

The logo for the Norwegian Refugee Council, consisting of the letters 'NRC' in white on an orange square background.

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A photograph of an elderly woman with a yellow headscarf and a matching shawl. She is sitting outdoors, looking off to the side with a thoughtful or concerned expression, her hand resting on her chin. In the background, there is a white building with windows, a tree, and a young child in an orange shirt. Laundry is hanging on a line to the left.

SUDAN

ONE HUNDRED DAYS OF WAR

24th July 2023

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1

INTRODUCTION

A hundred days of war in Sudan have exacted a devastating toll on civilian lives and infrastructure, but the worst is yet to come. The country is on the brink of collapse, grappling with a series of crises that together are unprecedented.

Sudan was already facing an overwhelming and vastly neglected humanitarian crisis before the war broke out. The first 100 days fighting have brought it to catastrophic levels. Despite various ceasefires the conflict has persisted, bringing clashes and killings to the heart of the capital and raging in the country's restive peripheries of Darfur, Kordofan and Blue Nile. Harrowing accounts of attacks based on ethnicity in West Darfur have kindled fears of history repeating itself.

Thousands of lives have been lost, and countless homes and displacement camps have been reduced to ashes. At least 3.1 million people have fled within the country or across its borders. The number of internally displaced people has soared to 2.2 million, overwhelming resources and straining host communities' resilience. On top of the violence, Sudan's long-suffering people now face the threat intense rainy season floods and a looming hunger crisis. The country's economy is in tatters and the central bank unable to circulate cash.

Faced with the enormity of such challenges, humanitarian organisations have worked tirelessly to provide assistance and protection. From the earliest days of the war, local responders have stepped in, bringing lifesaving aid to those displaced and those trapped. But access to people in need has been severely impeded. The denial of visas to international NGO staff and dependence on government stakeholders aligned with the parties to the conflict for coordinating the import and distribution of aid have hindered the ability to scale up the response effectively.

The humanitarian coordination system is struggling to adapt to the rapidly changing situation, and is yet to meaningfully include local organisations. The response requires a complete reset and restructuring to make it more relevant, effective and coherent with the needs on the ground. Strong leadership will be paramount.

A blend of first-hand observations from the ground, survivors' testimonies and a literature review, this report reflects on the first 100 days of this latest tumultuous period in Sudan's history. It is an urgent call for change and unwavering dedication to rebuilding the country's shattered hope. The international community has an essential role to play, especially demanding the protection of civilians and principled humanitarian action to reach those in need with the most timely and appropriate interventions possible.

The choices we make today will have a profound effect on the lives of millions of people, making our collective responsibility all the more significant.

2

GENERAL IMPACT

A hundred days of war have inflicted a devastating toll on civilian lives and infrastructure across Sudan, but its true extent remains largely unknown. The fighting has also severely disrupted the functioning of a country which already faced an unprecedented humanitarian crisis before war broke out on 15 April. Today, Sudan is on the verge of collapse. The number of people in need of assistance rose from 15.8 million at end of 2022 to 24.7 million in May, an increase of 57 per cent.¹



📷 In Gedaref, this displacement site is originally an elementary school hosts and hosts more than 60 families fleeing Khartoum, © Ahmad Mahmoud/ NRC

2.1 DEATH AND CASUALTIES

Figure from the Federal Ministry of Health show that civilian hospitals had reported at least 1,136 deaths and 12,000 injuries as of July 5. More than 330 children had been killed and more than 1,900 injured as of early July.² At least 18 Sudanese humanitarian aid workers (13 in Darfur, including one NRC colleague) and 10 health workers were also among the casualties.

A ceasefire brokered by Saudi Arabia and the US, and numerous other unilateral truces, have failed to stem the fighting. Fighting, killings and

airstrikes continued in Khartoum, particularly in Bahri, the northern area of the city, and in Omdurman on the opposite bank of the Nile. The war also extended beyond the capital region to West Darfur, North Kordofan, North Darfur, South Darfur, Central Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, where increasing waves of attacks and clashes were reported. There were also alleged campaigns of destruction, particularly in Darfur.

At least four episodes of large scale killing were reported in West Darfur. At least 191 people were killed in the space of few days around 24 April in Al Geneina,³ and another 280 between 12 and 14

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-summary-revised-hrp-and-regional-refugee-response-plan-may-2023-enar>

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/unicf-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-6-july-2023>

³ <https://www.nrc.no/news/2023/april/sudan-civilians-killed/>

May, the latter just hours after the announcement of the Jeddah ceasefire agreement.⁴ All telecommunications ceased to function across the state in the third week of May. Testimonies from refugees crossing into Chad allowed human rights organisations to identify a large scale killing in the border town of Masterei on 28 May during which 28 people were executed,⁵ and a mass grave of 87 people near Al Geneina, many of whom were killed on or around 14 June, when the governor of West Darfur was executed.⁶ In both cases, the victims were mainly from the Masalit ethnic group and included many children.⁷

At least one massacre was also reported in North Darfur, in which 129 people, including 54 who had been internally displaced, were killed during the first week of June in Kutum.⁸ Other deadly spikes in violence were recorded in Nyala in South Darfur, Zalengi in Central Darfur - where a blackout prevents an accurate account of casualties - and in North Kordofan.

