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PROTECTION BRIEF SUDAN

SEPTEMBER 2023



The rainy season is further compounding the situation of refugees and IDPs in White Nile State, with some displaced again due to flooding. Photo: UNHCR/Isadora Zoni

Operational Context & Analysis

The conflict in Sudan that started nearly six months ago, on 15 April 2023, continues unabated. The security situation remains tense and precarious, marked by armed clashes and massive displacement. The parties to the conflict have expanded to include new armed groups such as in Kadugli town, South Kordofan, where clashes erupted in August, as well as in Darfur, where many observers point to the risk of the conflict spiralling into large-scale violence along intercommunal lines. There are also concerns that fighting reaches other major towns such as Wad Madani and Kosti, where UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies maintain an operational presence. Air strikes were reported in Al Jazirah State in August 2023, approximately 150 kilometers from Wad Madani, adding to the existing fears of intensified conflict outside of the hotspot areas. Port Sudan, which is hosting several government ministries and currently serves as the main humanitarian hub in Sudan, has also recently experienced tensions between local militias and the Sudanese Armed Forces.

Political divides continue to grow, exacerbated by the deteriorating security situation. On August 13th, the Rapid Support Forces announced plans to establish an agency to “enhance and coordinate humanitarian operations”, which could act as a parallel mechanism to the existing established government system for coordinating humanitarian aid. Tensions escalated in White Nile State, following claims by Darfur Regional Governor Mini Minawi of potential attacks on the joint forces that are currently escorting humanitarian convoys between Kosti and Darfur. Minawi further warned that Signatory Armed Movements (SAM) may change their neutral stance if attacks on civilian convoys continued. Elsewhere in Sudan, support for either SAF or RSF continues to be reported, along tribal lines and among JPA signatory armed movements. In this regard, the former SRSG for Sudan, Volker Perthes warned that security developments, including mobilization along tribal lines, as well as calls in support of the continuation of fighting could draw Sudan into a full-scale civil war¹.

The impact of the conflict is dire in the locations directly affected but it goes beyond to the rest of country that is witnessing mass displacement. Civilians continue to fall victims of targeted or indiscriminate attacks caused by increased use of heavy weaponry in Khartoum, South Darfur and South Kordofan states. In Khartoum, over 40 civilians were killed in one aerial attack on a market south of the city.

The security situation is hampering access to life-saving assistance and services. Humanitarian efforts to respond are met with numerous challenges. As reported in previous editions, warehouses and property have been looted or destroyed, negatively the actual capacity to respond². UNHCR losses in terms of NFI stock are estimated at USD 7,138,197.77, excluding other assets such as vehicles.

The rainy season is further compounding the overall humanitarian environment. Heavy rains and flooding during the month of August destroyed shelters in several “Open Areas” in Khartoum where many South Sudanese refugees continue to live. In the congested refugee and IDP sites of Kosti, the lack of sanitation coupled with heavy rains was the source of health concerns.

¹ SRSG for Sudan and Head of UNITAMS Volker Perthes Remarks to the Security Council on 13 September 2023. Available at: <https://unitams.unmissions.org/en/srsg-sudan-and-head-unitams-volker-perthes-remarks-security-council-13-september-2023>

² Six UNHCR offices in Khartoum, Kordofan and Darfur have been looted and six UNHCR warehouses have been destroyed and/or looted since the start of the conflict, including in El Fasher (North Darfur), El Obeid (North Kordofan), Nyala (South Darfur), El Geneina (West Darfur) and Khartoum. The latter warehouse was reportedly destroyed in an airstrike



A high potential for disease outbreaks is reported in White Nile State, considering overcrowded conditions and poor WASH situation in the camps.
 Photo: UNHCR/Isadora Zoni

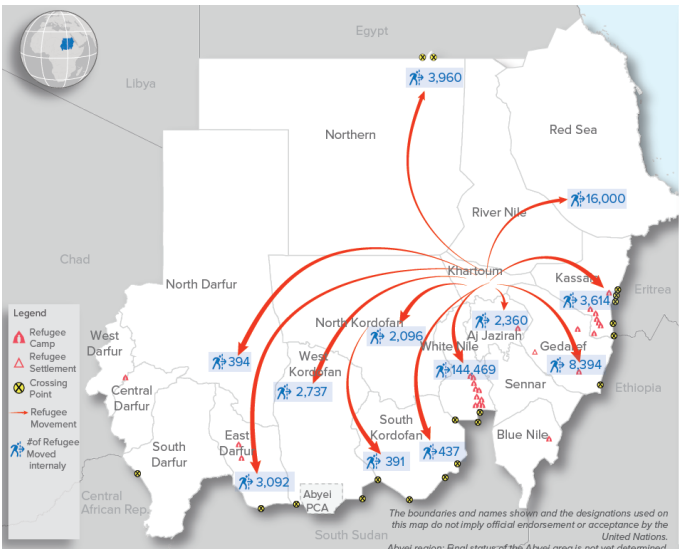
Despite the complex and challenging environment, UNHCR continues to deliver life-saving interventions through collaboration with Government authorities, partners and affected populations. However, owing to the highly volatile security situation in the areas of Khartoum, the Kordofans and Darfur, support to the affected populations there remains extremely limited.

