

SUDAN SITUATION

20 April 2023



Sudanese refugees arrive in Chad following an outbreak of violence in April 2023. © UNHCR/Aristophane Ngargoune

Operational context

Security and political developments

On 15 April 2023, heavy shooting broke out between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum affecting many parts of the city. Fighting was also reported in Merowe in the Northern State between the SAF and RSF. Intense fighting, artillery fire and shelling have since continued in Khartoum as well as Darfur. Various attempts to implement ceasefires have not been successful to date.

The UN Secretary General (UNSG) issued a [statement](#) condemning the outbreak of violence on 15 April, a [statement](#) on 16 April asking parties to respect international law and calling for those responsible of the deaths and injuries of civilians to be brought to justice and another [statement](#) on 17 April highlighting engagement with leaders across the region to restore peace. Regional bodies [IGAD](#) and the [African Union](#) have also issued statements on the situation. On 19 April, the UN Secretary General spoke with the President of Kenya and with the Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission.

On 17 April, in a press conference, the UN's Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) and head of UNITAMS for Sudan, reported that the conflict has led to several deaths and many injured. Tragically, [three staff from the World Food Program were killed in Darfur](#), while two others were injured.

The UN High Commissioner for refugees has also [called for an end to the violence](#) and [appealed](#) for the safety all civilians and aid workers while expressing solidarity with WFP for the tragic loss of their three colleagues.

The United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) has issued several [statements](#) urging an immediate cessation to the fighting as well as the safety of civilians.

On 18 April, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [called for an immediate cessation to hostilities](#) in Sudan and pleaded with the Sudan Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces to return to the negotiating table. He called for prompt, thorough and independent investigations into the killings of civilians, including three staff of the UN's World Food Programme, along with other reported violations.

On 20 April, the UNSG [attended a virtual meeting](#) organized by the African Union which brought together the UN, the League of Arab States, the East African bloc IGAD, the European Union, and countries committed to bringing an end to the hostilities in Sudan. They discussed ways the international community can help end the violence and restore order inside Sudan. The UNSG further appealed for warring parties in Sudan to observe a ceasefire for at least three days so that civilians trapped in conflict zones can seek medical treatment, food and other essential supplies.

The African Union issued a [communiqué](#) following the meeting condemning the violence and calling for “an immediate and unconditional humanitarian ceasefire for a week starting from midnight East African Time on 20 April 2023, to allow for the observance of Eid al-Fitr, and pave the way for a more permanent ceasefire.”

They further demanded “the establishment of humanitarian corridors and allow for unhindered humanitarian access and evacuation of injured civilians; address urgently the rehabilitation of critical basic infrastructure, in particular, water and electricity utilities and ensure access by the civilian population to these services; respect the safety of diplomatic and humanitarian personnel; and also ensure the re-opening of all modes of transport, in particular the Khartoum International Airport.”

Staff presence and safety

UNHCR has 481 staff members currently in Sudan - 115 International Staff and 366 National Staff. Khartoum is a family duty station and there are an additional number of dependents including children. We are also particularly concerned about staff members in Darfur. All staff and dependents are accounted for.

The fighting has affected UNHCR offices and staff residences in Khartoum and Darfur, including stray bullets, mortars and looting. Many staff across the country are still sheltering in place (Khartoum and Darfur), while in other locations staff are able to operate relatively normally with precautions, including working from home and limiting movements (Gedaref, Kassala, White Nile, Blue Nile, South Kordofan, West Kordofan).

Operational response

Sudan hosts one of the largest refugee populations in Africa, mainly from South Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, and Ethiopia, as well as the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad and Yemen. Most refugees live in out-of-camp settlements, host communities and urban areas, while others stay in 25 refugee camps located throughout the country. (See [dashboard with full breakdown of refugee population and locations in Sudan](#).)

