Policy Note

Sudan's Crisis: Navigating Disparities, Resilience, and Recovery for Refugees, IDPs, and Host Communities

Findings from the Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS), Round 4 (2025)

January 2026

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STARS

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LIST OF ACCRONYMS

FCS	Food Consumption Score
GoS	Government of the Sudan
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
JDC	World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Center on Forced Displacement
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAU	Organization of African Unity
STI	Sexually transmitted infections
SWMS	Sudan Welfare and Socio-Economic Monitoring Survey
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WMS	Welfare Monitoring Survey
STARS	Sudan Transition and Recovery Support

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The fourth round of the Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS-4), conducted between May and July 2025, highlights significant disparities in welfare, livelihoods, and access to services among refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and non-displaced Sudanese households. Despite ongoing conflict, some displaced households have begun to return—particularly to Khartoum and Al Jazira—reflecting both necessity and localized improvements in stability, though services remain disrupted.

Food insecurity is severe and widespread: 62 percent of refugees and 61 percent of IDPs report poor or borderline Food Consumption Scores, compared with 45 percent of non-displaced households. Employment trends diverge—overall employment for Sudanese households has risen modestly over the past year, while refugee employment has declined and remains lowest among IDPs. In education, survey results show higher primary attendance among refugee children in camps than among non-displaced Sudanese children, likely reflecting concentrated partner support in camp settings. This contrasts with administrative data showing low overall refugee enrollment, underscoring vulnerabilities for refugees outside camps. Households increasingly rely on negative coping strategies—reducing health and education spending, selling assets, and withdrawing children from school—to manage food shortages and income shocks.

POLICY PRIORITIES

With food security deteriorating and basic services collapsing in parts of the country, the immediate priority is to protect lives and livelihoods while laying the groundwork for recovery. That means supporting household incomes and income-generating activities and keeping essential services running—now. Concretely, partners should scale up food assistance for the most vulnerable—especially IDPs and refugees—expand digitally enabled cash support where markets function, and protect agricultural production and household assets, particularly in relatively stable areas. At the same time, rehabilitating agricultural technology—chiefly irrigation—and restoring market access in safer states must move quickly to raise food availability, reduce hunger, and stabilize prices.

At the same time, Sudan needs a coordinated approach to displacement, livelihoods, education, and health. Area-based programs that serve refugees, IDPs, returnees, and host communities together can strengthen social cohesion and improve service delivery. Thabat, a World Bank and donor-funded project that aims to increase access to basic services and food security in certain localities of Sudan, is a promising model in that regard, and the survey data indeed show better outcomes in Thabat states, even if causality cannot be established. Removing barriers to refugee employment and investing in agricultural value chains can support self-reliance and reduce reliance on harmful coping strategies such as child labor. To avoid a lost generation, reopen schools, finance school meals, and cut the financial costs of education. At the same time, sustain health and reproductive services, especially in refugee-hosting areas where donor funding is critical to save lives and protect maternal health. Underpinning all of these priorities is the need for stronger systems: adaptive social protection that can scale in crises, and real-time monitoring (such as the WMS) to guide targeting and adjust programs as conditions evolve.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Sudan is navigating one of its most complex development and humanitarian crises in recent history. The conflict, which broke out in April 2023, has resulted in a large displacement crisis, taken an enormous toll on lives and livelihoods of Sudanese people, and caused large scale destruction to Sudan's infrastructure and economy. At the same time, the country continues to host one of Africa's largest protracted refugee populations, estimated at over 850,000 people. Widespread displacement, deepening hunger, collapsing education systems, strained healthcare, and limited job prospects are converging into a multifaceted crisis and development challenge.

Sudan has a six-decade tradition of refugee protection, dating back to 1967, and continues to keep its borders open despite internal conflicts. In total, Sudan hosts more than 850,000 refugees and asylum seekers, about 97 percent from South Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. Before the conflict, Khartoum hosted the largest refugee caseload, followed by White Nile, Kassala, and East Darfur. The conflict's heavy impacts in Khartoum, Al Jazirah, Kordofan, and Darfur triggered large secondary displacement within Sudan, shifting the largest concentrations of displaced populations to White Nile, Kassala, and Gedaref. The protection environment has worsened for refugees still seeking protection in the country, and the government has introduced strict encampment policies that further constrain prospect for durable solutions. Despite the conflict, Sudan continues to receive new arrivals of refugees from neighboring countries, mainly from Ethiopia, Eritrea and South Sudan.

A growing share of previously self-reliant urban refugees has moved into camps, and UNHCR estimates that about 67 percent of refugees now reside in camps, up from roughly 30 percent pre-conflict. This secondary displacement of refugees is straining limited services and resources in comparatively safer states, and protection risks like sexual violence, family separation, exploitation, and rights deprivations are rising, with children particularly affected by reduced access to health care, education, birth registration, and a protective family environment.

WMS-4 offers near-real-time insights into welfare outcomes for nationals and refugees, including employment, food security, education, and health. This note presents comparative findings and proposes actions to improve interventions and projects aimed at building a pathway from relief to self-reliance and community resilience.

THE SUDAN WELFARE MONITORING SURVEY

The World Bank's Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS), funded by the Sudan Transition and Recovery Support (STARS) Trust Fund, has been interviewing households by phone since October 2024, capturing shifts in displacement, assets, food security, mental health, education and employment. This survey seeks to inform policy priorities and project design by the World Bank and other development actors.[1] Four rounds of the survey have been conducted so far. This note summarizes the results of the fourth and most recent round (WMS-4).

The first two rounds of the WMS covered 13 of the 18 states in Sudan and reached over 1,300 households. Due to widespread disruption in the five Darfur states, these states were not covered by the first two WMS rounds.

[1] For more information on the high-frequency phone survey, please visit: Sudan High-Frequency Phone Survey (World Bank) | Sudan Regional Crisis - Development Action Platform

Starting with round 3, the sampling strategy was overhauled to arrive at a representative sample across all 18 states of Sudan. WMS-3 reached over 3,000 households across all states. The fourth round, WMS-4, built on the sampling approach of WMS-3 but added a stratum of refugees to enable side-by-side comparisons with Sudanese nationals. A total of 4,241 households were interviewed for WMS-4, comprising 3,129 national households (including 827 internally displaced individuals) and 1,112 refugees[2] living in Blue Nile, White Nile, Kassala, and Red Sea states. UNHCR facilitated access to the refugee population by conducting a listing exercise among refugees in four states. The sample comprised of adults aged 18 and above with phones. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in low-connectivity areas (through random walk sampling).

WMS-4 collected information on a range of subjects, including displacement, food security, employment, and health. Additionally, crisis-specific data were collected regarding child labor, coping mechanisms, need and use of reproductive health services. WMS uses survey weights to ensure national representativeness for households (by residence, state, household size, gender, education, age) and for refugees (by age, gender, region). Where comparable to Round 3, trends are provided; however, not all indicators have direct round-to-round comparability.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Displacement Trends and Return Intentions

While displacement remains widespread, an increasing number of internally displaced Sudanese have started to return home, and the country continues to serve as a vital refuge for people fleeing neighboring countries.

Displacement remained widespread during WMS-4, affecting nearly a quarter of households as of July 2025. About 23 percent of households (approximately 14 million individuals)[3] were displaced during WMS-4, and an additional 6 percent reported that some family members had moved away. The situation is especially dire in North Darfur and Central Darfur states, where around 75 percent and 80 percent of the respondents have been forced to leave their homes. Large numbers of displaced Sudanese originate from Khartoum (about 25 percent) and North Darfur (around 20 percent). Conflict exposure and higher education are strongly correlated with being displaced. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to move more often, which could be because they have more resources or better networks that make relocation easier, and because substantial displacement originated from Khartoum, where individuals tend to be better educated.