UNHCR and its partners continue to relentlessly maintain communication with civilians in conflict-affected areas, exploring all avenues to bring them support. Pragmatic approaches are taken to respond to the mixed and complex nature of the displacement flows, composed of newly displaced refugees and IDPs, asylum seekers, refugees, stateless persons, returnees and deportees. In this regard, UNHCR is currently expanding the scale of its services in areas impacted by substantial displacement, which also covers host communities.

Community-Based Protection Networks are undertaking protection monitoring, community-level early warning and peaceful co-existence, identification of persons with specific needs, referrals, awareness raising or dispute resolution. UNHCR is also planning to expand its investment in the development of the capacities of the community by establishing and supporting multi-purpose community centers and supporting community-led organizations in parts of Darfur, Al Jazirah, White Nile, Northern, Kassala and Gedaref States.

Key Trends & Figures

Internal movement within Sudan



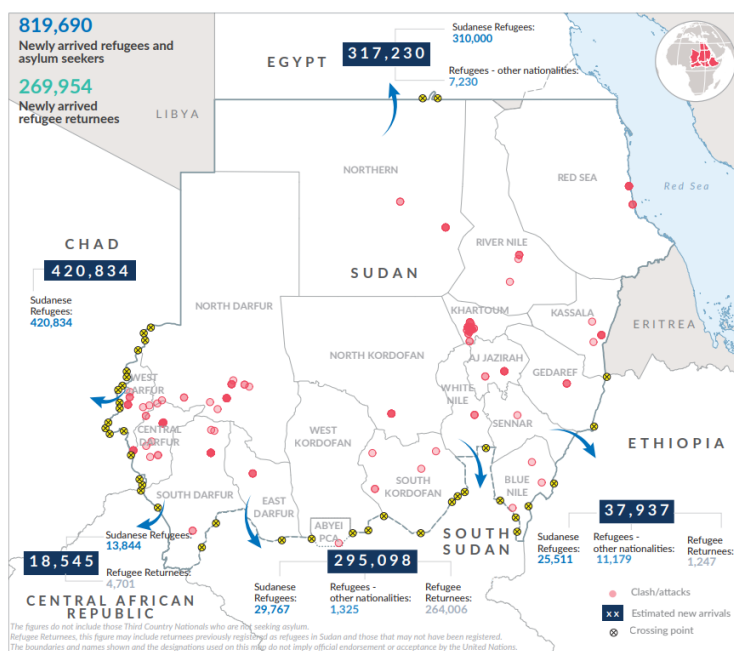
Internal movement of refugees in Sudan as of 13 September 2023

The self-relocation of refugees within Sudan is estimated to concern 191,000 individuals who moved mainly out of Khartoum towards 11 locations visualized in the following live [link](#). Individual registration and document issuance continues or has resumed in the Eastern states (Kassala, Girba, Gedaref, Blue Nile) and White Nile, UNHCR is also pursuing overall mapping of movements where needed.

There is also an ongoing active mapping of IDP sites and establishment of data databases under the lead of UNHCR partners in field offices. According to IOM DTM³, 4,295,092 Individuals (856,578 Households) have been recently internally displaced.

IDPs, Refugees and asylum seekers in Sudan continue to move towards areas where they find safety, within the country. The map-estimation of internal movements, complemented by registration/documentation activities, showed a trend of Ethiopian and Eritreans caseload moving, mainly towards Eastern states (Jazira, Gedaref and Kassala), while South Sudanese move toward White Nile. Movements towards Northern state in Sudan is also noticed for South Sudanese and Ethiopian caseload from Khartoum, albeit in lesser number.

Movement of refugees outside Sudan

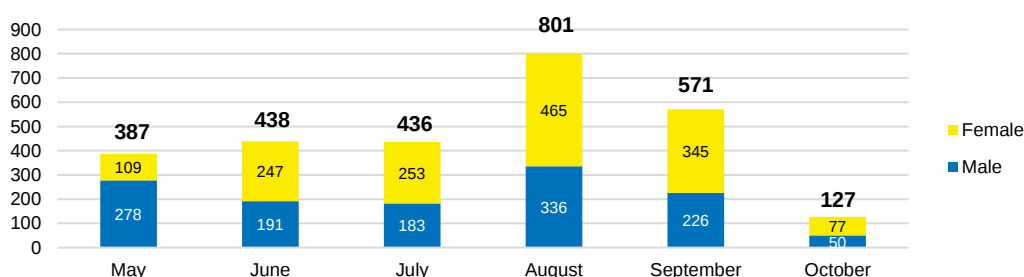


Population movement from Sudan as of 28 September 2023

Cross border movements. According to UNHCR data portal on Sudan Situation, as of 30th September 2023, the total number amounted to 1,098,475 individuals (130k increase since end of August), including 74.4% Sudanese refugees, 23.6% returnees and 2% of non-Sudanese asylum seekers. Beyond neighboring countries that have been reporting on Sudanese influx since the outbreak of the conflict, Uganda new registration statistics have in the past 3 months pointed to over 1,000 Sudanese asylum seekers in every month. A zoom on their state of origin shows 43% are from Khartoum, 21% from South Kordofan, 15% from North Darfur, 12% from South Darfur and 9% from Blue Nile.

