UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

PROTECTION BRIEF SUDAN

August 2025

Front Cover Photograph:

A volunteer health promoter, this mother-of-seven also hosts three refugee families (15 people) who fled Khartoum since the conflict started, at their shelter in the UNHCR-supported Alagaya refugee camp, Al Jabalain, White Nile State, Sudan. © UNHCR/Samuel Otieno

Disclaimer :

This Protection Brief on UNHCR's refugee response was drafted prior to the escalation of fighting and increased violence against civilians in Darfur and Kordofan in October 2025. While the conflict landscape in Sudan has continued to shift since April 2023, the key advocacy messages and observations presented in this Brief remain relevant as of its release date.

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Operational Context & Analysis

Despite ongoing diplomatic efforts, the conflict that erupted in Sudan in April 2023 continues to fuel one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, one marked by extreme violence, widespread human rights violations, and mass displacement.

The conflict has been characterized by sexual violence, torture, arbitrary arrests, and targeted attacks based on ethnicity or displacement status, among other brutal abuses. In this devastating environment, refugees, asylum-seekers, and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees face heightened risks. These threshold risks are compounded by secondary displacement, restrictive policies, and sharply limited access to basic rights and services.

The dynamics of displacement are complex and shifting : As of August 2025,[1], an estimated 13 million people were internally displaced (IDPs), with 8.6 million displaced since the conflict began. A further 3.8 million had been forced to flee across borders, the majority of whom are refugees and asylum-seekers. Approximately half of the internally displaced are living within host communities while the rest are in gathering sites in dire humanitarian conditions.

A change in conflict dynamics in late 2024 led to a decline in armed clashes in areas like Al Jazirah, Khartoum, and Sennar. This prompted a significant wave of returns. By August 2025, IOM reported a 15% reduction in displacement figures since January 2025, attributed to the return of nearly 1.7 million IDPs. This trend is also visible among Sudanese refugees spontaneously returning from neighboring countries like Egypt and South Sudan, though often under adverse conditions. While the increase in returns is a positive development, serious concerns remain about the safety, dignity, and long-term sustainability of these returns, as many areas lack basic services and security remains fragile.

The crisis, too, is far from over. Intensified offensives in Darfur and Kordofan continue to fuel violence and displacement. Critical humanitarian access is severely restricted, with no aid reaching the besieged city of El Fasher. The consequences are catastrophic with famine declared in several areas, alongside outbreaks of epidemic diseases. Damaged infrastructure has crippled access to healthcare and education for millions, while disrupted agriculture and supply chains have led to a steady socio-economic decline, rising poverty, and increased vulnerability, exacerbated by weather related disasters. According to the 2025 Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, over half the population—including 16 million children—urgently require humanitarian assistance.

Sudan remains a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and reaffirmed its commitment to refugee protection through eight pledges made in conjunction with the Global Refugee Forum in 2019, the first of which emphasized its open-door policy.[2] As of August 2025, Sudan was hosting over 859,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, with new arrivals continuing to come from South Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. However, the conflict has resulted in severe deterioration of the

[1] The latest forced displacement figures can be found at UNHCR's Operational Data Portal for the Sudan Situation.

[2] Reference UNHCR pledge submission data: *Microsoft Power BI*

protection environment. A government decree from March 2024 has led to stricter punitive measures against undocumented refugees and asylum seekers, including arrests, detention, and deportation. From April-August 2025, over 2,500 refugees were forcibly relocated from Khartoum to camps. UNHCR advocates for all relocations to be voluntary, safe, and to respect family unity.

Women and children bear the brunt of the conflict. Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) is widely reported, and children face heightened risks of violence, recruitment, trafficking, child marriage and family separation. The collapse of education services has disrupted learning for 12.6 million children, leaving youth vulnerable to exploitation. These protection gaps are critical and require targeted intervention, such as awareness raising on children's rights and establishing and reinforcing child protection mechanims.

Despite the challenges, UNHCR remains operational in Sudan, delivering life-saving protection and assistance. We are present in accessible areas and collaborate with local partners to conduct community outreach and referrals for specialized help in regions like Darfur, Kordofan and Khartoum where access has been severely impeded. UNHCR, in collaboration with the Commissioner for Refugees and in line with the Refugee Coordination Model, leads an inclusive refugee response. Protection priorities include registration, documentation, Refugee Status Determination (RSD) support, identification of individuals at heightened risk, Gender Based Violence (GBV) and child protection services, and strengthening local protection capacities. UNHCR is also working with partners to deliver urgent assistance to vulnerable spontaneous returnees. The broader response remains multi-sectoral, combining life-saving protection and assistance with growing efforts to coordinate development and humanitarian actors and responses from the onset of an emergency, and designed to enhance refugees' self-reliance and reduce dependency on aid.

Moving forward, our joint efforts must be strengthened to advance inclusion, self-reliance, and resilience for all displaced populations, and promote opportunities for long-lasting, sustainable solutions, in line with our commitments under the Global Compact on Refugees.

Key Advocacy Messages

UNHCR reiterates its call on all parties to the conflict to :

- **Provide access guarantees for humanitarian personnel and remove administrative barriers,** in line with UN appeals, to enable full and unhindered humanitarian access across Darfur, Kordofan, and Khartoum.

- **Uphold national and international legal obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL),** refraining from and taking all feasible measures to prevent attacks expected to cause harm to civilians and civilian infrastructures and holding those responsible for violating humanitarian and human rights laws accountable.

- **Allow safe passage to civilians** who want to leave areas of conflict and enable civilians' access to humanitarian assistance.

- **Refrain from mobilizing civilian populations** to join the fighting, and from forced recruitment and child recruitment, and ensure that all parties refrain from these acts. Respect the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum and refrain from recruiting refugees into their ranks or using refugee camps, sites or facilities for military purposes.

Government and authorities

- **Refrain from collective punitive measures** targeting foreigners, including refugees and asylum seekers ; ensure individual criminal responsibility and due process for individuals suspected to have violated any laws.

- **Safeguard the fundamental rights of refugees by addressing growing concerns that alleged immigration violations are leading to arbitrary arrest, detention, and deportation.** Such actions violate the 1951 Refugee Convention that refugees should not be penalized for illegal entry or stay as they cross borders to seek safety.

- **Promote legal safeguards and ensure access to legal aid** for both refugees and asylum seekers.