Despite the conflict, Sudan's borders have remained open to incoming refugees. Surprisingly, more than a quarter—28 percent—of refugees [4] surveyed crossed into Sudan after the start of the conflict, their experiences marked by both hardship and hope. Overall, most refugees in Sudan originate from South Sudan

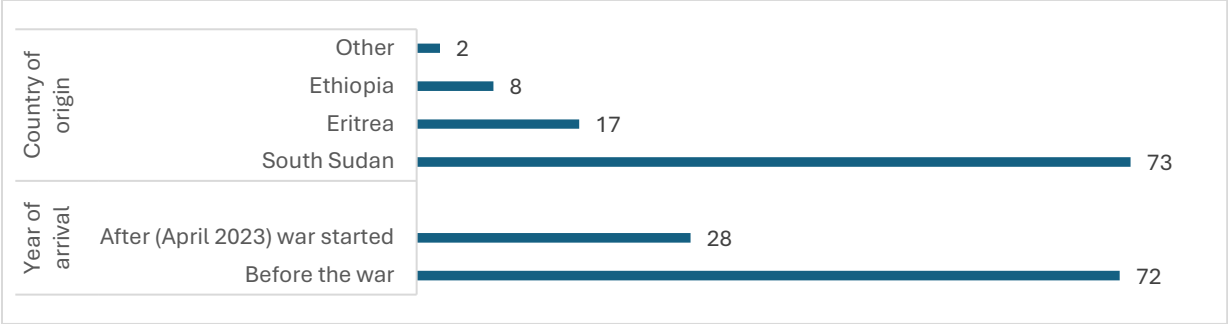
[2] The refugee sample is mainly from the camps, but according to UNHCR population data, only two-third of the refugees are in camp sites, making this sample representative of the in-camp refugees only.

[3] Survey estimates indicate that the total population is distributed as 889330 refugees, 12.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and 38.9 million people not displaced.

[4] By extrapolation, this would indicate an estimated 249,000 refugees across the country.

(73 percent) and Eritrea (17 percent), countries plagued by their own challenges that force many to flee (Figure 1). Notably, of those who have arrived since the conflict began, 83 percent come from these neighboring countries alone, with 63 percent from South Sudan and 20 percent from Eritrea. These movements reflect the highly fluid, pendular mobility patterns between Sudan and neighboring countries, shaped by shifting security, livelihoods, and social networks.

Figure 1: Share of refugees by country of origine and year of arrival.



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

As security conditions have started to improve in certain states, displaced Sudanese have started to return home. Approximately 13 percent of formerly displaced households have already moved back to their origin area. Notably, West Kordofan state leads with 49 percent of families returning, followed by Al Jazirah at 40 percent and Khartoum at 28 percent. Interestingly, Sudanese with higher levels of education are the most eager to return to their home areas. Refugees tend to have more varied resettlement plans (Figure 2b). Some refugees wish to stay in Sudan and integrate in the host community (39 percent), while others (21 percent) hope to move somewhere else entirely (in Sudan or abroad). An estimated quarter of the refugee respondents (around 25 percent) are hoping to return to their country of origin. Since early 2025, there have also been Sudanese refugees returning from Egypt, South Sudan and other countries, but these refugee returns to Sudan fall outside the scope of this survey.

Figure 2a: Return intentions among Sudanese IDPs

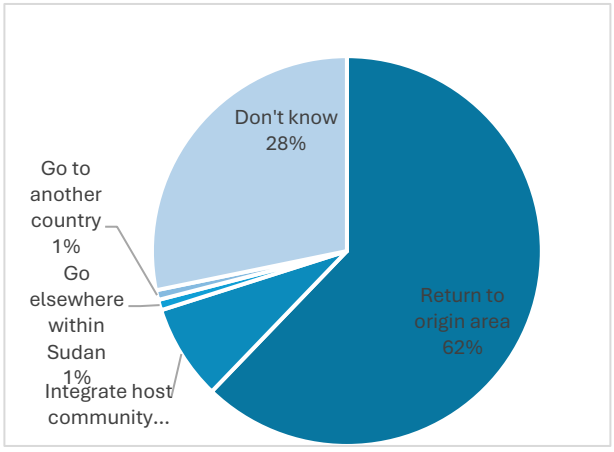
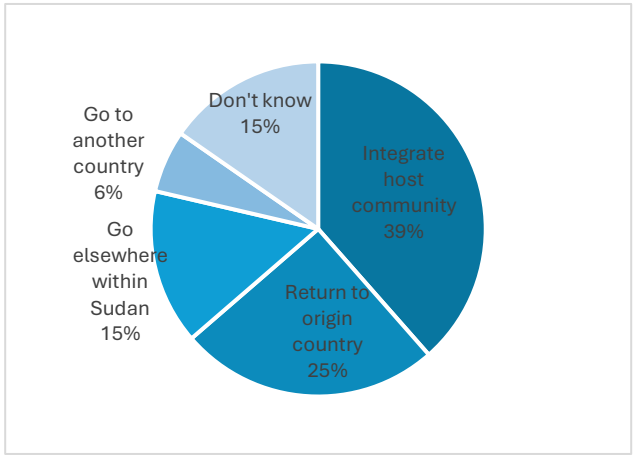


Figure 2b: Return intentions among refugees living in Sudan



Source: World Bank calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

Uncertainty over return intentions among refugees and IDPs underscores the complexity of their future choices. A significant portion (28 percent) of IDPs remain uncertain regarding their return intention, while refugees also display moderate uncertainty (15 percent "Don't know"). For internally displaced Sudanese households, return is often to their place of origin within Sudan, or to a location elsewhere in Sudan. For refugees, on the other hand, return generally means a movement across international borders, back to their country of origin. The substantial levels of uncertainty in both groups underscore the complex nature of displacement and return decisions.

For IDPs, the decision to return home involves careful consideration of the security situation at origin, available opportunities and access to services, and the capacity for resilience. IDP households with at least one recently employed member exhibit higher propensity to return to their place of origin. This pattern likely reflects improved financial capacity to cover the costs of travel and re-establishment. Return intentions vary notably by area of displacement: approximately 70 percent of displaced persons in urban areas, 58 percent in semi-urban areas, and 57 percent in rural areas express a desire to return to their places of origin. And there is a clear link between food security and return: families with stable access to food are far more likely to make the move back. These patterns suggest that employment, rural ties, and basic needs like food are critical drivers of return and should be central to any strategy to support returns. The ability to access agricultural land at home may also influence the decision of individuals who have been absent for an extended period to return.

Effective support for displaced people hinges on tailoring assistance to distinct IDP and refugee trajectories, focusing resources where needs are greatest, and adapting as conditions and intentions evolve. Targeted support for displaced populations requires recognizing the diverse and evolving needs of both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. Prioritizing assistance in states with the highest displacement rates, such as North Darfur and Central Darfur, and addressing the unique challenges faced by those from urban centers like Khartoum, enables more effective resource allocation and program design. Interventions will also need to reflect operational constraints and the current security context, which at present makes it difficult to advance solution-oriented work in the Darfurs.

Facilitating safe and sustainable returns involves improving security, investing in critical infrastructure, expanding access to livelihoods and essential services, and strengthening community resilience. For refugees, it is important to accommodate varied resettlement preferences, including local integration and voluntary repatriation, while addressing the uncertainty many face about their future. Ensuring safe and sustainable returns also requires efforts to rebuild the significantly weakened social fabric. This includes fostering meaningful community participation in shaping areas of return, promoting peaceful coexistence (such as addressing the rising incidence of hate speech directed at refugees) and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized groups, with particular attention to the engagement of youth and women. Continued monitoring and flexible programming are essential to respond to evolving displacement and return dynamics, including through crisis modifiers[5] in project design. This may require adjustments in geographic focus or priority

[5] A crisis modifier is a small, pre-arranged funding mechanism within a development project. It is set aside specifically to enable a rapid response when a shock occurs. It is triggered when predefined indicators or alerts

interventions. Area-based or sectoral approaches should, as far as possible, incorporate the needs of all population groups to ensure inclusive development programming, while navigating the challenges posed by ongoing conflict and rising xenophobia toward refugees.

2. Food Security

Sudan faces severe and worsening food insecurity, with refugees and IDPs suffering most as hunger spreads[6] and coping options dwindle.

Food insecurity remains a severe and persistent challenge across Sudan. Several areas, particularly in parts of Darfur and Kordofan states, are facing famine or conditions approaching famine, driven by the conflict, market disruption, climate vulnerability, and constrained humanitarian access. Map 1 shows significant food security gaps in Sudan, with western and southwestern states such as West Kordofan (22.2), South Darfur (21.5), Central Darfur (24.0), and North Darfur (27.3) reporting the lowest Food Consumption Scores (FCS). Many households there face severe food insecurity, and some areas—Central Darfur, West Kordofan, South Darfur, South Kordofan, and West Darfur—have poor food consumption rates between 65 percent and 80 percent (Map 2.a in Annex 1). By contrast, northern and eastern states—such as Nile (61.2), Red Sea (59.3), Northern (58.8), and Khartoum (57.5)—show much better FCS values. These levels suggest a larger share of households with acceptable food consumption and comparatively stronger food security conditions. In these states, acceptable food consumption rates range between 76 and 80 percent (Map 2.b in Annex 1). The central belt and parts of the south fall in between, with moderate FCS values that merit attention but are less severe than conditions in the west.

