



GENDER ALERT NO. 1



WOMEN AND GIRLS OF SUDAN: FORTITUDE AMID THE FLAME OF WAR

September 2024

Photo Credit: UN Women Australia

SITUATION OVERVIEW – GENDER AND HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN SUDAN

KEY DATA POINTS



Nearly 5.8 million, or approximately 54 per cent of internally displaced persons (IDPs), are women and girls and approximately 3 million of this group are girls under 18, who face unique protection risks. Over half of IDPs (52%) are children

under the age of 18, while approximately a quarter (27%) are children under five.¹



At least 80 per cent of internally displaced women in Sudan struggle to access safe drinking water due to affordability, safety, quality, and distance.³



Over 2.5 million girls, representing 74 per cent of girls of school-going age, are out of school.⁴



More than 550,000 new Sudanese refugees arrived in Chad between April 2023 and February 2024, nearly matching the total from the past two decades. Women and children make up 90 per cent of the refugees, with 77 per cent of the women arriving with only their children.²

84% of women in Sudan are unable to meet the minimum acceptable diet, an increase of 5 per cent compared to one year ago.⁵

1 Sudan Mobility Update. International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2024. DTM Sudan Mobility Update (06). IOM, Sudan. <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/dtm-sudan-mobility-update-06?close=true>. Aug 20, 2024.

2 UNHCR, 2024. Chad fears the 'very real' prospect of more Sudanese refugee arrivals, needs support. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press-releases/unhcr-chad-fears-very-real-prospect-more-sudanese-refugee-arrivals-needs>. 1 March 2024.

3 International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2024. IOM Displacement Tracking Survey, UN Women Analysis. April 2024.

4 Ibid.

5 United Nations World Food Programme. 2024. Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (unpublished.)



By December 2023, more than 6.7 million women, girls, boys, and men were already in need of gender-based violence (GBV) services⁶, representing a significant rise (more than 100 per cent) from 3.1 million before the conflict started.⁷ This figure is likely to be much higher now.

1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding women in Darfur, Khartoum, and Kordofan states will suffer from malnutrition this year and face severe health complications during and after delivery.¹¹



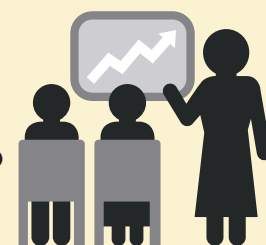
1.63 million women and girls of reproductive age are in need of health care. Among them, over 160,000 are pregnant women and an estimated 54,000 childbirths are expected in the next three months.⁸

64% of female-headed households (FHHs) in 10 states are food insecure compared to 48 per cent of MHHs. Of this, 14 per cent of female-headed and 7 per cent of male-headed households (MHHs) are experiencing severe food insecurity.¹²



More than 7,000 new mothers and 220,000 severely malnourished children from Darfur, Khartoum, and Kordofan states are at risk of dying in the coming weeks and months unless they can access maternal health services and nutritional support.⁹

1.63% of humanitarian funding went to local women-led organizations¹³ in 2023 (USD 1.3 million out of the USD 81.2 million) from the Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SHF).



40% of pregnant and breastfeeding women screened in the Zamzam IDP camp in North Darfur, are suffering from malnutrition.¹⁰

Background

More than 15 months into the conflict with no end in sight, violent clashes continue between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which has resulted in the largest internal displacement in the world. Growing trends of violations against civilian communities, increased reporting of conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of war, heightened levels of disease, and now a looming conflict-induced, human-made famine warning for those trapped in conflict areas and hotspots have ensnared the people of Sudan in a cycle of suffering.

By August 2024, 10.8 million people, of whom 54 per cent were women and girls, have fled from their homes.¹⁴ Some 2.2 million have sought refuge in neighboring countries, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Uganda, and South Sudan, in search of safety and humanitarian assistance.¹⁵ Further reports indicated that among the internally displaced, 1.8 million were women and girls of reproductive age, over 160,000 were pregnant women, with an estimated 54,000 expected childbirths in the next three months. Additionally, 1.2 million pregnant and breastfeeding women were facing acute malnutrition in 2024.¹⁶

6 OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). 2024. GBV sub-Cluster Report, Sudan: GBV Situational Update. <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/#cf-5HPjTQBSagrUKgisl8sJ0Q>. 1 April 2024.

7 OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). 2022. Sudan Humanitarian needs overview 2023 (November 2022). www.unocha.org/sudan. 7 November 2022.

8 UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). 2024. Sudan Emergency Situation Report No. 13 - 27 May 2024. <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-sudan-emergency-situation-report-13-27-may-2024>. May 2024.

9 Ibid.

10 Statement by Dr Christos Christou, MSF International President. 2024. <https://www.msf.org/sudan-needs-are-growing-day-response-deeply-inadequate>. 8 April 2024.

11 UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). 2024. Sudan Emergency Situation Report No. 13 - 27 May 2024. Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-sudan-emergency-situation-report-13-27-may-2024>. May 2024.

12 United Nations World Food Programme. 2024. Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (unpublished).

13 OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). 2024. Sudan Humanitarian Fund Reports. Available at <https://onegms.unocha.org/>. 24 June 2024.

14 Sudan Mobility Update. International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2024. DTM Sudan Mobility Update (06). IOM, Sudan. <https://dtm.iom.int/reports/dtm-sudan-mobility-update-06?close=true>. Aug 20 2024.

15 Ibid.

16 UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund). 2024. Sudan Emergency Situation Report # 13 -27 May 2024. Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-sudan-emergency-situation-report-13-27-may-2024>. May 2024.

According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), April 2024-February 2025, Sudan is facing the worst levels of acute food insecurity ever recorded in the country, with over half the population (25.6 million people) likely to face Crisis or worse conditions (IPC Phase 3 or above) from June to September 2024. At least 755,000 people face Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in Greater Darfur, South and North Kordofan, Blue Nile, Al Jazirah, and Khartoum states. The population in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) is estimated at 8.5 million people (18 per cent of the population) with a risk of famine in 14 areas likely to affect both residents and IDPs and refugees in assessed states.¹⁷

Crisis affects women, men, girls, and boys differently due to their societal roles and status, and these disparities are often worsened in conflict situations due to limited resources and services. Women's access to essentials like food, water, and health care is particularly constrained by insecurity and depleted resources. An assessment

conducted this year (2024)¹⁸ by the REACH Initiative in South Kordofan, in six hard-to-reach localities (Alreif Alshargi, Habila, Al Quoz, Kadugli, Delami, and Dilling) revealed how women's and girls' access to food had been impacted, with 30 per cent of women being denied food, and 26 per cent of girls reportedly being denied any access to humanitarian lifesaving resources and services.¹⁹