Violent conflicts have displaced many Sudanese internally, especially in Darfur and Kordofan regions. Flooding has caused further displacement. Past violence has also driven hundreds of thousands to flee mainly to Chad and South Sudan. Given the fragile political, security and socio-economic situation in the country, the displaced populations rely on humanitarian assistance. UNHCR's response remains critical to support protection and assistance to refugees and IDPs in the country.

UNHCR Offices across the country are currently unable to access the millions of people we serve due to ongoing fighting and communication from security agencies that they cannot guarantee staff safety while in the field. Many partners across the country have also suspended activities due to safety considerations for their staff members.

UNHCR is undertaking coordinated contingency planning with the three Regional Bureaus that oversee Sudan and its neighbouring countries: East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes (Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia), West and Central Africa (Chad and CAR), and Middle East and North Africa (Egypt and Libya).

UNHCR country operations are working with host governments and partners to review and update contingency plans, undertake preparedness activities, and put in place border monitoring. Scenarios for potential population movements include:

- Outflows of new Sudanese refugees (to all neighbouring countries, arrivals already seen in Chad)
- Return of refugees hosted by Sudan (the most likely large-scale return could be of South Sudanese)
- Secondary movement of refugees hosted by Sudan (i.e. possibility of South Sudanese refugees moving to Ethiopia, of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees moving to Egypt, etc.)

The most significant cross border movements so far in the region have been to Chad, with unconfirmed reports that people may also be moving towards the border with South Sudan.

SUDAN

UNHCR has temporarily suspended its activities in Khartoum, the Darfurs and North Kordofan due to the intensity of the conflict. Our teams are in touch with refugee leaders and community-based protection networks to monitor the situation and advise refugee communities to avoid unnecessary movements. A 24-hour hotline and the help website for refugees are functioning but UNHCR is unable to provide assistance due to the security situation. We have received reports of several refugee and IDP deaths and injuries as a result of the fighting.

Refugee camps in Gedaref, Kassala, White Nile and Blue Nile, as well as refugee settlements in South and West Kordofan are so far relatively calm with refugee committees functioning, local staff of partners present and essential services running, mainly health and water. However, there are reports of rising tensions with troop movements observed. The majority of staff are working from home and UNHCR has been advised by government that only national staff should travel to the camps until further notice.

Refugees have expressed anxiety about the announced suspension of WFP operations countrywide. UNHCR and WFP are exploring modalities to continue with the upcoming regular monthly food distributions where possible, i.e. in Eastern Sudan and White Nile which is considered safer, pending security assessments. No food distribution will take place in North and South Darfur at the moment.

If and as the conflict continues, the impacts on the many displaced populations that UNHCR and partners are currently unable to reach will certainly worsen. New displacements within the country will lead to huge additional needs. It is already clear that when the conflict subsides, there will need to be considerable restocking of humanitarian supplies, as well as replacement of looted vehicles and equipment.

CHAD

A UNHCR team is at Chad's eastern border with partners to assess the situation where an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 Sudanese have arrived from Darfur. The Government of Chad (the *Commission Nationale d'Accueil de Réinsertion des Réfugiés et des Rapatriés* - CNARR) and UNHCR will proceed on 24 April with the pre-registration of new arrivals.

