

Focus on conflict in the Sudan

Since 15 April 2023, armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has had devastating consequences across the Sudan and parts of neighbouring countries.

Conflict started in cities across Northern and Khartoum states, and spread across the Darfur and Kordofan regions, with the most severe clashes occurring in the capital Khartoum and Ag Geneina town in West Darfur.

Attempts to halt the conflict and reduce its impact on civilians have not succeeded in quelling the violence. As conflict continues, it is drawing out pre-existing tensions along tribal, ethnic and socioeconomic divides, particularly in Darfur (UNHCR, June 2023).

As a result of the conflict, an additional 8.6 million people in the Sudan are facing high levels of acute food insecurity, a 74 percent increase since the 2022 peak, bringing the total to 20.3 million people (42 percent of the population) in IPC Phase 3 or above during July–September 2023 (IPC, August 2023).

The humanitarian situation is worsened by the lack of humanitarian aid in the region, and repeated looting of warehouses containing humanitarian supplies (IOM, June 2023).

The Sudan is facing major challenges to import and produce its food requirements

As a result of reduced foreign currency reserves and local currency depreciation, import and export activities have declined, with many companies involved in trading activities not functioning.

The Sudan imports around 85 percent of its annual wheat requirements, with over 50 percent originating from the Russian Federation and about 20 percent from Ukraine. The consequences of the war in Ukraine as well as conflict in the Sudan and weakened national currency have significantly disrupted wheat imports (IPC, August 2023).

The massive destruction of major food processing factories, particularly flour factories in Khartoum, and the

disruption of supply chains and trade routes across the conflict-affected areas will continue to negatively affect food availability in markets in 2023. Wheat, sugar, fuel and other imported goods have difficulty moving from the east to conflict-affected areas of the west.

There is a significant risk to domestic food production as insecurity limits access to fields and the availability of key agricultural inputs. Intercommunal violence could limit pastoral movements to access water, markets and pasture, impacting pastoralist livelihoods.

A mass displacement crisis within the Sudan and neighbouring countries

In just three months – by early August 2023 – over 3.5 million people have been displaced by the fighting, of whom 2.7 million have been internally displaced and 855 500 have crossed international borders (UNHCR, August, 2023; IOM DTM, July 2023).

The conflict is aggravating one of the world's biggest pre-existing displacement crises – even before the conflict, the country was already hosting the sixth highest number of IDPs among all GRFC food-crisis countries (3.8 million by the end of 2022) (HNO 2022).

Since April 2023, the majority of IDPs (74 percent) have fled from Khartoum state followed by South Darfur, North Darfur, West Darfur, Central Darfur and North Kordofan. The highest proportions of IDPs have been displaced to River Nile, Northern, White Nile and Sennar states (IOM, July 2023).

Most IDPs live in host communities (69 percent), with the remainder living in rented accommodation, formal camps, improvised/critical shelters, schools and other public buildings, and open area informal settlements (IOM, July 2023).

The Sudan has also long hosted refugees, with 1.14 million individuals reported at the end of March 2023, the second highest refugee population in Africa – mainly from South Sudan, Eritrea, Syria, and Ethiopia, as well as the Central African Republic, Chad and Yemen. Since armed clashes erupted, nearly 190 000 refugees and

asylum seekers in Sudan have been displaced internally (UNHCR, July 2023).

As highlighted in *figure 2.5*, Chad has been the most frequent destination for refugees fleeing the Sudan since the latest conflict began, hosting approximately 329 200, followed by Egypt and South Sudan. In contrast to other countries, returnees comprise most of the arrivals in South Sudan (UNHCR, July 2023).

Recent changes in Egypt's policies require Sudanese nationals to obtain a visa, challenging free movement between the two countries and leading to people being stranded in a no man's land (between the Sudan and Egypt). According to IOM, they face dire conditions, without access to food, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, or proper shelter, including shade (IOM, May 2023).

This multi-faceted crisis risks being further compounded by forecasted weather extremes, including above-normal rainfall increasing the risk of flooding in the northern areas of North Darfur, parts of South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, Sennar, and White Nile states. This could lead to more displacement, further limit humanitarian access to

these regions and affect agricultural production (IOM, June 2023).

An additional strain on fragile border areas

The crisis affects communities on both sides of the Sudan's borders as refugees, asylum seekers and returnees are concentrating in areas with high levels of acute food insecurity in the Central African Republic, Chad and South Sudan (IPC, May 2023; CH March 2023; IPC, November 2022). Competition over scarce resources risks fuelling tensions between displaced populations and host communities.

Rapid assessments suggest that the price of commodities, such as sugar and millet, have almost doubled in border areas of northern Central African Republic that typically rely on cross-border trade with the Sudan (OCHA, June 2023).

In eastern Chad, rapid assessments conducted in May found that sorghum prices had doubled, limiting food access for both refugee and host households (UNHCR, May 2023). Since the beginning of the conflict, food prices in border areas of South Sudan increased by 20–84 percent (OCHA, July 2023).

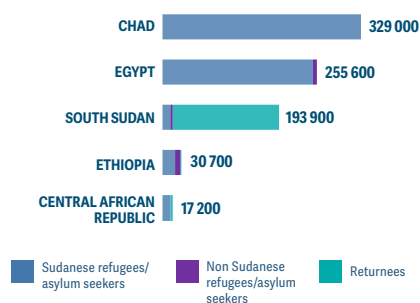
In Chad, returnee populations have congregated in spontaneous locations near the border that lack essential goods and services, including food (IOM DTM, June 2023).

