

PROTECTION BRIEF: SUDAN

April 2024



A Congolese refugee displaced from Khartoum to Wad Madani, Sudan due to the conflict and is sheltering in Al Bandar school along with other refugees and Sudanese internally displaced people. UNHCR/D. Uprety

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Operational Context & Analysis

A year into the military hostilities in Sudan, the level of violence, destruction and displacement continues unabated, and the security situation remains tense and volatile. Humanitarian needs driven largely by the conflict in the country are immense. According to the 2024 Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan, an estimated 25 million people, about half the country's population, need humanitarian assistance. Over half that number are children.

As of end-March 2024, over 6.5 million people are displaced from their homes in Sudan¹, in addition to some 3 million people who were already internally displaced before the conflict started in April 2023. Almost 1.8 million people have sought safety in neighbouring countries like South Sudan, Chad, Egypt the Central African Republic, and Ethiopia.² These staggering figures of displacement, many that have occurred multiple times, make the Sudan emergency one of the worst protection crises globally and one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent memory.

The volatility of the conflict and its rapid expansion beyond Khartoum State in the early phases has exposed civilians to gross violence, human rights violations, and multiple displacements. The spread of the conflict to Al Jazirah State in mid-December 2023, showed how quickly the situation can change. Over 500,000 people were displaced in only a few days, some of them for the second or third time since the start of the conflict.

Parties to the conflict are reported to be actively recruiting civilians, including children, to join the conflict and are seeking alliances beyond Sudan's borders which have the potential to destabilize the region. Inter-communal violence and targeted attacks along ethnic lines have already been witnessed in some parts of the country. Tensions will only rise as the conflict drags on and forcibly displaced populations and hosting communities compete for limited resources.

Efforts to end hostilities at the regional and international level have not yet been successful, and a complete end to the conflict and return to peace looks unlikely in the short to medium term, leaving millions of people in an increasingly difficult situation in the country.

It is widely reported that serious human rights violations in Sudan have been observed including, but not limited to, targeted or indiscriminate killing of civilians, conflict-related sexual violence, extra-judicial killings, forced conscription and recruitment of children. These violations are in addition to particular protection issues stemming from violations of the civilian character of sites hosting forcibly displaced people. The parties to the conflict have also imposed movement

¹ IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix: Monthly Displacement Overview (07), March 2024: [Home](#) | [Displacement Tracking Matrix \(iom.int\)](#)

² UNHCR data portal: [Situation Sudan situation \(unhcr.org\)](#)

restrictions in their respective areas of control which have increased concerns for the protection of particularly vulnerable groups like women and children. Civilians including refugees and asylum-seekers are also experiencing additional challenges such as the rising cost of living, inflation, lack of access to basic health care services and education and the scarcity of commodities. This has resulted in the steady decline of the socio-economic situation in the country, which is compounded by the impacts of climate change and rising poverty levels.

Nevertheless, despite the challenges of the past 12 months, Sudan has kept its borders open, welcoming refugees and asylum-seekers to its territory. In 2023, close to 12,000 people mostly from Ethiopia and Eritrea sought international protection in Sudan, of whom nearly 7,200 arrived after April 2023. By end-March 2024 that number had increased to almost 10,000.

Despite the complex and challenging working environment, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, has stayed in the country providing life-saving protection and basic assistance to forcibly displaced and hosting communities in close coordination with the Government and relevant authorities. It has an established presence in accessible areas in eastern and southern Sudan and has opened new offices in Northern State, near the border with Egypt and in Farchana, Chad, the latter to support cross-border operations into the Darfur region. In other, still inaccessible areas, like Kordofan and Khartoum States, UNHCR collaborates with local partners and community-based protection networks to conduct protection monitoring, identify and refer people with specific needs to specialised services, communicate with communities and raise awareness on protection issues. In those areas, UNHCR has shifted towards remote working modalities, increasing engagement with local partners for protection monitoring and provision of protection and assistance.

Though UNHCR's prioritized response aims to address immediate life-saving needs and provide safe and inclusive access to essential services, its overall objective is guided by the Global Compact on Refugees which promotes solutions and inclusion from the outset of emergencies. UNHCR uses a community-based approach to empower communities, enabling access to essential services, basic assistance and livelihood opportunities. Aligned to the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR works with the Government of Sudan and other partners to enable inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers into national systems alongside providing emergency assistance.