Gender inequality in Sudan is shaped by entrenched patriarchal cultural norms that promote male dominance and female subordination in both private and public spheres, deeply affecting the lives of women. Since independence, women and girls have strived to overcome disempowerment and rights infringements through literacy classes, accessing education, and pursuing economic opportunities. This systemic inequality has severely affected women during times of crisis, as they are denied fundamental rights, freedoms, and participation in decision-making processes.²⁰

SUDAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

Food Security and Nutrition by Sex of the Household Head

Gender disparities in access to food in Sudan have been exacerbated by the current crisis, highlighting the significant inequalities between men and women. Female-headed households (FHHs) face greater challenges securing food for their families. During the crisis, these disparities have intensified as conflict and displacement disrupt traditional livelihoods and strain already limited resources. For instance, according to an assessment by WFP (2024),²¹ in 10 states in Sudan—Greater Darfur (5), South and North Kordofan, Blue Nile, Al Jazirah, and Khartoum—households headed by women were significantly more food insecure than households headed by men, underscoring the severe and pressing nature of access to food in FHHs (see Figure 1).

The main income sources for the FHHs and male-headed households (MHHs) vary. MHHs tend to engage in longer-term and higher-return livelihood activities such as non-agricultural wage labour, agricultural wage labour, and mining. If households rely on these activities as their main source of income, they also tend to be more food

secure. Meanwhile, FHHs rely, to a greater extent, on informal transfers, such as remittances. In this particular study, it was found that ten per cent of FHHs relied on informal transfers, which is higher than for MHHs (4 per cent). Within this context, women find it difficult to meet their food security needs, as entrenched socio-cultural norms usually restrict them to a narrow range and usually less sustainable livelihood activities, as well as limit their participation in education.²²

Food Access by IDP Women and Girls

The IOM Displacement Tracking Survey, April 2024²³, revealed a worrisome situation for women and girls in Sudan in this time of looming famine. Severe food insecurity amongst women and children has been particularly identified in Al Fasher, North Darfur; the Buran and Belief localities in South Darfur; and some larger parts of Greater Kordofan, for example, El Obeid and El Fula regions. The same survey found that out of a population of 6,786,816 of people nationwide facing severe food insecurity, more than half were women and girls, 3,597,012 (53 per cent).²⁴

17 IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification). Sudan: Acute Food Insecurity Snapshot. April 2024-February 2025. https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Sudan_Acute_Food_Insecurity_Snapshot_Jun2024_Feb2025.pdf. 27 June 2024.

18 REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives ACTED and the United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH activities are conducted in support and within the framework of inter-agency coordination mechanisms at field and global levels to be more efficient aid planning and response. Available at https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/impact/2b8cb5ec/REACH-SDN_Needs-assessment-in-hard-to-reach-areas-of-South-Kordofan-Presentation_March-2024-2.pdf.

19 REACH Initiatives. 2024. Sudan crisis: Needs assessment in hard-to-reach areas of South Kordofan. Available at https://repository.impact-initiatives.org/document/impact/2b8cb5ec/REACH-SDN_Needs-assessment-in-hard-to-reach-areas-of-South-Kordofan-Presentation_March-2024-2.pdf. 4 June 2024.

20 UN Women. 2024. In-depth Gender Assessment Report. Available at https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/sudan_crisis_-_in_depth_gender_assessment_.pdf, 2024.

21 United Nations World Food Programme. 2024. Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (unpublished)

22 United Nations World Food Programme. 2024. Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (unpublished)

23 UN Women. 2024. IOM Displacement Survey. UN Women Analysis. April 2024.

24 Ibid.

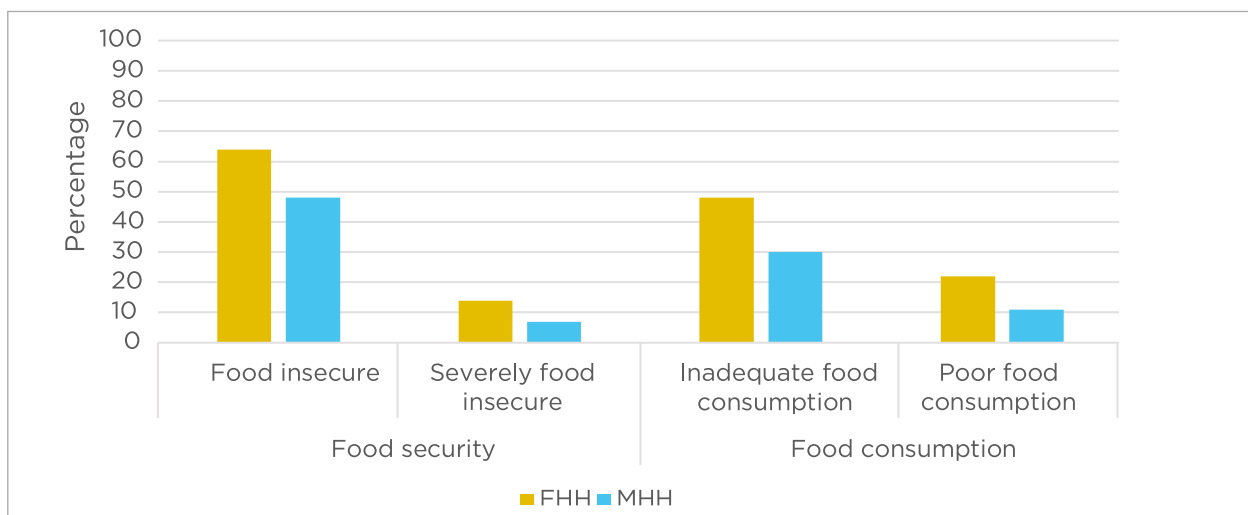


Figure 1: Food security and food consumption by sex of the household head

Source: WFP2024 (n= 16,249), CFSVA.