New arrivals in South Sudan consist predominantly of returnees. They have been using a limited number of river-based routes and transit to communities already facing high humanitarian needs, including Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity, particularly in the Greater Upper Nile region (REACH, June 2023; IPC, November 2022). New arrivals reported that food was their priority need (UNHCR, May 2023) but it has been difficult to access due to limited livelihood opportunities and rising food prices.

In Ethiopia, food assistance has struggled to keep pace with the number of arrivals (IOM, July 2023).

FIGURE 2.5

Countries receiving largest numbers of refugees fleeing Sudan, 2023



Source: UNHCR, July 2023.

A further shock to an already alarming nutrition crisis

Prior to the current violence, the wasting situation in the Sudan was among the worst of the food crises covered by the GRFC 2023 (FSIN and GNAFC, May 2023) and has been progressively deteriorating over the past years. In 2022, the prevalence of wasting among children under 5 years was equal or above the 15 percent ‘very high’ WHO threshold (OCHA, June 2022).

The ongoing conflict is expected to exacerbate the drivers of child wasting and maternal acute malnutrition, including poor access to healthy diets, inadequate child and maternal feeding practices, limited health services and poor WASH conditions. It is also driving high food prices and impeding agricultural production, contributing to inadequate food intake and dietary diversity.

Nutrition assistance to young children is being hampered and nutrition monitoring interrupted, making it difficult

FIGURE 2.6

Prevalence of children under 5 years old with wasting, between May–July, 2023

Country	SAM (%)	MAM (%)	GAM (%)
Central African Republic (border points)	-	-	16.9
Chad (border points)	6.1	18.4	24.5
Ethiopia (Kurmuk transit centre)	1.6	8.9	10.5
Ethiopia (Metema transit centre)	0.7	5.1	5.8
South Sudan (border points)	6.5	16.9	23.4
South Sudan (Renk transit centre)	7.5	18.8	26.3
Sudan (White Nile refugee settlement)	2.9	12.4	15.3

GAM (child wasting); SAM (severe child wasting); MAM (moderate child wasting).

Type of screening = cumulative MUAC screening, except for South Sudan Renk transit centre = Mass MUAC screening, and Sudan White Nile refugee settlement = routine facility MUAC data.

Source: UNHCR, June 2023.

to understand the evolving nutrition situation or react to any newly emerging needs. Conflict has interrupted provision of lifesaving prevention-of-malnutrition assistance, which prior to the conflict targeted about 2 million children under 2 years (OCHA, December 2022).

The projections provided by the Sudan HNO 2023, made before the conflict, indicated 3 million children under 5 years were expected to be affected by wasting in 2023, up from 2.76 million in 2022, with the number of severely wasted children increasing from 0.56 million in 2022 to 0.61 million in 2023, representing a 9 percent increase. In addition, about 1 million pregnant and breastfeeding women were expected to be acutely malnourished in 2023 (HNO 2023, November 2022).

The HNO projections were revised upward due to the effect of the conflict on markets, food systems, health and nutrition services, provision of government services and humanitarian assistance. The revised 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (May 2023) projected a 30 percent increase in the number of children suffering from wasting in hotspot areas, an increase of 15 percent in states hosting large IDP populations and 10 percent elsewhere in the country (OCHA, June 2023).

Very high levels of malnutrition among populations on the move

Needs for food and basic social services including essential nutrition assistance among refugees in the Sudan and in neighbouring countries, mostly among women and children under 5 years, were already high pre-conflict. A Standardized Expanded Nutrition Survey (SENS) conducted among refugees in May 2022 indicated that 16–19 percent of children under 5 years in White Nile’s ten resettlements were suffering from wasting, above the 15 percent ‘very high’ WHO threshold, while in Gedaref’s four settlements, the prevalence ranged from 8–14 percent, considered ‘medium to high’ by WHO thresholds (UNHCR, November 2022).

Refugee and returnee populations who fled the Sudan after the onset of the conflict and have sought refuge in the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan had Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) measurements indicating levels of wasting above the 15 percent ‘very high’ WHO threshold for all countries



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The 3.5 million people displaced since April 2023 are experiencing interrupted access to nutritious food, basic health services, safe and adequate water, and sanitation, worsening acute malnutrition among young children.

except Ethiopia. The situation was the most severe in the Renk transit centre of South Sudan and border points of Chad, which recorded a wasting prevalence of 26 percent and 25 percent respectively, including also the highest percentages of severe wasting, with 7.5 percent and 6.1 percent respectively. In border crossing points of the Central African Republic, 16.9 percent of children under 5 years were affected by wasting, according to MUAC measurements. See figure 2.6.

In the Kurmuk and Metema transit centres in Ethiopia, the prevalence levels of 10.5 percent and 5.8 percent as measured by MUAC indicated a moderate nutrition situation among children under 5 years.

MUAC screenings of pregnant and breastfeeding women in May and June 2023 in two transit centres in both Ethiopia and South Sudan recorded high acute

malnutrition prevalence of 25.7 percent and 17.8 percent in Ethiopia and 13.5 percent and 28.7 percent in South Sudan. This analysis highlights the need for targeted interventions to address child wasting and maternal malnutrition of populations on the move in these regions, particularly in Chad and South Sudan, where the prevalence of severe wasting is notably high. It also points to the need for nutrition partners to sharpen preparedness and response plans for a nutrition crisis within the Sudan once the conflict abates.

While no assessment of the nutrition situation in country is possible, the state of individuals assessed at border screenings, the pre-conflict nutrition crisis, and continued deterioration of all nutrition drivers at a national scale suggests a poor outlook for those in the middle of the conflict who lack access to food, nutrition and basic social services.