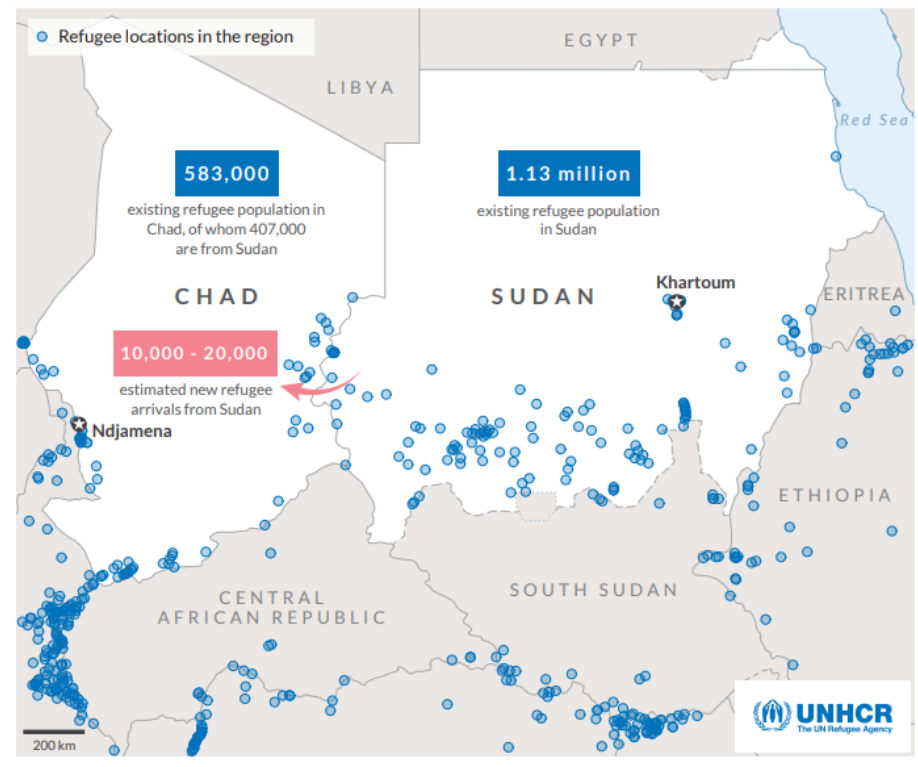
New arrivals have settled in villages less than 5 km away from the border, sleeping in makeshift shelters or under trees. They need urgent protection and assistance, particularly water, shelter, food and core relief items. In the Chadian villages at the border there are no clinics, schools nor access to potable water.

Border monitoring missions have received information about groups of Sudanese attempting to cross the border being prevented to do so by Sudanese armed fighters. New refugees in Chad have expressed fear of violence in the villages along the border spreading to their settlement. The arrival of new asylum seekers in the villages of Tellesa, Magaroro, Kherdja and Amdressa – located about 20km from Sudan – was reported on 20 April.

The Chadian army has positioned itself along the border to secure the border area and the population, including asylum seekers.

Response planning and coordination meetings continue between the Chadian government, UNHCR, other UN agencies and NGOs. A special meeting of the Humanitarian Country Team was held on 20 April where an overview of the situation of the new arrivals and their needs was discussed as well as the articulation of the response in two phases. The first phase will focus on immediate protection and assistance activities such as registration, protection and border monitoring, provision of potable water, food, basic non-food items and medical screening. The second phase

will focus on relocation further from the border and possible creation of a new refugee camp (adding to the already existing 13 camps hosting some 400,000 refugees). The contingency plan for a possible, larger influx is being updated.



A UNHCR team composed of the Head of the Sub-Office in Abeche and the Assistant Country Representative in charge of Operations arrived in Adré near the border with Sudan on 17 April to assess the situation. On 18 April, the UNHCR Representative, accompanied by the WFP Representative and the UNICEF Child Protection Officer traveled to Farchana to join the assessment mission. A UNHCR emergency team from within Chad operation will be deployed from Ndjamena to Easter Chad on 24 April.

ETHIOPIA

The operation, alongside partners and local authorities, is reviewing its contingency planning and preparedness plans in the different locations bordering Sudan. The various offices across the country are also reviewing their core relief items stocks. The borders between Sudan and Ethiopia are reported to be closed from the Sudan side but open from the Ethiopia side (except in Tigray, where the border is closed from both sides).

In Gambella, a border monitoring mission to the Raad checkpoint was undertaken with nothing significant to report. No movements have been observed elsewhere in the region. Discussions are underway with the Refugee and Returnee Service (RRS) to establish regular border monitoring mechanisms to ensure hands-on and up-to-date monitoring of population movement between South Sudan and Ethiopia.