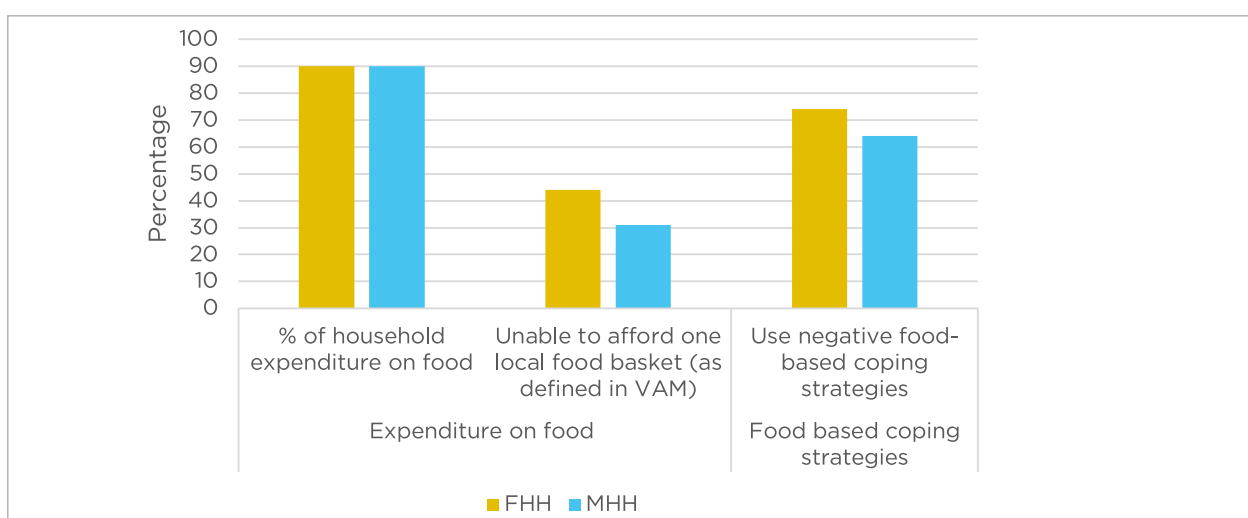


Figure 2: Food affordability and coping strategies by sex of the household head

Source: WFP2024 (n= 16,249), CFSVA.

Despite women's major contributions to food systems, including preparation and distribution, persistent gender inequalities and harmful social norms, including GBV, continue to affect them. This situation is made worse by conflict-associated food scarcity and decreased mobility for women. Additionally, although women are responsible for securing household food, they have limited access to land and are overburdened by unpaid care work. According to tradition, they have no control over the produce. The protracted macroeconomic crisis and currency depreciation have further contributed to an increase in food prices. For example, the average retail price of sorghum and oats in February 2024 was 339 per cent higher than the average over the previous five years for the month of February, whilst the price of groundnuts increased by 329 per cent. Overall, the WFP food basket has increased in price by 109.5 per cent compared to before the conflicts started.²⁵ These price increases have diminished households' purchasing power:

The inter-agency Famine Prevention Plan (2024)²⁶ highlights the interplay between gender and food insecurity in emergencies, noting that gender inequality not only exacerbates food insecurity and GBV but also undermines the safety and dignity of women and girls. This has contributed to an increase in negative coping strategies. Given the high levels of food insecurity and the looming threat of famine, the negative consequences for displaced women and girls will intensify unless urgent measures are implemented.

Coping strategies: There are differences between male and female-headed households when it comes to food security-related coping strategies, with a higher percentage of households headed by women not using any coping strategies. This could be related to lower levels of disposable asset ownership

25 WFP (World Food Programme). 2024. Market monitor: February 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/wfp-market-monitor-sudan-february-2024>. 21 March 2024.

26 OCHA. 2024. Sudan: Famine Prevention Plan 2024 - Through Accelerated Mitigative Actions to Halt Deterioration of Food Insecurity, Livelihood Impoverishment and Malnutrition. Available at <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/sudan/sudan-famine-prevention-plan-2024-through-accelerated-mitigative-actions-halt-deterioration-food-insecurity-livelihood-impoverishment-and-malnutrition>. 12 April 2024.

by women. Inequalities in property ownership, limited financial access, or limited social and institutional support usually impact women more severely and limit their choices when trying to find ways of dealing with food insecurity. Conversely, MHHs more commonly adopt several coping strategies, e.g. liquidating savings, selling assets, borrowing money, etc. This makes them better equipped to mitigate periods of economic strain. The pattern highlights the need for gender-specific interventions to address the unique challenges and limited coping capacity of female-headed households, underlining the importance of creating support mechanisms that cater specifically to their needs.²⁷

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

The cumulative effects of conflict, economic sanctions, and political instability, coupled with climate change, often described as a 'threat multiplier',²⁸ and infrastructure damage from aerial bombardment and explosive ordnance have destroyed water pipes and water treatment plants, making service intermittent. Additionally, rainfall has become more erratic, while flooding and drought have become more frequent.

The need for menstrual hygiene-related products remains hugely unmet and inadequate in the humanitarian response, resulting in a multitude of negative consequences for the everyday lives of women and girls. It is reported by women's organizations²⁹ that where menstrual products are available, unbridled inflation has led to prices that are far too high for most women and girls to afford, particularly as families are struggling to access enough food and clean water. The scarcity of menstrual products raises women and girls' likelihood of developing infections such as urinary tract infections (UTIs) and reproductive tract infections (RTIs), which may become life-threatening given the lack of access to clean water and medical services, especially among IDP women and girls. Additionally, the absence of female menstrual hygiene products creates a significant barrier for women and girls to resume normal daily activities even if they relocate to other safer spaces.³⁰

Women and girls continue to be disproportionately impacted by the lack of safe, easily accessible, and affordable water, sanitation, and hygiene, especially during menstruation and childbirth. The low levels of participation of women and girls in WASH related decision-making are disproportionate to their responsibility as primary users, providers, and managers of WASH at the household level. Women's participation has long been encouraged, but

there is still a long way to go in translating this engagement into better services for themselves and empowerment for better decision-making at all levels.³¹

Gender-Based Violence

According to the Human Rights Council's 'Report on the Independent International Fact Finding Mission for the Sudan',³² sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and more particularly rape and gang rape are widespread in conflict affected areas. All parties to the conflict are culpable of violations of the human rights of girls and women,³³ but reports of transgressions by men wearing RSF uniforms or those of RSF-aligned forces are higher.³⁴ Men and boys have also been victims of sexual violence although in much smaller numbers than women and girls. The ages of victims range between 8 and 75 years. According to the survivors that were interviewed, attacks took place in their homes and sometimes while fleeing or looking for shelter. Victims were beaten, lashed, and threatened with death or harm to their relatives or children, before being raped.³⁵ Furthermore, women human rights defenders, journalists, and medical personnel were also victims of sexual violence, in what appears to be 'punishment' for their activities.³⁶

Before the September 2024 attacks in Al Jazirah and Sennar (eastern Sudan States), the number of people at risk of GBV was already alarmingly high, standing at 6.7 million.³⁷ This increase is more than double the 3.1 million recorded before the conflict began.³⁸ The mission of the Human Rights Council also found evidence of women and girls being abducted by the RSF in Darfur and Greater Khartoum. This was done in order to rape or sexually

27 United Nations World Food Programme. 2024. Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment (unpublished).
 28 UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). 2023. Sudan's water crisis and the women fighting back. Available at <https://www.unep.org/gan/node/14325>. 13 February 2023.
 29 International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2024. IOM Displacement Tracking Survey, UN Women Analysis. April 2024.
 30 Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) Network. 2023. Periods Don't Stop for War! Stand with Sudanese Women and Girls: They Need Your Help Now! Available at <https://sihanet.org/periods-dont-stop-for-war-stand-with-sudanese-women-and-girls-they-need-your-help-now/>. 27 November 2023.