The geographic divide in food insecurity underscores the need for regionally targeted interventions. Persistently low FCS in western and parts of central Sudan likely reflects systemic constraints—including conflict, displacement, and limited access to markets and essential services. Addressing these underlying drivers alongside immediate assistance will be critical to improving food security and promoting more equitable outcomes across Sudan.

Food insecurity affects almost half of the Sudanese population (either poor or borderline food consumption). The most at-risk groups include individuals with little or no formal education, residents of semi-urban and rural areas, and those living in regions marked by high levels of conflict (Figure 3). While certain areas, like the areas under World Bank-financed Sudan Thabat - Enhancing Community Resilience Project[7], have shown more resilience (though this cannot be causally attributed to the project), the overall picture points to substantial hardship, especially among the most vulnerable communities (see Annex 1 for more details). These contrasting trends highlight the need for further investigation to understand the underlying factors and assess the effectiveness of targeted support in these communities.

Food insecurity remains a pressing and disproportionate challenge for refugees and IDPs in Sudan. Refugees are disproportionately affected by hunger, with urban refugees facing some of the harshest

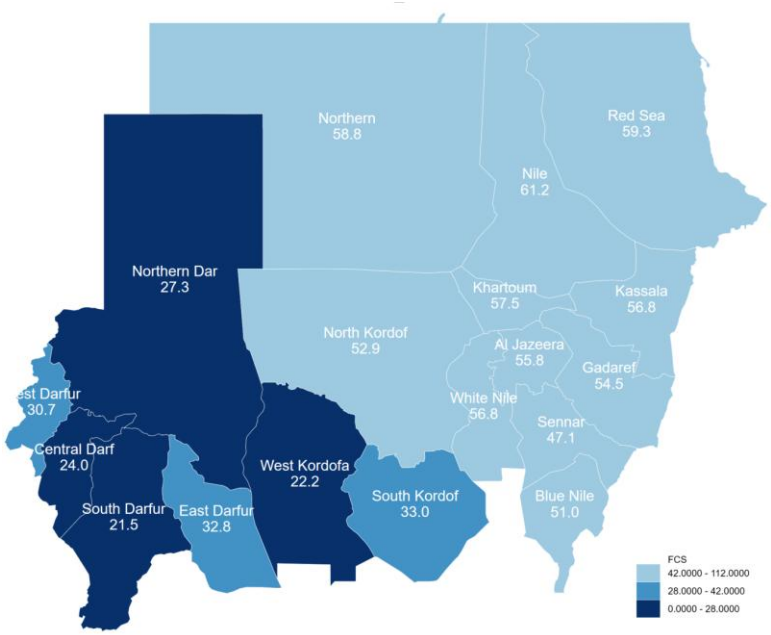
signal that a crisis is emerging. Once activated, it allows programs to scale up or adjust activities quickly, such as shifting geographic focus or adding new interventions.

[6] Seasonality has a limited influence on refugees' food security. Because most refugees have restricted or no access to agricultural land, harvest cycles do not materially affect their circumstances; they largely rely on markets and humanitarian assistance. In urban settings, food insecurity is primarily driven by constrained incomes and reduced support which further diminishes any seasonal effects.

[7] The project aims to support the resilient development of communities affected by conflict in Sudan.

conditions, potentially owing to a lack of food assistance available outside of camp locations. The lack of access to education worsens food insecurity among refugees: those without schooling are most prone to food insecurity, whereas individuals with higher education levels generally enjoy better food security. WMS-4 uncovers that non-displaced individuals have better food consumption outcomes than IDPs and refugees. Respectively 61 percent and 62 percent of IDPs and refugees have insufficient food consumption—categorized as either borderline or poor—compared to 45 percent of non-displaced (Figure 4).

Map1: Average Food consumption score by state



Source: World Bank calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

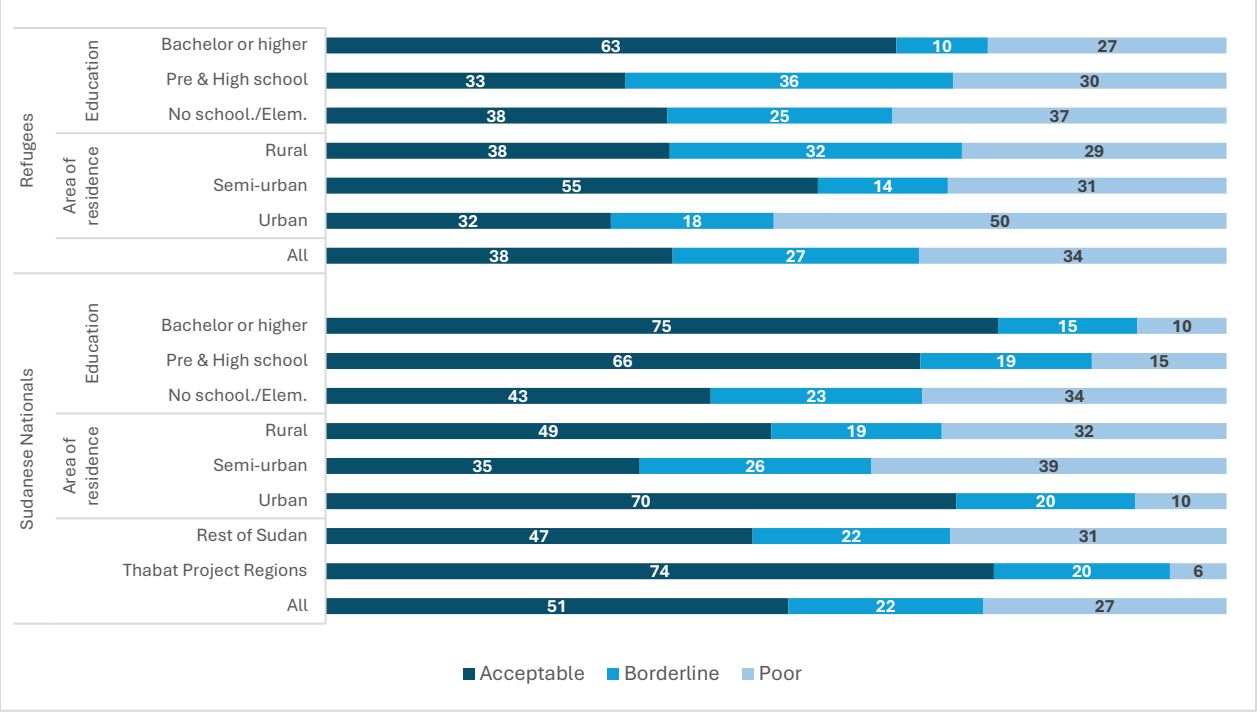
Refugees rely heavily on humanitarian assistance to access food. While Sudanese households primarily rely on market purchases to source their food, refugees depend heavily on food aid provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) and NGOs, which accounts for 61 percent of their food supply. Such reliance on food aid is increasingly precarious[8] in light of declining international assistance, and 65% of surveyed refugees indeed reported that food rations have declined since the start of 2025[9] (Box 1). While Sudanese household can supplement their food purchases with their own agricultural production, refugees face restrictions on land and resources, which mean their own agricultural production is minimal (Figure 5a). To address these vulnerabilities, it is crucial to expand and diversify livelihood solutions and options for refugees, reducing dependence on unstable aid flows and fostering greater resilience. While refugees face severe food insecurity,

[8] Sudan is facing severe difficulties in delivering humanitarian aid because of ongoing conflict. Humanitarian operations are frequently disrupted by continued fighting, looting, and restrictions imposed by both parties to the conflict, all of which hinder assistance to displaced populations. Compounding these challenges, several major donors have scaled back their support, resulting in the closure of vital food programs and health centers.

[9] The significant drop in food rations for refugees is confirmed by operational data from the WFP, which indicates that refugees in Sudan received just 70 percent of the targeted daily food ration of 2,100 kilocalories per person by mid-2025.

