

**PUBLIC REPORT  
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# Sudan crisis, two years on

**The unraveling of the world's largest humanitarian disaster from the Sahel to the Red Sea**

Photo: Karl Shembri/NRC





Two years into Sudan's brutal war, the humanitarian catastrophe has engulfed the entire country, spilled over across the region, and shows no signs of abating. Thousands continue to be killed, starved and raped as violence forces millions to leave their homes throughout Sudan and across borders.

Since breaking out in Khartoum in April 2023, the armed conflict quickly spread and escalated into the world's gravest humanitarian crisis. All key indicators turned scarlet over the course of the past 24 months:

- **Highest number of People in Need ever recorded** : For the first time in the history of modern humanitarian response, a single country reaches over 30 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. That's 3 in every 5 people living in Sudan.
- **Highest number of internally displaced in the world** with 11.5 million people forcibly displaced inside Sudan, including 8.5 million since the start of the war. Combined with over 3.7 million refugees and returnees in neighboring countries, more than 12 million people have fled violence in the past 2 years, making it one of the largest displacement crises post-World War II.
- **Highest number of people in emergency or catastrophic levels of hunger**, with over 600,000 people living in famine, and 8 million others on the cliff edge.

Beyond the statistics, civilians inside and outside Sudan face harrowing hardships. While some suffering can be measured, much of it remains unseen, endured in silence, with no records or witnesses. Besieged by warring parties, large chunks of populations are out of reach. Amidst sweeping hunger and displacement, women and girls are also the target of horrific sexual violence used as a weapon of war.

This report aims to provide snapshots, through testimonies, key figures and visuals, of the humanitarian disaster unfolding across the region, which also collides with an unprecedented and colossal funding crisis. While the war in Sudan was already testing the limits of humanitarian response, the ability of humanitarian actors to provide lifesaving aid to some of the world's most vulnerable has been shaken to its core by the abrupt collapse of funding streams — all amounting to a perfect storm for victims of the conflict.

**M**aria, 20, escaped her village in Darfur carrying her small infant Imtias on her back held tightly in place by a thin piece of cloth, the only possession she brought with her. She walked, and ran, with a group trying to get as far from the shooting and bombs as possible. Many of those alongside her were mothers carrying small children as well. Maria recounted that the babies did not move or make sounds, and the mothers did not know if they were still alive, or if they were carrying their dead children on their backs. Now a refugee in Chad, she says: *"At night we now only hear the crying of the children that still can cry. The sounds of war are gone. We are still alive. But we have no more strength left."*



# Displacement shockwaves across the region

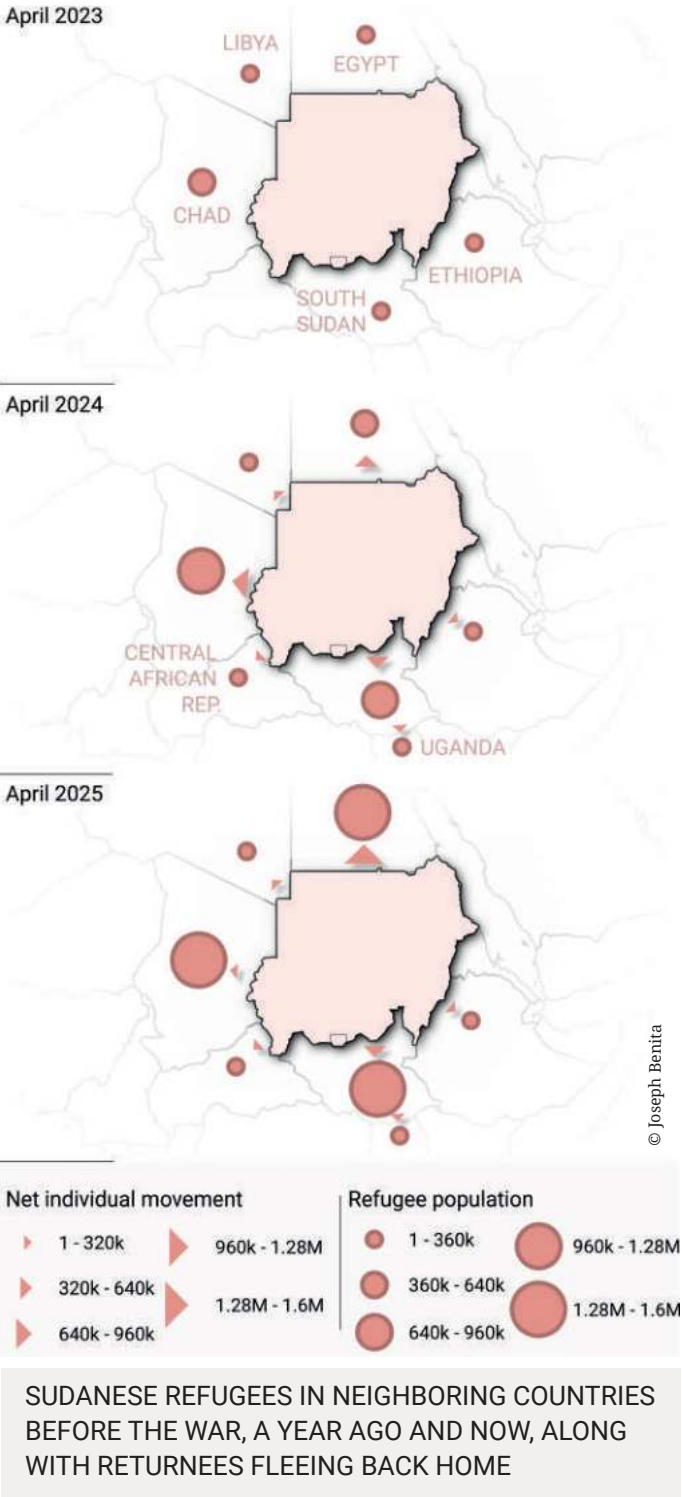
Sudan now accounts for **1 in 8 internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide** and 1 in 13 refugees globally, making Sudan a major driver of global displacement. **Nearly half of the forcibly displaced people** throughout East Africa come from Sudan.