Key Trends & Figures

917,470

refugees and asylum-seekers hosted in Sudan

219,503

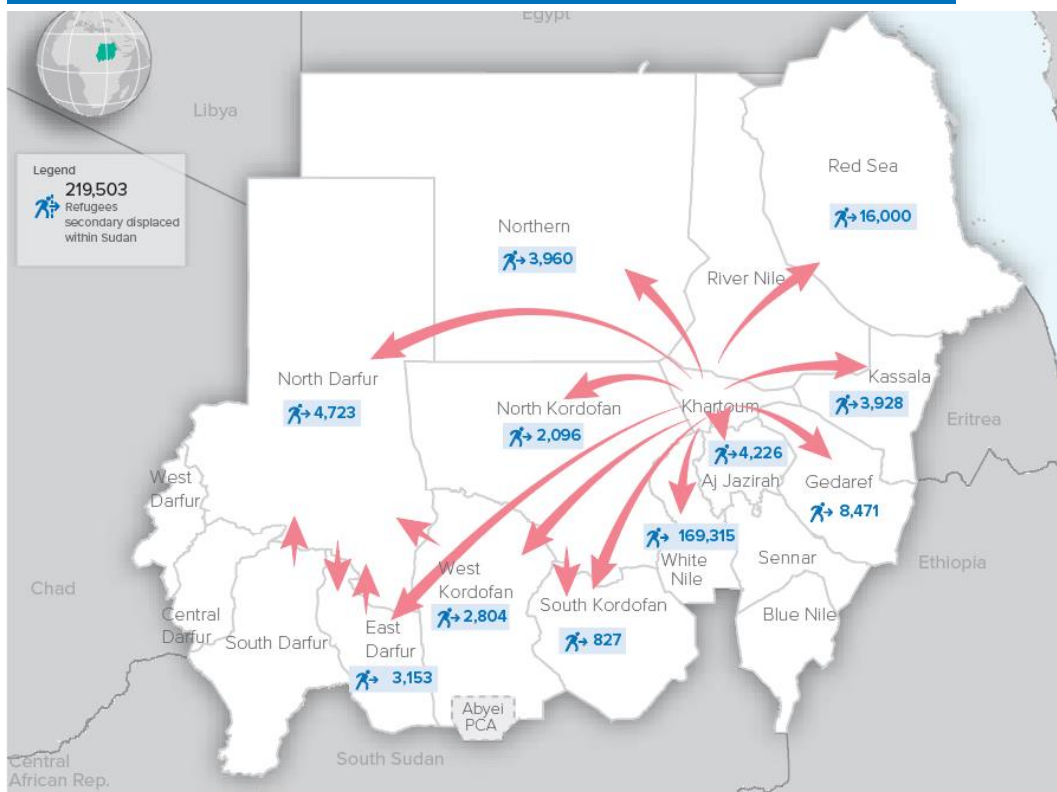
refugees and asylum-seekers secondarily displaced in Sudan

510,928

refugees returned to their country of origin

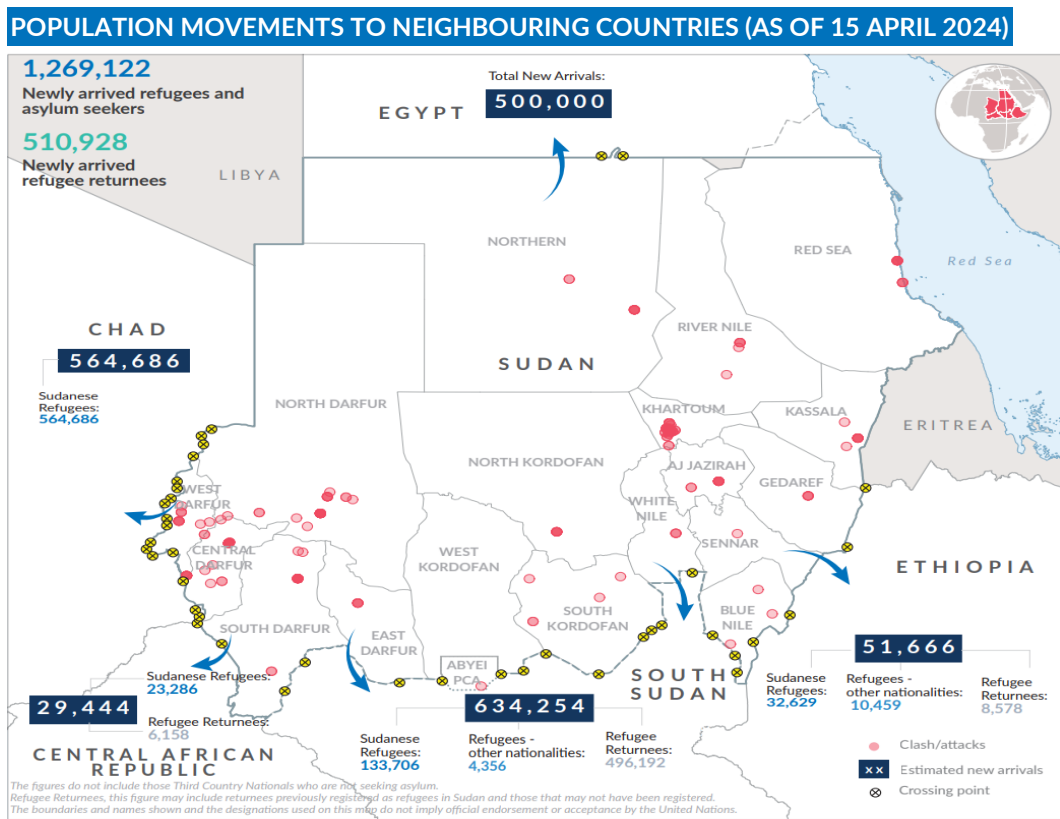
UNHCR and its partners have been mapping the secondary movements of refugees and asylum-seekers in Sudan and into neighbouring countries. The estimation of internal movements shows that Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees and asylum-seekers moved mainly to eastern states of Al-Jazirah, Gedaref and Kassala, while South Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers moved to White Nile State. UNHCR has also noted some movements of South Sudanese and Ethiopian refugees and asylum-seekers from Khartoum northwards, albeit in smaller numbers.

SECONDARY DISPLACEMENT OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS IN SUDAN



Source: UNHCR, COR – 15 April 2024

By end-March 2024, UNHCR had also recorded over 510,000 refugees, many of them unregistered, who had returned to their countries of origin under adverse conditions. The majority have returned to South Sudan, with smaller numbers to Ethiopia and the Central African Republic. Despite the difficult conditions in Sudan, the Government has maintained its open-door policy to receive refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries.