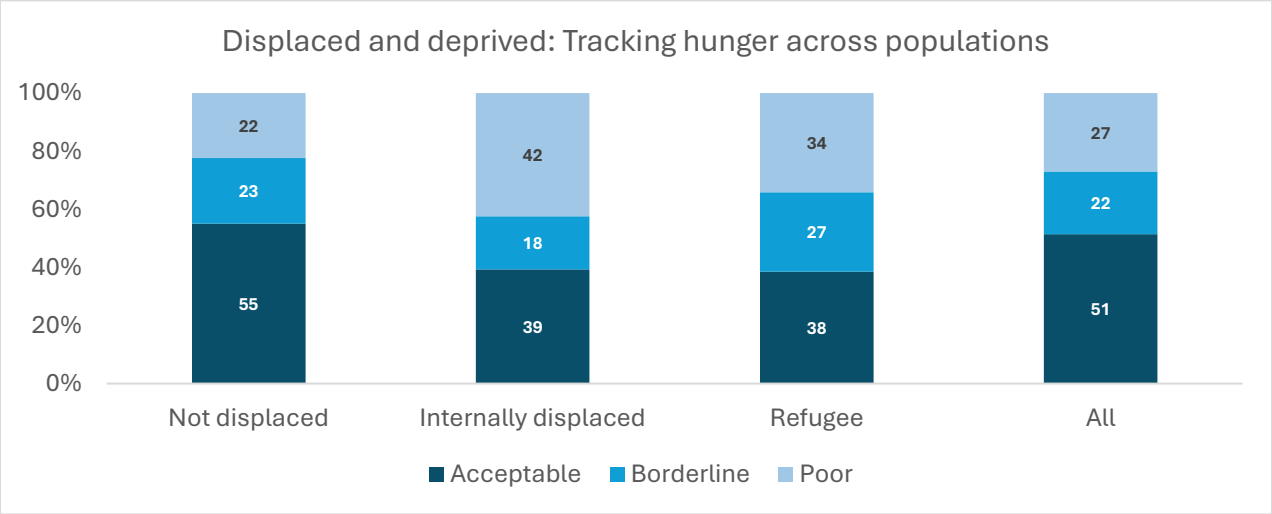
the situation is equally alarming among IDPs, and food assistance remains limited: About 43% of food-insecure IDPs reported receiving food assistance, compared to 78% of refugees.

Figure 3: Prevalence of food insecurity by category (percent)



Source: World Bank calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

Figure 4: Displaced and deprived: Tracking hunger across populations



Source: World Bank calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

Between February and July 2025, food insecurity has significantly worsened across Sudan, particularly impacting refugees and vulnerable host communities. Figure 5b indicates that many households (refugees

and nationals) previously classified as 'borderline' have slipped into 'poor' food consumption, largely due to sustained conflict-related disruptions, reduced access to markets, and significant cuts in humanitarian food assistance that have eroded their ability to cope and maintain even minimal dietary diversity. Areas such as Central Darfur, North Darfur, West Darfur, and South Kordofan have seen sharp increases in poor food consumption, though West Kordofan has shown some improvement (note that WMS-4 was implemented before the fall of El Fasher and the subsequent events).

As food insecurity deepens, many families are forced into increasingly desperate measures to cope with ongoing hunger. To survive, both refugees and Sudanese nationals (including IDPs) are making difficult choices, often at the expense of their long-term wellbeing. The most common coping strategy, particularly among refugees (76 percent), is to reduce spending on essential non-food items like healthcare and education. Additionally, many households are being forced to sell productive assets—58 percent of refugees and 45 percent of nationals, which undermines their future ability to generate income. Notably, most refugees did not sell household assets simply because they had too few to begin with. These measures highlight the steep cost of survival in the face of persistent and worsening food insecurity.

Box 1 Drivers of Reduction of Food Rations in Refugees Camps

The reduction in food rations is primarily driven by two interconnected factors:

1. **Declining Humanitarian Resources:** Supply constraints and funding cuts have led to significant reductions in both the quantity and frequency of basic food distributions. Key informant interviews from Blue Nile, Kassala, and White Nile indicate that essential items such as cereals, oil, and pulses are now distributed less often and in smaller amounts. For example, households in Um Sangour Camp (White Nile) currently receive only a quarter of their previous corn allocations, while rice and bread distributions in Khor Alwarel Camp last barely two weeks. Similarly, residents of Babikri Camp (Gedaref) and Wad Sherifi Camp (Kassala) report drastic cuts in lentil and cereal portions, forcing families to stretch limited supplies. Refugee testimonies consistently highlight that basic food distributions have decreased, compelling people to find ways to make the little they receive last longer.
2. **Insecurity and Limited Access:** Although resource constraints are the main driver, insecurity and restricted access have further exacerbated the crisis by disrupting supply routes and hindering humanitarian operations, especially in Darfur and Kordofan. In West Kordofan and North Darfur, insecurity has rendered several areas inaccessible, causing delays in aid deliveries and increasing transport costs. Local markets, while sometimes open, are often economically non-functional; prices have soared, and goods arrive irregularly due to blocked or unsafe roads. Refugees in Babikri Camp (Gedaref) also report that threats of robbery and insecurity along market routes prevent households from purchasing food, even when it is available.

Figure 5a: Where do you primarily get your food from? (all respondents, %).

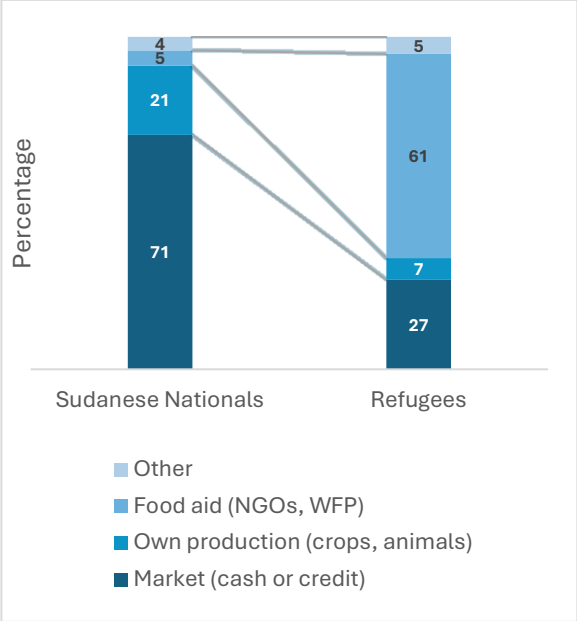
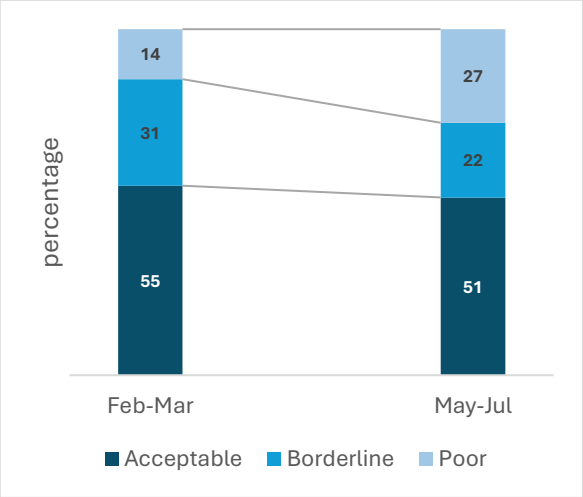


Figure 5b: Sudan's food crisis deepens sharp rise in severe insecurity (all respondents, %), 2025



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, rounds 3 and 4.

Given the rise in food insecurity, there is an urgent need to protect the most vulnerable households while reducing reliance on harmful coping strategies. Refugees in urban areas are particularly exposed, as they receive limited food assistance and depend almost entirely on volatile markets. Expanding cash-based assistance for these households, alongside maintaining life-saving food distribution for camp-based refugees and IDPs, would help address immediate gaps while supporting household choice and dietary diversity. Strengthening local markets and food production remain important, and equally critical is embedding food security monitoring into adaptive social protection systems so that support can scale up rapidly when conditions deteriorate.

3. Employment

Sudanese nationals are seeing better job prospects, while refugees face fewer job opportunities, greater aid reliance, and more child labor.