The Sudan crisis has produced strong ripple effects in already-fragile neighboring countries. **Large, sudden influxes of refugees and returnees have overwhelmed border areas with up to thousands of people crossing every day into South Sudan and Chad.** The scale of displacement is exacerbating existing competition for resources, increasing ethnic tensions and heightening security concerns. The escalated risk of conflicts has been felt in South Sudan, Chad, and Ethiopia, with porous borders enabling the illicit flow of arms and resource-driven strife putting refugees, returnees and host communities at risk of communal violence.

As a direct result of Sudan's war, 4.8 million people are now in need of humanitarian assistance in neighboring countries, up from 1.8 million in mid-2023. While funding requirements for the Regional Refugee Response Plan have surged, only a third of the requested amount was received last year. Further aid shrinkage looms large as US money contributed to 45% of the response across the 8 impacted countries in 2024.

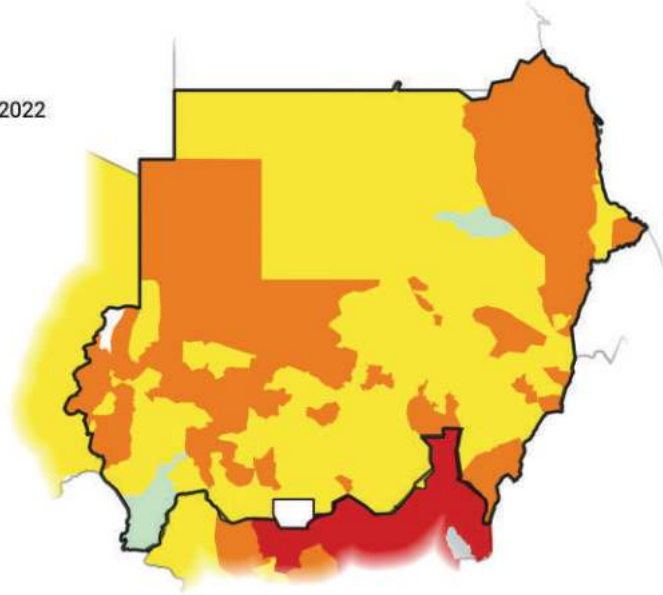
**T**eissir, 23, and her two sisters fled after armed men attacked her village in Darfur one morning. First, Teissir heard screaming, then sounds of shooting before a grenade flew through her window. The explosion badly injured her sister. *"We saw our neighbors being shot left and right from us. There was so much smoke in the whole village that we couldn't see anything... We followed our neighbors."* Amidst the chaos, she lost her parents. They walked 10 days before arriving in eastern Chad. *"We did not know where we were going, we just walked, putting one foot in front of the other. We were walking like someone who is lost because that is what we were: lost. I thought we would die. There was nothing left for us. I didn't want to get up again. I wanted to just stay and wait for my death, but my little sister gave me the strength to go on."*