³ IOM – DTM: DTM Sudan - Monthly Displacement Overview (01) | Displacement Tracking Matrix (iom.int)

Kassala: New arrivals into Sudan. Despite the worsening of the security and socioeconomic situation of the country, a total of 2,760 new arrivals have been recorded in Kassala from 01 May to 05 October 2023, with an average of 530 arrivals per month. These new arrivals include 1377 females and 1383 males who have come to Sudan mostly directly and rarely through organized convoys from various entry points. Over 98 percent of these new arrivals are Eritreans, followed by Somalis and Ethiopians. August saw the largest number of new arrivals (801), followed by September (571), May (387), June (438), July (436) and October (127) – as of 05 October only though. The continuous influx of refugees to Kassala is partially attributed to flow of unregistered refugees/ asylum-seekers mainly from conflict ridden cities including but not limited to Khartoum. Other factors also include the decline in controlling the human smuggling activities of refugees out of Sudan due to the outbreak of law, as well as conducive weather in the Mediterranean seas at this time of the year.



New arrival trends in Kassala as of 5 October 2023

As regards new arrivals coming straight from Eritrea, information collected through a rapid assessment, help desk counselling and from key community informants indicate that incessant human rights violations including forced conscription to open-end military service, arbitrary disappearance, extra-judicial executions, worsening economic situation, as well lack of access to fair trials are accounted for continuous exodus of the Eritreans from their country. Furthermore, Eritrean well-established diaspora community in Europe and economic support by relatives from abroad are stated to be as the pull factors for the same population group to leave their country.

Protection Risks

Forced displacement and serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws

Reports indicate that as of 25 September, over 4.2 million persons have become internally displaced persons⁴ and over 1 million individuals have fled across borders because of the ongoing conflict⁵. Reports indicate that there have been approximately 7,500 fatalities⁶, a stark difference from the conservative figures provided by the Ministry of Health of 1,500 civilian fatalities, and over 6,000 individuals wounded⁷ as of 31 August.

⁴ IOM, *Displacement Tracking Matrix Sudan - Monthly Displacement Overview (01)*, 26 Sep 2023, available at <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/dtm-sudan-monthly-displacement-overview-01>

⁵ UNHCR, *Operational Data Portal, Refugee Situations, Situation Sudan situation (unhcr.org)*

⁶ Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), *Situation Update, September 2023, Sudan: Deadly Reciprocal Offensives for Strategic Locations in Khartoum and Darfur*, 8 September 2023, available at <https://acleddata.com/2023/09/08/sudan-situation-update-september-2023-deadly-reciprocal-offensives-for-strategic-locations-in-khartoum-and-darfur/>

⁷ Sudan Tribune, *Sudan's war claims lives of over 1,500 Civilians: minister*, 31 August 2023 available at <https://sudantribune.com/article276711/>

Refugees who remained in camps and settlement in East Darfur report harassment, killings and robbery at gunpoint in farming areas, along routes and within their settlements. In Nyala town, South Darfur, civilians fled to various localities in South Darfur, as well as to East Darfur and North Darfur after clashes erupted between SAF and RSF. UNHCR received reports that some relocated to al Obeid, Kosti, Ed Daein, Wad Madani and Port Sudan.

Given the current security situation, refugees are at heightened risk of abuse when moving to safe locations, including arbitrary arrest and detention. UNHCR has identified four Central African refugees in detention in Red Sea State after they fled Nyala for safety. UNHCR and partner advocacy prompted their release however they continue to face harassment due to their imputed affiliation to one of the parties in conflict.

Whereas some civilians manage to flee conflict areas in the search of safety and security, others remain trapped, unable to leave. Obstacles to the movement out of conflict areas range from the prevailing security risks to the lack of transport or alternatives in terms of shelter. In Khartoum, the epicenter of conflict, UNHCR is closely monitoring the critical situation of around 1000 refugee families who continue to live there, with hopes of finding safe ways to flee to safety. UNHCR is exploring avenues to support their relocation including through multi-purpose cash assistance (for onward transport). In September, when Zalingei town was besieged by armed clashes, IDPs living in Hasa Hisa camp could not flee for security reasons. In some instances, parties to the conflict have prevented civilians' flight, including to neighboring countries as was the case in July for civilians in Sirba town, West Darfur whose movement to Chad was largely blocked. Most of them relocated eventually to West Darfur as IDPs.

As a result of the continued deteriorating security situation, a sizable number of refugees, mainly South Sudanese, have been compelled to return to their countries of origin in adverse circumstances (i.e., areas of return not ripe for their sustainable return). In so doing, some have faced arbitrary arrest, detention and robbery.