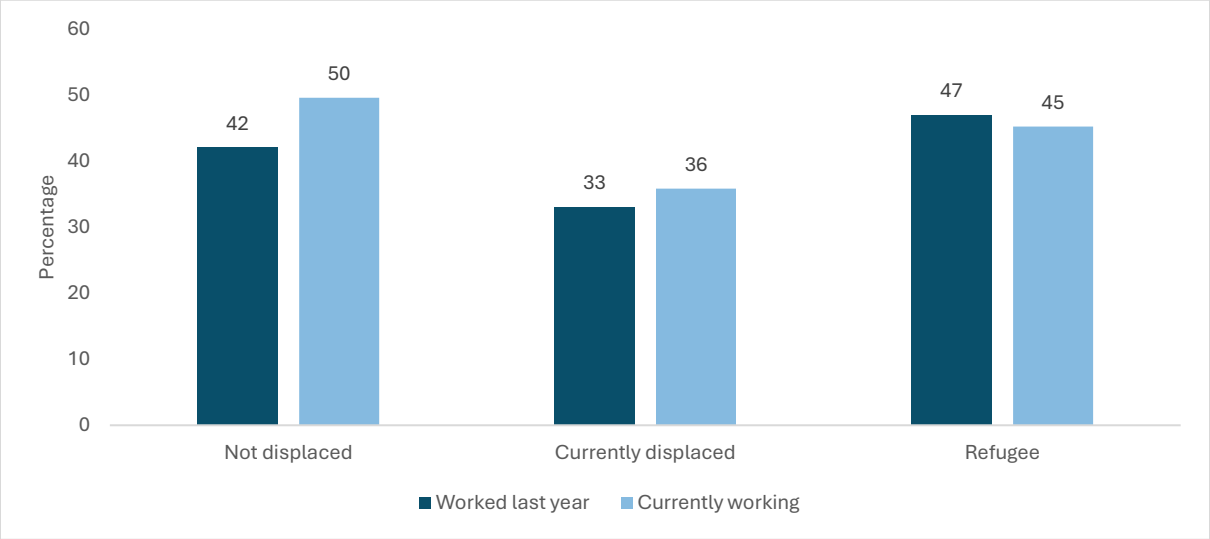
Following a sharp drop after the onset of the conflict, employment indicators for Sudanese nationals have improved, whereas refugees continue to face particular challenges in accessing jobs. While Sudanese have seen employment gains in the last 12 months (between May/July 2024 and May/July 2025)—particularly among men and those with a secondary or high school education—refugees have experienced a slight decline in overall job opportunities, due to significant barriers to employment outside camps[10] (Figure 6). Refugees with higher education are an exception, as they have experienced an increase in employment.

[10] See Box 2 for an overview of the employment challenges faced by refugees in Sudan.

Persistent gender disparities mean that both Sudanese and refugee women remain significantly underrepresented in the workforce.

Agriculture and trade have been providing new employment opportunities, though broader employment challenges persist. Employment in agriculture increased from 14 percent to 17 percent, and trade rose from 11 percent to 13 percent, with a modest uptick in manufacturing as well. Despite these sectoral gains, the structure of employment among Sudanese nationals has remained largely the same, with a slight increase in self-employment—from 44 percent to 45 percent—suggesting a shift toward informal or entrepreneurial income streams. Wage-based employment has seen only a marginal rise, indicating limited access to formal salaried positions, while reliance on other income sources like remittances and aid has decreased from 19 percent to 17 percent.

Figure 6: 12 months of change: employment trends among non-displaced, IDPs, and refugees[11]



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

Refugees are increasingly dependent on humanitarian support as employment opportunities diminish. 55 percent of refugees reported not working during WMS-4, slightly up from 53 percent 12 months earlier. As a result, the share of refugees relying on food aid increased from 42 percent to 45 percent, underscoring their heightened vulnerability in light of declining aid.

[11] The surveys indicate that refugees had higher employment than nationals in 2024 (a year before the survey). Employment rates among refugees may be higher during periods of reduced aid, as they are often willing to accept any type of job to survive unlike nationals who have not been displaced. This is especially true when many host community residents have moved away. However, with the increase in returnees, nationals are now competing with refugees for jobs, which could explain the recent decline in refugee employment rates. When limiting the sample to those who were refugees before the war began, their employment rate declined from 48% last year to 46% this year.

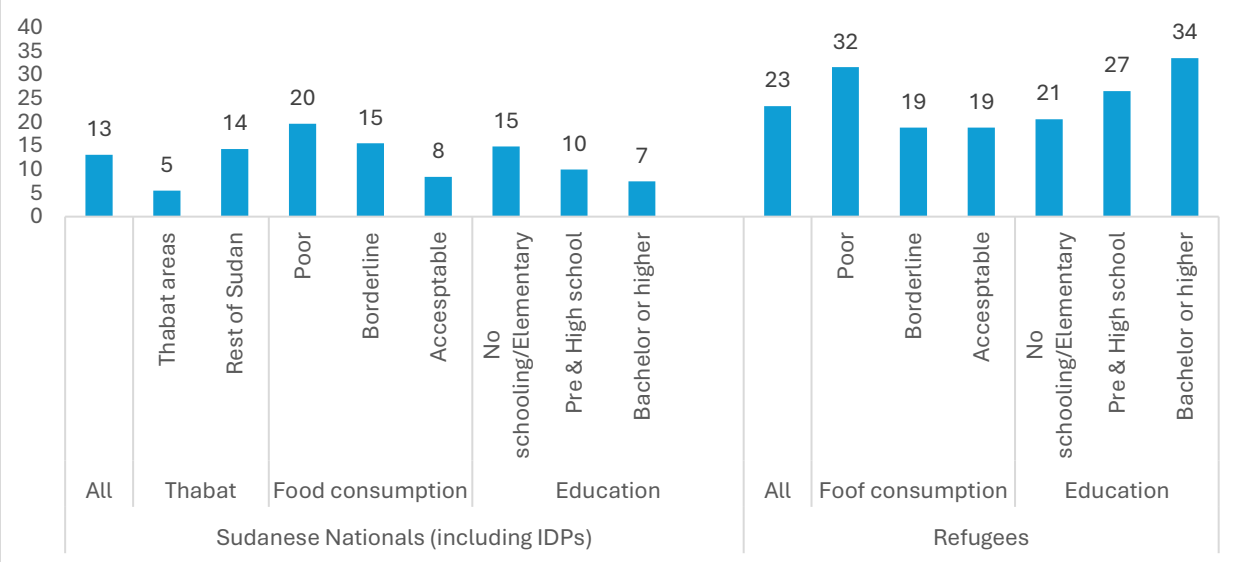
Box 2 **Employment Challenges for Refugees in Sudan: Legal Framework and Realities**

Sudan is home to over 850,000 refugees, primarily from South Sudan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia (UNHCR, 2025). Although Sudan is a signatory to both the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention, its domestic legal framework—particularly the 2014 Asylum Regulation Act—provides limited clarity regarding refugees' rights to employment. This legal ambiguity leaves refugees without clear pathways to participate in the formal labor market (ILO, 2022).

Most refugees in Sudan (67 percent) work outside camps, primarily in agriculture (51 percent) and small-scale trade (16 percent), while 33 percent remain employed within camp settings. These jobs are usually informal. Refugees face significant barriers to employment outside camps, including movement restrictions (41 percent), security concerns (17 percent), and limited job opportunities (51 percent). Even when informal work is available, formal employment is rare due to unclear procedures for obtaining work permits, limited awareness of rights among refugees and local authorities, and regional disparities in law enforcement and administrative capacity.

Refugees' difficulties in obtaining farmland and employment opportunities have resulted in diminished income, which in turn has contributed to a rise in child labor. Increased prevalence of child labor is a concerning trend, particularly among households struggling with food security, in refugee communities and among Sudanese families with lower education levels (Figure 7). In these vulnerable groups, children are more likely to work, reflecting the broader economic and social challenges that have emerged in the wake of declining employment opportunities and persistent food insecurity.

Figure 7: Percentage of households where a child (under 15) worked in the last 7 days[12]



Source: World Bank calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

[12] The sample includes 39 refugee households with at least one child under 15 and whose respondent is highly educated (Bachelor +); among these, 13 report having working children.

Recovery efforts should be area-based and inclusive of host communities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and returnees. In rural areas, prioritize support to the agriculture sector to promote self-reliance and strengthen food security for refugees and host populations. In urban settings, align interventions with recovery and reconstruction initiatives. Rebuilding efforts should explicitly account for displaced and returnee populations, for example, by adopting inclusive hiring practices and fostering inclusive market systems.

