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Blue Nile State, Sudan



1. REPORT SUMMARY

In July, September, and October 2022, fighting erupted between the Hausa community and the Funj, Hamaj, and Berta communities in Ar Rusayris, Wad Al Mahi, and Geisan localities of Blue Nile. The conflict resulted in the displacement of 127,961 persons, primarily from the Hausa ethnic group, an estimated 441 deaths and the injury of 469 individuals since July 2022.¹

In July, the Hausa initially sought safety in Al-Damazine, but many moved onward to surrounding states and Khartoum based on familial and cultural ties. In early September, violence broke out when some members of the Hausa community voluntarily returned to village 7 in the Wad Al Mahi locality. In October, violence resurfaced in Ar Rusayris and Wad Al Mahi localities, leaving at least 13 people dead and more than 24 injured.²

Within the broader context of Sudan, the conflict also coincides with the drafting of the new constitution by the Sudanese Bar Association, which could impact political settlements and remove protections from prosecution over various human rights violations since 2003. This drafting process and political uncertainty appear to be causing anxiety for different armed groups and political parties in Sudan. This Protection Analysis Update will explore the protection dynamics within the Blue Nile state since July 2022. The Protection Sector jointly with partners monitored the situation, communicated the findings through two POC advocacy briefs with senior UN and donor officials, held and attended

risk mitigation meetings jointly with the state officials, identified the most vulnerable individuals for assistance by protection sector partners, GBV, CP and MA AoRs, and other sectors including ES/NFIs.

The main protection risks during this period include Attacks on Civilians, Conflict, and Forced Displacement; child protection; Gender-based violence; Housing, Land and Property; Explosive Ordnance (EO).

Methodology

The Protection Analytical Framework guides this Protection Analysis Update. This update was developed through a desk review of primary and secondary data from assessments, sector analysis, protection monitoring and academic research³.

Limitations

Humanitarian access issues create informational and data gaps on protection concerns. Humanitarian actors have yet to have access to much of the state.

2. CONTEXT OVERVIEW

People in Need

Before the conflict in July 2022, Blue Nile State hosted over 151,156 IDPs and 79,560 IDP returnees, most of whom live in rural areas, with only

¹ [Sudan | Situation Reports \(unocha.org\) and EET Ar Rusayris BN 009 \(iom.int\) and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk concludes his official visit to Sudan | OHCHR](#)

² [Sudan - Flash Update: Conflict in Blue Nile State, Wad Al Mahi locality, Flash Update No. 05 \(17 October 2022\) | Digital Situation Reports \(unocha.org\)](#)

³ The baseline data for HNO and HRP 2023 indicates there are 159,091 IDPs in seven localities of Blue Nile state, while the POC advocacy briefs focuses on the latest displacement of population including to an unknown number of people to SPLM-No controlled areas. Two localities of the state are also affected by the presence of land mines and UXOs and therefore not easily accessible for humanitarian workers.

11% of whom reside in urban locations.⁴ These Blue Nile IDP caseloads were displaced between 2011 and 2017 due to fighting between government forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N), which broke out in September 2011. Blue Nile also hosts 79,560 IDP Returnees. Lastly, of the 127,961 persons displaced since July, 67,516 remain displaced in Blue Nile. Besides the conflict, political tension between the two factions of SPLM-N, access to resources including land and mines also causing violence and displacement. Since 2011, Sudanese, including IDPs, Sudanese refugee and IDP returnees, residing in SPLM-N controlled areas led by Abdelaziz Al Hilu are deprived of accessing any kind of GoS programs.

Protection Environment, Security Situation and Access

SPLM-N split into two factions in 2017, those aligning with Malik Agar and those who follow Abdelaziz Al Hilu. Since their split, the factions continue to clash in Blue Nile and South Kordofan. SPLM-N Malik Agar signed the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) in 2020, which designates Blue Nile as an autonomous region resulting in the end of hostilities with government forces. It also improved humanitarian access to the state. Despite the coup d'état in October 2021, the Juba Peace Agreement in the Blue Nile has remained, though antsy, intact.