- **Reaffirm and uphold the principle of non-refoulement.**

- **Facilitate the access of refugees and asylum seekers to documentation and legal pathways** to help them regularize their status.

- **Reconsider measures limiting freedom of movement, such as restrictive encampment policies**, which hinders refugees' access to protection services and self-reliance opportunities.

UNHCR calls on States

- **Increase attention and financial resources** to support host communities and the displaced population in Sudan. The reduction in financial resources and associated reduction in assistance is exposing those forcibly displaced, including refugees and asylum-seekers, to negative coping mechanisms, such as risky labour for women and children often leading to protection and GBV risks.

- **Ease or remove restrictive entry requirements for Sudanese** and others fleeing the conflict in Sudan in line with UNHCR guidance in light of the ongoing, armed conflict in Sudan.

- **Implement additional safeguards for unimpeded humanitarian access** in conflict areas, safe passage of humanitarian convoys carrying essential supplies like food and medicine, and the enhanced protection of humanitarian workers.

- **Strengthen support for resettlement and complementary** pathways as critical tools to protect refugees and asylum-seekers in Sudan by identifying third countries willing to welcome them. Expedite the processing of cases submitted

prior to the conflict and ensure timely access to safety and solutions for those at most acute risk.

Donors and other stakeholders

- **Provide flexible, multi-year funding to support UNHCR's protection efforts in Sudan**, particularly for the prevention and response to GBV and for child protection., which are particularly underfunded. In 2025 at least 38,000 people will not have access to life-saving support and specialized response services for survivors of sexual violence, intimate partner violence and exploitation leaving them vulnerable to further sexual violence and other forms of exploitation. Sustained donor engagement is critical to expand GBV services, strengthen protection systems, and ensure comprehensive care for survivors.

- **Support funding mechanisms that enable the re-establishment of a more sustainable protection programs** and advocacy in stable states with high protection needs, while also scaling up and ensuring effective service delivery in conflict-affected areas.

- **Prioritize development support to strengthen government capacity to deliver inclusive services,** particularly healthcare, for refugees, IDPs, and host communities. This is essential to sustain and expand refugee inclusion amid rising health needs. Importantly, too, investing in and building the capacity of host country health systems (as well as other vital services) delivers lasting benefits for both nationals and displaced populations.

- **Increase funding for NGOs, civil society, and women- and youth-led initiatives to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms**, such as psychosocial support, GBV survivor networks, and local protection committees.

- **Support the delivery of essential services in areas of return** and complement these efforts with targeted interventions that promote safe, dignified, and sustainable reintegration, in line with United Nations frameworks for long-lasting solutions.

- **Support efforts to strengthen social protection schemes and ensure the inclusion of the large number of vulnerable individuals among refugees, IDPs**, and returnees. Any future system must integrate humanitarian cash and services with state structure, local civil society mechanims and private sector deliver channels

Key Trends & Figures as of August 2025[3]

859,187

Registered refugees and asylum-seekers hosted in Sudan

270,472

Secondarily displaced refugees and asylum-seekers

3,273,547

Registered Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers hosted outside Sudan

9,819,680

Conflict-induced IDPs
2.36M Prior to April 2023
7.46M Post April 2023

442,590

Reported Sudanese returnees as of 31 August 2025 since January 2024

2,249,163

IDP returnees between November 2024 and July 2025 (78% returned from locations within Sudan, while 21% reportedly returned from abroad)

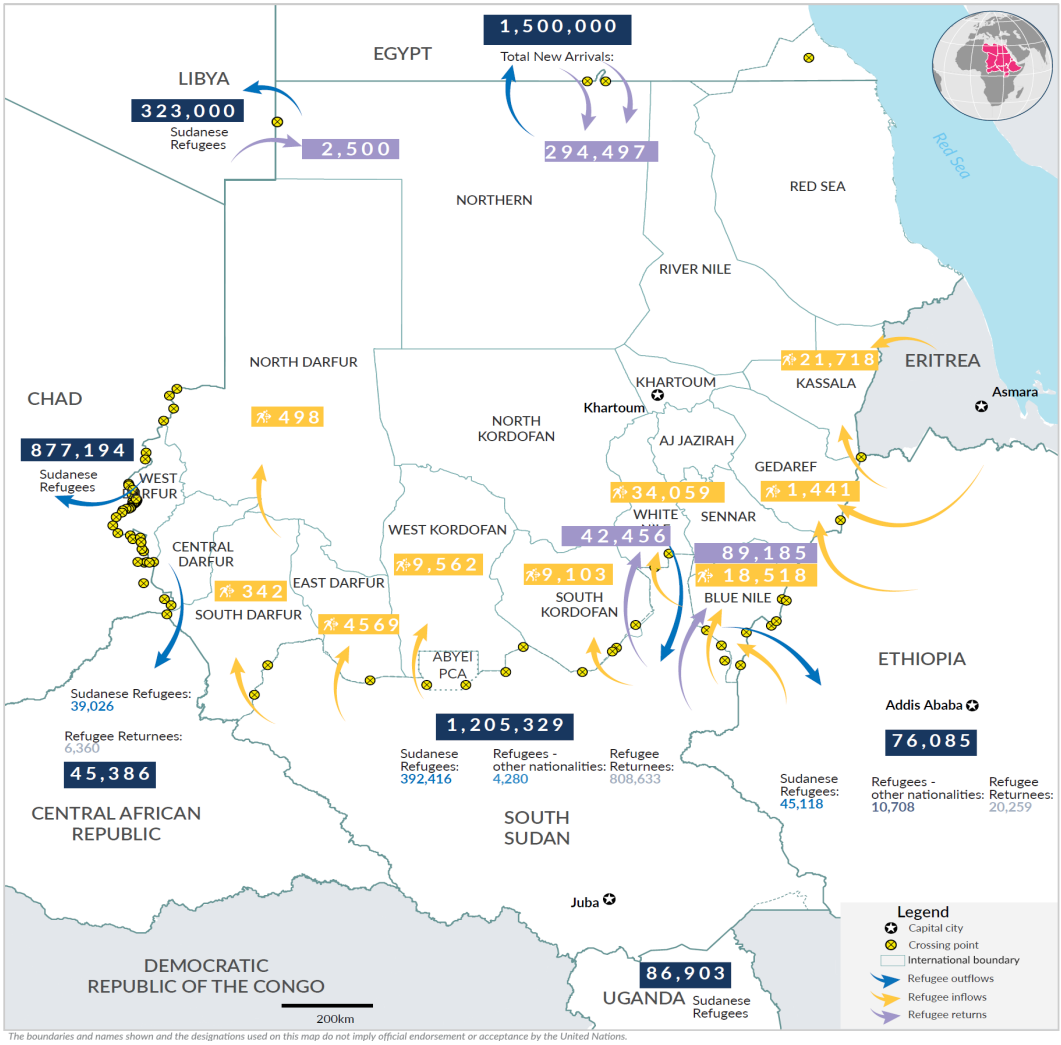
Before the conflict erupted in April 2023, Sudan was a major refugee-hosting nation, with over 1.1 million registered refugees and asylum-seekers as of March 2023. By January 2024, 961,000 individuals remained active in UNHCR's records, all navigating a profoundly deteriorated humanitarian and socio-political landscape.