31 UNICEF. 2024. Women and Wash. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/sudan/media/9876/file/UNICEF%20Sudan%20-%20Investment%20Case%20-%20Women%20and%20WASH.pdf>
 32 UN Human Rights Council. 2024. Report on the Independent International Fact Finding Mission for the Sudan HRC 2024. Report A/HRC/57/23. Report to the Human Rights Council, Fifty-Seventh session, 9 September - 9 October 2024, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. 6 September 2024.
 33 UN Human Rights Council. 2024. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General Report, February - April 2024. Situation of human rights in the Sudan. <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/situation-human-rights-sudan-report-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights-ahrc5529-advance-unedited-version>. 22 February 2024.
 34 UN Human Rights Council. 2024. Report on the Independent International Fact Finding Mission for the Sudan HRC 2024. Report A/HRC/57/23. Report to the Human Rights Council, Fifty-Seventh session, 9 September - 9 October 2024, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. 6 September 2024.
 35 UN Human Rights Council. 2024. Report on the Independent International Fact Finding Mission for the Sudan HRC 2024. Report A/HRC/57/23. Report to the Human Rights Council, Fifty-Seventh session, 9 September - 9 October 2024, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. 6 September 2024.
 36 UN Human Rights Council 'Report on the Independent International Fact Finding Mission for the Sudan HRC 2024. Report A/HRC/57/23. Report to the Human Rights Council, Fifty-Seventh session, 9 September - 9 October 2024, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. 6 September 2024.
 37 GBV AoR, Protection Cluster; UN Population Fund. 2024. Sudan - Disaster before us: GBV Situational Update as of 1 April 2024. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-disaster-us-gbv-situational-update-1-april-2024>, 4 April 2024.
 38 OCHA. 2022. Sudan humanitarian needs overview. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/sudan-humanitarian-needs-overview-2023-november-2022>. 7 November 2022.

exploit the victims. Those taken to unknown locations were threatened with violence or death in case they tried to leave or resist sexual violence.³⁹

Insecurity and violence in Khartoum state, Darfur, and Kordofan regions hinder the work of GBV service providers who are unable to adequately support survivors due to the destruction of health infrastructure, and lack of supplies and equipment. Additionally, victims of GBV are unable to seek justice due to the non-functioning of the justice system. Looting targeting the judiciary and others, as well as physical destruction of courts and related infrastructure, have impacted negatively on the administration of justice and the rule of law in many states where conflict has erupted, including Khartoum, Greater Darfur, Greater Kordofan, and recently Al Jazirah states.⁴⁰ The fact finding mission of the Human Rights Council recommended that a comprehensive approach to transitional justice must be followed that will include inclusive dialogue and sincere consultations. It was also recommended that a separate international judicial mechanism be considered to complement and work in partnership with the International Criminal Court, a truth commission, and a victim support and reparations office.

Civic Space for Women's Rights Defenders

Civic space for the defenders of women's rights has shrunk since the fighting started in April 2023. The OHCHR⁴¹ also reports alarming trends of targeted threats of sexual violence against women human rights defenders and female humanitarian volunteers, including death threats, and smear campaigns with some reportedly having disappeared. Those threatened did not have funds to relocate and/or were unable to move freely due to the deteriorating security situation and social stigma. According to the OHCHR, "at least four journalists, including two women, had been killed, 31 deprived of their liberty, and two disappeared".⁴²

Access to Health Care Services

The extensive displacement crisis has exacerbated risks in maternal and child health. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) documents that across Sudan, women are dying because of complications during pregnancy or childbirth, which could be prevented if the humanitarian response was scaled up and sufficient safe access provided.⁴³ For example, in an assessment conducted by the REACH Initiative, among 80 pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, 68 per cent were unable to access health care services.⁴⁴

Levels of malnutrition are particularly concerning among pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. For instance, a screening conducted in January 2024 by Médecins Sans Frontières in Zamzam camp, North Darfur, revealed that over 40 per cent of pregnant and breastfeeding women were malnourished.⁴⁵ This suggests they are likely prioritizing their children's needs over their own. This situation poses a significant risk not only to the health of these mothers but also to the next generation of Sudanese children. Up to 30 per cent of child malnutrition originates in utero, so children born to malnourished mothers are likely to be malnourished themselves.⁴⁶

Some of the factors that continue to affect the healthcare system include the limited number of operational hospitals, acute shortage of medical supplies and personnel, and issues related to overcrowding. The situation is further complicated by the lack of female staff at health centers, which poses a challenge for women who, for religious beliefs or cultural norms, can only be attended to by female medical personnel.⁴⁷

39 UN Human Rights Council. 2024. Report on the Independent International Fact Finding Mission for the Sudan HRC 2024. Report A/HRC/57/23. Report to the Human Rights Council, Fifty-Seventh session, 9 September - 9 October 2024, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. 6 September 2024.

40 UN Human Rights Council. 2024. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General Report, February - April 2024. Situation of human rights in the Sudan. <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/situation-human-rights-sudan-report-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights-ahrc5529-advance-unedited-version>. 22 February 2024.

41 UN Human Rights Council. 2024. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General Report, February - April 2024. Situation of human rights in the Sudan. <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/situation-human-rights-sudan-report-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights-ahrc5529-advance-unedited-version>. 22 February 2024.

42 UN Human Rights Council. 2024. United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General Report, February - April 2024. Situation of human rights in the Sudan. <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/situation-human-rights-sudan-report-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights-ahrc5529-advance-unedited-version>. 22 February 2024.

43 Statement by Dr Christos Christou, MSF International President. 2024. Available at <https://www.msf.org/sudan-needs-are-growing-day-response-deeply-inadequate>. 8 April 2024.

44 UNICEF. 2024. Humanitarian Situation Report No. 18. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/157541/file/Sudan-Humanitarian-SitRep-April-2024.pdf>. 28 May 2024.

45 Statement by Dr Christos Christou, MSF International President. 2024. Available at <https://www.msf.org/sudan-needs-are-growing-day-response-deeply-inadequate>. 8 April 2024.