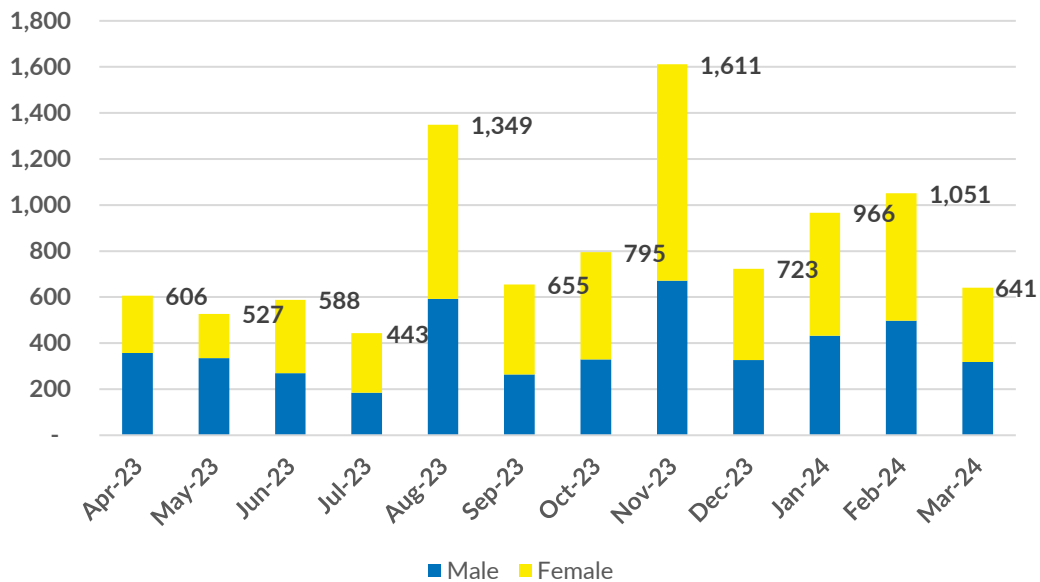


Source: UNHCR - 15 April 2024

Since January 2023, over 14,500 refugees and asylum-seekers, mostly from Ethiopia and Eritrea, sought asylum in Sudan, with close to 10,000 arriving since the start of the conflict until end-March 2024.

The graph below shows the gender disaggregation of refugees and asylum-seekers arriving after April 2023, showing a higher proportion of females arriving in Sudan in the last year.

REFUGEE AND ASYLUM-SEEKER ARRIVAL TRENDS (APRIL 2023-MARCH 2024)



Source: UNHCR

Protection Risks

1. Risks resulting from on-going military hostilities, including violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) by parties to the conflict

Since the start of the conflict, **civilians including refugees and asylum-seekers have been caught in the crossfire** resulting in many **deaths and injuries**. According to data collected by Armed Conflict and Event Data Project (ACLED)³, by end-March 2024 at least 14,790 people had been killed due to the fighting. This includes more than 7,000 civilians, including many women and children. In addition, WHO reported 62 attacks on health care facilities, leading to 38 deaths and 45 injuries.⁴ However, the number of deaths is likely significantly larger as many casualties have not been admitted nor reported to health facilities across Sudan.

UNHCR protection monitoring analysis⁵ indicates that in the Darfur region there have been **targeted and deliberate attacks on civilians** including internally displaced people and specific ethnic groups. Reports of **conflict-related sexual violence**, kidnapping, looting, extortion and other forms of violence, particularly in hot-spot conflict areas such as the Darfur region are frequent. Towards the end of 2023, there were reports of **ethnically motivated killings of civilians**, increasing tensions in an already fragile area.

The conflict has also left **significant number of refugees and asylum-seekers stranded**, unable to access humanitarian assistance or find means to relocate to safer areas. UNHCR and partner reports indicate that refugees continue to suffer from the shelling and lack of assistance in conflict hotspots. There have been reports that refugees have been hindered from leaving conflict areas particularly at check points, with some forced to return after harassment and looting of their belongings. The **restriction in freedom of movement** has forced people to take alternative risky routes to flee conflict zones, leading to an increase in the frequency of forcibly displaced people using smugglers to seek safety also beyond Sudan's borders.

UNHCR protection monitoring reports indicate **violations of the civilian character of asylum** which negatively impacts the physical security and safety of forcibly displaced people and render sites hosting the displaced including refugees vulnerable to attack. There are reports alleging that parties to the conflict have been attempting to recruit refugees from camps. In West Kordofan, according to authorities, there has been an increase in the **recruitment and training of refugees and asylum-seekers**. As a core part of its advocacy efforts to promote the safety and security of the civilian population, including refugees, UNHCR has worked

³ ACLED (2024), data generated from [Country Hub: Sudan \(acleddata.com\)](https://countryhub.unhcr.org/countryhub/dataset/sudan)

⁴ OCHA, Sudan Humanitarian Update (25 March 2024), [Sudan Humanitarian Update \(25 March 2024\) \[EN/AR\] - Sudan | ReliefWeb](https://www.unhcr.org/en/news/updates/sudan-humanitarian-update-25-march-2024)

⁵ UNHCR, Sudan | Protection Brief (Darfur Region) - October 2023; <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/103953>

with Commission of Refugees (COR) and relevant authorities to stress the importance of preserving the civilian character of asylum.