4. Education

There is a notable discrepancy between administrative data and survey findings regarding refugee school enrollment in Sudan. While administrative sources indicate alarmingly low enrollment rates among refugee children, survey data from camps reveal significantly higher primary school attendance, suggesting that official figures may underestimate actual participation in certain contexts where targeted support is provided.

According to UNHCR estimates, the conflict in Sudan has led to widespread school closures and displacement, leaving over 17 million children—including 300,000 refugees—out of school (HNRP, 2025). UNHCR data shows 43 percent of refugees are school-aged, but just 18 percent of refugee children (6–14 years) attend primary school, with only 5 percent enrolled in secondary school (Table 1). Many higher education institutions in affected states have shut down, displacing thousands of students and faculty.

Table 1: Enrolment rate among refugees in Sudan (in percentages)

	Male	Female	Both
Primary	17.7	18.0	17.8
Secondary	5.2	4.5	4.9

UNHCR, 2025

While most refugee children remain out of school, those living in camps show slightly higher enrollment than Sudanese children, though gender and regional disparities persist.

Refugee children in camps have slightly higher primary school enrollment rates than both IDPs and non-displaced populations. Despite facing daunting challenges, surveyed refugee children have higher rates of primary school enrollment than their Sudanese national peers, with boys (74 percent) and girls (72 percent) both outpacing national averages (Figure 8a and Figure 8b). This indicates that refugee children residing in surveyed camps have better access to schools supported by UN/NGOs and development partners, compared to internally displaced and non-displaced populations. In both groups, boys generally have slightly higher enrollment rates than girls, but the gender gap is larger among refugees. Refugee boys continue to lead in secondary education enrollment, while Sudanese girls surpass refugee girls. These patterns emphasize persistent gender disparities in educational access, with more significant gaps seen in refugee communities compared to Sudanese nationals.

Figure 8a.: Proportion of boys/girls aged 6-13 currently in primary school

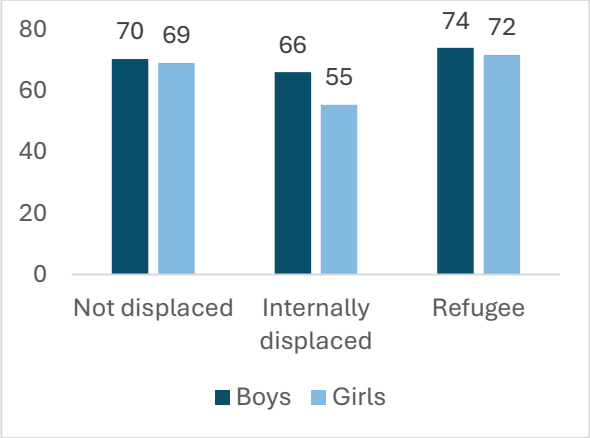
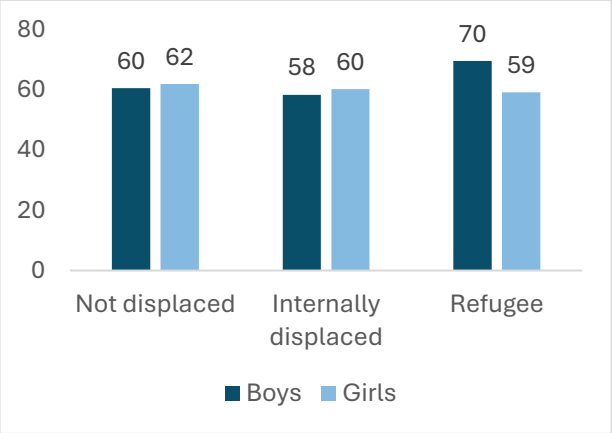


Figure 8b: Proportion of boys/girls aged 14-18 currently in secondary school



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

Socioeconomic factors play a critical role in determining school attendance for Sudanese and refugee children. Access to primary education is notably higher for children living in food-secure households and those whose parents have attained higher levels of education. This underscores the importance of both nutrition and parental support in promoting educational opportunities. The data reveal that primary school enrollment rates for children aged 6–13 are strongly linked to household food consumption and parental educational attainment, pointing to the need for comprehensive interventions that address both economic and educational barriers.

Regional differences in school enrollment highlight both progress and persistent challenges across Sudan. States like Northern and Aj Jazirah lead the way in primary school enrollment for both boys and girls, while Central Darfur lags with the lowest rates. Most regions report higher enrollment for boys, with significant gender gaps in Khartoum, North Darfur, and East Darfur. In contrast, Northern and Red Sea states show more balanced participation between boys and girls, and River Nile stands out with the highest enrollment for both genders. Notably, girls surpass boys in enrollment in North Darfur and West Darfur, suggesting localized successes in promoting girls' education.

The absence from formal schooling often leads children into idleness or informal labor, particularly among both refugees and Sudanese girls[13]. Refugee girls are more likely to be idle when not enrolled, whereas Sudanese girls typically shoulder more domestic work. Childcare responsibilities are widespread among out-of-school children, though agricultural work is minimal for refugees. Data indicates that a substantial proportion of children not attending school are idle—87 percent among refugees compared to 57 percent of Sudanese nationals. Meanwhile, Sudanese boys frequently engage in informal work, such as

[13] Refugee girls often do unreported domestic or care work, as these tasks are unpaid and not officially recognized. Restrictions on movement mean any work outside camps also goes unreported. Lower school enrollment rates among refugee girls, despite available educational support and increased household insecurity, suggest they may be working to help support their families, often at the expense of their own education.

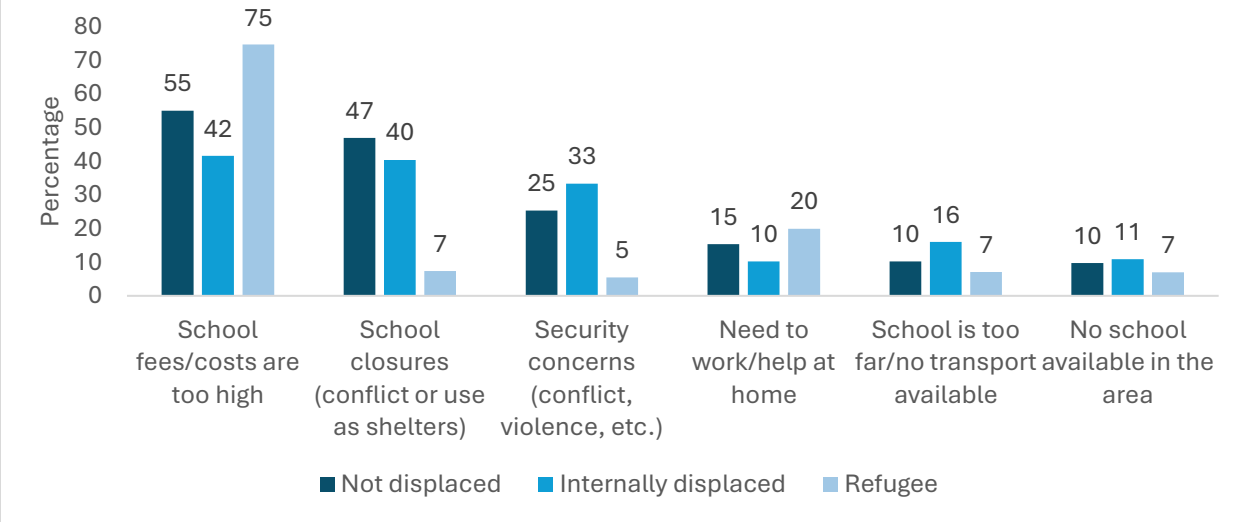
agriculture, herding, restaurant jobs, and street vending, further illustrating the varied challenges faced by these vulnerable groups.

Refugees and displaced families face the greatest barriers to education, with high costs, school closures, and economic hardship preventing millions of children from attending school.

Financial barriers are the most significant challenge to school enrollment, with refugees hit the hardest. Three out of four refugee households (75 percent) cite high school fees and costs as the main reason their children cannot attend school. This is notably less reported among non-displaced (55 percent) and internally displaced households (42 percent), underscoring the severe financial pressures refugees face due to limited income and resources (Figure 9). In several camps, schools have ceased to operate, leaving families with no choice but to send their children to schools outside the camps—a solution that is often prohibitively expensive. Although respondents note that school fees may not be charged, the costs associated with supplies and uniforms remain too high, leading many families to opt out of sending their children to school.