**N**adia, 35, escaped Darfur holding on to her 5 year old son Ismail when war reached her home. *"We were hiding from the war that was surrounding us as we planned our escape. Suddenly, in a moment, I lost everything."* Armed men had taken over her town. *"They broke our doors and killed everyone: my husband, my 15-year-old son and 14-year-old daughter"*, explains Nadia unable to hold back tears. *"I was in another room, when the shooting stopped, I came out to find their lifeless bodies. There was no time to grieve, no time to bury them. Soldiers took over the town and we had to escape,"* she added. She took the little she could and embarked on a five-day hike to the border crossing with South Sudan with her remaining son. Six months pregnant with twins at the time, Nadia miscarried during the the harrowing journey to Renk.





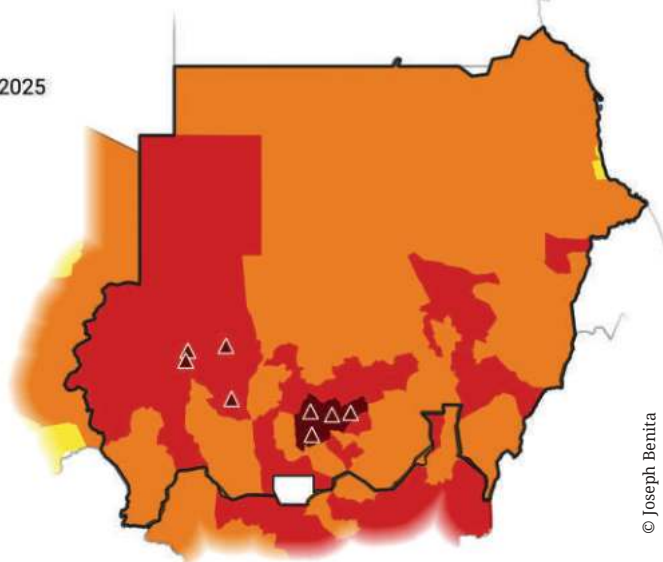
2022



Minimal Stressed Crisis Emergency Famine

▲ Areas where famine is declared, or expected

2025



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HUNGER CRISIS THREE YEARS AGO, AND NOW: MAPS OF FOOD INSECURITY ACROSS SUDAN, AND IN THE BORDER REGIONS OF SOUTH SUDAN AND CHAD

## Extreme hunger becomes the norm

One in two people in Sudan are now trapped in a cycle of severe hunger, including **close to 9 million living in or on the brink of famine**. Catastrophic food insecurity has already caused the deaths of thousands, with graveyards rapidly expanding as shown by satellite images. Famine has been confirmed in 5 areas, is projected to reach 5 more by May and could unfurl in 17 additional areas without urgent intervention.

Malnutrition levels are soaring, with children and pregnant women among the most vulnerable. The situation is especially dire for displaced families, 90% of whom are unable to afford even one meal a day. In areas worst affected by food insecurity, like Khartoum and Darfur, hundreds of communal kitchens that were feeding tens of thousands recently closed their doors due to lack of funds.

**This is a man-made catastrophe driven by relentless conflict and displacement.** Acts of war by all conflict parties, including siege tactics, have crippled agricultural production (the backbone of livelihoods for two-thirds of the population), destroyed farms and markets, driving food systems to collapse and pushing millions deeper into hunger.

**Chad and South Sudan**, two neighboring countries that each host over a million Sudanese refugees and returnees, **are grappling with their own hunger crises**.

At the onset of the regional emergency, Chad already ranked 125 out of 127 on the World Hunger Index, with high food prices, disrupted trade, and climate shocks compounding hunger. The strain on local resources has been immense in eastern Chad, where most of the newly displaced populations have found refuge. In the main transit site of Adré, 85% of the households surveyed in January declared depending on food assistance to survive. Only 2 out of 10 said the quantity of food received was enough to cover their daily needs.

With hunger also eating away at South Sudan, **those who recently fled the war are the hardest hit: nearly one in two returnees will teeter on the edge of famine in the coming months** compared to one in five people among the general population.