Meanwhile, the SPLM-N faction of Abdelaziz Al Hilu has yet to join the peace process, but they did sign in 2021 a "declaration of principles" with the government of Sudan. The document outlines priorities, including the unification of armed forces and the right to freedom of religion; however, the legal status of these Principles is unclear.

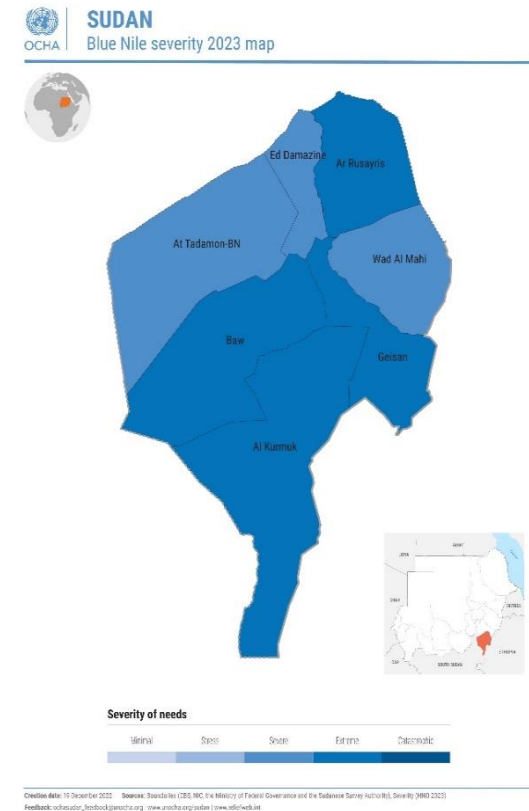
⁴ [\(DTM Sudan\) Mobility Tracking Round Four 0.pdf \(iom.int\)](#)

⁵ [Blue Nile Area: Triggers of the tribal conflict - Sudan Tribune](#)

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The conflict in 2022, as discussed in the report summary, cannot be segregated from the current tensions between the two SPLM-N factions partially due to the growing influence of SPLN-AI Hilu. The conflict is also over the perceived alterity of the Hausa in Blue Nile by Funj, Hamaj, Berta and other tribes. They descend from a West African tribe of the same name. Tensions and discontent towards the Hausa started in early 2022 after the Hausa community had requested its own native administrative body (*Nazarah* or chiefdom) to manage areas where they are a majority.⁵

Further resentment of the Hausa community is linked to the perceived political allegiances that assumed before



the Juba Peace Agreement that the Hausa were aligned with the state government and not SPLM-N.⁶

3. PRIORITY PROTECTION RISKS

1- Attacks on Civilians and other unlawful killings and attacks on civilian infrastructure

The protracted IDP caseload in Blue Nile is 81,700 individuals (2022 HNO), with the new displacement the number of IDPs increased to 159,091 as per the HNO 2023 baseline data. While the protracted IDPs who were displaced between 2011 and 2017 due to the conflict between SPLM-N and the Sudanese Armed Forces reside within host communities in rural areas, the newly displaced are residing mainly in different public institutions and facilities. The number of IDPs in SPLM-N-controlled areas is unknown. Since July 2022, the uptick in intercommunal clashes and attacks on civilians in Blue Nile has resulted in significant internal displacement.

In July, after an alleged killing of a Hausa individual by a member of the Funj community in Ganis, the conflict escalated to include the Hamaj and Berta communities resulting in the loss of 100 lives and the displacement of over 31,000. The conflict displaced ten schools within Damazine and Ar Rusayris, Wad Al Mahi and Geisan localities in the Blue Nile. The Government deployed joint security forces to Blue Nile, including those from the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), some of whom guarded the IDP sites. In the aftermath, authorities limited humanitarian access to IDP sites, which caused challenges in establishing needs and responses. Simultaneously, the government at the State and Khartoum levels indicated that the

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IDPs (Hausa) could return to their places of origin in Ganis within Ar Rusayris localities. Protection partners observed the Hausa returning to Ganis in Ar Rusayris to check on their properties without intending to stay. Some even allegedly returned to Damazine after experiencing the threat of violence.