46 Médecins Sans Frontières. 2024. Cited in WHO, 2024. Sudan's children trapped in critical malnutrition crisis, warn UN agencies. Available at <https://www.who.int/news/item/30-05-2024-sudan-s-children-trapped-in-critical-malnutrition-crisis--warn-un->. 30 May 2024.

47 UN Women. 2023. Initial Gender Assessment in Sudan. Available at https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-08/final_initial_gender_assessment.pdf. 2023.

Education

Prior to the conflict, 6.5 million boys and girls were already not attending school.⁴⁸ The learning crisis has increased during the past year, with nearly 18 million school-age girls and boys now lacking access to formal education⁴⁹, and over 90 per cent of the nearly 23,000 schools closed or inaccessible.⁵⁰ Reopening schools has become difficult due to approximately 2,500 schools being used as shelters for IDPs.⁵¹ Anecdotal reports indicate that girls are disproportionately affected by school closures and the use of schools as shelters by IDPs. This situation has increased the risk of dropouts and left girls without protection and access to secure learning. According to UNICEF, 74 per cent of school-age girls are out of school.⁵² Cases of forced marriage, including child marriage, which have also been linked to hyperinflation and economic challenges, are also on the increase.⁵³ Girls who stop their education or do not have access to education are more vulnerable to child marriage than those who remain in school. Since the conflict has impeded children's access to schools, there is a heightened risk of dropouts, and many girls have been left without protection and access to secure learning. Families may agree to these forced marriages out of fear of potential violent retaliation if they resist.

Women-Led Organizations (WLOs)

WLOs and women's rights organizations (WROs) play a crucial role in Sudan's response as frontline responders, providing a broad range of services aimed at supporting women and girls in meeting their basic needs. These services include basic health care, food assistance, and advocacy for women's rights in IDP host sites, as well as distributing non-food items (NFIs). They also serve as a voice for Sudanese women and girls who bear the brunt of the conflict's negative impacts. With direct contact with local communities and displaced people, and as frontline responders, they understand the needs of the community better.⁵⁴

In July 2024, UN Women conducted a survey involving 12 partner WLOs. The survey comprised 12 questions covering ten different aspects. The organizations were randomly selected from various states. The key findings of this survey are summarized in the sections below.

Participation of WLOs in Various Humanitarian Clusters

Surveyed WLOs reported a high level of involvement with various humanitarian clusters.⁵⁵ Nearly all are intervening in the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and addressing increased risks of GBV. Other services provided by WLOs include identifying safe spaces for women, supporting livelihoods, capacity building, and disseminating skills for peacebuilding. Their engagement in the Cash Programming Group is considered low, as only 33 per cent are participating. Cash support helps women access basic family needs, reduces the need for the liquidation of assets, and addresses the increasing demand for and cost of health services (see Figure 3).

Partnership

Strong and diverse partnerships are important within the current context as they help to spread risks and provide a support system in times of crisis or funding challenges. Partnerships are also vital for WLOs for networking and sharing of knowledge, and opportunities. They also contribute to organizational sustainability and resilience amid the uncertainty. The study found that the diversity of partnerships between WLOs and other entities is high (see Figure 4).

Adjusting Organizations' Priorities (Reprogramming)

Two-thirds of the interviewed WLOs have adjusted their priorities to a large extent, and one-third to some extent to respond to the emerging humanitarian needs of women and girls. WLOs are also actively involved in peacebuilding and development initiatives in communities that are hosting the IDPs.

48 UNICEF, and Save the Children. 2023. 19 million children in Sudan out of school as conflict rages on. Available at https://www.unicef.org/sudan/press-releases/19-million-children-sudan-out-school-conflict-rages-unicef-save-children?_gl=1*xei2m*_ga*ODE0Nzg4OTE5LjE3MjExMjk1MDc.*_ga_ZEPV2PX419*MTcyMjAxNTU4MCM4ZLjEuMTcyMjAxNTYxNi4yNC4wLjA

49 UNICEF. 2024. Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report No. 21. Available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/161221/file/UNICEF%20Sudan%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%2021%20-%201%20-%2031%20July%202024.pdf.pdf>

50 UNESCO. 2024. Crisis and Consequence: The Escalating Humanitarian Emergency in Sudan. Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/crisis-and-consequence-escalating-humanitarian-emergency-sudan>

51 Ibid.

52 UNICEF. 2024. Humanitarian Situation Report No. 18. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/sudan/unicef-sudan-humanitarian-situation-report-no-18-april-2024>

53 ACAPS. 2024. Sudan: Impact of the war on women and girls. Available at <https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/archives/detail/sudan-impact-of-the-war-on-women-and-girls>

54 UN Women. 2023. Women are leading the humanitarian response in Sudan. Available at <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2023/07/women-are-leading-the-humanitarian-response-in-sudan>

55 The Humanitarian Cluster System is a system, used by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, to coordinate multi-agency responses to large humanitarian emergencies and consist of 11 clusters. These are: Camp Coordination and Camp Management; Early Recovery; Education; Emergency; Telecommunications; Food Security; Health; Logistics; Nutrition; Protection; Shelter; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Health.