The situation in conflict zones is exacerbated by the weakening or **breakdown of law and order** resulting in armed groups committing extortion and burglaries with impunity, exposing the forcibly displaced population to further protection risks. There are also reports of **wide distribution of weapons** which also contributes to criminal activities, affecting civilians including refugees and asylum-seekers.

2. Grave violations of children's rights

UNHCR's protection monitoring analysis indicates that due to their vulnerability and age, children have suffered disproportionately from the conflict in Sudan. Children have been separated from their families, have had to engage in child labour, or are forced into early marriage and recruitment. Both parties to the conflict are reported to be involved in recruiting children into the conflict, which has also resulted in casualties among children. Reports reveal that in the Kordofan region and areas near Khartoum, unaccompanied and separated children are particularly targets for recruitment due to their vulnerability.

In the Darfur region, instances of recruitment of children by different armed groups were reported, including more than 60 children recruited across Kebkabiya and Kutum localities and reportedly at least seven were recruited in Tawila locality. In North Darfur, children are reported to have joined training camps. The recruitment campaign's success is attributed to the closure of schools and the lack of alternative livelihood opportunities.⁶

The conflict has also resulted in disruption of learning country wide. Some 19 million children in Sudan are out of school which includes over 400,000 refugee children. Most schools are accommodating forcibly displaced people which further aggravates protection risks for children.

In many of the cities and towns hosting newly forcibly displaced populations an increased concentration of children in market areas are visible. Children engage in petty jobs like selling water and washing dishes and are exposed to heightened risks of exploitation, mistreatment and abuse. Similarly begging in the streets by children is reported to be more frequent than it was prior to the conflict.

According to UNHCR's observations and reports shared by partners, many children are separated from their usual caregivers or are unaccompanied and in need of alternative care arrangements. These factors, together with the fragmentation of family structures caused by widespread displacement, death and injury of civilians also appear to be driving a rise in the reported prevalence of unaccompanied and separated children.

⁶ UNHCR, Sudan | Protection Brief (Darfur Region) - October 2023; Document - Sudan | Protection Brief (Darfur Region) - October 2023 ([unhcr.org](https://www.unhcr.org))

In informal sites hosting the forcibly displaced, there are limited vocational training and livelihood opportunities for children transitioning to adulthood, insufficient specialized psychosocial support for young survivors of gender-based violence, all of which detrimentally impacts the development and well-being of children.

3. Prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence

A high prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) including conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has been reported during the conflict⁷. Reports also indicate that parties to the conflict have disproportionately targeted women and girls with sexual assaults including rape and sexual slavery and abuse. In addition, the conflict has also disrupted prevention, risk mitigation, response programming and referral mechanisms established prior to the conflict, which leaves survivors with few options for redress. The absence of authorities to curb the abuse and limited access in conflict-affected states, shortage of supplies and limited availability of specialized GBV services continue to be the most pressing challenges.⁸

GBV remains severely under-reported as survivors face difficulties accessing services due to continued hostilities or out of fear of retaliation or stigma. Data collected by Armed Conflict and Event Data Project (ACLED), indicates an increasing number of CRSV related incidences as of end of March 2024⁹. In the early months of the conflict, there were reports of refugee and asylum-seeker women raped in their homes or in transit as they were moving away from conflict zones. Women and girls in North Darfur have also reported significant risks, including incidents or rape, while attending to agricultural activities.

In East Darfur, there are increasing reports of gender-based violence incidents, particularly from refugee communities. For example, it was reported that two teenage refugee girls were abducted from their settlement in El Daein locality and raped by armed men. In another incident, three women from a refugee settlement were reportedly raped and multiple reports of incidents of physical assault, harassment and intimidation by armed groups have been received.

According to UNHCR protection monitoring reports, forcibly displaced women face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence. Conflict, food insecurity coupled with limited livelihood opportunities in camps and settlements heightens the risks of intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation and resorting to harmful coping mechanisms. Women and girls reported scarcity of food as a contributing factor to increased levels of intimate partner violence (IPV) in the camps settings.

⁷ OHCHR (30 November 2013) *Report on Human Rights Situation in Darfur*; [ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/SD/UNAMID_OHCHR_situation_Darfur2013.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/SD/UNAMID_OHCHR_situation_Darfur2013.pdf)

⁸ Document - UNHCR Protection Brief – Sudan – June 2023

⁹ ACLED (2024), data generated from [Country Hub: Sudan \(acleddata.com\)](https://countryhub.acled.com)

The severe underfunding across sectors continues to create gaps in assistance and service delivery and has particularly contributed to increased risks of GBV against women and girls. Early and forced marriage in exchange for dowry payments is also reportedly on the rise due to difficulties that particularly refugee households face to engage in livelihood activities and meet their basic needs. GBV risks are further increased by various external factors such as inadequate lighting, limited access to energy or water, forcing women and girls to walk long distances, lack of sufficient gender-segregated latrines, and limited access to specialised GBV services. The situation is exacerbated by the deterioration of the socio-economic situation and limited humanitarian assistance which could also expose women and girls to sexual exploitation and abuse risks or force them to resort to harmful coping mechanisms.