After the return of Hausa IDPs in Village 7, Wad Al Mahi locality clashes broke out with the Hamaj, Berta, and Jabalween tribes on 1 and 2 September 2022 in village 7.⁷ On 13 October 2022, the inter-communal conflict between Hausa and Jabalween tribes (part of Hamaj) erupted when a Hausa farmer was reportedly killed by a member of Jabalween over alleged land ownership in Village 6 in Wad Al Mahi locality. The conflict escalated over the following days, which resulted in the killing of more than 42 people and localised displacement to nearby villages and Village 7, Wad Al Mahi. As soon as the incident unfolded, the authorities deployed police but were unable to control the situation. Later that month, clashes spread to Village 4, Wad Al Mahi resulting in loss of lives, causing injuries and destruction of property and displacement of some 7,000 Hamaj and Gumuz communities in Villages 1-5 in Wad Al Mahi Locality.

On 23 October, clashes between Hausa and Hamaj continued in Village 8 in Geisan locality, resulting in undetermined losses and displacement of civilians into Damazine and Ar Rusayris. In the ensuing days, there were more clashes in Villages 9, 10, 11 and 12 of Geisan locality, where much of the Hausa community resides. This has resulted in the displacement of some 16,000 non-Hausa from these villages to four schools in Damazine, whereas Hausa have been displaced within the

Figure 1 Conflict Displacement from Blue Nile

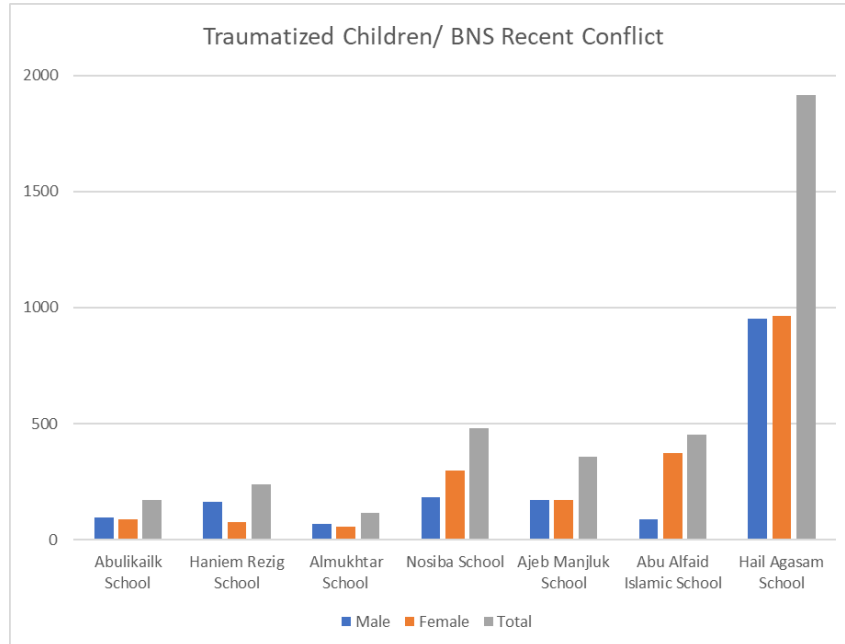
⁶ [What is behind the tribal violence in Sudan's Blue Nile State? | Explainer News | Al Jazeera](#)

⁷ IOM DTM [EET_Ar Rusayris_BN_006IA \(iom.int\)](#)

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remaining villages while those who got a chance left the state. Since July, IOM DTM estimates that over 127,961 persons have been displaced.⁸ Limited services are available to IDPs in displacement areas,



and sites lack security. As a coping mechanism, some IDPs, mainly Hausa women and children, have sought onward movement to protect themselves using familial and tribal networks. So far, onward movements were recorded to Sennar (33,547), Gezira (5,626), White Nile (17,241), Gedaref (3,382), Khartoum, and other states.⁹

In October, the military established a roadblock in Village 5 and restricted all movement beyond; this temporarily cut off access to

refugees in Camp 6. On 19 October 2022, the Governor of the Blue Nile region issued a decree prohibiting the movement of civilians using trucks in the Dam towns 1-7 within Wad Al Mahi locality. This restriction in freedom of movement allegedly prevented people from seeking safety and accessing life-saving services, endangering their right to health, food, and life. This was followed by the declaration of a State of Emergency, which has now been extended for another 30 days, effective from 21 November 2022.¹⁰ This declaration prevents freedom of movement after curfew.