The Governor of Gedaref' decision to close the Gallabat border for eight days in August 2023 following reported armed confrontations between Ethiopian Defense Force and armed militia in Amhara Region of Ethiopia, albeit temporarily, has heightened the use of smugglers for movements into and out of Sudan. In the month of August alone, 95 refugees were intercepted in Gedaref after they had resorted to smugglers to reach Sudan. UNHCR partners provided them legal and psychosocial assistance. UNHCR is also witnessing the use of smugglers along new routes within Sudan. In Red Sea state for example, 13 individuals, including two UASC, were intercepted in Halayeb, along the Kassala- Egypt route in July 2023. A member of this group lost his life due to the harsh travelling conditions. The group is waiting for relocation to Shagarab camp in Kassala.

Civilians continue to face restrictions in accessing safety outside of Sudan. On 6 August, OCHA and UNHCR undertook a mission to Argeen border crossing where approximately 227 individuals, including 17 South Sudanese refugees, remained stranded. The group was mainly composed of women, children and elderly persons whose conditions were particularly dire.

The new passport factory inaugurated in Port Sudan on the 30th of August is now producing thousands of passports per day. The waiting list continues to grow, along with the costs. Despite relative improvement in the access to documentation, civilians in Sudan continue to face exit restrictions due to the tightening of visa policies in neighboring countries, and absence of active consular services to notably facilitate family reunification.

Grave Violations of Child Rights

Children continue to be seriously affected by the ongoing conflict. Death, maiming and forced recruitment into the armed forces are observed. On 16 September 2023, 30 children associated with armed forces or groups were captured by SAF and handed over to ICRC. They eventually were all relocated to Kassala. Some were hospitalized, while the others were handed over to UNICEF for follow-up.

Refugee and IDP children who have reached safe locations show signs of distress following their experience of active combat. Their mental health and psychological well-being have been severely impacted by their forced displacement, with signs of acute emotional distress widely reported amongst them as well as their caregivers. The Government's lack of clarity on the resumption of school in 2023 will further limit the availability of safe spaces for children to continue learning while developing their social and interpersonal skills. Indeed, the use of schools as gathering sites in many states continues to hamper their effective use as educational facilities. According to the Sudan Site Management Sector, at least 82% of the currently mapped 526 gathering sites are schools (in Al Jazirah, Kassala, Gedaref, White Nile, Red Sea and Northern States).

To mark 100 days since the beginning of the conflict, UNICEF has warned that a grave violation against a child is reported at an average rate of over one per hour⁸. The risk of death is also prevalent among children due to disease, malnutrition, and limited access to health services. 1,200 refugee children under 5 have died in nine camps in White Nile state between 15 May and 14 September due to suspected measles outbreak and high malnutrition. The situation is further exacerbated by the general poor state of health facilities⁹. In Wadi Halfa, the lack of food and resulting malnutrition among children remains a major concern.

Gender-Based Violence

There are persistent reports of sexual violence against women and girls across Khartoum, South Darfur and West Darfur. The reported cases are believed to represent a small fraction of the actual number of incidents, with reporting being inhibited by lack of access to services, ongoing security risks and community stigma¹⁰. In August, the CVAW (Combatting Violence Against Women Unit) warned of an increase in forcible disappearance along with the ethnic targeting of women, leading to an upscale in the type of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) faced by women in the country¹¹.

In addition to reported violations by parties to the conflict, UNHCR partners report increased intimate partner violence and a high risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. Access to specialized medical care in several areas, including Post-Exposure Prophylaxis, remains limited, often increasing the likelihood of HIV infections or unwanted pregnancies. Stigma, shame, and fear of retaliation impede survivors' access to the limited services available. The overall response to GBV and CRSV against women and girls is severely hampered by a lack of access to conflict areas.

The risk of sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA) remains high in Sudan. This is compounded by the underlying vulnerability of refugees and asylum seekers, secondary displacement trends, and gaps in partner presence and life-saving assistance in conflict hotspot areas, particularly in Darfur, Khartoum and Kordofan.

⁸ UNICEF: *Severe violations of children's rights an 'hourly occurrence' in Sudan, warns UNICEF*. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/press-releases/severe-violations-childrens-rights-hourly-occurrence-sudan-warns-unicef>

⁹ UNHCR and WHO Joint Press Release, 19 September 2023

¹⁰ UNHCR, Protection Cluster, *At a Glance: Protection Impact from the Conflict*, Update no. 14, 20 August 2023

¹¹ BBC Arabic: *Sudan Conflict- Is sexual violence being weaponized against women?* Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/arabic/interactivity-66565844.amp>

Social Cohesion Concerns

Massive displacement resulting from the ongoing conflict in Sudan has stretched limited resources. Tensions are mounting among various displaced groups and with the host community. Owing to the slow and restrictive visa issuance processes and the continuing deportations from Egypt, rising tensions over the depletion of resources have been noted among forcibly displaced persons and their hosts in Wadi Halfa.

In Eastern Sudan, the authorities are particularly concerned about the coexistence of refugees and IDPs in urban gathering sites amidst the host community. The State governments are therefore seeking to implement stricter encampment policies, with requests to establish new camps to host refugees outside the city centres.