A significant number of incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including rape, sexual assault and sexual exploitation were also recorded. Women and girls were both targeted, sometimes because of their ethnicity.⁹ Some survivors fled to neighbouring countries pregnant as a result of rape.¹⁰

Around 100 verified cases of rape were reported, but the government's Unit for Combating Violence against Women estimates that they represent only around two per cent of the total, meaning the

actual number of cases of sexual violence is likely to be more than 4,000. Even before the war broke out, more than three million women and girls were at risk of GBV. That figure has now risen to around 4.2 million.¹¹

2.2 DISPLACEMENT

RECORD DISPLACEMENT

A hundred days of war forced 3.3 million people to flee their homes, both within the country and across borders. At least 2.6 million people have been displaced internally,¹² more than in the last ten years combined.¹³ Most fled to the eastern states of River Nile, Northern, White Nile, and Sennar.

More than 1.9 million people have fled Khartoum state to other parts of Sudan.¹⁴ Satellite imagery also suggests that 57 per cent of the population of greater Khartoum city has fled,¹⁵ which would represent 2,8 million people.¹⁶

In Darfur, 690,000 are now internally displaced people (IDPs) and around 240,700 have crossed the border into neighbouring Chad.¹⁷ Ninety-seven per cent of IDPs in West Darfur wish to move to another location.¹⁸ This could be a reaction to the mass violence based on ethnic identity that has occurred in the state, and the complete absence of basic services in affected areas. The majority of IDPs in Khartoum and

⁴ <https://www.nrc.no/news/2023/sudan-update/>

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/11/sudan-darfur-town-destroyed>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/07/sudan-least-87-buried-mass-grave-darfur-rapid-support-forces-deny-victims>

⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/darfur-aid-workers-witness-hundreds-murdered-bodies-including-children-abandoned-streets>

⁸ Protection Sector, *Darfur Protection of Civilians Flash Update North Darfur: Attacks on Kutum town and Kassab IDP camp* (June 2023)

⁹ <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/sudan-children-young-12-raped-and-assaulted-sexual-violence-rips-through-country>;
<https://www.who.int/news/item/05-07-2023-sudan-top-un-officials-sound-alarm-at-spike-in-violence-against-women-and-girls>

¹⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-heightened-risks-violations-and-sexual-violence-reported-civilians>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/iom-displacement-tracking-matrix-sudan-situation-report-13-18-july-2023>

¹³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/10-years-displacements-10-weeks>

¹⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/iom-displacement-tracking-matrix-sudan-situation-report-13-18-july-2023>

¹⁵ <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/sudan>

¹⁶ Out of an estimated population of 4.97 million in 2022 https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20230711_ACAPS_Thematic_report_Sudan_Khartoum_pre-crisis_profile.pdf

¹⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/iom-displacement-tracking-matrix-sudan-situation-report-13-18-july-2023>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Central Darfur also favour fleeing onward 71 and 75 per cent respectively.¹⁹ A significant proportion of IDPs in other parts of the country would prefer to integrate locally or return to their areas of origin.

Fleeing is not option at all for many. Satellite imagery reveals that mobility through major corridors in Darfur has reduced by 51 per cent.²⁰ Obstacles to movement are likely to include attacks and extortion at checkpoints and being unable to afford the cost of transport.

PEOPLE ALREADY DISPLACED

Attacks on populations already displaced have been a significant feature of the war. Informal and formal camps for IDPs have either been completely burnt down, as occurred in Al Geneina in West Darfur, or partially destroyed, as in the Sissi camp in Morni in West Darfur, and the Rwanda camp in Tawila and Kassab camp in Kutum in North Darfur. Those fleeing Al Geneina, mainly on foot, reported being consistently attacked en route, particularly after 15 June.²¹ Others reported dead bodies on the roads to Chad, organised executions and firing in crowds of people in flight.²²

Some of the heaviest fighting in Khartoum has taken place in highly impoverished areas that were home to IDPs and refugees. Around 154,800 South Sudanese refugees have been displaced again across Sudan,²³ and around 142,000 have crossed back into South Sudan.²⁴ Such large-scale displacement suggests that Khartoum's "Open Areas", in which many South Sudanese refugees

used to live, have been significantly affected. Around 144,000 have self-relocated to White Nile, where local officials authorised the creation of a tenth refugee settlement.