The mentioned situation has also stooped the education process of children as the IDPs were and still residing at states in some of the localities of Blue Nile and other states.

2- Child Protection risks¹¹

During the 2022 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA), 62% of IDP households in Blue Nile reported that some members, children in particular, did not have at least one type of civil documentation because most did not have or lost them. Often those members of the household without civil documentation are girls and boys.

Protection Actors observed psychological distress among children by those recently displaced in 2022 due to violence and intimidation during the violent conflict.

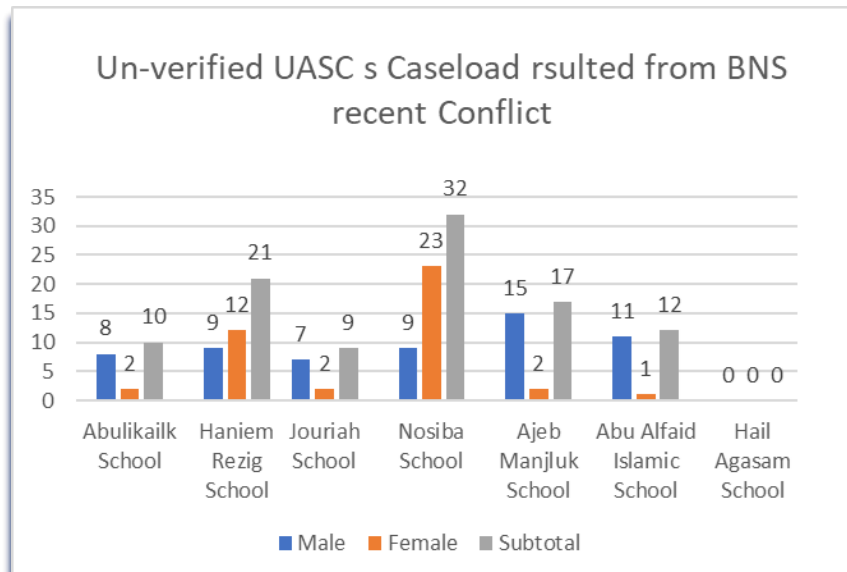
⁸ [Sudan | Situation Reports \(unocha.org\)](https://www.unocha.org/sudan/situation-reports)

⁹ [EET Ar Rusayris BN 009 \(iom.int\)](https://www.iom.int/EET-Ar-Rusayris-BN-009)

¹⁰ [CrisisWatch: November Alerts and October Trends | Crisis Group](https://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/sudan/CrisisWatch-November-Alerts-and-October-Trends)

¹¹ concerned child protection risks includes child, early or forced marriage, forced recruitment and recruitment of children in armed forces and groups, forced family and child separation, psychological/emotional abuse or inflicted distress

The displacement in 2022 caused the significant family separation. In the immediate aftermath, 76 UASC were identified in Um Shouka IDPs settlement Sinjar locality living in with host community in Sennar state. Women often reported separations from their husbands. Compounded with the fact that IDPs lost their food stock and source of livelihood, housing, and other non-food items, IDPs are at risk of adverse coping mechanisms, including child labour and survival sex.



Child Recruitment by armed groups has long been an issue in Blue Nile. Accompanying both sides of the conflict, children join armed groups other than family members with the inclusion of girls and boys through manipulation of a promise of safety, a sense of community, branding, and brainwashing. Women and children in the conflict affected areas of

¹² [Hausas in Sudan: The pilgrims' descendants fighting for acceptance - BBC News](#)

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Sudan are the most affected mentally and psychologically and are in need of MHPSS. While parties to the conflict and armed groups attacking civilians, killing and destroying civilian infrastructures do not respect the rules of war, it is women and children who witness killing of their family, tribe members, burning of their houses, villages, looting of their property and livestock and fleeing to different directions.