Due to the global shrinkage of foreign aid, the World Food Programme has warned that life-saving interventions in a number of countries, including for Sudanese refugees in Chad, will halt in April without urgent funding. This would accelerate the spread of acute hunger well beyond Sudan's borders.

**S**adia, a 40-year-old Sudanese woman arrived at the Mile Camp in Chad with her two daughters and elderly mother after violence drove them from their South Darfur home. "They came at night while we were sleeping and destroyed my house. There was so much fighting in our village... I took my mother, my daughters, and a donkey and ran." After finally arriving in Chad, she explained she was thankful to have arrived in a place where she "could stop running." However, life there has brought new challenges, including a daily struggle to find food. "My 15-year-old daughter is walking around the camp right now to find food or work. There is no food here in the camp. For the first four months we received food, but then it stopped, and we need to find ways to find food on our own. Every evening, I worry about the day to come. Will we find enough food? Do we have enough strength left in our body to survive? When we eat, we only eat a small handful and never feel satisfied. We do not eat every day. If we eat it is only some flour with water."

## Nowhere is safe

For one in three people living in Sudan, violence has raged less than five kilometers from their home over the past year as shown by ACLED's Conflict Exposure Calculator. Thousands of civilians have been killed in direct attacks, with estimates of the overall death toll far higher and reaching six digits. In Darfur and Kordofan, entire communities have been terrorized and slaughtered because of their ethnicity, which may amount to crimes against humanity and genocide. **With extreme levels of violence unleashed, civilians are not only collateral damage, but the deliberate target of a « war on people ».** Parties to the conflict are responsible for actively compounding their suffering, not just failing to protect them.

Gruesome gender-based violence (GBV), including the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, is an ugly face of the Sudan conflict. **Women and men, boys and girls continue to endure immensurable brutality as armed groups have perpetrated mass rape, slavery, and torture.** Children as young as one year old have been raped. With health services severely lacking, urgent post-rape care is often out of survivors' reach. Social stigma and fear of retaliation prevent many from even seeking the medical attention they desperately need. Meanwhile, programs offering protection from GBV in Sudan were absurdly underfunded in 2024, only receiving 1.2% of the 23 million USD required. Ongoing funding cuts are expected to shut access to GBV prevention and response services in parts of the country.

**In neighboring countries where Sudanese refugees and returnees fled for their lives, many find they are still far from safety.** They now face a variety of additional and grave risks, from human trafficking in Southern Libya to cholera outbreaks spreading along their displacement routes in South Sudan and Ethiopia, already killing hundreds. Women and girls are exposed to further gender-based violence as they often lack decent and safe shelters in displacement sites, and have to walk long distances to fetch water or firewood. Meanwhile, protection services are also underwhelmingly funded in Chad and other host countries.

In addition, **the soaring rate of out-of-school children across the region increases child protection risks to alarming levels.** 17 million children in Sudan are out of school. In Chad, 65% of refugee children, or more than a quarter million, don't have access to education. In Adre's transit camp specifically, more than 90% of children do not attend any public or community educational structure. Out-of-school children are more likely to fall prey to trafficking, sexual violence and recruitment into armed groups, or be forced into child marriage or hazardous work for survival. The absence of education increases the likelihood of long-term psychological trauma, cyclical poverty, and a lack of future opportunities, making it harder for communities to rebuild. The education crisis, both in Sudan and in refugee-hosting countries, threatens to create a "lost generation" if urgent interventions are not implemented.



Photo: Karl Shemburi/NRC

**A**frah, 15, a survivor of rape and refugee in South Sudan, recounts the brutality that forever changed her life. As the war drew closer to their home, her mother left to find money for the family's escape. *"The war progressed quickly. Soldiers were stealing and shooting at people,"* Afrah recalled. Hours later, two armed men broke down their door. They searched the house and demanded to know if anyone else was hiding. Terrified, Afrah told them she was alone.