Around 32,200 refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Syria, Yemen, and other countries have also fled Khartoum.²⁵ Many have reportedly returned to their countries of origin. Fleeing across Sudan is hampered by existing regulations that require refugees to request a permit prior to leaving their place of registration²⁶ and an unknown number of refugees have also been forcibly relocated to existing camps in Gedaref in the case of those from Ethiopia, and Kassala in the case of those from Eritrea.²⁷ All of the sites were already overstretched before the latest influxes, and increased pressure on limited resources has led to tensions between refugee groups in Gedaref.

LIFE IN DISPLACEMENT

The majority of new IDPs have found shelter with host communities and in rented accommodations and another, 19 per cent live in camps, schools and other public buildings, informal settlements or improvised shelters.²⁸ In White Nile, for example, 28 schools are hosting families who have fled Khartoum.²⁹ Communal shelters and informal sites are found across eastern Sudan, including in the cities of Atbara, Gedaref, Kosti, Port Sudan, Wadi Halfa and Wad Madani.

Displaced families tend to live in highly cramped and impoverished conditions, where they use communal kitchens and share the little food they have. NRC assessments in Wad Madani and Kosti

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/19a09496f0924d23ae0d7b2c9b2d2830/data>

²¹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/sudanese-civilians-killed-shot-they-flee-darfur-city-by-foot-2023-06-20/>

²² <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-geneina-city-rotting-corpses>; <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1138072>

²³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/unhcr-sudan-overview-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-distribution-internal-movement-sudan-16-july-2023>

²⁴ These figures may include the double-counting of South Sudanese refugees from other states and unregistered refugees <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/protection-brief-sudan-july-2023>

²⁵ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-emergency-population-movement-sudan-13-july-2023>

²⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/protection-brief-sudan-july-2023>

²⁷ In addition, in Kassala state, the local authorities requested the Commissioner of Refugees (COR) to relocate some 8,000 South Sudanese refugees from Kassala state to White Nile state, where the vast majority are hosted, with a view of regrouping them all in one location <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/protection-brief-sudan-july-2023>

²⁸ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/iom-displacement-tracking-matrix-sudan-situation-report-13-18-july-2023>

²⁹ Sudanese Red Cross, *White Nile Assessment Presentation* (June 2023)



📷 Two Ethiopian refugee families sharing one room in a reception site in Wad Madani. © Ahmed Omer/NRC

found relying on donations or humanitarian assistance to feed themselves.³⁰ The assessments showed that the informal sites are used as transit point to travel onwards, either within the state, or to other states. Sanitation facilities are limited, and most families lack basic household items having fled with very little if anything at all.

Around 80 per cent of respondents to assessments in both locations said children between the ages of six and 11 were out of school, and a significant proportion of families were missing documents including identity cards, passports and birth and marriage certificates.³¹

Most countries receiving refugees and returnees fleeing the war are among the most fragile in the world. Around 240,700 arrivals have been registered in Chad, 174,500 in South Sudan, more than 66,300 in Ethiopia and around 16,900 in Central African Republic. Around 255,500 people

are also reported to have arrived in Egypt.³² In Wadi Halfa, on the border with Egypt, a large number of families stuck in limbo without the legal documents required to apply for visas.³³

2.3 DESTRUCTION AND DISRUPTION

WIDESPREAD DESTRUCTION

The warring parties have used heavy artillery in densely populated urban areas, damaging critical infrastructure and homes. Satellite images show that at least 427 buildings have been damaged or destroyed in Khartoum state.³⁴ Many public facilities such as courts, ministries and places of worship have been looted and destroyed. Prisons have also been attacked. The capital's airport was destroyed in the first week of the war.

³⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/conflict-displacement-madani-al-jazira-rapid-needs-assessment-25-april-2023>

³¹ NRC, *Multi-Sector Needs Assessment Kosti* (May 2023), *NRC Multi-Sector Needs Assessment Wad Madani* (May 2023)

³² <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/iom-displacement-tracking-matrix-sudan-situation-report-13-18-july-2023>

³³ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/protection-brief-sudan-july-2023>

³⁴ <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/19a09496f0924d23ae0d7b2c9b2d2830/data>

Satellite images of Darfur reveal the destruction of at least 26 communities, including homes, schools, hospitals, markets and water, electricity and communications infrastructure. Many humanitarian facilities have also been targeted.³⁵ Images of West Darfur show that at least 0.7 square kilometres of civilian infrastructure has been destroyed in Al Geneina, including at least six schools, and that 20 per cent of the town of Mornei, amounting to at least two square kilometres, was affected by fire over the course of two days.