In Wad Madani, gathering sites are congested, and pressure on public services is particularly high, including in terms of health and water services. This is leading to soaring prices of commodities and higher costs of living. Discontent and growing resentment from host communities towards forcibly displaced is observed. South Sudanese refugees who have been hosted in the state for over a decade have been exposed to unprecedented pressure, including threats by the host community to set on fire their settlement. The brewing of alcohol which South Sudanese refugees do to generate additional income has been the cause of this rising tensions. The authorities at local and state level have insisted that this refugee community be relocated elsewhere, including back to their country of origin, South Sudan. Some members of the group have never lived in South Sudan and would not know where to go.

Due to these tensions, a number of IDPs have indeed decided to eventually go back to their homes in Khartoum in spite of the ongoing war there. According to information received by UNHCR teams in the field, heads of families, mostly adult males, are starting to return to Khartoum in a bid to prepare for the family to join them, at a later stage.



Crowded conditions observed at a gathering site in Wad Madani, Jazirah State. Photo: UNHCR/Deep Uprety

Restrictions on Humanitarian Access and Assistance Delivery

Impeded humanitarian access to conflict areas such as Khartoum, Kordofans, Darfur and other conflict affected locations is having dire implications on forcibly displaced people, particularly persons with specific needs who are unable to obtain the required assistance. Whether on account of the security situation or natural hazards such as heavy rains and flooding rendering roads impassable, any hindrance to humanitarian access can pose a myriad of risks to refugees and IDPs safety and well-being.

Many refugees, especially in Darfur, have remained without food assistance for several months now. The humanitarian situation in Zalingei (Central Darfur) is catastrophic with significant shortage of medicine and food. Similarly, in Tawilla (North Darfur), the most pressing needs are access to food and clean water following attacks that destroyed the town's major infrastructure including hospitals, solar systems, and water supply generators. The humanitarian situation in Nyala town is also rapidly deteriorating in the absence of basic essential services. All state hospitals except the Turkish hospital are incapacitated due to acute shortage of medical supplies, lack of electricity, and drinking water.

The lack of access to health facilities and medical supplies has dire consequences for many. In Dar Alsalam open Area in Jabel Awelia locality (Khartoum), scarcity of food, cash and health services resulted in the death of 4 elderly persons and 2 infants.

In locations where UNHCR is operating, the Government of Sudan is posing new restrictions. UNHCR has recently received communication to suspend registration activities in White Nile and Red Sea States, with no justification provided.

Key Elements of the Protection Response

Access to Safety

UNHCR has closely engaged with refugee communities who remain in conflict areas such as in Khartoum. A mapping exercise to collect details on their whereabouts was completed. Through that exercise and the continuous communication with the refugee communities, UNHCR identified about 1000 families that are willing to move outside Khartoum. UNHCR is currently exploring the safest ways to bring them to safety. In Red Sea State, UNHCR is providing support to IDPs working in art and culture professions who were relocated from Khartoum with UNESCO's support.

To mitigate the challenges refugees' face in planning their return home, UNHCR is undertaking intention surveys. The exercise targeting Ethiopian refugees has been completed in Babikri and Um Gargour camps (Gedaref), as well as in Camp 6 (Blue Nile). A total of 1050 individuals participated. The majority of those surveyed in Camp 6 (91%) expressed a wish to return to Ethiopia in a year's time if the security and economic situation permit. Nevertheless, UNHCR has recorded some spontaneous returns to Ethiopia. Ethiopian refugees in Gedaref expressed less of an inclination to return to Ethiopia, with the majority in Babikri (63%) not wishing to return and 31% remaining undecided, while in Um Gargour 70% of those surveyed did not wish to return to Ethiopia and 19% were undecided. In Red Sea State, UNHCR and partners conducted an intention survey whereby only 4% of surveyed South Sudanese indicated a wish to return home.

UNHCR and COR observed returns into Sudan through the Gallabat border crossing of Sudanese, including previously registered Ethiopians and Eritreans who cited shortage of services and general insecurity in Ethiopia as primary reasons for their move back to the country.

Over 5,000 deportations from Egypt to Sudan have been recorded since the conflict began on April 15th, with more than 3,000 in this reporting period. These deportations affect mostly Sudanese nationals, including registered refugees. Most deportations are motivated by expired legal documentation and/or lack of residency status. UNHCR has engaged relevant partners in the response to their needs, including with psycho-social support, in a bid to prevent their return to unsafe areas.

Despite the dwindling prospects for durable solutions, UNHCR Sudan continues to advocate for expedited processing of refugees in the pipeline for third country solutions. UNHCR Sudan, in collaboration with IOM and resettlement countries, facilitated the departure of an unaccompanied child under family reunification to Belgium, as well as 3 refugees under resettlement consideration to the United States. 27 refugees departed on 22 August to Canada under the private sponsorship scheme. This movement was organized by IOM, in coordination with UNHCR and Canada. Capitalizing on these successful departures, UNHCR advocates for more departures of refugees who were accepted or were at an advanced stage of processing prior to the conflict. Regular coordination activities continue to be undertaken with UNHCR offices in neighboring countries to ensure that information to refugees who crossed borders to pursue their third country option is up to date and that adequate support is available to facilitate access to solutions.