4. Return in adverse circumstances

Since the outbreak of conflict, refugees and asylum-seekers have reported feeling heightened anxiety about the impact of the conflict on their safety in Sudan. They are faced with increasing economic hardship due to the loss of livelihoods, reduced employment opportunities and disruptions to the banking system which have affected their ability to receive remittances from abroad. These factors have led refugees and asylum-seekers to undertake self-organized spontaneous returns to their countries of origin, including reportedly by hiring smugglers to facilitate their onward movement.

By end-March 2024, more than 510,000 people had spontaneously returned to their countries of origin under adverse circumstances. The majority of those who have returned, in particular South Sudanese, were not previously registered as refugees in Sudan. Most of the returns (97%) have been to South Sudan with fewer returns to Ethiopia and the Central African Republic. In Blue Nile State, the authorities facilitated the issuance of travel permits for more than 200 refugees to repatriate spontaneously to Ethiopia following the deterioration of security and lack access to services.

In line with the guidance issued in April 2019 UNHCR does not facilitate refugee returns to South Sudan¹⁰. Nevertheless, some 37,000 South Sudanese refugees have requested UNHCR support to facilitate their return to South Sudan. According to UNHCR reports, the majority of the refugees requesting such facilitation live in Darfur (56%) and Kordofan (39%) states. The main push factors cited are insecurity (e.g. arrests, assault, killings, and GBV), lawlessness, and limited access to basic services and assistance like food and health care.

In September 2023, following reports of spontaneous returns of Ethiopian refugees from Gedaref and Blue Nile States to Ethiopia, UNHCR conducted an

¹⁰ UNHCR position on Return to South Sudan - Update II

intention survey among Ethiopian refugees in Gedaref State, where 64% of the total respondents expressed interest to return to Ethiopia in the foreseeable future (6-12 months), 28% did not want to return while 8% of the respondents were undecided. In Blue Nile State, UNHCR jointly with COR conducted an intention survey in which 500 refugees expressed the intention to return to Ethiopia.

An assessment conducted by WFP with newly displaced people hosted by relatives in Kassala and Gedaref States found that the influx of IDPs into these states had created a food security crisis, manifested by a sharp rise in food insecurity among both the IDP and host populations, and a decrease in the availability and affordability of food, pushing many individuals into extreme hunger, which is seen to contribute to refugees' intention to return in adverse circumstances.

In the Kordofan and White Nile States the influx of IDPs, the prolonged conflict and limited access to basic services and humanitarian assistance is fuelling resentment and tension between host communities and forcibly displaced populations. Refugees are among the most affected by the resentment and tensions due to resource depletion and increasing poverty.

In some areas local authorities are also calling for strict application of the encampment policies and relocation of refugees to established camps. For example, in Northern State local officials requested all foreign nationals including refugees and asylum-seekers to pay 120,000 SDG (approx. US\$ 100) for the right to reside in the town. This is not only an exorbitant amount, which most people cannot afford to pay, but also a factor encouraging irregular movements out of the country, placing those at further protection risks in the neighbouring countries.

5. Violations of human rights law, including arbitrary arrest and detentions, deportations, restrictions to freedom of movement and smuggling and trafficking

Restrictions to freedom of movement

There are no official asylum policy changes adopted by Sudan¹¹. However, there has been a rapid and significant deterioration in the protection context in Sudan for forcibly displaced people, particularly refugees and asylum-seekers. The conflict has displaced refugees and asylum-seekers often multiple times increasing their protection risks. In addition, the conflict has prompted the strict implementation of Sudan's encampment policy and its reservation to Article 26 of

¹¹ Sudan is a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (hereinafter jointly the 1951 Convention) with a reservation on article 26 relating to freedom of movement for refugees. Sudan is party to the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (the OAU Convention) but has not ratified the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention). Sudan adopted the ICGLR Declaration on Eradication of Statelessness in the Great Lakes Region in 2017. In addition, the two ICGLR Protocols on IDPs (Protocol on the Protection and Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons and Protocol on the Property Rights of Returning Persons 2006) are legally binding for Sudan.

the 1951 Convention “*Provision on freedom of movement*”. This has led to further restriction of movement out of camps or states of registration, in strict application of Article 14 of the Sudan Asylum Act 2014, which also impacts refugees’ and asylum-seekers’ ability to engage in livelihood activities.

Further, the imposing of a State of Emergency in most parts of the country is having implications on the mobility of both nationals and foreigners as curfews and security patrols seems to target foreigners in particular in different places leading to increased cases of arrest and detention.

Constraints on freedom of movement, whether formal, informal, or fear-driven are common across the Darfur states and have significant negative impacts on affected populations. In some areas, generalized insecurity and the vulnerability of marginalized groups culminate in the self-restriction of movement due to fear of violence. Reports from North Darfur in early December 2023 indicated that armed elements required the payment of fees by civilians passing checkpoints and imposed so-called ‘protection fees’ to avoid incidents of attacks and looting of their properties by armed groups. These practices have become relatively widespread. Reports from Central Darfur indicated that the large IDP population was forced to pay ‘protection fees’ amounting to SDG 3,000 (approx. US\$ 2) per household in a context of ongoing looting of all basic service facilities, restrictions on freedom of movement, and ongoing GBV incidents.

In Red Sea State, the issuance of inter-state travel permits for refugees was suspended, allegedly as a mitigation measure to reduce the instance of refugees joining the conflict.