Further destruction and casualties could also occur after the fighting, given the widespread presence of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in various urban areas in Khartoum, Al Obeid in North Kordofan, Al Fasher in North Darfur, Al Geneina in West Darfur and Nyala in West Darfur.³⁶

DISRUPTION OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Health

The health sector is collapsing as a result of an acute shortage of medical supplies, water and fuel for electricity, not to mention attacks. Fifty-one such attacks have taken place since the start of the war, 32 of which affected facilities, 23 personnel, 12 supplies, eight transport, six warehouses and six patients.³⁷ Sixty per cent of hospitals across Sudan were reportedly non-functional as a result of looting and the destruction of equipment and supplies.³⁸ Two-thirds of the capital's hospitals are inoperative as a result of attacks or occupation by warring parties.³⁹

In North Darfur, only between 10 and 15 health facilities are operational in the state capital of Al Fasher, down from more than 100 before the war

began.⁴⁰ In the protection cluster's non-exhaustive list, at least 25 medical facilities were ransacked and looted in a number of locations, including 16 in Khartoum, five in West Darfur, two in Central Darfur, one in North Kordofan and one in North Darfur.⁴¹

Markets

Markets and food factories have been destroyed in Khartoum, Darfur and Kordofan, fuelling food insecurity and destabilising the economy. The protection cluster's non-exhaustive list documents at least in 21 markets affected – six in Khartoum, five in West Darfur, three in North Darfur, three in South Darfur, two in central Darfur, one in Al Obeid and one in Blue Nile. Countless shops and other businesses have also been affected, including the Samil factory in Khartoum, which produced 60 per cent of Sudan's ready-to-use therapeutic food for children and was burnt down on 13 May.⁴²

The destruction of markets has a far-reaching impact, not only in areas affected by the conflict but also elsewhere because it hinders the resupply of goods. Disrupted transport networks,⁴³ shortages, the increasing price of fuel and the demands of a growing number of IDPs also play a significant role. With Khartoum's markets severely affected, towns rely increasingly on cross-border trade. But this is not coping with the demand. For example, the South Sudanese market in Renk does not have the capacity to resupply Sudan, meaning that prices across the border in White Nile are high. Nor are many transporters ready to take the risk of moving merchandise, particularly through conflict-affected areas such as Darfur or North Kordofan. Supplies of goods for export has also been paralyzed, with total exports since January only reaching 282 million dollars, compared with 2.5 billion dollars in the first half

³⁵ <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/apps/sites/#/sudan/pages/darfur-1>

³⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-situation-report-14-jul-2023-enar>

³⁷ Protection Sector, At A Glance: Protection Impacts Of The Conflict Update no. 10 (July 2023)

³⁸ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/glance-protection-impact-conflict-update-no-9-9-july-2023>

³⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/04/sudan-explosive-weapons-harming-civilians>

⁴⁰ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-over-1000-wounded-people-treated-msf-supported-hospital-during-almost-three-months-fighting-el-fasher>

⁴¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/glance-protection-impact-conflict-update-no-9-9-july-2023>

⁴² <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/another-bitter-blow-children-sudan>

⁴³ <https://www.africanews.com/2023/07/19/in-sudan-war-has-brought-transport-to-a-standstill/>

of 2021.⁴⁴ This deprives Sudan of the foreign currency needed to import fuel, wheat, medicine and food.

Banks

Many bank headquarters and branches in Khartoum, North Darfur, South Darfur and Central Darfur have been looted. The Central Bank in the capital has been a medicine, target by parties to the conflict and the scene of fierce fighting. Its real time gross settlement (RTGS), which allows transfers from one bank to another, has been down since the start of the crisis. Most of the servers that control banking operations around the country are based in Khartoum and are inaccessible, affecting banking for people across the country. Very little cash is available as a result, and functioning banks have significantly limited their operating hours and the number of people that can access their services daily. In addition, Sudan's significant flow of remittances before the conflict is now disrupted because of the closure of many foreign exchange transfer firms.⁴⁵

In addition to the effects of this on the general population, including the payment of salaries, the lack of liquidity prevents humanitarian organisations from operating at scale, paying suppliers, organising cash-based assistance but also running normal operational costs such as salaries. As mobile network availability improved in July, the use of banking apps expanded, offering cashless payment options and national coverage, including for the purchase of cash at a premium.

Water and electricity

Both services have been widely disrupted if not completely interrupted in areas affected by the conflict. Electricity shortages and the increasing price of fuel for generators threaten the operational capacity of water systems and health

facilities. In Khartoum, entire districts no longer had running water, and that electricity was only available for a few hours a week.⁴⁶ In North Darfur, Al Fasher residents also told NRC that whole neighbourhoods had been left without electricity, and those in Al Geneina in West Darfur said water points had been targeted and destroyed. They said they had to walk half a kilometre to a water point, add their names to a list and wait for three or four days before coming back to collect a jerrycan. This was often done at high risk of armed men targeting them at the water point.

Telecommunications

Networks have suffered significantly, both from direct damage to towers and other infrastructure and the indirect effects of electricity shortages. Of the country's three mobile network operators, MTN and Sudani are barely functioning, while Zain experiences congestion, including as a result of the concentration of IDPs in the east. Two major internet service providers, Canar and Sudatel, are not operating, and local VSAT services are unreliable.⁴⁷ West Darfur and Central Darfur have had no telecommunications since since the third week of May.