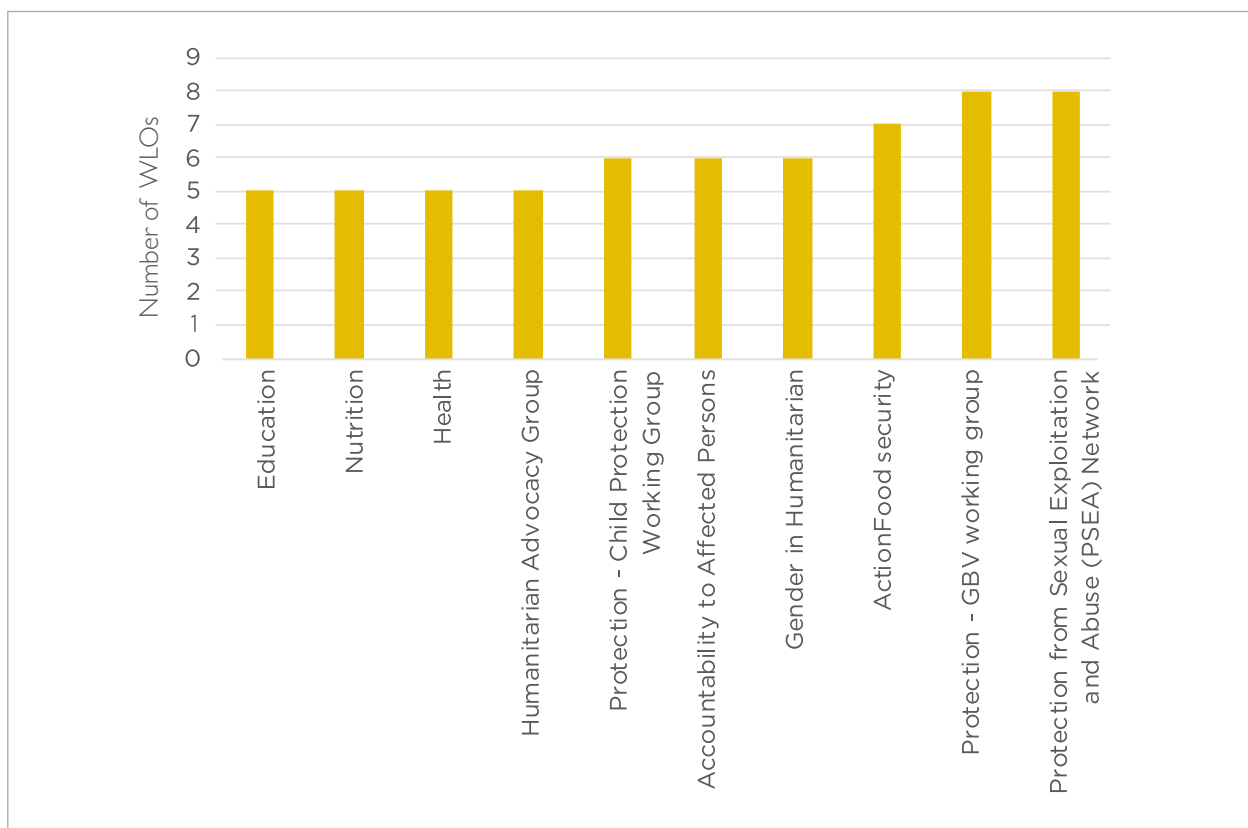


Figure 3: Participation of WLOs in Different Clusters

Source: Women Led Organization Survey (n=12). UN Women, July 2024.

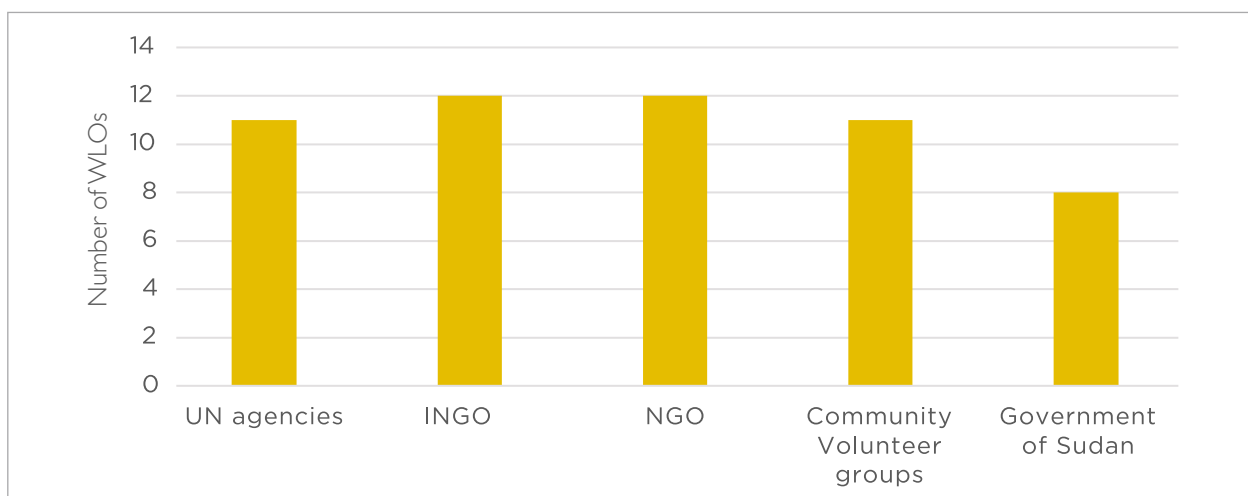


Figure 4: Diversity of Partnerships among WLOs

Source: Women Led Organization Survey (n=12). UN Women, July 2024.

Challenges Facing WLOs

WLOs and WROs in Sudan face significant challenges while actively providing humanitarian assistance to affected populations. These include limited funding, a decrease in personnel due to displacement, and security challenges faced by women and girls—all of which have impacted service delivery.⁵⁶ Of the surveyed organizations, a lack of

funds was their top challenge. This was followed according to their rankings by lack of basic facilities/no premises/destroyed premises, lack of supplies, transportation, lack of shelter/displaced staff, security and safety concerns when trying to work, lack of reliable data for programming, and limited staff to implement tasks.

⁵⁶ UN Women. 2023. Regional Gender Assessment of the Impact of Sudan Conflict on Women and Girls in Sudan and its Neighbouring Countries. Available at https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/regional_gender_assessment_of_the_impact_of_sudan_conflict_on_women_and_girls_in_sudan_and_its_neighbouring_countries.pdf