Enhanced efforts for engaging communities and identifying Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs)

UNHCR is building the capacity of the displaced communities through support to Community-Based Protection Networks (CBPNs) to emphasize their role in mitigating the effects of conflict through monitoring, identification of persons with specific needs, referral to services, awareness raising, and dispute resolution. In the East, UNHCR has encouraged the establishment of new community self-management structures that cover host populations and new arrivals.

To ensure timely identification of persons with specific needs (PSNs), identification and prioritization of interventions has been undertaken through protection desks. Established in several localities, they provide a trusted platform for close interaction with crisis affected populations and provision of verified and updated information. In Wadi Halfa protection teams were deployed alongside the distribution team to ensure protection mainstreaming during distribution, and to respond to queries and concerns. In Port Sudan, the Protection Desk at the COR office is actively engaged in referrals, mainly to health services. In Gedaref, COR and UNHCR have agreed to establish a protection desk at Gallabat border.



*A protection desk in Wadi Halfa has been established together with the Sudanese Red Crescent Society in support of vulnerable displaced persons.
Photo: UNHCR/Rached Cherif*

UNHCR developed its communication methods with affected communities in order to enhance the identification of PSNs and enable their swift access to services. UNHCR Sudan launched a WhatsApp channel (+249900934472) where updated and verified information on UNHCR services is now accessible in four languages, (Arabic, English, Amharic and Tigrinya). The WhatsApp channel also provides the option for human feedback, ensuring a two-way communication mechanism that includes referrals to relevant services. This complements existing efforts to share information through the UNHCR Sudan [Telegram channel](#) for lower bandwidth connections.

Hotlines with dedicated Focal Points are functional albeit disrupted from time to time by the connectivity issues. Over 2,600 calls were received by end of August. The interagency (UNHCR/ WFP) complaints feedback mechanism (CFM), call center via phone no. 1460 was revived in early September with a UNHCR dedicated operator responding to calls and making referrals to UNHCR services.

UNHCR Help Page for Sudan continues to be updated on a regular basis ([UNHCR Sudan - Help for refugees, asylum-seekers and internally displaced people](#)). Other channels include an active confidential email account to receive complaints and requests for assistance (sudkhhelp@unhcr.org). The operation is set to improve the complaints feedback mechanism across all offices and is engaged with the inter-agency AAP working group in the planned conduct of community consultations to further improve the response across the country.

Emergency shelter and non-food items (ES/NFI), including cash assistance, is provided to vulnerable households as well as to PSNs in several locations. In Wadi Halfa, cash-based interventions (CBI) have reached over 6,000 individuals in two rounds since the 30th of August. CBI activities have also resumed in Gedaref and there are ongoing verification exercises to start providing CBI in other locations. Finally, UNHCR and partners have distributed NFIs to over 30,516 households (152,580 individuals) in the Kassala, Gedaref, Blue Nile, Sennar, Northern, Al Gazirah, White Nile, and North Darfur states from the 1st of July to date.



Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)

UNHCR has a leading role at the National MHPSS Technical Working Group (TWG) alongside WHO. The TWG is held monthly and attended by different UN agencies and International and National Organizations (I/NGOs). Through this collaborative effort, coordinated MHPSS interventions across the country are taking shape. A service and actor mapping has been developed and joint capacity building efforts are taking place in different states aimed at building national capacities on MHPSS service delivery to affected populations. Besides the National TWG, UNHCR worked with partners and other stakeholders in different states to form sub-MHPSS TWG at the state level. There are currently sub-TWGs in Gedaref, Kassala, Northern State, and White Nile states. Work is ongoing to establish sub-TWGs in Darfur, Blue Nile, and River Nile states.

The [MHPSS National Response Guidance note](#) was developed and shared with TWG members across Sudan. The Guidance seeks to ensure harmonized understanding of the concept of MHPSS and associated terms in use by agencies and service providers to ensure appropriate interventions for the improved well-being and resilience of affected populations.

The MHPSS project proposal in the Northern State by UNHCR in partnership with the Sudanese Red Crescent Society (SRCS) has been approved by the Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF). Implementation of the project will begin soon.

Child Protection and Education

Child protection response is limited in the hotspots of Kordofan, Darfur and in Khartoum due to the security situation. Elsewhere, identification of at-risk children is ongoing through protection desks, door to door support and case management. Capacity building of partners and local actors, volunteers and community structures has been done to further strengthen identification, risk mitigation and response. Similarly, community sensitization is ongoing on trafficking and other major issues affecting children.

While schools remain closed at the moment, earlier in the year (May, June, July) a total of 138 students from Um Gargour (103) and Fao 5 (35) took the National Exam for Grade Six in Gedaref state. From the results that were announced recently, sixty-eight students (66%) successfully passed the exam and will move to the intermediate level when the new school year is announced. Female students performed better than male students, accounting for 76% of those who passed. UNHCR and other partners in Kassala had advocated for children from the most vulnerable families to sit for grade 6 state level examination. As a result of this advocacy and coordination with the ministry of education, 623 refugee children, 9000 children from host community, and 1800 IDPs children who fled the conflict in Khartoum were supported to sit for this exam. Of the 623 refugee students who did the exam, 430 passed the exam (71.3% female). In White Nile State (WNS), approximately 3000 refugee children participated in state level primary school exam with 93% overall pass rate.