Arbitrary arrest and detention, and deportations

Arrests of refugees and asylum-seekers were reported in White Nile, Al Jazirah, Gedaref and River Nile States for alleged association or being members of armed groups, compromising the civilian character of asylum. Lack of, or limited humanitarian assistance, access to basic needs and livelihood opportunities could be key factors which have contributed to the vulnerability of forcibly displaced people to recruitment by armed groups. Large parts of Sudan are in hot-spot conflict zones where the living conditions of forcibly displaced people and hosting communities are dire with very limited assistance or basic services, if any.

There are unconfirmed reports of some 80 unregistered South Sudanese nationals who were deported by the authorities and another 24 refugee youth detained on allegations of active involvement in the conflict.

Smuggling and trafficking

Most neighbouring countries’ borders are open with relatively lenient entry requirements for Sudanese. However, crossing into Egypt is becoming increasingly challenging with a strict visa policy and a small daily admission quota in addition to increased rate of deportation of Sudanese entering Egypt, on

grounds of illegal entry and lack of documentation as well as overstay beyond the initially granted duration.

As of April 2024, more than 10,000 individuals were deported from Egypt, 3,679 of whom were deported in 2024. The inability of people to comply with the rules or afford visa fees is forcing IDPs, refugees and asylum-seekers to resort to irregular and risky routes into Egypt, often using smugglers and traffickers. In February 2024, UNHCR received a report that 15 Sudanese nationals had died in a road traffic accident after irregularly crossing the border into Egypt.

With regard to Sudanese deportations, it will be key to implement Sudan's national action plan on counter-trafficking involving all stakeholders with a human rights-based, protection-focused approach based on international frameworks will be key to implement.

Key Elements of UNHCR's Protection Response

Community based approach

Protection monitoring reports reveal that a significant part of the displaced population has at least one specific need or vulnerability. The most common are having a chronic medical condition or physical disability, being an unaccompanied or separated child or elderly. These vulnerable people are disproportionately affected by the conflict and multiple displacements, exposing them to further risks.

With constrained humanitarian access impacting protection programming, UNHCR in Sudan is strengthening the capacity of community-based protection networks (CBPNs) across the country, establishing community centres in areas of recent displacement, enhancing its communication with communities (CwC) through various channels to reach out to the most vulnerable populations and supporting community-led projects and organisations. To monitor, track and refer people with specific needs, UNHCR developed a monitoring tool and standard operating procedures and pathways to identify and refer people for specific services and assistance.

UNHCR works with 345 community-based protection committees or associations representing various groups of forcibly displaced people. UNHCR supports these community-based protection networks with training on protection monitoring methodologies and the identification of specific needs. The CBPN's have been instrumental in identifying, referring, and supporting vulnerable individuals, strengthening communication with communities and building community resilience through monitoring and raising awareness on specific areas of protection concern.

UNHCR uses various communication channels to enhance its communication with forcibly displaced populations especially in hard-to-reach areas. [UNHCR's Help Website](#) provides essential information on protection queries, available services, and contacts, and asylum procedures, rights and duties. UNHCR set up a WhatsApp channel for communication with forcibly displaced people which is available in four languages and has proven indispensable to keep communication channels open and understand the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers during the conflict. There are 20 telephone hotlines across the country and a UNHCR-WFP inter-agency call centre available for refugees and asylum-seekers to obtain information or counselling.

Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) focal points were identified and trained in each office to ensure AAP mainstreaming across all programmes. At inter-agency level, UNHCR is an active member of the AAP Working Group and is

focal point for one of the Strategic Priority Plans related to capacity building to improve the response across the country.

Strengthening protection systems for women and children

In accessible states, UNHCR supports unaccompanied and separated children and their caregivers with material assistance and also conducts best-interest procedures (BIP) for refugee children in eastern and White Nile States. In regions not currently accessible, UNHCR works through CBPNs to identify and refer children with specific needs for relevant specialised support. Between January and April 2024, UNHCR and partners identified and assisted 1,436 unaccompanied and separated children.

In accessible locations UNHCR ensures GBV survivors receive lifesaving GBV response services, while in remote and inaccessible areas protection desks and CBPNs are key to the referral to available services. Survivors receive psychosocial support and are referred for legal counselling and/or medical assistance. UNHCR and partners continue to carry out awareness raising sessions for refugee and asylum-seekers on GBV to sensitize communities to enhance knowledge on GBV risks and where to access services, how to report sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) and where to find Child Protection services.

Through its local partners, UNHCR provides community awareness raising sessions on child protection risks and on the risks of smuggling and trafficking. UNHCR works with UNICEF and other child protection actors to coordinate identify, support and refer child protection cases and report other violations relevant to the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms.

UNHCR's Girba field office in Kassala State implemented narrative theatre approaches with the community to prevent forced marriage and denial of resources. Through this approach, community actors reflect on causes, consequences, and community-based solutions. Frontline workers as well as sectors staffs were trained on how to provide support and safely refer GBV survivors to specialized services using existing GBV referral pathways.

However, the overall ability to provide quality protection interventions for women and girls affected by GBV including CRSV, is severely hampered by a lack of access to conflict areas and limited resources. UNHCR is committed to increase collaborations with local partners, including women-led organisations (WLOs), facilitating greater collaboration and knowledge sharing as they are critical partners for effective humanitarian responses.

UNHCR actively participates in GBV-related working groups and shares analysis about GBV trends to advocate for prioritization of the appropriate response. Additionally, to strengthen case management processes and enhance GBV programming, staff were trained to use the GBV module in UNHCRs refugee

database proGres. UNHCR Sudan has been coordinating with UNFPA on the roll out of GBVIMS+ in four refugee and asylum-seeker hosting states.