The conflict has since triggered a dramatic reversal, turning Sudan into a primary source of displacement. An estimated 3.8 million people have fled to neighboring countries like Egypt, Chad, and South Sudan, creating a complex regional crisis where a substantial portion of the refugees are now Sudanese nationals. To address this, UNHCR's teams in Sudan and neighboring countries have enhanced their systems to identify new arrivals. This coordination allows for the updating of records and secure data transfer, enabling forcibly displaced individuals to access vital protection and assistance in host countries.

[3] *Continually updated figures are available on UNHCR's Operational Data Portal for the Sudan Situation.*

Despite the ongoing conflict, Sudan continues to receive new refugees from countries struggling with their own conflict and instability: cumulative new arrivals from April 2023 to August 2025 had reached 90,093. The vast majority (97%) are from South Sudan, followed by Eritrea (2%) and Ethiopia (1%). As of July 2025, 69% of refugees were living in camps, which is a reversal from pre-conflict when the majority resided out-of-camp and enjoying freedom of movement and access to vital employment and livelihood opportunities. This development is attributed to stricter enforcement of encampment policies, refugees moving to camps to access services, and secondary displacement as people flee conflict hotspots. Refugees are primarily concentrated in White Nile State (50%), Kassala (12%), and Gedaref (7%). Meanwhile, the majority of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)—54%—are in the Darfur states (South, North, Central, and East), followed by White Nile (5%).

Total inflows and outflows to Sudan as of 31 August 2025



Source : UNHCR – 31 August 2025

Methodology

This brief summarizes UNHCR's protection efforts in response to the ongoing humanitarian crisis as of August 2025, focused on preventing, mitigating, and addressing risks faced by refugees, asylum seekers and returnees in an incredible complex and challenging context with limited long-lasting solutions available. The analysis is based on multiple data sources, including UNHCR's programme reports (January–August 2025), incident reporting, field monitoring, and observations. Protection monitoring was conducted through the Refugee Emergency Protection Monitoring (REPM) framework. Additional tools were used, such as household surveys, border monitoring, Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessments (MSNA), and evaluation instruments. These were complemented by external sources like OCHA's Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)[4] and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) 2025, and IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)[5]. Access constraints and underreporting of sensitive violations like rape and other sexual violence presented key limitations to data collection, requiring UNHCR to turn to diverse sources and partner reports. This brief highlights key achievements over the period, ongoing challenges, and urgent needs of refugees, asylum seekers and returning displaced populations, to support informed and effective protection responses.

UNHCR Response: Progress and Impact Areas

This overview highlights UNHCR's protection response and its impact from 2024 through August 2025, building on the previous brief, and demonstrating continued progress in safeguarding the rights and well-being of refugees, asylum seekers, returnees and affected populations despite steep and shifting challenges.

Border monitoring and protection risk analysis: In January 2025, UNHCR launched systematic monitoring along Sudan's borders with Egypt, South Sudan, Libya, and Ethiopia to identify protection risks and track spontaneous return trends. The initiative combined household surveys, key informant interviews, and regular visits to the borders, enabling timely referrals of vulnerable individuals. Data collection and analysis informs trends in cross-border movements and population profiles, feeding into interactive dashboards shared with partners through protection platforms to support coherent early warning and operational planning. Additionally, the "CORE" report for Sudan, UNHCR's enhanced information-management approach to new refugee emergences, provides bi-weekly updates on new arrivals, displacement trends, and assistance delivered by the Government, UNHCR, and partners. UNHCR is also strengthening the capacity of the Sudanese COR, national partners, and border authorities through training and material support.

[4] *https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025-overview*

[5] *https://dtm.iom.int/reports/dtm-sudan-return-monitoring-snapshot-07?close=true*

Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) & Community Engagement: UNHCR and partners prioritized closing gaps in communication with communities (CwC) and community engagement through consultations and Multipurpose Community Centers (MPCCs). Between January and June 2025, 746,753 individuals (395,781 women; 350,972 men) were reached with integrated protection services, primarily via MPCCs and Community-Based Protection Networks (CBPNs). As of 30 June, 60 MPCCs were operational, planned, or under rehabilitation across 14 states, including 11 in Darfur and West Kordofan. In Darfur alone, MPCCs served an average of 1,653 individuals monthly.

CBPNs continue to play a critical role in disseminating timely information on security, services, and where providers who can help are located, enabling broader outreach than UNHCR and partners alone. By mid-2025, 91 CBPNs with 1,592 members were supported in priority areas. A joint call center with WFP, launched in mid-2024, allows displaced persons to submit feedback and complaints, reinforcing accountability and responsiveness.

Localisation and empowering community-based organisations: As part of efforts to strengthen local protection capacities and promote inclusive service delivery, UNHCR supported 22 Forcibly Displaced Persons-Led Organizations (FDPLOs) across Sudan. Additionally, 28 women-led organizations (WLOs) were nominated for a Digital Gender Inclusion and Innovation Bootcamp aimed at enhancing digital literacy, institutional capacity, and gender-responsive programming. In 2024, UNHCR supported a Kassala-based project led by a WLO focused on identifying and referring displaced individuals in need of mental health and psychosocial support. UNHCR is also working with UN agencies and international NGOs to establish a regional coordination platform for WLOs, ensuring their meaningful participation in protection planning and response. These initiatives reflect UNHCR's commitment to empower local actors—particularly women-led groups—as key partners in delivering inclusive and sustainable protection outcomes.