Displacement is the main obstacle to accessing education. Almost half (47 percent) of currently displaced households report school closures as a major obstacle to access to education. These closures are often due to conflict or schools being used as shelters. Similarly, 40 percent of non-displaced families cite school closures, likely reflecting ongoing instability in their communities. In contrast, only 7 percent of refugee households mention this issue, suggesting that refugee camps may provide access to schools, though other challenges like high costs become more critical. Safety concerns also vary: one-third of currently displaced and a quarter of non-displaced households worry about security, compared to just 5 percent of refugees.

Figure 9: Main reasons why some or all children in your household are not enrolled in school



Source: World Bank staff calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

Economic hardship compels many families to prioritize immediate survival over education for their children. The need for children to work or help at home is a significant barrier for all groups, especially among refugees (20 percent) and currently displaced households (15 percent). This highlights how essential

children's labor can be for families struggling to make ends meet, often resulting in education being sacrificed for short-term financial stability.

Access to education is hindered not only by financial and security concerns, but also by significant infrastructure and availability gaps. Physical access to schools is another major problem, particularly for displaced families. Sixteen percent of displaced households report that schools are too far away or that transportation is unavailable, while 11 percent say there are no schools in their area. This reflects the extra hurdles faced by families in remote or underserved locations, where educational infrastructure may be lacking, destroyed due to the ongoing conflict or overwhelmed by new arrivals. The problem is particularly pronounced in areas of return where few teachers remain, significantly reducing the capacity to deliver education.

The enabling policy environment in Sudan facilitates refugee inclusion in the education system. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the education of refugee children, and works closely with COR, UNHCR, UNICEF and other partners. To achieve this goal, development programming should ensure all groups – refugee, IDP, returnee and host community children – are included in area-based and education sector programs. Targeted interventions such as school-feeding programs, cash-for-education transfers, and fee waivers for learning materials and uniforms could substantially reduce the financial barriers identified and help sustain school attendance among displaced and refugee children.

Ensuring equitable access to education for conflict-affected children requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both immediate and systemic barriers. To effectively support refugees, internally displaced persons, returnees, and host communities, it is essential to remove obstacles to access and retention in education, safeguard learning continuity, and strengthen delivery systems. In addition to tackling exceptionally low enrollment rates among refugee children - especially at the secondary level - and addressing gender and geographic disparities, efforts should focus on bridging infrastructure and availability gaps that limit educational opportunities. This includes improving school facilities, expanding classroom capacity, and ensuring the consistent availability of qualified teachers and learning materials. Furthermore, it is important to mitigate common challenges such as cost, distance, school closures, and safety concerns. By prioritizing these areas, education stakeholders can promote more equitable access, enhance retention, and foster long-term resilience for children affected by conflict.

5. Health and Access to Healthcare

Refugee and Sudanese families face major barriers to maternal and reproductive healthcare, with critical gaps remaining for all.

Access to essential healthcare services remains a pressing concern for both refugee and Sudanese families (both IDPs and non-IDPs) in Sudan. Refugees consistently report a higher need for medical care, particularly in areas such as prenatal, postnatal, and vaccination services. For example, the demand for prenatal care stands at 86 percent among refugees and 83 percent among Sudanese nationals, while vaccination needs are also notably high—78 percent for refugees and 67 percent for nationals (Figure 10a and Figure 10b). Post-natal care follows a similar trend, underscoring the critical importance of maternal health services for both populations.

Despite numerous challenges, refugees appear to have greater access to key healthcare services than Sudanese nationals. This is especially evident in maternal care, family planning, and emergency obstetric services, where refugees report higher utilization rates than other groups. As in the case of education, this

could be driven by the free provision of healthcare services in camps, supported by UN/NGOs and development partners. IDPs experience lower access to these services, especially in areas of return where destruction of pre-existing healthcare infrastructure makes service delivery challenging. Access to testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV remains low across both groups, pointing to ongoing gaps in reproductive health provision. Both communities prioritize safe childbirth and reproductive health education, although refugees tend to express lower needs for contraception and STI treatment than their Sudanese counterparts.

Figure 10a: Proportion that accessed when needed.

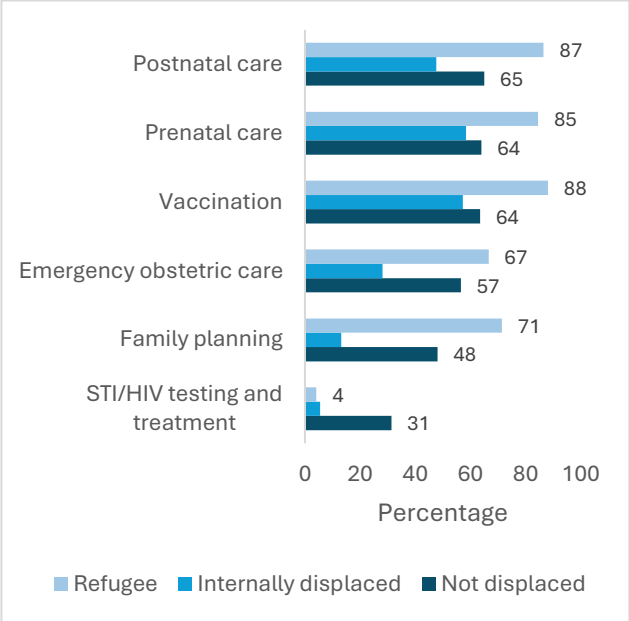
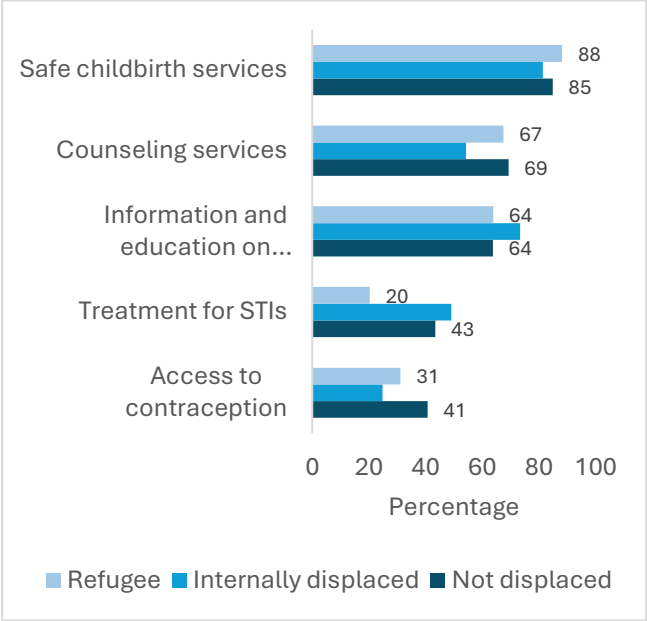


Figure 10b: Proportion of respondents reporting … as the most pressing reproductive health needs



Source: World Bank calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

In line with the Global Compact on Refugees and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, efforts are ongoing to enable refugees and all other forcibly displaced persons to access the promotive, preventive, curative, palliative, and rehabilitative, essential health services they need, at an affordable cost and of sufficient quality to be effective, in order to lead healthy and productive lives. Gradual integration of refugee health services into the national system is envisaged, and an increased or significant proportion of development funding, considering the limited capacity of line ministry (in terms of human resources, technical, operational, medicines and medical supplies).

CONCLUSION

The findings from the WMS-4 demonstrate that Sudan's crisis is multifaceted and uneven, with deepening disparities across displacement status and access to services. The intersection of widespread displacement, a worsening food crisis, strained social services, and limited employment opportunities places refugees and IDPs at greatest risk—even as non-displaced Sudanese show early signs of resilience and modest economic recovery. Refugees appear to weather some aspects of the crisis, particularly in education and healthcare,

largely due to the concentrated presence of humanitarian support in camps; however, this support is declining, leaving these temporary gains at risk of reversal, particularly in an ever-deteriorating protection environment, compounded by repeated internal conflicts and strict enforcement of encampment policies.