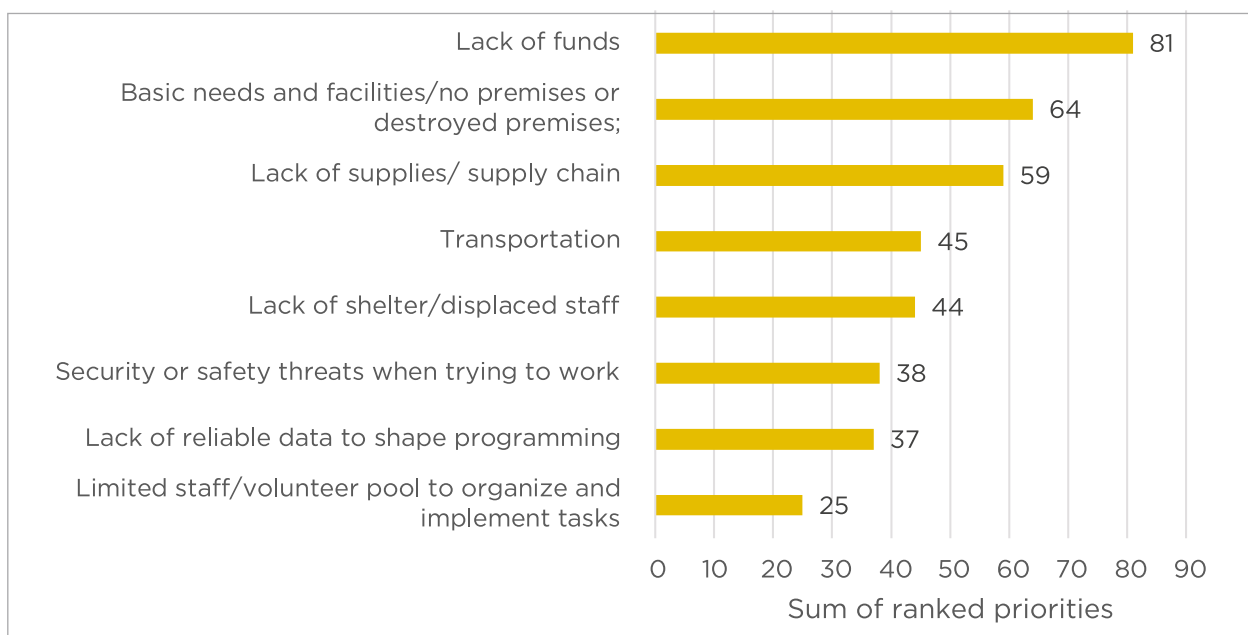


Figure 5: Challenges faced by WLOs (max 12*8=96)⁵⁷

Source: Women Led Organisation Survey (n=12). UN Women, July 2024.

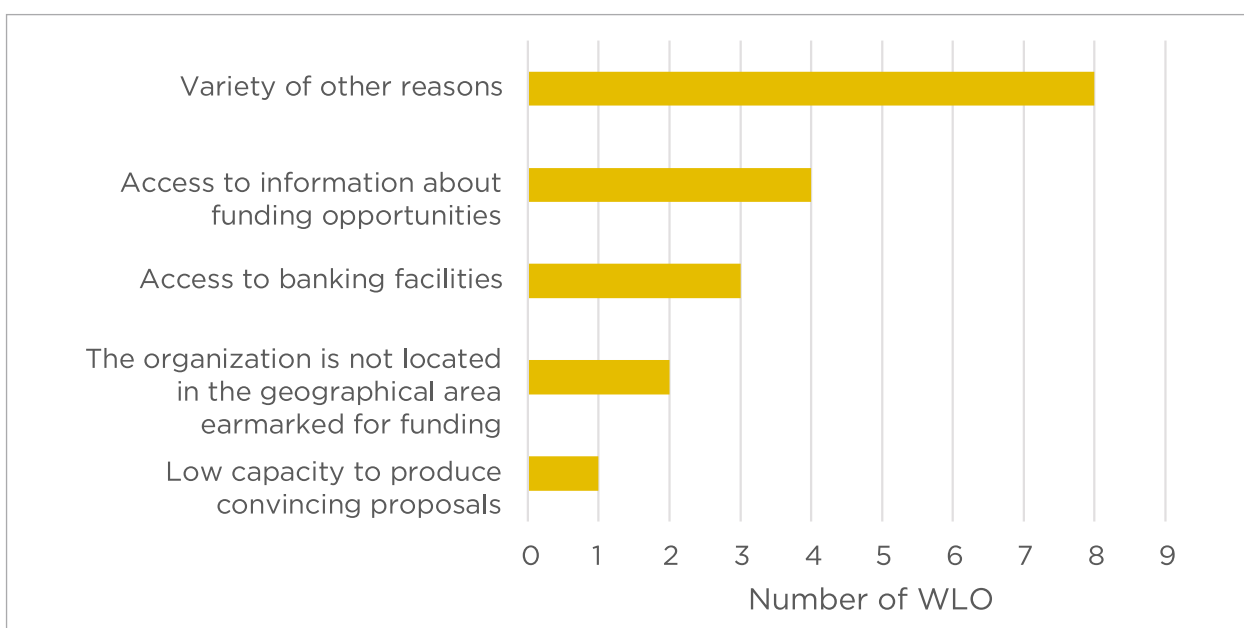


Figure 6: Factors that contribute to WLOs' inability to access funding

Source: Women Led Organisation Survey (n=12). UN Women, July 2024

Factors that Contribute to WLOs' Inability to Access Funding

All the WLOs interviewed faced challenges in accessing humanitarian funds. They identified several factors that influence their funding difficulties. A third of the surveyed organizations indicated a lack of access to information about funding opportunities, while 25 per cent encountered difficulties in accessing bank facilities. Additionally, 17 per cent of

WLOs mentioned that their organizations did not operate in areas where earmarked funds by the funding partners were available, and eight per cent struggled with low capacity to draft proposals. Since the onset of the crisis, UN Women has strengthened the capacity of WLOs through funding and participation in high-level regional meetings. Part of institutional capacity development included training on how to draft proposals, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. Gender in Humanitarian Action, and how to collect gender data.

⁵⁷ Respondents were asked to rank eight priorities from the most to the least important. Any given problem could only be allocated one unique rank from 1 (least important) to 8 (most important)

Key Asks of WLOs

Based on the aforementioned findings, the WLOs identified the following support and partnership needs from UN Women and the Inter-Cluster Coordination Working Group (ICCG). They highlighted specific clusters, such as the Shelter/NFI clusters and the Cash Programming Working Group, where their level of participation has been low.

- **Strengthen WLOs' capacities to effectively address the diverse challenges they face.** These include soft and technical skills including leadership skills, advocacy expertise, resource mobilization, networking and collaboration abilities, and knowledge of gender-sensitive approaches to address specific issues affecting women and girls. These include health care, education, economic empowerment, and meaningful participation in humanitarian coordination mechanisms and the humanitarian programme cycle.
- **Increase women's participation and representation in shelter management,** as only five of the 12 surveyed organizations indicated were members of the Shelter/NFI clusters. Women's meaningful participation in shelter management would ensure that women's needs are not overlooked and are included in the design of response plans.
- **Advocate for enhancing WLO representation within the Cash Programming Working Group to address gender disparities and vulnerabilities** stemming from high unemployment and loss of household incomes. This will enable women to determine the type of cash interventions appropriate to them in different crisis contexts.
- **Strengthen skills in the collection of gender statistics and visual and non-visual communication.**

UN WOMEN SUDAN'S CURRENT RESPONSE TO THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