Child Protection: UNHCR continues to strengthen child protection systems through partnerships and capacity-building. As of July 2025, 67% of identified unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) in Eastern Sudan and White Nile were in alternative care, though only 39% had secured long-term solutions. A total of 9,193 UASC received specialized case management, with Best Interest Procedures (BIP) initiated for 28% of children at risk, enabling referrals to legal, medical, and cash assistance. To strengthen national capacity, Train-the-Trainers (ToT) sessions on BIP and Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms (MRM) were conducted across the country.

Prevention and response to Gender-Based Violence: UNHCR sustained its GBV response in accessible areas, ensuring survivors received essential services including lifesaving psychosocial support, legal counselling, and medical care. In remote locations, referrals were facilitated through Protection Desks, five WLOs, and CBPNs. Between January and July 2025, 65 awareness sessions reached 13,200 individuals with key messages on GBV risks, trafficking, child protection, and how to report sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA).

In 2024, the Girba Field Office introduced an initiative to foster community dialogue on forced marriage and denial of resources. To strengthen safe referral pathways, the Field Office also trained 357 frontline workers (190 women, 167 men) using established GBV protocols. Despite these efforts, access constraints and limited resources continue to hinder quality service delivery, particularly for women and girls affected by GBV and CRSV.

In partnership with UNFPA and UNICEF, and to strengthen case management and inter-agency coordination, UNHCR is implementing GBVIMS+, a system for recording, analysing and reporting incidents. Trainings for GBV partners were held in Gedaref in October 2024, with a refresher conducted in August 2025 following service disruptions by key partners due to funding constraints.

Upholding the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum: UNHCR continued its collaboration with the Government through targeted outreach and stakeholder training, including engagement with displaced populations. In White Nile and Kassala states, UNHCR and COR conducted joint trainings for local authorities and refugee communities on the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum to raise awareness and address risks of recruitment. In Gedaref, 3,000 multilingual IEC materials were distributed, and 24 refugee representatives were trained on rights and responsibilities. A workshop in Um Rakuba, held in partnership with Mutawinat, engaged 125 participants, including law enforcement and judicial actors. In early 2025, UNHCR and COR launched targeted awareness campaigns in refugee camps, complemented by a joint workshop with IOM and partners on mixed movements, reinforcing the civilian nature of asylum. A combatant screening tool was deployed at Village 8 transit center to support individual registration and documentation, enhancing the identification of potential combatants among asylum seekers.

Strengthening national asylum capacity: UNHCR provides infrastructure and training support to COR, which leads RSD. UNHCR's analysis revealed 35,000 pending asylum cases, and working with COR, UNHCR proposed a plan to clear the backlog by Q3 2025.UNHCR helped to scale up registration outreach, and over 90,000 identification documents were issued through new registrations and renewals, which are critical for securing legal rights and accessing services. UNHCR will continue to prioritise technical support to the Government to improve procedural effectiveness, ensure fair and efficient processing of asylum claims, and provide legal and operational assistance.

Civil documentation: UNHCR also continues to collaborate with partners and the civil registry to improve civil documentation for refugees and asylum seekers, despite persistent constraints on access and capacity. UNHCR and UNICEF have strengthened their partnership to advance the civil documentation and related rights of refugees, with a focus on children who are at particular risk of statelessness when they lack documentary proof of nationality. The UNHCR-UNICEF collaboration, formalized through a recently revised Letter of Understanding, encompasses joint advocacy for an inclusive civil registration system that provides free birth registration for all. Operationally, the partnership provides direct support to civil registry offices and mobile teams, coupled with capacity-building initiatives. Furthermore, the agencies are working jointly to ensure the inclusion of refugee children within national social welfare systems and

are advocating for their rights under frameworks such as the Sudanese Child Rights Act of 2010.

Legal aid and access to justice: In partnership with a national NGO working on the rights of women and children, UNHCR continued providing legal aid and counselling to refugees and IDPs across Sudan, facilitating access to fundamental rights through civil documentation, legal representation in cases of arrest and detention, and support in housing, land, and property matters. In 2024, over 16,300 individuals received direct legal aid, as a result of the partnership, as well as UNHCR's direct assistance including representation and counselling, while broader legal interventions reached more than 84,000 people through awareness sessions, training, detention monitoring, and referrals. During the first half of 2025, 13,490 individuals accessed legal aid services, reflecting a growing demand for legal assistance in the current context. Community-based legal support was strengthened through paralegal networks across key states. However, legal aid operations encountered increasing challenges as the national NGO faced challenges in operating in key states significantly limiting access to justice and protection services.".

Supporting spontaneous refugee returns: UNHCR's border monitoring reveals that 92% of returnees from Egypt cite financial support as their most pressing need, while 89% from South Sudan prioritize food. Cash, food, health, and water consistently emerge as the most urgent needs across all corridors. However, returnees from South Sudan face greater housing challenges, and those from Egypt highlight the need for tailored responses rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach to returnee populations. In border areas, like Wadi Halfa to Sudan's north and Joda to Sudan's south, UNHCR is identifying and assisting the most vulnerable returnees, through cash support and referrals to services such as legal counselling and psychosocial care. Between September 2024 and July 2025, over 11,000 vulnerable Sudanese returnees from Egypt received three months of cash assistance (total: USD 180), facilitated through newly opened bank accounts. UNHCR-run protection desks continue to offer case management and legal aid, though funding constraints limit reach. UNHCR continues to map the number and quality of provider-partners to whom vulnerable people needing services can be referred to when needed and expanding long-term reintegration support—including cash, civil documentation. Integration of most vulnerable forcibly displaced persons in state-provided social protection schemes is urgently needed.

UNHCR continues to support South Sudanese refugees in Sudan who choose to return home spontaneously. A June 2024 survey found that 49% did not intend to return, 39% planned to return soon, and 12% remained undecided. While 63% felt informed, many lacked clarity—particularly regarding security and available support. To address this, UNHCR provides country-of-origin information through protection desks. In Gedaref, UNHCR is counselling Ethiopian refugees preparing to return. Since April 2023, over 23,000 individuals have returned spontaneously to their home countries, with UNHCR advocating for safe passage and faster processing of travel permits.

Resettlement and Complementary Pathways: By March 2023, 339 resettlement submissions were made, but new submissions were suspended after the conflict

began in April. UNHCR continues to counsel individuals and advocate for expedited processing of pre-conflict cases. Despite airport closures, 241 refugees departed via Port Sudan for resettlement to Canada, Sweden, Australia, and the United States. An additional 442 left through complementary pathways such as family reunification and private sponsorship.