Schools

The exact effects of the war on education are unclear, but around 1.5 million children are thought to have been displaced. This will have a significant impact on their education by reversing gains already made and will increase the number of out-of-school children.⁴⁸ At least six schools in Al Geneina, West Darfur, have been damaged or destroyed in the fighting.⁴⁹ Many civilians in Misterei, also in West Darfur, were attacked in schools as people ran for safety there when the town was under assault.⁵⁰ In Al Fasher, North Darfur, armed groups have occupied at least four schools.⁵¹

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ ACAPS – Upcoming publication on Access to camp in the country

⁴⁶ https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20230711_ACAPS_Thematic_report_Sudan_Khartoum_pre-crisis_profile.pdf

⁴⁷ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-conflict-etc-situation-report-4-reporting-period-10062023-16062023>

⁴⁸ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/unicef-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-6-july-2023>

⁴⁹ <https://hub.conflictobservatory.org/portal/sharing/rest/content/items/e7ef463ce2e94da682a985ea601e21c9/data>

⁵⁰ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/11/sudan-darfur-town-destroyed>; in Darfur and other peripheries, it is common to see IDPs or people running for safety towards schools

⁵¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/glance-protection-impact-conflict-update-no-9-9-july-2023>

Even in more secure areas of refuge, the war's impact on children is substantial. In White Nile, for example, NRC observed children displaced from Khartoum showing symptoms of trauma, including high levels of fear, inability to talk, war memories dominated their minds and little desire to eat or interact. The psychological effects of conflict, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder can have long-term effects on their mental health and education.

Humanitarian facilities

Parties to the conflict have systematically targeted humanitarian assets, particularly in Khartoum, Al Fasher, Al Geneina, Kutum, Al Obeid, Nyala and Zalingei. At least 199 incidents of violence against personnel and assets have been recorded by OCHA, 199 NGO and UN vehicles have been stolen and more than 130 offices and warehouses have been looted.⁵² Pillaging has severely depleted the supplies available, meaning that operations in many of the worst-affected areas have to be started again from scratch.

The recent decline in reports of incidents targeting NGO supplies reflects a lack of remaining stocks rather than reduced intent to target them. As humanitarian organisations deploy new assets and supplies to the country they continue to be highly vulnerable, not only to being targeted by parties to the conflict but also to increased criminality and opportunistic looting and robbery linked to the breakdown of law and order.

2.4 DISASTERS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

UPCOMING RAINY SEASON

Rainfall projections for June to September 2023 indicate above-average precipitation in northern regions of North Darfur, parts of South Kordofan and most of Blue Nile, Sennar and White Nile states.⁵³ This heightens the risk of flooding in these areas, potentially impeding humanitarian access. Tens of thousands of people are displaced each year in White Nile as heavy floods submerge homes, villages, refugee camps and roads. This is all the more concerning now the state hosts 267,900 more people who have fled the war in Khartoum.⁵⁴

The potential for floods presents a dual risk. People who live in areas affected by the conflict that then become flooded may not be able to flee because of widespread insecurity or fear of attack. On the other hand, people fleeing conflict may not be able to reach safety because flooded roads are impassable.

The war has also disrupted humanitarians' rainy season preparations, which would normally have started in April. Efforts are currently under way, but the pre-positioning of supplies, the repair of water and sanitation facilities, the reinforcement of shelters and the rearrangement of displacement sites have not been rolled out sufficiently to face the upcoming needs.

The season also carries considerable biohazard risks, including outbreaks of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever that have increased with the presence of stagnant and contaminated water. Lack of access to proper water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and health services and low immunisation rates are also likely to fuel outbreaks of infectious diseases such as measles, cholera and other diarrhoeal diseases. Respiratory tract infections and skin diseases are also expected.

⁵² NRC, *Access Monitoring* (July 2023)

⁵³ https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20230621_ACAPS_Thematic_report_Sudan_anticipated_impacts_of_the_2023_rainy_season.pdf

⁵⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/glance-protection-impact-conflict-update-no-9-9-july-2023>



📷 Mariam fled the violence in Khartoum to arrive in Khor Ajwal camp in White Nile with 8 children, sharing limited food and resources with a generous family. © Ahmed Omer / NRC

FOOD INSECURITY

Sudan already faced record levels of food insecurity before the conflict. Today, an additional 2.5 million people are expected to slip into hunger, bringing the total number of people facing acute food insecurity to more than 19 million, or 40 per cent of the country's population. Eight million people are at risk of crisis (IPC 3) levels of food insecurity or worse by November 2023.⁵⁵

Access to food is adversely affected both by disrupted supply chains and dysfunctional markets. Prices are soaring beyond most households' reach and by some estimates inflation rates may surpass 200 per cent.⁵⁶ The conflict has also severely disrupted Sudan's planting season, which normally begins in May, and this in turn is likely to increase food needs across the country.