Windle Trust International continues to provide counselling and psychosocial support as well as child safeguarding training sessions in White Nile, Kassala and Gedaref for displaced students from Khartoum.

In White Nile state, UNHCR remained on the ground, supporting refugee education through advocacy, resource mobilization and awareness raising. Education partners are engaged at school level and more than 12000 children benefitted from psychosocial support activities. A national campaign has been launched to establish more temporary spaces for school children. This is because many schools are being used as gathering sites for displaced populations, denying children an opportunity to continue their learning even where there could be prospects. Also, many children have been forced to flee from their original homes, which overwhelms the educational infrastructure available in the states where they have moved to. Different states are looking to resume schooling in the near

future with the hopes that Government can relocate displaced populations outside of the schools. Stable states such as Kassala, Gedaref, White Nile are putting in place plans to start Education in Emergencies programs within the schools and/or temporary learning shelters ahead of schools re-opening. UNICEF recently re-launched their learning passport for Sudan to support e-learning efforts.

Civil Documentation

UNHCR has advocated for resumption of civil documentation issuance with Government authorities, also in a bid to facilitate movement out of country for civilians in search of safety and refuge. A recently procured machine for passport issuance will alleviate some of the challenges encountered. Following the inauguration of the new passport facility in Port Sudan on 30 August, application procedures have resumed in Al-Jazirah, River Nile, Kassala, Gedaref, Kosti, Sennar and Northern States. While issuance of national numbers remains suspended, the Directorate of Civil Registry announced the resumption of issuance of birth certificates in key cities including Port Sudan, Wad Madani and Dongola.

The Civil Registry Directorate managed to retrieve the national data (following the destruction/loss of most of its main servers in Khartoum) and is currently fixing connectivity issues, despite these continuous efforts, access to civil documentation, including birth registration, remains extremely challenging due to the limited outreach and capacity.

GBV Prevention, Risk Mitigation and Response

In accessible areas, GBV prevention and risk mitigation measures were expanded and included strengthening of referral mechanisms for improved case management and provision of specialized support for survivors. GBV specialized services, including case management and psychosocial support services, are also expanding. Engagement with community-based protection networks to strengthen their capacities and to get their support in information dissemination to wider communities was undertaken. Coordination mechanisms were also strengthened to provide integrated and multisectoral GBV risk mitigation and response. Moreover, capacity building of community-based and community volunteers was done to safely handle disclosure of GBV and to raise awareness of risks in the community.

Similarly, UNFPA and UNHCR have planned to jointly roll out GBVIMS+ for effective and safe collection, storage, analysis and sharing of GBV-related data as there is gap in terms of harmonized GBV information management in Sudan. This will also minimize the utility of collected data to inform program decisions for effective GBV prevention and care for survivors and for organized information-sharing between key stakeholders.

There is enforced prevention and response to SEA across humanitarian intervention activities through UNHCR's close collaboration with government counterparts, partners, other UN agencies and the PSEA Network, including forcibly displaced people. A SEA Risk Assessment was completed in Gedaref. Partner and government staff training on SEA and Code of Conduct has been conducted in areas with operational capacity, such as Blue Nile State, Gedaref and White Nile.



Focus group discussion conducted among IDP women in Ar-Seriow, Damazine, Blue Nile State. Photo: UNHCR/Ahmed Omer

Challenges & Opportunities

Suspension of registration of vital events and delivery of civil documentation is hampering access to durable solutions. Although the Civil Registry resumed some of its key functions in limited states, including in Wad Madani, Port Sudan and Dongola, the system continues to be suspended in the other parts of the country. The absence of the Civil Registrar means no issuance of vital civil documents which are requisite for family reunification/ private sponsored cases. This also negatively impacts family reunification for unaccompanied children. Additionally, there are budgetary constraints related to exit visas and travel permits with ever increasing costs, contrary to nationals for whom exit visas are now waived due to exigencies of the prevailing situation.

The effects of displacement on education. Further to the continued use of schools as gathering sites, displaced populations particularly secondary refugee displacement will be worst affected with suspended learning due to limited access to education opportunities even before the conflict. The risk of children staying home for prolonged durations remain and there is no guidance yet on Sudan Secondary Certificate exams.

According to the Sudan Education Cluster, teachers across the country have not been paid for months and this is also posing a potential threat to re-opening of schools. In areas where UNHCR has handed schools to Ministry of Education, the gains made under the gradual inclusion of refugees in the national system agenda are bound to be reversed which will negatively impact the global and regional agreement on IGAD and GRF.

Growing pressure on public services is fueling tensions. Rising tensions have been observed among displaced individuals in Wadi Halfa due to depletion of resources. In Wad Madani resentment is growing towards the forcibly displaced population from Khartoum owing to the pressure on public services, particularly health and water as well as the commercial market. The Al Jazirah authorities are insistent on refugees being relocated to other states, including those who have lived in the state for over a decade.