*"They pointed a gun at me and ordered my brothers away, threatening to kill them if I didn't obey,"* she said, her voice trembling. *"They told me to be silent as they began removing my clothes. One held the gun on my brothers while the other raped me, then they switched,"* Afrah said fighting back tears. *"This went on for nearly two hours. I couldn't scream or cry. I was bleeding, but they didn't stop. When they finally left, they threatened to return and kill my family if I told anyone."*

In Renk where her family sought refuge, Afrah received post-rape care, including some psychological support, at a hospital and a safe space for survivors of sexual violence but says she is still traumatised. *"Although we left our home, when I see a man with a gun, everything from the night comes up"* she says. For her mother, due to the trauma her daughter experienced, she no longer feels safe to go to the forest and get firewood: *"With the little cash assistance I got, I now sell sweets and bread close to home so I can be closer to my children."*





## Lack of access equates to death sentences

Humanitarian assistance is the only remaining lifeline for millions of civilians across the region. In Sudan, thousands of volunteer local responders are risking their lives to save others — and paying the price. They've been targeted, looted, and detained by warring parties, especially as frontlines move. **Sudan is the second deadliest place in the world to be a relief worker:** 54 were killed in 2024, 98% of whom were Sudanese.

Humanitarian access in Sudan is being choked to a near standstill by security constraints, bureaucratic restrictions, and a deliberate obstruction of aid delivery by parties to the conflict. The politicisation of humanitarian assistance for military and political gains drastically slows the response and curtails its scale.

**While aid actors are caught in a maze of violence and red tape, siege tactics trap millions of people in complete desolation.** Across conflict hotspots like El Fasher, Al-Jazira, and parts of Khartoum and Kordofan, entire communities have been cut off from communication networks and essential services. With roads blocked and humanitarian convoys unable to reach them, families are running out of food, clean water, and medicine.

In neighboring countries such as Chad, Libya and Ethiopia, access is hampered by travel restrictions to remote border areas and diminished airbridge capacities. Except for a few places, cross border response is nothing but a pipe dream. As a result, **thousands remain excluded from any type of response: not counted, neglected and trapped in a cycle of suffering.**

In Sudan and across the region, systemic barriers like poor infrastructure already stymie life-saving aid — and it's about to get worse. With the rainy season approaching, roads will turn to mud, bridges will collapse and entire areas will become unreachable. This also coincides with the annual lean season, when hunger peaks. Needs will spiral fast at a time that humanitarian access will be at its lowest, leaving even more people in growing desperation.



## What is needed?

Time is running out to stop the spread of famine, protect civilians, and restore stability to Sudan and its neighbors. The human cost of the ongoing war is harrowing. The human cost of ongoing funding cuts, frightful. As millions of lives hang in the balance, international actors must prioritise scaled-up aid delivery, demand immediate protection of vulnerable populations and unhindered access for humanitarian actors, while ensuring sustainable support for locally-led responses to mitigate the catastrophe unfolding in the country and the wider region.

**1/ Halt the war** by prioritizing diplomacy to secure an immediate and sustained ceasefire and avoid conflict spillover in neighboring countries; call upon UN Member States to take urgent and meaningful measures to prevent external actors from funding the war and fueling the conflict.

**2/ Avert the expansion of famine** by mobilising funding for the scale-up of famine response in Sudan and across the region through targeted multi-sector aid, including cash and vouchers. Funds must be front-loaded as fast as possible, ahead of the lean season.

**3/ Combat Conflict-Related Sexual Violence** by funding local women-led initiatives providing safe spaces, psychosocial support and medical care to survivors, and ensuring that protection and GBV interventions are considered life-saving; strengthening accountability for violations by supporting international mechanisms to investigate and prosecute these crimes; sending a clear message to parties to the conflict that such actions are violations of International Humanitarian Law and that perpetrators will be held accountable.

**4/ Secure safe, unimpeded humanitarian access to reach the most vulnerable, as obligated under International Humanitarian Law**, by using diplomatic leverage to ensure the rapid delivery relief items and safe movements of humanitarian workers —including demanding the lifting of bureaucratic and administrative constraints, using all cross-border and cross-line options as well as air routes, pressuring conflict parties into ending ongoing siege tactics, and demanding the protection of aid actors and local volunteers under international law.

**5/ Bolster inter-country and regional coordination** and prioritize flexible cross-border funding allowing aid actors to be more reactive and agile so they can respond swiftly when new needs and/or access opportunities arise in Sudan and across borders.

**6/ Empower local humanitarian leadership, including Women-Led Organizations and Women's Rights organizations in the Sudan regional response** by providing urgent, quality funding with minimal administrative requirements to sustain their survival amid funding shortfalls. This should include allocating up to 100% of the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF) to local actors and meaningfully engage local actors in other coordination and decision-making platforms across the region.