Damaged value chains prevent farmers from securing essential agricultural inputs, including fuel and fertiliser, which may force them to plant less or turn to the cultivation of cash crops.⁵⁷ They may also decide to take up alternative livelihoods. All of these outcomes reduce yields and food availability after the next harvest. In states affected by conflict, such as Darfur, the planting season tends to be accompanied by an increase in attacks against farmers, which is all the more concerning now the country is at all-out war.

Livestock rearing is also a crucial livelihood for farmers and pastoralists throughout the country, and vaccine shortages as a result of the closure of the main laboratory in Khartoum will have a negative impact.

Given these circumstances, all four dimensions pertinent to food security – availability, access, utilisation and stability – are currently endangered.

⁵⁵ https://www.savethechildren.net/news/nearly-half-children-sudan-set-go-hungry-conflict-stops-farming#_edn1

⁵⁶ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/wfp-market-monitor-sudan-june-2023>

⁵⁷ Cash crops are planted to sell on the market to make profit, as opposed to subsistence crops for feeding a family or their livestock. Because of the way commodity prices fluctuate, cash crops are sometimes unable to provide farmers with enough security to sustain a decent livelihood, at least not on their own.

3

THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The humanitarian coordination architecture in Sudan was already strained before the outbreak of war. A peer-to-peer mission to Sudan operated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in early 2023 found gaps in coordination capacity, particularly at the sub-national level; a lack of cohesion and common approach, including for access; insufficient leadership and strategy on protection; and significant delays in localisation efforts. The war is testing a system that has already showed functional limitations.



📷: NRC Emergency Cash distribution to internally displaced in Kosti, White Nile. © Ahmed Omer / NRC

3.1 IS THE RIGHT AID GETTING TO THE RIGHT PLACES AT THE RIGHT TIME?

A revised humanitarian response plan (HRP) for 2023 was published in mid-May in response to the rapidly escalating violence and the drastic increase in the number of people in need. It shifted focus to a purely lifesaving and protection response, and its geographical scope was expanded to areas receiving significant numbers of IDPs.⁵⁸

The response design can be revitalized. Most agencies are focusing only on in-kind assistance, such as the distribution of food and non-food items, even though the HRP indicates that cash is the preferred modality for many in areas where some markets are still functioning. The focus is partly the result of the liquidity crisis, which has impeded the rollout of large cash-based interventions, but the alternatives to the banking system that now exist have yet to be explored and supported at scale.

⁵⁸ https://reliefweb.int/attachments/9c793415-1562-41d0-b094-12e2e9bc6e18/Revised%202023%20HRP%20Sudan_final.pdf; SO 1: Provide timely multi-cluster lifesaving assistance to crisis affected people to reduce mortality and morbidity. SO2: Mitigate protection risks and respond to protection needs through humanitarian action.

The response is also largely focused on people living in camps and camp-like settings. This is partly justified given their vulnerability, but it is also because typical humanitarian responses to mass displacement are camp-based. The vast majority of IDPs, however, live with host community and so miss out on interventions.

Faced with new challenges, growing and changing needs and a target population on the move, the response is yet to adapt and reinvent itself. An assessment strategy would support a better understanding of needs in each priority location, allowing the response to tackle most pressing concerns with the right modalities.

After 100 days of war it is still too early to properly assess the impact of the response. Consolidated achievements are pending, and humanitarian organisations have achieved some large-scale results. At least 2.8 million people have received some assistance in the last three months across the country, including food, nutrition, health, water or protection services.⁵⁹ Coverage is patchy, however, and with only limited monitoring and accountability mechanisms in place, the quality of the overall response is unknown

Efficiency is also a significant challenge. The majority of humanitarian facilities and assets in conflict areas have been looted, and many national staff have had no choice but flee for their lives. This means that in many cases, interventions have to be restarted from scratch. This is an issue because critical operational costs, such as security and support, have been chronically underfunded and are now likely to rise. Response timelines have also been significantly compromised.

Lack of access is a major factor, but new challenges have also emerged with the war, including the scarcity of cash in the banking system and dwindling stocks. The increasingly restricted environment for humanitarians is another key issue.

While not being representative of the population in need, social media monitoring indicates a

significant trust deficit in the international aid response, the result of low or opaque achievements and poor communications, both towards targeted communities and through public means such as traditional and online media.⁶⁰

3.2 ACCESS

After 100 days of war, Sudan is one of the world's most difficult places for humanitarian workers to operate in.⁶¹ Access is severely restricted nationwide as a result of high-intensity conflict, increasing criminality and direct constraints that have emerged and redoubled.

Diplomatic efforts from the conveners of the Jeddah ceasefire agreement were helpful, but attaching humanitarian access to a political deal did not improve the situation. Rather it made access reliant on the parties' tactical interest in respecting the cessation of hostilities or withdrawing from strategic locations.