- **Supporting WLOs:** UN Women is providing technical and financial support to over 30 WLOs and women-led initiatives in conflict-affected states, including Gedarif, Kassala, Blue Nile, Red Sea, Al Jazirah, North Darfur, White Nile, and Sennar, to facilitate targeted, coordinated, and rapid humanitarian response to support women and girls during the crisis.
- **Leading gender coordination for the humanitarian system:** UN Women has established the national-level Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group, strengthening gender integration in policy and strategies, including Operational Guidance for Responses to IDPs in Host Communities in Sudan, which will ensure meaningful participation of crisis-affected women and girls across humanitarian interventions. UN Women continues to provide strategic and technical gender expertise to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG), and other key coordination fora to ensure that gender is integrated across all components of humanitarian action.
- UN Women is bolstering local women's groups by amplifying their voices in political dialogues via initiatives like the "Peace for Sudan" platform and solidarity meetings. Additionally, UN Women is expanding its support for other women-led peace initiatives, enhancing their impact at regional and global levels and forging connections with IGAD, AU, Arab League, key political mediators, UN Member States, and global women leaders.
- **Upholding the dignity of women and girls:** UN Women has so far distributed personal care kits and an assortment of kitchen utensils to women and girls in Kassala, Gedarif, and Port Sudan during the 16 Days of Activism on Violence Against Women. UN Women is currently purchasing additional supplies.
- **Gender Analysis:** UN Women has conducted rapid gender assessments to understand the gender dimension of the crisis and its impact on women and girls, to influence gender-responsive humanitarian response.
- **Women Situation Rooms:** UN Women has so far supported community-led, women-led Women Situation Rooms in three states (Red Sea, Kassala, and Gedarif) as the go-to place to receive and deposit new information. This, combined with daily debriefings, serves as an additional mechanism to support women and girls running away from war, victims of GBV, and for sharing safe relocation routes.



Photo: UNICEF/Amadjiib Ramadan Mahamat

- **Strengthening women's participation in humanitarian response:** UN Women is empowering women-led organizations by enhancing their capacities and offering financial support, enabling them to participate effectively in humanitarian planning. This initiative aims to improve gender-equitable outcomes and enhance access to vital humanitarian services for crisis-affected women and girls through targeted, coordinated, and responsive actions.
- **Galvanizing women's leadership and influence in humanitarian action:** UN Women continues to strengthen its humanitarian presence/footprint by

supporting emerging women-led community-based initiatives in partnership with WLOs that incubate and mentor them. In 2023 alone, 20 such initiatives in Kassala, Gedarif, Blue Nile, and Red Sea were supported. These initiatives actively provided humanitarian support to the displaced population, while receiving capacity building and mentoring support from UN Women.

For more information about UN Women's response to the crisis in Sudan, please see the 12-month Crisis Response Framework at <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/08/external-brief-sudan-12-month-crisis-response-framework>.

UN Women Call to Action

- **Address accountability and the provision of justice to victims:** UN Women calls for a comprehensive approach to transitional justice, based on inclusive dialogue and consultations in support of the recommendation of the report to the HRC.⁵⁸
- **Include women in peace and security processes:** Women and youth need to be represented as key agents of change in decision-making spaces related to peace processes. By including the perspectives and voices of women, youth, and WLOs, peace processes will be more inclusive, comprehensive, and effective.
- **Rape and all other forms of sexual violence must end:** The high levels of sexual violence and exploitation need to end and appropriate justice mechanisms and support services be instituted.
- **Increase resources as these are urgently needed to address the crisis:** Significantly more financial support is needed to mitigate the impact of the conflict on women and girls.
- **Address significant gender data gaps:** More resources are needed to generate gender data and amplify the plight of women and girls. Humanitarian agencies, working in Sudan, also need to move beyond just ticking the box which requires that sex-disaggregated data are produced, towards analyzing and using this data to inform decision-making.

⁵⁸ UN Human Rights Council. 2024. Report on the Independent International Fact Finding Mission for the Sudan HRC 2024. Report A/HRC/57/23. Report to the Human Rights Council, Fifty-Seventh session, 9 September - 9 October 2024, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General. 6 September 2024.

EXPERIENCES OF DISPLACEMENT

26-year-old female, displaced from Omdurman to Atbra

My husband and I fled the war for 20 days until we arrived at my parents' house in Omdurman. I was four months pregnant. I developed severe abdominal pain and although it was too risky to leave the house, we had to flee again. I cried a lot because we didn't know where to go to and by what means. The threat of murder, rape, and looting was so real it looked like a scene from the wars waged in the western regions of Sudan and the events of the sit-in dispersal. I couldn't sleep and only closed my eyes for less than six hours in three days. There was no choice but to leave and travel outside Khartoum. This was not easy as there was no fuel and the little available was being sold at very high prices in the black market. Luck was on our side and we finally got transport. We traveled to Atbara and I am now a refugee in my beloved country. I hope for proper psychological support because the entire process hurt me a lot. I want full protection for myself and my baby. I want to participate in reducing the disastrous effects happening in my homeland now, alleviating the health crisis, food shortage, displacement, and child safety. I want the war to stop immediately. I want peace now and I want to return to my homeland.

44-year-old female, displaced from Khartoum to Kadugli then to Uganda

I woke up in the morning to find my entire neighborhood surrounded by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). By noon, the airstrikes began, prompting my neighbors and I to flee to other states that same day. We moved from Omdurman to South Kordofan, Kadugli with my three children aged four, six, and eight years. On the way, we encountered graphic scenes. In El-Muweilih area, a battle had taken place and we found bodies lying along the road. We were searched more than 10 times at random check points along the way

and my children were crying because they were scared of it all especially the guns. We reached Kadugli after two days. Despite my fear, I knew that I had to stay strong for my children so they wouldn't be more afraid or cry. The journey was terrifying and extremely difficult. Along the way, my mobile phone and money were stolen. I stayed in Kadugli for four months until the situation became even more difficult with the war escalating. I decided to take a risk with my children and travel to Uganda through the White Nile, Renk and Juba where we would cross the border. My husband chose to stay in Sudan so I struggled with the children all by myself. I was hopeful that the war would end within a month but unfortunately, this hasn't been the case. I need psychological as well as financial support because I do not have a job.

20-year-old female, displaced to Egypt from Al Jazirah


After the outbreak of the war in Al Jazirah, with all its intricacies and the living conditions that resulted from it both in terms of security and stability, my family and I were forced to make the most difficult decision—to flee. The feeling that haunted me regarding this idea can only be described as extremely negative. I was conflicted between staying in my homeland and facing the war or fleeing to save our lives and psychological stability. We were displaced to Egypt three weeks after the war. My life changed drastically compared to before the war. I miss the smallest details of home and the comfort that enveloped me. I miss my daily life in the university environment, where the setting gave me a high self-worth and built my confidence; in short, I miss security and psychological stability. During the war period, I faced many challenges. My dad died in Khartoum and we only heard after four days because there was no internet. Obtaining basic necessities such as food and water was extremely difficult and sometimes posed a danger to my life.

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