3- Risks associated to Housing, Land and Property

Evidence has shown that this conflict in Blue Nile has been triggered by disputes over access to land, economic domination and broader questions of ethnic identity, particularly between people considered indigenous to an area and those regarded as settlers. Like much of Sudan, Blue Nile lacks a comprehensive land registration, making it challenging to determine ownership, boundaries and zoning. Land issues and the land administrative institutions are tribalism, restricting the land rights of groups in the state. Unfortunately, the Hausa are seen to be members of this category in Blue Nile despite living in the state for at least a century. Communities seen to be "indigenous" receive representation within the Native Administration, which entitles them to land rights. Though some Hausa have been given land in the past¹², a large part of this community rents land for farming. Despite the inequality of land rights, the Hausa have been significant contributors to the agricultural industry in Blue Nile. This industry in Blue Nile was developed as far back as the cotton trade during the British Colonial Occupation in the early 20th century¹³. Blue Nile remains a significant agricultural center for Sudan and continued to conflict will likely contribute to rising food insecurity.

¹³ [Hausas in Sudan: The pilgrims' descendants fighting for acceptance - BBC News](#)

Protracted IDPs reported housing, land and property issues in their displacement area, according to the 2022 MSNA, including the threat of eviction/harassment by landlords or others. Secondary occupation, land grabbing and land tenure insecurity are also protection issues within Blue Nile. In the aftermath of the conflict since July, the secondary occupation has been reported in Ganis, Ar Rusayris locality. Secondary occupation prevents IDPs from returning home, and some fear retaliation if they were to assert their rights. The loss of land means a loss of livelihoods for IDPs, adding to an already sizeable food-insecure population. Their displacement also has increased the cost of living for the non-displaced as the Hausa are significant contributors to food production in Blue Nile. Other shocks, including hyperinflation and economic degradation, compound their needs. To cope, IDPs seek shelter with their relatives, friends or communities that are sympathetic.

Due to the protection risks that land issues create for civilians before displacement, many Hausa IDPs have voiced that they do not intend to return home for now. Preliminary intention surveys indicate that onward movement is the most popular choice.

4- Presence of mines and other Explosive Ordnance (EO)

In Blue Nile state, EOs continue threatening people's lives, including local populations, IDPs and Returnees. A total of 464 people were reported to be either killed or injured by EOs, including three boys wounded in 2022 in Blue Nile. About 63 locations remaining contaminated with the EOs covering an area of four million square meters are registered in the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA), waiting for survey and clearance operations.

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Blue Nile state has the second highest contamination of explosive Ordnances (EO) in Sudan due to long-lasting armed conflicts since 2011. Explosive ordnance kills, inhibits the delivery of humanitarian aid, prevents civilians' safe movement and access to services and resources and therefore blocks or delays recovery from conflict. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and children are most vulnerable to the threat posed by the presence of landmines and ERW.

5- Gender-Based Violence

In Blue Nile, the inter-communal conflict has exacerbated and created new security risks for women and girls, including disruption of community and family structures, presence of armed non-state actors, limited or lack of legal and security institutions, and heightened tensions related to displacement. Blue Nile remains one of the most affected areas in Sudan, with high levels of GBV and reports of several types of GBV occurring during the fighting. There is a generally poor understanding of GBV in Blue Nile, which contributes to the under-reporting of GBV cases.

Security remains the primary concern. Although the government deployed armed forces, the restriction in movement due to insecurity remains a challenge for the girls and women that restrict their access to their farms, markets, and homes. Displaced women and girls who live in gathering sites with minimal safe spaces expose women and girls to GBV risks and sexual abuse and exploitation due to lack of privacy.

According to interviewed women and midwives, several types of GBV occurred during attacks, including sexual violence. However, GBV remains under-reported, and most survivors do not access services due to insecurity, fear, stigma, and lack of community awareness. The lack of essential services in most areas, including a lack of referral mechanisms to health, PSS, etc, is a gap. A sense of hopelessness and

psychological stress had been observed in most communities: fear of attack, anxiety, and sleepiness among the IDPs among women and children, and observed clear signs of psychological distress that need urgent interventions.¹⁴

In the Blue Nile, the limited access to protection services, as well as the absence of women's participation and involvement in community activities and decision-making processes, has contributed to the increase of physical protection risks and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) among women and Girls in IDP gatherings during conflicts.