During the initial seven-day ceasefire from 20th to the 27th of May, humanitarian organisations were pressed to deliver assistance into Khartoum despite no lifting of the bureaucratic impediments to allow it, very little notice and a short window of time. Humanitarian diplomacy should instead press warring parties to continually demonstrate adherence to International Humanitarian Law, rather than pushing for short windows of access. UN focal points are present in Jeddah, but a separate humanitarian forum would be more useful to avoid politicising access.

Visas have been unattainable for the majority of international NGO staff since the start of the war. A few have been issued, but more than 25 NGOs have had no success with their applications, and 114 visas are still pending approval, many of them for more than two months. The situation has seriously impeded humanitarian organisations' collective ability to scale up their response at a time when needs are increasing dramatically.

⁵⁹ Humanitarian Country Team Key Messages.

⁶⁰ Internews Social Listening on the Sudan conflict, June 2023.

⁶¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/misery-deepens-sudanese-civilians-conflict-hits-three-month-mark-statement-martin-griffiths-under-secretary-general-humanitarian-affairs-and-emergency-relief-coordinator>

Port Sudan is the only officially recognised port of entry for international personnel, limiting the deployment of staff who already had visas to the east of the country. They still need approval for travel between states, which is generally permitted in the east, but movements to Khartoum and other areas continue to be banned. Such bureaucratic impediments combine with the destruction of most of the pre-existing aid infrastructure to undermine humanitarian organisations' ability to resume operations quickly in some of the worst-affected areas of the country even when the violence subsides. While several hundreds of trucks of aid supplies have successfully reached their intended destinations through the utilisation of an OCHA-led deconfliction mechanism, hundreds more planned movements were unsuccessful owing to access denials, logistical challenges and a non-permissive security environment.

A window of opportunity for humanitarian access in Al Geneina, West Darfur, is slowly opening as authorities at the federal and state level engage in dialogue with organisations standing-by in Eastern Chad. Widespread insecurity and targeted attacks across Darfur more broadly, however, continue to limit humanitarians' movement. The non-issuance of visas and national-level bureaucratic impediments also continue to undermine the response in the region, meaning that many organisations will miss the opportunity to deploy rapid assistance before small access windows close again as the conflict continues.

3.3 PRINCIPLES

Humanitarian organisations have sought to undertake a principled response based on needs and impartiality, but their efforts have been undermined by unequal and often insurmountable access barriers to communities in many of the areas worst affected by the conflict, such as Darfur. The barriers described in the subsection above mean that access to populations in eastern areas of the country controlled by the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) areas has been better than to those in non-SAF controlled areas elsewhere.

Humanitarian organisations' dependence on SAF-aligned government stakeholders responsible for coordinating the import and distribution of aid, and the permission required for all interventions, undermines their ability to operate independently. There is also a risk of aid being co-opted for political gains, or denied to populations in areas controlled by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The RSF for their part have repeatedly demonstrated their intent to use the delivery of humanitarian assistance as a mark of legitimacy, whether locally or internationally.

3.4 LOCALISATION

Since war broke out on 15 April, locally led humanitarian responders have played a lifesaving role for people affected by the fighting. These new frontline responders have spearheaded initiatives ranging from the establishment of "emergency rooms"⁶² in Khartoum, Jazira or White Nile states to community-driven initiatives such as improvised clinics in West, South and North Darfur.

The international aid community was already lagging on localisation in Sudan before the latest crisis, as the IASC peer-to-peer mission in early 2023 noted. The past 100 days of local actions provide an opportunity to re-evaluate approaches and foster ethically grounded partnerships between international and grassroots organisations, but the humanitarian coordination system is yet to embrace the change and meaningfully include local stakeholders in the response, let alone create the space for more local leadership.

This dynamic calls for a careful rethink of international organisations and donors' approach to partnership. By being associated with them, local structures can also be more exposed. The provision of resources may increase their likelihood of becoming targets. In highly insecure areas where international organisations may choose not to operate because of lower risk thresholds, the use of local stakeholders as implementers or access enablers can also mean the outright transfer of risk.

⁶² These grass-roots networks of local respondents emerged within the first weeks of the conflict, in different neighbourhoods of Khartoum, and then across the states hosting IDPs.



📷 Two local volunteers working in the kitchen in a reception site in Wad Madani. © Ahmed Omer / NRC

These dilemmas demand proper reflection and dialogue between international and local structures to establish a comprehensive and mutual understanding and sharing of risks. The formal humanitarian system also tends to force the “NGOisation” of local stakeholders, while many networks are unregistered and volunteer-based, with fluid structures and strong grassroots anchoring, which are part of their strengths. The formal humanitarian system must work with these networks and seek complementarity, rather than bypassing them, using them as substitutes in high-risk environments or insisting they are restructured.