Preserving the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum and of sites

Due to the conflict, refugees and asylum-seekers have become vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups. Local populations and authorities frequently view them with suspicion, they are often targeted for (perceived) affiliation with or support for opposing groups. The reports of recruitment of refugees and asylum-seekers have triggered significant fears of infiltration and presence of armed elements in camps and neighbouring hosting communities.

UNHCR has designed a comprehensive sensitization package tailored to raise awareness among refugee and asylum-seeker communities on issues relating to the civilian character of asylum as well as to the State of Emergency. As part of its advocacy, UNHCR is collaborating with COR to disseminate these messages to preserve the civilian character of displacement sites and to sensitize refugees to the related risks. Targeted key messages on the civilian nature of asylum and conduct during emergency situations were developed and disseminated among refugees.

Additionally, UNHCR and COR are following up with authorities on reports of detentions and deportations, to verify information and seek solutions. For example, UNHCR is working with COR to increase the level of documentation of refugees as a protection tool.

Enhanced border monitoring and coordination

Through systematic border monitoring and coordination with border officials, UNHCR is tracking deportation incidents, producing analytical reports, and sharing information with relevant UNHCR offices to inform and advance advocacy. Regular regional cross-border meetings take place to enhance coordination and harmonize advocacy approaches. UNHCR has engaged partners to address the various needs of deportees and others stranded at the border, such as providing health care or psychosocial support.

Cross-border operations

UNHCR is providing life-saving assistance to forcibly displaced people in West and Central Darfur states using a cross-border modality from Chad. In 2023, alone, close to 38,000 vulnerable forcibly displaced and host community members received non-food items kits via this channel. UNHCR also participates in inter-agency missions to the Darfur region conducting protection and programme implementation monitoring.

Enhancing registration, refugee status determination and documentation

Due to the conflict, UNHCR prioritized registration, verification and documentation activities in areas with less exposure for staff and forcibly displaced to security risks. In the East, reception and registration of newly arriving

refugees and asylum-seekers and issuing of the “photo-slip” is ongoing. Since January 2023, UNHCR has registered over 14,500 newly arriving refugees and asylum-seekers.

In Sudan, refugee status determination (RSD) is conducted by the Government of Sudan through the office of the Commissioner of Refugees (COR) and is supported by UNHCR. Nationals from South Sudan, comprising 70% of refugees in Sudan, enjoy prima-facie refugee status. Prior to the conflict, RSD activities took place in Khartoum and in Shagarab, Kassala State. Once the conflict started, RSD could only take place in Shagarab where it continues. Between January and March 2023, COR adjudicated 1,037 asylum cases in Khartoum, while a total of 1,211 asylum cases were adjudicated in Shagarab by end of 2023.

The conflict, displacement, looting and vandalism have led to loss and destruction of civil documents, making movement and access to essential services challenging. In addition, the national civil registration system and offices were destroyed in the conflict, which led to data loss affecting citizens and forcibly displaced people alike. UNHCR has advocated for resumption of civil documentation issuance for refugees and asylum-seekers with the authorities to enable access to basic services and enable movement.

In August 2023 issuing of passport to Sudanese citizens resumed. UNHCR also supports refugees and asylum-seekers to obtain lost or new civil documentation. Passports are required to enable access to medical care that is not available in Sudan.

However, challenges remain to issue other civil documents. For example, in White Nile State, UNHCR together with UNICEF and other partners are advocating for the resumption of birth registration and to reduce or waive birth registration fee of SDG 30,000 (approx. USD 20) for refugees.

Access to justice and legal aid

UNHCR through its partner provides legal assistance, counselling, sensitization and awareness raising sessions on various legal and protection issues to forcibly displaced people and relevant authorities like law enforcement and the judiciary. Between January and April 2024, more than 2,500 refugees benefitted from the legal counselling and sensitization provided by UNHCR’s legal aid partners.

UNHCR partners also provided legal representation to 840 refugees and asylum-seekers mostly arrested and detained, advocating for their timely release. Regular detention monitoring is carried by the lawyers. Legal aid is also provided to forcibly displaced people on a range of other issues such as gender-based violence or civil documentations.

Resettlement and complementary pathways

Before the conflict, UNHCR had planned to submit at least 1,225 refugees for resettlement from Sudan to the United States of America and Canada in 2023 while managing a larger caseload of almost 3,000 refugees already submitted in previous years and under consideration by resettlement countries. Until March 2023, UNHCR had submitted 339 refugees. However, with the start of the conflict in April, new submissions were necessarily suspended. To manage expectations and address refugees' concerns, UNHCR has provided individual counselling. UNHCR continues to advocate with resettlement countries for the expedited processing of cases submitted prior to the conflict.

Though air travel was challenging due to the closure of airports across Sudan, 241 refugees departed for resettlement to Canada, Sweden, Australia and the USA in 2023 through Port Sudan. During the year, another 442 refugees also departed from Sudan through complementary pathways for admission to third countries, based on family reunification and private sponsorship.

From January to March 2024, over 70 refugees originating from Eritrea and Ethiopia departed to Canada, the USA, Sweden, and Australia. In 2024, UNHCR will continue facilitating resettlement departures in coordination with IOM and resettlement states. Regular coordination between the UNHCR Regional Bureau and offices in neighbouring countries ensures that information is shared about refugees with an active resettlement case who have crossed borders seeking safety from the conflict to facilitate their access to protection and solutions in third countries.