Protection Risks

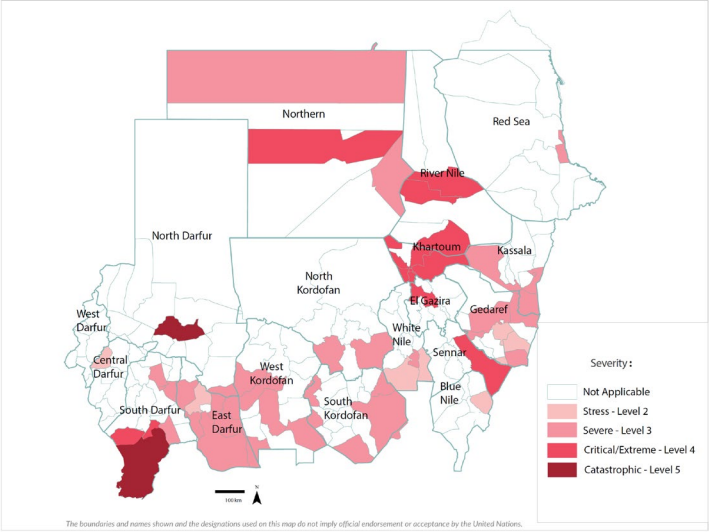
Protection Risk I

Refugees in Kordofan and Darfur face heightened protection risks and limited access to life-saving humanitarian assistance

An estimated 82,557 refugees are currently hosted across the Darfur region, with East Darfur accommodating the largest number, with 41,152 individuals. Approximately 81,000 refugees reside in the Kordofan region. The refugee population in Darfur has grown in 2025 due to the arrival of some refugees previously residing in Kordofan and new arrivals from South Sudan. The ongoing conflict continues to place refugees and asylum seekers under significant strain.

UNHCR's Refugee Protection Monitoring identifies Kordofan and Darfur as regions of critical concern. This is reinforced by findings from the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), which ranks Kordofan, East Darfur, and Central Darfur at severity level 3, while North and South Darfur are classified at severity level 5, indicating a complex and escalating humanitarian crisis.

These severity levels reflect the deepening impact of the crisis on displaced populations. Refugees face heightened protection risks due to active conflict, lack of legal documentation, and perceived political affiliations. These vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by restricted humanitarian access, which limits the delivery of critical assistance and disrupts essential services and livelihoods.



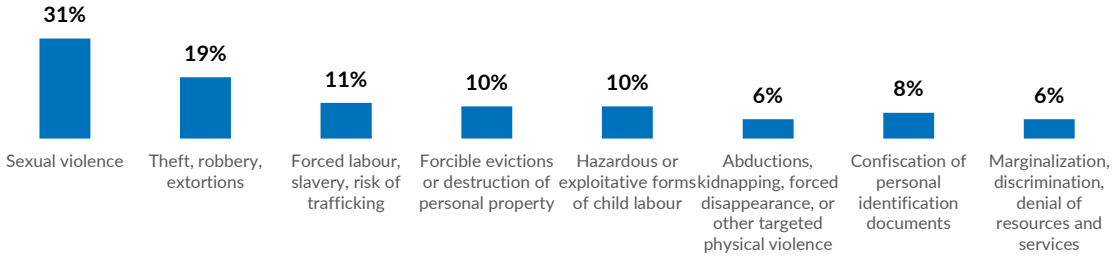
Source: UNHCR (August 2025), MSNA Data -Refugee

The hman cost of this conflict is stark. Refugees in Kordofan and Darfur report exposure to violence and violent threats at rates significantly above the national average. The conflict has been particularly intense in North Darfur and Al Obeid. Meanwhile, in South Kordofan, towns like Kadugli have endured a prolonged siege, which included a devastating

2025 artillery attack by the SPLM/A-N on a civilian gathering that resulted in 52 deaths, predominantly women and children.

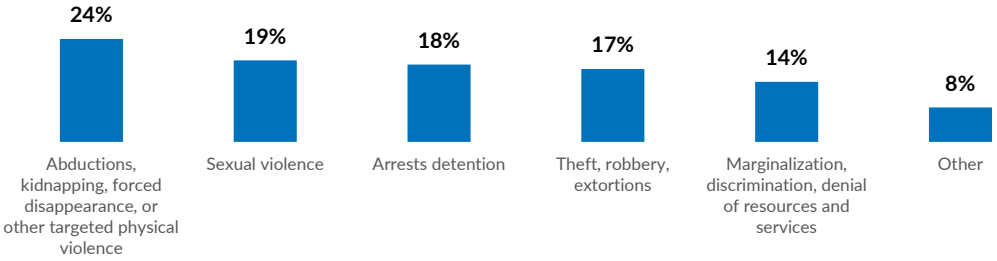
This dangerous environment is reflected in the data: 35% of households in Kordofan and 12% in Darfur reported direct or indirect experience with serious threats to their safety, compared to a 7% national average. The most common threats are sexual violence, robbery, abduction and forced disappearance (See Figure 1) below.

Figure 1 : Nature of Protection incidents in Kordofan states



Source : UNHCR Refugee Protection Monitoring using Kobo Tools, 2024-2025

Figure 2 : Nature of Protection incidents in Darfur states



Source : UNHCR Refugee Protection Monitoring using Kobo Tools, 2024-2025

UNHCR's protection monitoring continues to document severe human rights abuses and a collapse of the rule of law, creating an environment of extreme risk for refugees, asylum-seekers, and all civilians. Analysis reveals that armed actors frequently target individuals based on ethnic identity, with reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detention, and conflict-related sexual violence being commonplace. Incidents of kidnapping, looting, and extortion are also pervasive, particularly in conflict hotspots like Khartoum, Darfur, and Kordofan. The widespread distribution of weapons has further fueled criminal activity, exacerbating the threats faced by forcibly displaced populations.

Movement restrictions and legal vulnerability: Refugees and asylum-seekers face significantly heightened movement restrictions due to safety concerns, a lack of legal documentation, and perceived political affiliations. For instance, in Kordofan, 57% of households lack legal documentation, leaving them vulnerable to arrest and extortion. Reports indicate that attempts to flee conflict zones are often thwarted at checkpoints, where individuals face harassment, looting, and denied safe passage or are forced to turn around.

