, my son is nine months old, and he's supposed to get the measles vaccine in Sudan. I searched here on Facebook and found the nine-month vaccine is for polio, and he already took it. How can we manage this? I also noticed they have different vaccines than ours 😊 ...”
Woman, Facebook, Egypt

IDENTITY DOCUMENTS, AND ASYLUM AND REFUGEE PROCEDURES

The outbreak of conflict in Sudan has resulted in challenging and unsafe living conditions for many residents, forcing them to seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Egypt, Uganda, and Eritrea. Displacement has created a sense of urgency for finding safer environments and better living conditions elsewhere.

The quest for reliable information to make informed decisions about movement has led many individuals to turn to social media platforms and online communities, including refugees, displaced persons, and residents of other countries. For instance, “منصة اللاجئين السودانيين في مصر” (Sudanese Refugees Platform in Egypt), which is a public Facebook group with 178,000 followers is favored by those seeking information regarding refugee status and rights in Egypt. People use these virtual spaces to share questions and find information regarding living conditions, job opportunities, rental options, and available aid for refugees. Individuals also rely on the insights of others to learn about the quality of life in potential countries for relocation.

“How are you, people... I'm asking about living in Uganda compared to Egypt ... If anyone has an idea?”

Man, Facebook

“I am in Port Sudan, and I want to settle in Asmara. How is the situation there? Is the cost of living high, and what about the general living conditions? Also, what about rental prices?”

Facebook, Port Sudan - Sudan

“Peace be upon you people I am in Sudan tell me about the conditions in Egypt. I want to go to Egypt there are people who advised me not to go to Egypt. And how is the Commission [UNHCR] issue going for you”

Man, Facebook, Egypt

The lack of official information about refugee rights increases the spread of rumors, as a rumor was circulated in a Facebook group regarding the amount of financial support provided by humanitarian organizations to refugees in Egypt. This may lead people to make decisions about movement based on false information.

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“Experienced people...Are there jobs in Egypt for a decent life? After receiving the yellow card, will I receive \$500 every month for subsistence from human rights organization?...”

Facebook

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The urgent need for safety and better living conditions increased needs for information about visa procedures such as how to obtain a visa, and requirements for renewal of visas.

“Good morning.. Can I travel to Kampala on behalf of my children to complete the visa procedures, or do we have to travel together?”

Man, Facebook

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“Hello, I'm asking if a person wants to register for an Egyptian visa, and his passport will end in October, meaning 10/2024, I heard the visa can take up to 6 months.

Is my passport valid to get a visa or must I change it for a longer-term passport?”

Woman, Facebook

“Hello, my visa has expired, and I renewed it, getting an extension for two months for free. Now, these two months have also ended. If I want to renew it again will they give me another two months, could you please provide guidance”

Facebook, Uganda

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As the conflict persists, people are seeking asylum in neighboring countries like Egypt and Uganda. This creates a continued need for information about asylum procedures in these countries. One of the primary information needs for asylum seekers is to understand their rights and options. Many individuals who flee their home country do not have a clear understanding of the legal procedures and requirements involved in seeking asylum. Individuals on social media shared questions and inquiries regarding the documents required to obtain the refugee card provided by UNHCR, while some asked about the privileges of the refugee card in terms of travel and movement between countries and the possibility of entering the country again after leaving it.

“...The main question is what other privileges does it [refugee card] provide, especially regarding travel and mobility between countries. More importantly, does it restrict your travel outside Uganda. For example, can you take the card, travel to another country with a visa,and return after a certain period, regardless of the duration. Are there any limitations or restrictions .. that people should be aware of. I would appreciate a detailed explanation in the comments from anyone with information or personal experiences regarding asylum, even if it's in other countries. This will be beneficial for everyone.”

Facebook, Uganda

“Peace be upon you. I have a question, I have two sisters who are 12 and 16 years old. Their national ID does not contain a picture. Can they get a yellow card?”

Woman, Facebook, Egypt

Some individuals noted they wanted to return to Sudan or travel to other countries and shared their need for information on how to close a refugee application, whether the refugee application should be closed, and whether withdrawing their application could cause a problem. The lack of information often leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

By providing comprehensive information about the asylum process, governments and humanitarian organizations can empower asylum seekers to make informed decisions and navigate the complex legal system.