3.5 COORDINATION

After the evacuation phase, the humanitarian coordination system kicked in to face the new challenges. This included activating the emergency telecommunications cluster, revitalising the access working group and the civil-military coordination mechanism, and nominating a humanitarian coordinator and a temporary deputy for Sudan and a permanent one for Darfur.

The coordination system, however, has struggled to reform itself. It maintains a centralised approach, with Port Sudan as the new heart of operations for most of the response. But while the city is undoubtedly useful as logistical and coordination hub (given its relative safety and access to an international airport), it is also the furthest point from the needs to be addressed. The changed context and current operational realities require a concerted effort to better invest in and resource sub-national level humanitarian coordination. This will allow for the response to become more balanced, but for consultations and decision making to move closer to the hotspot.

Considerable efforts are underway to create a Darfur hub in eastern Chad, which would enable a more coherent and relevant response by being closer to the people in need and enhancing coordination between humanitarian organisations, including between the UN and NGOs. The response in central and eastern parts of the country, meanwhile, is still patchy, with few efforts to establish a common strategy.

Many UN agencies and international NGOs, including NRC, have decided to keep a limited presence in the country, but most international staff have been evacuated. Many Sudanese aid workers have also been forced to flee to safer parts of the country and sometimes across borders. The first weeks of the war demonstrated the humanitarian community’s lack of preparation in terms of security and safety management and scenario and contingency planning at the Khartoum and state level. It also showed information and coordination gaps between UN agencies and NGOs that need fixing, including clearly outlined commitments for joint evacuation planning under the Saving Lives Together (SLT) framework.⁶³

⁶³ <https://www.gisf.ngo/themes/coordination-for-hsrn/saving-lives-together/>

4

CONCLUSION

Sudan is one of the most protracted displacement crises of the world. It has also been the one of the most neglected over the years, attracting little political, diplomatic or media attention. The humanitarian response was already underfunded early in 2023 despite unprecedented needs. Only 14 per cent of the original 2023 HRP, which called for \$1.75 billion, was funded. That figure had risen to 17 per cent of the revised amount of \$2.6 billion as of 23 June.⁶⁴



📍 Sahar, once a pharmacist in a respected pharmaceutical company in Khartoum, now displaced with her mother and sister in Kosti. ©Ahmed Omer/ NRC

The first 100 days of war have drawn a degree of attention to Sudan and the region. The situation made headlines when the fighting first broke out, but that attention is fading away and needs to be sustained. Diplomatic and mediation efforts are under way at the regional and international level, with platforms in Jeddah, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union and neighbouring countries, but they are yet to have a tangible effect on civilians. Senior UN representatives has also ramped up funding. A high-level pledging conference raised \$1.5 billion for Sudan and the subsequent refugee crisis in neighbouring countries, but this only covers around half of the region's estimated needs.

All of this means that the humanitarian response requires a reset. The war has been a shock to the system and the situation has changed

dramatically. It would be a mistake to return to business as usual. The first 100 days of war have brought terror and desolation to Sudan, and the next 100 are likely to be worse. The violence continues unabated and the coming weeks may also bring devastating floods and an associated cascade of destruction, displacement and disease. A major hunger crisis is also looming.

This calls for drastic change. We must make the response more relevant and bring it closer to the needs identified, increase its effectiveness and create more coherence with all stakeholders by including the local networks. This will require strong leadership, particularly in applying humanitarian principles. It should be a priority for senior officials to carve out a space for neutral and independent humanitarian action in Sudan and overcome the obstacles to its timely delivery.

⁶⁴ <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-response-dashboard-1-january-15-june-2023>

5

RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 TO THE GOVERNMENT OF SUDAN

- Expedite the issuance of visas to aid personnel, particularly INGO staff, given the urgent humanitarian needs countrywide.
- Provide clear guidance on visa application procedures for humanitarian organisations.
- Issue authorisations for cross-border entrance via all ports of entry of aid personnel and supplies, including NGO staff alongside UN personnel.

5.2 TO THE HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP: the humanitarian country team, donors and heads of UN agencies and NGOs

- Align the humanitarian community's operations with the needs on the ground, moving beyond the centralised approach in Port Sudan.
- Invite all responders to take part in operational coordination platforms, including emerging national organisations, even if they are unregistered.
- Refocus the response to improve its relevance by better aligning human organisations, especially at the sub-national level, based on a strategic analysis of needs that ensures we intervene in the right places and at the right scale.
- Redouble efforts to negotiate and facilitate humanitarian access.
- Expand space and build consensus for neutral and independent humanitarian operations, rebalancing operational capacities and strategic focus on humanitarian outcomes in currently hard-to-reach areas

5.3 TO THE HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR

- Build the global visibility of Sudan's crisis, issuing clear statements on access, protection and response priorities, and build interest in the neglected humanitarian situation.

5.4 TO INTERNATIONAL DONORS

- Increase humanitarian funding to Sudan and the regional response.