In Benishangul-Gumuz, no significant population movements have been observed. UNHCR and RRS are to conduct a border monitoring mission to the border with Sudan (Kurmuk town) on 24 April to ensure availability of reception facilities and maintain strong rapport with border authorities.

UNHCR is holding regular meetings with RRS on the evolving situation in Sudan, with the aim to establish coordinated action as part of the contingency preparedness plan.

SOUTH SUDAN

In South Sudan, national authorities have expressed their concern that while there is potential for an influx of new Sudanese refugees if the situation further deteriorates in Sudan, a more likely scenario is the return of significant numbers of South Sudanese refugees currently in Sudan.

As of 20 April, several hundred people have arrived at various border crossing points in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile States, with unconfirmed reports of large numbers of people possibly heading toward the South Sudan border. UNHCR field teams and partners are monitoring the border and continuing to work with the government to update contingency plans.

In addition to the potential for a large-scale return of South Sudanese which could destabilize already fragile parts of the country, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in South Sudan is anticipating overall humanitarian impacts of the conflict in Sudan including disruptions of cross border trade, increased food insecurity and wider economic impacts.

UNHCR's existing refugee operation in South Sudan is already affected by fuel shortages, after a bulk delivery of fuel due to arrive from Sudan to JamJang over the last weekend did not occur.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

No population movement into CAR has been recorded so far and massive population movements are not expected. It is much easier for communities from Nyala/Southern Darfur to cross into Chad than into CAR.

UNHCR does not have a presence in the border areas, which are logistically difficult to reach and affected by recurrent military/non-state armed group operations and criminality, requiring MINUSCA escort. The National Commission for Refugees (CNR) is monitoring the situation, through civil and military local authorities. UNHCR has been collecting information on the border with Sudan through exchanges with other agencies including MINUSCA, CNR, and other informal channels, all of whom have reported no movements observed.

On 19 April, UNHCR met the Secretary General of the CNR to discuss the Government's approach to border monitoring and a possible influx. The CNR proposed to strengthen their presence in key areas near the border with Sudan. UNHCR currently lacks the resources to expand protection and border monitoring or support an increased presence of the CNR.

EGYPT

UNHCR hosted an Interagency Working Group meeting on 20 April with partners and donors to discuss the contingency planning for arrivals from Sudan to Egypt, which hosts a large Sudanese diaspora and some 60,000 refugees and asylum seekers registered with UNHCR. The movement of populations is anticipated to include Sudanese and significant numbers of other third country nationals, including registered Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees.

There have so far been not significant movements towards Egypt, presumably due to the ongoing conflict and lack of means to travel. Partners reported rumors of small numbers on the route to Egypt's southern border expected to arrive in the next several days.

LIBYA

Based on information received from authorities, no significant increase of entries from Sudan have been observed. The natural environment of the border area between Sudan and Libya (hundreds of kilometers of sand roads) is not favorable for mass movements by foot. Normally only equipped vehicles can traverse the

terrain, with the presence of armed groups presenting additional challenges. Ain Kazit border point to Sudan was closed for commercial and civilian movement by the Libyan National Army as of 20 April.

The border area with Sudan is not accessible to UN staff – whether international or national including national – and UNHCR works with a national partner in the Kufra area, which is approximately 400km from the border with North Darfur.

External Engagement

A UNHCR [media statement](#) was issued on 20 April regarding the new arrivals into Chad.

UNHCR also released a [statement](#) on 17 April urging neighboring countries to keep borders open for those who may be in need of international protection.

Advocacy messages

UNHCR joins with UN agencies to advocate for:

- An immediate cessation of hostilities, a restoration of calm and to begin a dialogue to resolve the crisis.
- For all parties to protect civilians, including humanitarian staff, and refrain from attacks on schools and health facilities, electricity and water supply systems.
- Aid must reach the millions in need. People must be able to access food, fuel and other critical supplies and services for their families.
- People trying to flee and access assistance within or outside the country should be able to do so safely.
- Borders to remain open for those seeking international protection or return to their countries of origin

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