4. RESPONSE

Though **humanitarian access** improved after the signing of the Juba Peace Agreement, it remains an issue as limited actors have been granted access to SPLM-N-controlled areas. Lack of regular access to the IDP population at various stages of response creates challenges in establishing needs and responses, avoiding duplication at the initial stages. In Blue Nile, in particular, unimpeded humanitarian access is an issue. Protection Actors face limitations in going to IDP sites unescorted. Despite this situation, humanitarian actors reached people as per the below table:

Blue Nile/ localities	Overall PIN	Overall Target	Overall reached Q3
	437875	249195	464,184
Al Kurmuk	74212	21138	67,584
Ar Rusayris	105345	79197	88,951
At Tadamon	26007	15327	32,019
Baw	83566	37597	52,662
Ed Damazine	48814	39539	111,419
Geisan	57716	32162	60,347

¹⁴ Inter-Assessment Report-Blue Nile State

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Wad Al Mahi	42215	24235	51,201
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As for the funding situation, the financial requirement for general protection and protection AoRs HRP 2022 Sudan was USD 161.9 million, however, only USD 27.7 million (17.1%) was provided.¹⁵

The Protection Sector has taken the following responses:

- **General Protection:** The response has included protection monitoring of IDPs, identification of the most vulnerable individuals and families for assistance through existing projects and referrals to other agencies and advocacy with the authorities at the state and national level to safeguard the rights of IDPs, humanitarian access, humanitarian workers and voluntariness of IDP returns. Advocacy against encamping a minority affected group in Damazine (under military guard).
- The activation of community-based referral mechanisms enhances rapid and safe referral of complicated obstetrical cases needing emergency services.
- **GBV sub-sector:** In July, partners deployed two psychologists and 12 social workers in 6 schools in Ed Damazine. GBV safety audits were conducted in the schools. The sub-sector established the GBV referral pathway established.
- Provided a complete package of case management services at Ed Damazine maternity hospital (confidential corner).
- Partners also distributed dignity kits and sanitary pads. GBV case management services to the GBV survivors by supporting the functionality of Confidential Corners in Ed Damazine and Ar Rusayris hospital. UNFPA supported GBV survivors with life and skill-building activities, income-generating activities, and start-up capital.

¹⁵ <https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/1068/summary>

- **Child Protection sub-sector:** The response has included monitoring the violation of child rights and other child protection concerns and identifying children with specific needs (injured, unaccompanied, and separated children).
- **Mine Action Sub-Sector:** Since 2002, UNMAS has supported the mine action programme in Sudan to release 12 million square meters for productive use, including 676,837 square meters in 2022 as of September. About 15,477 mines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and 306,703 small arms ammunition have been destroyed in Blue Nile. The responses provided in 2022 so far include the deployment of 10 Multitask Teams (MTTs) to implement land release operations, including survey and clearance of EO-contaminated land in Blue Nile. In addition, four Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) teams were deployed to raise awareness about the threat and to support the affected populations to mitigate the risk of EOs. The assistance is provided to 40 victims of EOs in Blue Nile state.

- The authorities in Khartoum should initiate immediate, impartial investigations into armed actors accused of injuring and killing civilians and destroying and looting civilian property, and other violations of IHL/IHRL.
- Enhance long-term national comprehensive reconciliation and co-existence through federal and local arbitration mechanisms
- Mine Action Actors and the National Mine Action Center to continue clearing lands from mines and EO contamination and raising awareness about mitigating the threat of the EOs, particularly in the areas of Al Kurmuk and Ulu.
- The authorities and community leaders to break the cycle of social deprivation and alienation that often leads to frustration and hostility impacting children's and women's lives.

5. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

The Protection Sector recommends the following actions:

- The National Authorities to expand the geographical coverage and implement the National Plan for Protection of Civilians (NPPOC)¹⁶ in Blue Nile state, establish the state-level POC committee with clear ToR, covering all the nine thematic areas of the NPPOC and ensure participation of the affected population in decision-making processes.

¹⁶ The NPPOC covers intervention in the following nine thematic areas: 1) addressing the issues of displaced persons and refugees; 2) the rule of law and human rights; 3) disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; 4) combating violence against women and children; 5) humanitarian action; 6) strengthening

conflict avoidance and resolution mechanisms; 7) issues involving nomads and herdsmen; 8) reconstruction, development and basic services; and 9) water and sanitation.