Across Darfur states, a combination of formal barriers, informal practices, and fear-driven self-restriction severely impedes refugees' ability to move to safer areas. Recent assessments confirm that refugees in North Kordofan and Central Darfur are particularly affected, with reported movement restriction rates of 45% and 40% respectively—far exceeding the national average of 24%. This widespread inability to move freely prevents access not only to safety but also to critical protection services.

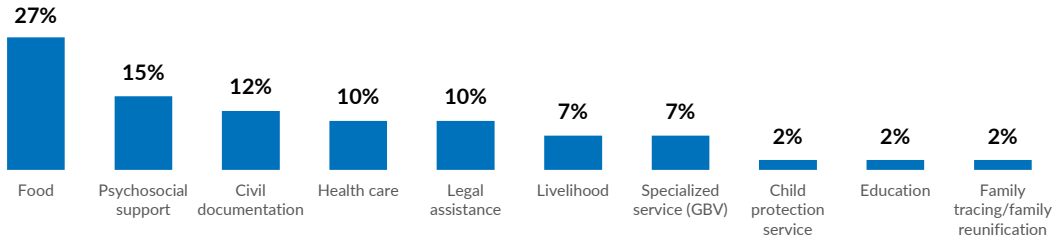
Critical gaps in humanitarian access and services: The operational environment is defined by severe service gaps, which are worsened by secondary displacement and the stranding of populations in or between conflict hotspots. UNHCR monitoring highlights critical shortages of food and life-saving assistance, with newly arrived and unregistered individuals in Kordofan and Darfur being especially vulnerable. While UNHCR and its partners are conducting remote monitoring, the limited operational presence and access on the ground make it difficult to verify new arrivals and deliver adequate assistance, leaving fundamental needs unmet.

Refugees in conflict-affected states of Darfur and Kordofan continue to face severe barriers to accessing essential services, including adequate shelter, healthcare, education, and assistance in finding ways to support themselves and their families. In Darfur, movement restrictions imposed by armed actors, notably the RSF, are severely impeding both civilian movement and the delivery of humanitarian aid. This has resulted in critical shortages of food and water and has drastically reduced access to healthcare, heightening overall vulnerability. The most requested services among refugee communities are psychosocial support, child protection, legal assistance, and specialized care for survivors of gender-based violence (See Figures 2 and 3 below).

MSNA findings confirm a severe hunger crisis across Sudan, driven by conflict and a lack of resources. Nationally, 72% of households reported someone went to bed hungry in the last 30 days, a figure that rises to catastrophic levels in conflict zones like North Darfur (98%), West Kordofan (90%), and South Darfur (87%). Similarly, 74% of households nationwide ran out of food due to a lack of resources, with rates exceeding 90% in several states.

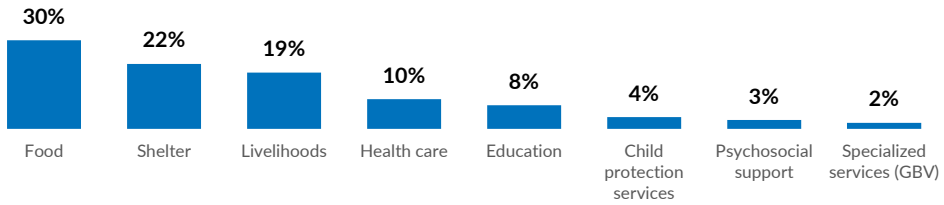
Access to essential services is critically limited nationwide. Half of the national population cannot access medical care, a problem that affects 78% of households in West Kordofan. Furthermore, specialized protection services (such as child protection and to prevent and respond to GBV) are inaccessible to over half the population in high-risk areas like North Darfur (51%) and North Kordofan (53%), compared to the 27% national average, creating a severe gap just where needs are most acute.

Figure 3 : Requested referrals by refugees and asylum seekers in Kordofan states



Source : UNHCR Refugee Protection Monitoring using Kobo tool kit 2024-2025

Figure 4 : Requested referrals by refugees and asylum seekers in Darfur states



Source : UNHCR Refugee Protection Monitoring using Kobo tool kit 2024-2025

The deteriorating conditions have prompted some refugees to seek return to their countries of origin, primarily South Sudan and the Central African Republic, albeit under adverse circumstances. Spontaneous movements to these countries have been observed since April 2023, hundreds of refugees formally requesting UNHCR's assistance to facilitate their return.

The operational environment remains highly challenging. In Kordofan, ongoing conflict creates extreme volatility, leading to access restrictions, direct threats to aid workers, and a heavy reliance on remote management strategies. In response, UNHCR and partners, including the Commission for Refugees (COR), are leveraging protection monitoring data to guide targeted interventions. These efforts focus on enhancing access to legal documentation, expanding community-based protection mechanisms, and intensifying advocacy to address the acute vulnerabilities driven by the conflict.

Protection Risk II

Limitations on freedom of movement, incidents of arbitrary or unlawful arrest and detention, forced deportations, and heightened risks of refoulement

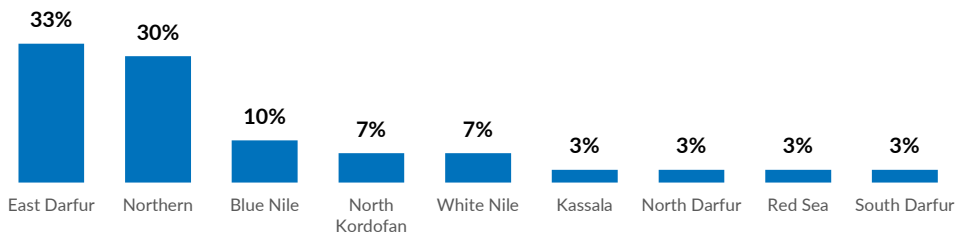
Forcibly displaced people in Sudan, experienced a continued erosion of their protection during the period covered by this brief. **The conflict has intensified the government's strict enforcement of its encampment policy and other movement restrictions on refugees and asylum seekers,** citing national law and Sudan's reservation to the 1951 Refugee Convention as justification. This crackdown, reinforced by a State of Emergency, curfews, and frequent security patrols, has made movement perilous, with undocumented individuals facing a constant threat of arrest, detention, deportation. The forced deportation incidents often result to

violations of rights including family separations and loss of property and personal belongings.