Port Sudan is Sudan's main point of entry and exit and as such, it has become the new administrative hub for government institutions, embassies and civil society organizations. UNHCR engaged with authorities on matters such as immigration, documentation and civil registration. Nevertheless, a steep rise of internal movements towards Red Sea State by individuals of various nationalities is anticipated for documentation purposes and other consular services.

Border with Eritrea opening. Movement towards Eritrea has been increasingly reported for individuals unable to cross to other countries such as Egypt. The re-opening of the border is a welcome opportunity as it provides safe exit for Sudanese individuals who are using the Asmara Airport to travel to third countries for which they have valid visas.

Impediments to access to safety

Access to territory: While in White Nile the border with South Sudan remains open, there is a reduction in the number of South Sudanese individuals entering Sudan through Joda border since the crisis began. In Gedaref, the Governor of Gedaref issued an emergency order on 8 August 2023 imposing several restrictions, including the closure of borders with neighboring countries except for allowing foreign nationals to leave Sudan or for Sudanese stranded abroad to return home.

UNHCR and COR undertook a joint border monitoring mission to Gallabat on 10 August and found that approximately 4,000 individuals, including Ethiopian, Eritrean and Sudanese individuals were stranded in Metema, across the border from Gallabat in Ethiopia. They were unable to move onward due to the conflict in Amhara region or return to Sudan due to the border closure, and some of them reported an intention to move with the help of smugglers. On 13 August, Gallabat border crossing point was re-opened

partially, and Sudanese and Ethiopian immigration authorities have resumed issuance of visas for individuals wishing to enter Ethiopia and travel onward to Gondar or Addis Ababa.

Smuggling and trafficking: The current crisis in Sudan has shifted Sudan from an origin, destination and transit country of mixed flows, to primarily an origin country. While smuggling networks were thriving before the conflict, particularly in Gedaref and Kassala, the phenomenon appears to be on the rise with renewed focus on the route to Egypt rather than Libya due to restrictive and long visa processes or inadequate documentation. Reports received in the field via Telling the Real Story project volunteers indicate that smugglers are charging up to 2,000 USD to facilitate irregular movement from the Shagarab camps to Egypt and Ethiopia.

Irregular crossing through smugglers appears increasingly linked to the lack of legal pathways outside the country. It is anticipated that more refugees and other nationals will resort to smugglers should barriers persist, and if visa requirements in neighbouring countries are not waived or reduced. Additionally, the Government of Sudan encampment policy and the difficulty in securing permits to leave camps continue to create a situation whereby refugees resort to smugglers to leave camps, putting them at risk of trafficking.

Key Messages/Asks

- UNHCR urges the parties to the conflict to observe, in their conduct of hostilities, their obligations under international humanitarian law and to protect civilians. This includes not directly targeting civilians or civilian objects and upholding the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality.
- UNHCR calls on the Government of Sudan to promote peaceful co-existence between forcibly displaced persons and host communities and facilitate aid delivery in urban settings.
- Recognizing the effect of displacement on educational facilities in safe locations, UNHCR also calls on the Government of Sudan to strive to reopen schools for the 2023/2024 school year while responding to the needs of IDPs.
- Identity documentation and government registration continue to be paramount to establishing a personal identity and accessing basic needs. As such, UNHCR calls on the Government of Sudan to resume the issuance of identity documentation wherever possible, including the issuance of national numbers and recording life events, and to (re)resume the registration of refugees in all safe areas of Sudan.
- UNHCR call for the elimination of obstacles at border crossing points to enable civilians seeking to escape the conflict to be able to do so and for refugees to either return to their country of origin or to pursue their third country solution prospects. UNHCR calls on the Egyptian

government to increase admissions of vulnerable people from Sudan, by easing or removing visa requirements and by accepting refugee certificate holders at the border.

- Towards finding solutions for refugees with resettlement prospects, UNHCR calls on resettlement States to support refugee movement out of the country, as a life-saving activity. With over 3,000 individuals in the resettlement pipeline, it remains imperative that these individuals are supported, and where feasible that they be relocated safely and legally to neighboring countries for continued processing.
- Additional funding is required to address the needs of children at risk which include family tracing and reunification, provision of alternative care to UASC, increasing frontline staff and enhancing the capacity of partners and local/national child Protection systems. Similarly, due to the significant risk of GBV and SEA in the ongoing conflict, the current funding and capacity to address the need of GBV risk mitigation and response services is inadequate. There is a high need to scale-up GBV risk mitigation and response interventions. Funding will also enable additional investment in the establishment of new CBPN structures, especially in areas where many refugees have been relocated. There is a need to step up previous interventions with the community and equip them with the means to support each other. At this point in time, when people are in dire need of support for basic needs, the CBPNs need motivation to regularly interact with humanitarian aid agencies and to act as a liaison with the community.
- Finally, UNHCR continues to call for additional safeguards for humanitarian access in conflict areas, safe passage of humanitarian convoys carrying supplies, including food and medical supplies as well as enhanced protection for humanitarian workers in particular females.

PROTECTION BRIEF SUDAN

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