In addition, UNHCR has continued to provide practical assistance to individuals in Sudan who have been granted visas and travel documents for reunification with family members abroad.

Operational Challenges & Opportunities

Operational challenges

Insecurity and active conflict are the primary challenges impacting staff safety and UNHCR's work in Sudan. The expansion of the conflict to eastern states, increased security threats and limited humanitarian access, prevented humanitarian organisations from delivering life-saving basic services including emergency protection services, clean water, sanitation facilities, health care, and education. Any further expansion of the conflict to Sennar and White Nile States will likely increase access challenges and protection risks. Poor communications and connectivity issues during the crisis continue to affect implementation of protection programmes and timely communication with communities.

In addition, the cost of implementation has increased exponentially, due to unavailability of materials, transport and importation challenges. Further, the magnitude of the displacement and geographical size of the country makes it difficult to provide effective protection and deliver critical assistance with limited funding and reduced staffing. The near collapse of public service provision in conflict-affected locations, significantly reducing their functionality and their capacity to support forcibly displaced people. The broader breakdown in law and order in conflict affected states and absence of law enforcement bodies, is leading to the inability to provide protection from armed groups and criminal activities.

Opportunities

UNHCR's response is guided by the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) to promote solutions and inclusion from the outset of an emergency.

Given the extent of the political, social and economic crisis, ongoing conflict, the breakdown in the legislative sector and governance, the risk of famine and increasing health concerns, UNHCR will focus on advancing the few opportunities towards attaining the Sustainable Development Goals and stay engaged in development planning processes to ensure the inclusion of forcibly displaced and other affected populations. The main opportunities are programmes developed under the *UN Common Approach* in Sudan aimed at enhancing protection and resilience of communities.

In January 2023, the Government of Sudan launched the National Durable Solutions Strategy benefitting forcibly displaced and hosting communities alike by including them in state and national planning frameworks and systems. The strategy and its implementation at local levels provides opportunities to create enabling conditions for forcibly displaced persons to rebuild their lives, break cycles of dependency, and to build social structures with hosting communities. UNHCR will prioritise support to Government in implementation of area-based

coordination and state -level strategies to implement this National Durable Solutions Strategy, where feasible.

UNHCR is pursuing inclusion of refugees in national systems in the education sector following the major shift in 2012 that brought the management of refugee education under the state Ministry of Education. In January 2024, schools began gradually re-opening in regions hosting refugees in White Nile and Blue Nile States, initiated by the State Ministry of Education, UNHCR and partners. By end-February 2024, over 11,100 refugee children had resumed learning with more educational spaces lined up for an opening in eastern Sudan. UNHCR and partners will build on the gains made towards inclusion and general refugee access to primary, secondary and tertiary education.

UNHCR has developed joint country frameworks with FAO, UNICEF and UNDP to promote coordination in efforts geared towards advancing inclusion and integration of refugees and asylum-seekers into programme planning and resource mobilization efforts. To enhance peaceful co-existence among the forcibly displaced and host communities, several projects were implemented across the country that benefit both host communities and the forcibly displaced, such as including vulnerable host community members in cash-based assistance projects. These are aimed at increasing income, improved food security, nutrition and served to promote social cohesion between forcibly displaced and hosting communities easing some pressures on scarce resources.

Key Advocacy Messages

UNHCR calls on all parties to the conflict to:

- **De-escalate, return to dialogue** and engage constructively to end the conflict and minimise the impact of the conflict on civilians.
- **Exert their responsibility and ensure the commitment** of all persons and factions acting under their instructions, direction or control to their **core obligations under International Humanitarian Law (IHL)**. This includes refraining from attacks expected to cause harm to civilians and civilian objects and holding accountable those responsible for violating international humanitarian and human rights laws.
- **Allow safe passage to civilians** who want to leave areas of active conflict and enable civilians' access to humanitarian assistance.
- **Refrain from mobilizing civilian populations** to join the fighting, forced recruitment and child recruitment, and ensure that all persons and factions acting under their instructions, direction or control refrain from these practices. Respect the civilian character of asylum and refrain from recruiting refugees into their ranks or using refugee camps or facilities for military purposes.
- **Afford fair treatment to refugees and asylum-seekers** arrested and detained for alleged affiliation to parties to the conflict, a right to trial, due process, including access to legal representation and free assistance of an interpreter in court. No person should be deported to their countries in line with the principle of non-refoulement where their lives and liberties are not guaranteed.
- **Promote peaceful co-existence** between forcibly displaced people and refrain from undue pressures on forcibly displaced like threats of eviction.
- **Allow telecommunication network** providers to facilitate the restoration of network functionality across the country for ease of communication between forcibly displaced people and facilitate humanitarian activities.

UNHCR calls on States to:

- **Provide more attention and financial resources** to support Sudan. The reduction in financial resources and associated reduction in assistance is exposing the forcibly displaced including refugees and asylum-seekers to negative coping mechanisms often leading to protection risks.
- **Apply lenient entry requirements for Sudanese** and others fleeing the conflict in Sudan by easing or removing these restrictions and refrain from deporting those forced to flee back to Sudan, which is affected by armed conflict.
- **Implement additional safeguards for unimpeded humanitarian access** in conflict areas, safe passage of humanitarian convoys carrying essential supplies, like food and medical supplies and the enhanced protection of humanitarian workers.

PROTECTION BRIEF: SUDAN

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UNHCR Sudan

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