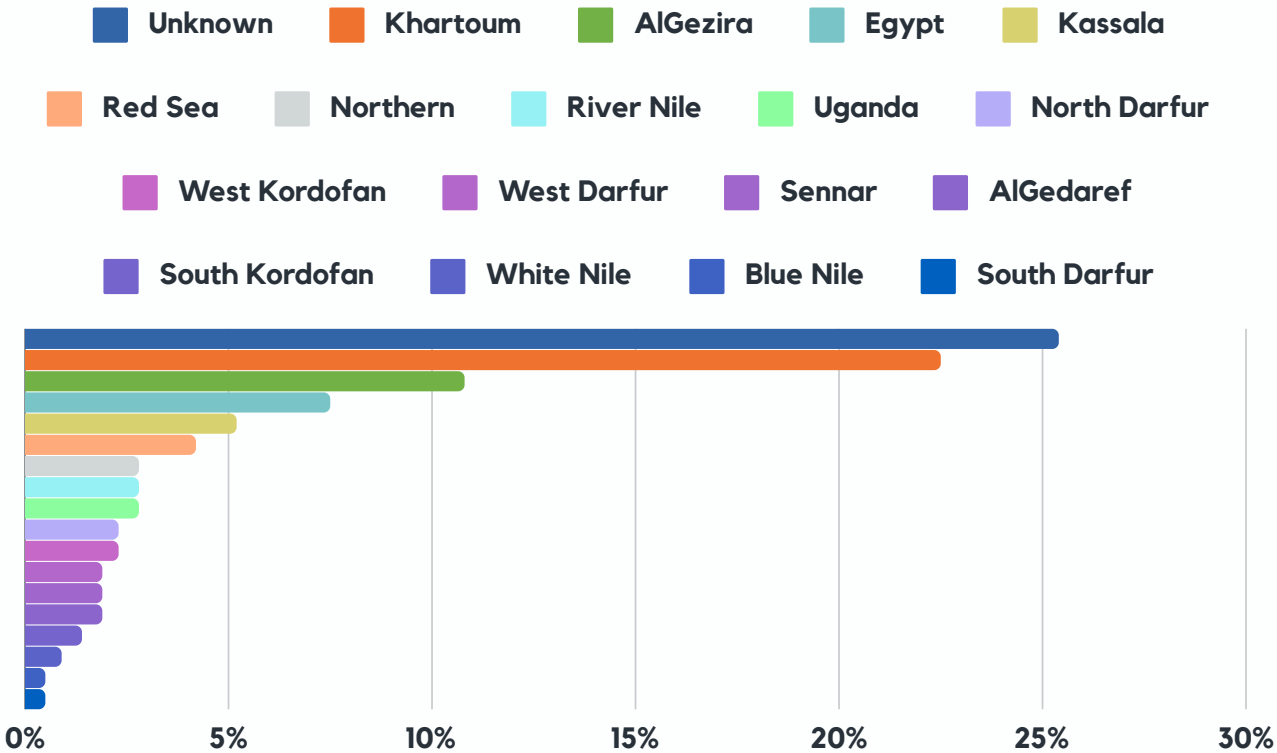


“Guys I want to ask you
Is it necessary to close the file
because I want to go back to
Sudan? If I do not close it, will it
affect me in any way? Please
explain for me”
Woman, Twitter, Egypt



“Guys, what is the solution.
UNHCR, gave us the
appointments in May and on
13th of March, the situation will
be more difficult as they said
the appointment message will
not protect us 😞”
Woman, Facebook, Egypt

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA



This is the geographical breakdown of 212 social media posts collected between 24 January and 20 February, 2024.

Due to conflict in Sudan, many Sudanese have lost their passports, birth certificates, and other identification documents. The loss of these documents has affected them in various ways. For example, a social media user shared on Facebook her inability to vaccinate her child due to the absence of a birth certificate and passport and shared her urgent need for a vaccination center that does not require identification documents.

The absence of a passport also affects people who use government-issued travel documents, it hinders their access to SIM cards and their ability to withdraw money. Individuals who face these challenges turn to social media to find those with valid passports and refugee cards to help them.

“Peace be upon you. We arrived with travel documents and were shocked by the harsh reality that requires a passport at every step. Currently, we don't have SIM cards and cannot withdraw money from abroad due to this issue. Consequently, we are unable to rent an apartment. We are looking for someone, a man or a woman, with a valid refugee card or passport to help us with this matter. Note: If the rent is also possible with just the passport or ID card, please let us know to avoid any complications.”

Facebook, Uganda

OTHER HUMANITARIAN INFORMATION NEEDS

Individuals continue to look for information regarding the whereabouts of missing loved ones. Shelter also continues to be a key humanitarian need for displaced people, and it is common for individuals to seek advice and information regarding shelter online, such as the available shelter centers for displaced persons in Kassala and Port Sudan.

How can Social Media listening contribute to Accountability?

Internews' timely social media listening activities can help humanitarian organizations plan and adapt their programs and activities, to ensure they are responding to communities' needs and priorities and identifying harmful misinformation or information gaps. Listening attentively to people's concerns through social media, and understanding their priorities allows people affected by the conflict to influence and shape the humanitarian response to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to needs that are voiced. Social media listening is one way to ensure accountable humanitarian support is being provided.

Internews Methodology

Internews' analysts gather feedback, concerns, and rumors posted on social media by individuals affected by conflict and displacement in Sudan. The example posts featured in this report are representative of the most common concerns seen across the data set. All data is collected in the original language and categorized by theme to support analysis that aligns with and supports humanitarian coordination mechanisms and response.

To access the anonymized data set that supports this analysis, please contact Asia Kambal, akambal@internews.org.