The impact is widespread: approximately 25% of refugee households reported being unable to move freely. The main obstacles are omnipresent security checkpoints and a pervasive fear for personal safety. In high-risk states such as North Kordofan and Central Darfur, these restrictions are not merely an inconvenience; they are a critical barrier to life-saving services, cutting off communities from healthcare and protection.

Refugee Protection Monitoring data shows that 13% of all reported protection incidents involve detention, with rates soaring to 33% in East Darfur and 30% in Northern State since 2024. These statistics are a stark indicator of the growing dangers faced by refugees and asylum-seekers, especially those lacking documentation in light of Sudan's escalating security measures.

Figure 5 : Reported arrests and detention incidents per state



Source : Refugee Protection Monitoring using Kobo toolkit, June 2025

In 2025, arrests and detentions have risen sharply, particularly in states that were retaken by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) such as Gezira and Khartoum. UNHCR's incident tracking tool, alongside its Refugee Protection Monitoring (RPM), has documented a sharp increase in the arrest and detention of refugees since July 2025 compared to the previous year. Data from a May 2025 review indicates that South Sudanese refugees bear the brunt of arrests and detentions, constituting 94% of affected individuals, followed by Ethiopians at 4%.

The risk of refoulement is rising, as recent analysis indicates that these deportations are not standard law enforcement operations. Instead, they often involve mass roundups aimed simply at reducing foreign presence. During these operations, undocumented refugees and asylum seekers are at serious risk of being forcibly returned to countries where they may face life-threatening harm. Such actions violate principles under both international and Sudanese law—specifically Article 31 of the 1951 Refugee Convention and Article 29 of Sudan's 2014 Asylum Act. These provisions protect refugees from being penalized for irregular entry or presence, recognizing that conflict and a halt in registration and asylum procedures may prevent them from renewing documentation or accessing legal pathways. Penalizing refugees through fines or deportation for lacking valid documents

undermines their right to seek protection and contravenes established legal standards.[6]

In Gezira, Sennar, and Khartoum states—the epicentre of mass deportation activity—the primary aim appears to be the forced return of South Sudanese nationals who have long resided in Sudan. In May 2025, UNHCR and the Commissioner for Refugees (COR) endorsed a Strategic Approach on Protection and Solutions for unregistered South Sudanese, aligned with UNHCR's Position on Return to South Sudan and Sudan's legal framework. This approach categorizes South Sudanese in Sudan into three groups: (i) those present before South Sudan's independence or born in Sudan; (ii) those who fled between 2013 and 2018; and (iii) those who arrived after the 2019 peace agreement. It recommends prima facie refugee recognition for groups (ii) and (iii), while encouraging alternative legal pathways—such as naturalization or residency permits—for the pre-secession group. Crucially, all categories must be protected from forced removal. Further, in accordance with the 2014 Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UNHCR, the Sudanese Ministry of Interior, and the Sudanese Commission on Refugees—and consistent with longstanding practice since its adoption—South Sudanese were recognized as 'brothers and sisters,' granted registration, and afforded rights to reside, work, and move freely within Sudan.

The deportation of South Sudanese who have been long-term residents in Sudan not only contravenes international human rights standards but also raises other concerns about the manner in which these deportations have been executed and about how they deny rights these individuals have acquired over time due to their prolonged presence in Sudan. Reports indicate that deportations have been profoundly distressing: In Gezira, deportees described being forcibly rounded up and then required to organize and finance their own transportation to South Sudan. This has resulted in family separations, significant emotional trauma, and profound uncertainty about their future.

Deportations are increasing: Between January and June 2025 alone, over 4,800 South Sudanese were forcibly expelled through the Joda/Wunthou border, often without due process. These actions are exacerbated by a rise in hate speech and negative public perceptions that falsely frame refugees as security threats, further eroding social cohesion and refugees' access to essential services.

UNHCR, the Commission for Refugees (COR), and legal aid partners are actively monitoring detentions and advocating for release of refugees and asylum seekers. However, the ability to provide legal aid and representation is severely hampered by the collective and rapid nature of the arrests and deportations, often carried out by security. The absence of legal aid partners in Khartoum and Gezira, significantly limiting the legal resources available to detainees in these areas.

[6] *See UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection No. 14: Non-penalization of refugees on account of their irregular entry or presence and restrictions on their movements in accordance with Article 31 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees | Refworld.*

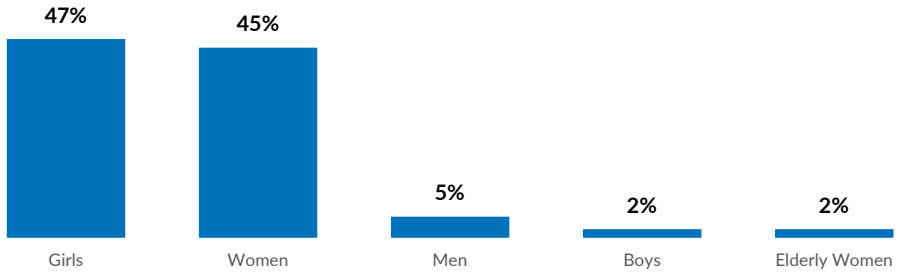
Protection Risk III

Women and girls remain highly vulnerable to ongoing violence, threats, and other protection risks

In Sudan, gender-based violence (GBV) remains significantly under-reported. Survivors often face serious barriers to accessing support services due to fear of stigma, retaliation, and insecurity linked to the ongoing conflict. These challenges hinder timely and effective responses to GBV incidents. Women's economic participation is also constrained: nationally, 22% of women cite a lack of employment opportunities and 11% cite fear of harassment/GBV in the workplace as barriers, with West Kordofan and South Darfur reporting above national levels. This dynamic underscores how safety risks and access to livelihoods intersect.

According to UNHCR protection monitoring reports, forcibly displaced women face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence. The most reported GBV risks include physical assault (intimate partner violence), rape and sexual assault, forced/early/child marriage, and psychological/emotional abuse.

Figure 6 : Individuals most affected by sexual violence incidents across the country



Source : UNHCR Refugee Protection Monitoring (RPM) -2024-2025

UNHCR protection monitoring data reveals that GBV is a critical and widespread threat, with sexual assault alone constituting 27% of all reported protection incidents nationwide. Most survivors are women and girls (92%), while men and boys account for 7% of reported conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) incidents. These incidents are most concentrated in the conflict-affected regions of Darfur, Kordofan, and White Nile.