Turning evidence into action, the response should be tailored and adaptive—prioritizing high-displacement areas, and enabling safe, voluntary returns through security, livelihoods, and essential services. Expand cash and food assistance to protect vulnerable households, strengthen markets, and embed food security monitoring in social protection systems. Promote inclusive, sustainable livelihoods via microenterprise, agriculture, skills training, and barrier reduction, with phased delivery and local coordination. Ensure equitable education access by tackling enrollment gaps, gender and geographic disparities, and systemic obstacles to learning continuity.

Sustaining real-time monitoring through mechanisms like the WMS for dynamic targeting, evidence-based programming, and ensuring that interventions effectively reach those most in need will ultimately contribute to Sudan's long-term recovery and stability. Looking ahead, ensuring financial sustainability by embedding these interventions within multi-year humanitarian and development planning will be essential to ensure predictable financing and a gradual, sustainable path to resilience and recovery for all groups.

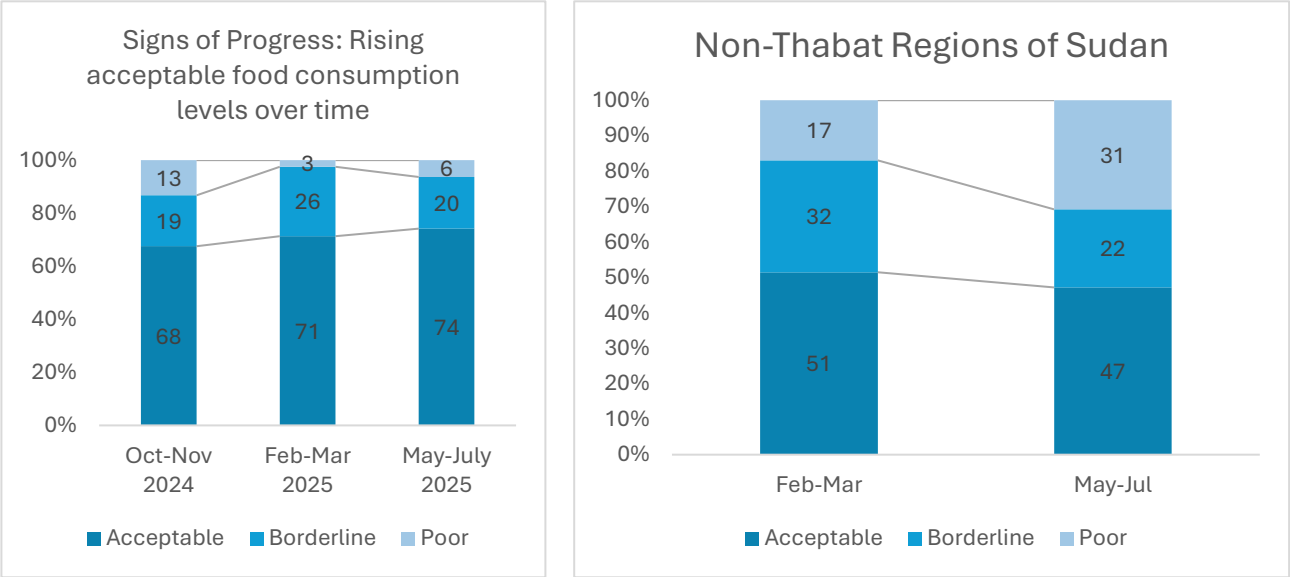
ANNEX1: FOOD SECURITY TRENDS IN THABAT PROJECT REGIONS AND THE REST OF SUDAN

Changes in food security categories between Round 3 and Round 4, comparing the Thabat project regions to the rest of Sudan[14].

Between February and July 2025, notable changes were observed in food security across Sudan, with distinct trends emerging between the Sudan Thabat project localities and the rest of the country. In the rest of Sudan, food security deteriorated considerably: the proportion of people experiencing poor food consumption rose by 14 percentage points, while those with acceptable consumption fell by 4 percentage points.

In the Thabat project regions, the picture was more nuanced. Poor food consumption rose by 3 percentage points, yet the share of individuals with acceptable food consumption also increased by 3 points, and the borderline category fell by 6 points. This pattern indicates divergence: while some residents faced heightened food insecurity, others experienced improvements—potentially reflecting project effects or strengthened community resilience.

Figure A1.1: Share of Population by Food Security Category (%)



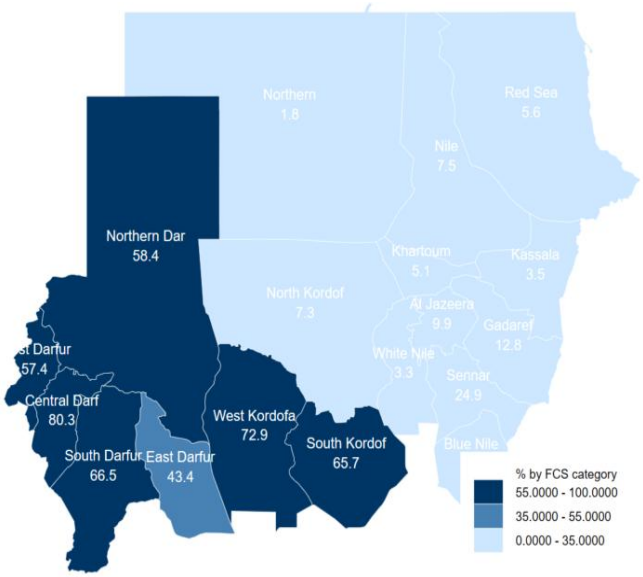
Source: World Bank staff calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 1, 3, and 4. The first round did not cover the Darfur and Kordofan states.

Overall, both regions experienced a reduction in the "Borderline" category, but the outcomes diverged. The Rest of Sudan saw a general decline in food security, whereas the Thabat regions demonstrated signs of

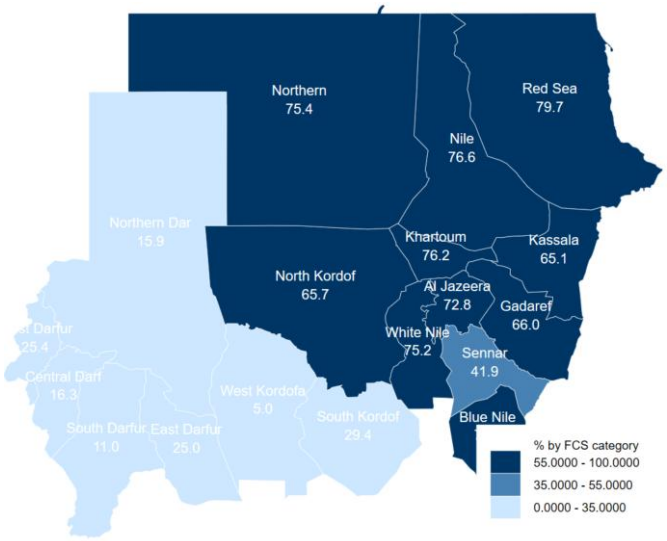
[14] Seasonal cycles drive predictable fluctuations in food availability, prices, and incomes, intensifying food insecurity during the "lean" period between planting and harvest. As household stocks dwindle and agricultural incomes drop, market prices rise, forcing poor families to cut back on meals, sell assets, or incur debt—often increasing risks of undernutrition and disease. While conditions typically improve after harvest, the ongoing conflict is making seasonal gaps more severe and unpredictable for vulnerable households.

stabilization despite ongoing challenges. These contrasting trends highlight the need for further investigation to understand the underlying factors and assess the effectiveness of targeted support in these communities.

Map 2a. Share of population with poor food consumption by state



Map 2b. Share of population with acceptable food consumption by state



Source: World Bank calculation based on Sudan Welfare Monitoring Survey, round 4.

Map 2.a and 2.b reveal pronounced regional disparities in food security across Sudan. Central Darfur, West Kordofan, South Darfur, South Kordofan, and West Darfur stand out for their exceptionally high rates of poor food consumption, with figures ranging from approximately 65 percent to 80 percent. In these states, a significant share of the population does not meet basic dietary requirements, underscoring critical levels of food insecurity. Conversely, states such as Khartoum, River Nile, and Red Sea report a much higher proportion of their populations with acceptable food consumption, indicating relatively better food security conditions compared to the more affected regions.

These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions in the states most impacted by poor food consumption. The widespread food insecurity observed in central and western Sudan points to persistent systemic challenges, likely driven by factors such as conflict, displacement, and limited access to markets and essential services.