The convergence of active conflict, severe food insecurity, and a lack of livelihood opportunities creates a perfect storm of risks, exacerbating intimate partner violence (IPV), sexual exploitation, and harmful coping mechanisms such as.... Women and girls directly link the scarcity of food and the deteriorating socio-economic conditions to a measurable increase in IPV within camp settings.

Despite the escalating need, access to life-saving GBV services remains extremely limited. The conflict has directly destroyed and looted critical infrastructure, including hospitals and clinics, collapsing formal response mechanisms in many areas. In relatively stable regions, health systems are overwhelmed by the influx of displaced people, crippling their capacity to provide even basic care, let alone specialized GBV support.

Severe underfunding across the humanitarian response has created critical gaps in service delivery, further compounding the risks for women and girls. This has led to a documented rise in forced, early and child marriages—which account for 15% of GBV incidents—as families resort to desperate measures to cope with their economic plight.[7]The deterioration of conditions has also raised the threat of sexual exploitation and abuse, as women and girls are forced to engage in survival sex to meet their basic needs.

In addition, the physical environment in many camps also actively heightens the vulnerability of women and girls. Inadequate lighting, a lack of sex-segregated latrines, long distances to water and service points, and the absence of specialized GBV services all increase the risk of violence. In response, UNHCR and partners are scaling up survivor-centered services, including emergency medical care, psychosocial support, and legal assistance. In 2024, over 37,065 forcibly displaced people benefited from these services. This life-saving work continues, with 16,941 individuals reached between January and July 2025. However, the scale of the crisis far outpaces the current response capacity.

Protection Risk IV

The conflict has significantly heightened protection risks for children

Family separation is a primary concern. MSNA data indicates that 9% of households nationally have children under 18 living without both parents. This figure rises alarmingly in conflict hotspots, reaching 21% in North Darfur and 19% in North Kordofan. Furthermore, 8% of households nationwide report a child currently living outside the home, a situation affecting 21% of households in North Kordofan and 17% in North Darfur.

Children living away from home face serious protection risks: 76% are compelled to seek work (which can include hazardous or exploitative labour), and 63% are married. Families surveyed also indicate an alarming 36% of children living away from home are missing or out of contact. Alarmingly, 8% of these cases are linked to kidnapping or abduction. These trends reflect the urgent need for strengthened child protection measures and targeted interventions in high-risk areas.

Access to child protection services remains uneven. While 63% of respondents nationally report no barriers, this drops to 44% in North Kordofan and 51% in South Kordofan. The main barrier is lack of awareness of what child protection help is available and how to access it, reported by 41% in North Kordofan compared to 23% nationally. Other challenges relate to distance and transportation which affects35% of households in North Kordofan compared to 8% nationally. These gaps highlight the need for localized outreach on child protection and targeted service delivery strategies in high-risk areas.

[7] *See https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1220/document/sudan-humanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2025/article/362-gender-based-violence-area-responsibility; see also https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/111029.*

The conflict has also devastated access to education countrywide. Only 22% of refugee school-age children attended formal education regularly in the six months, month-month in 2025. Among the over 75% who are completely out of school, 82% have no access to any alternative learning opportunities. The main causes of disruption are school closures due to conflict (46%) and financial barriers (35%). Compounding this, one in five households reported concerns about the learning environment, citing schools being used as shelters for the displaced (36%), insecurity (26%), and poor infrastructure (19%).

This collapse of schools or other safe learning spaces as both protective and educational structures leaves children acutely vulnerable to exploitation, child labor, and child marriage, recruitment by armed groups, and other severe protection risks.

Opportunities & Challenges

UNHCR's protection monitoring confirms that refugee status, sex, and age are intersecting factors that create acute and compounded risks for individuals in conflict-affected states like Darfur and Kordofan. These overlapping vulnerabilities expose them to targeted threats and extreme hardship. The operational environment remains severely constrained, with access barriers, limited funding, and reduced staffing hindering the delivery of life-saving assistance and protection. The near-total collapse of public services, especially in education and health, has further eroded the capacity to support forcibly displaced people.

In response, UNHCR and partners have developed a multi-year ***Sudan Refugee Protection and Solutions Strategy -June 2025 - December 2027***[8] aligned with the Country Response Plan. This strategy aims to address the underlying causes of protection risks by combining immediate life-saving support with efforts to strengthen self-reliance and pursue durable solutions from the outset of the emergency.

In education, UNHCR remains committed to refugee inclusion in national systems. A key achievement is the Sudanese government's endorsement of the Transitional Education Plan (TEP) 2025–2027, which UNHCR helped shape. Led by UNESCO, the TEP balances urgent humanitarian needs with long-term development, ensuring refugee children are integrated into Sudan's education system as it is rebuilt.

In contrast, in the health sector, Sudan's draft National Health Policy (2027–2030) lacks provisions for refugee inclusion in national health systems alongside Sudanese nationals. Refugees currently access parallel health programs via the Ministry of Health. In response to funding cuts, UNHCR is revising partnerships with agencies like WHO and UNICEF and exploring new ones to expand services. A roadmap for transitioning refugee health to the Ministry of Health has been developed by UNHCR though its success hinges on securing substantial financial resources.

[8] *Refugee Protection and Solutions Strategy- June 2025- December 2027 (UNHCR Sudan, 2025),, accessible at: https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/sudan-refugee-protection-and-solutions-strategy-jun-2025-dec-2027.pdf.*

Although the pre-conflict National Durable Solutions Strategy is on pause due to the conflict, the National Durable Solutions Working Group co-led by UNHCR, UNDP and DRC, was revitalized in late 2024. This has strengthened engagement on self-reliance and socio-economic inclusion. In relatively stable regions like White Nile and Kassala, UNHCR and partners have implemented livelihood programs benefiting both displaced and host communities.

Given the scale of the crisis—marked by conflict, service collapse, and food insecurity—there is an urgent need to link self-reliance with long-term development and peacebuilding. UNHCR is focused on leveraging key opportunities, particularly programs under the UN Common Approach in Sudan, to enhance community resilience, advance progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, and ensure the inclusion of forcibly displaced populations in all future development planning.

PROTECTION BRIEF
SUDAN

August 2025

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR Sudan

data.unhcr.org/en/country/sdn
www.unhcr.org