

100 days into the conflict in Sudan: An emerging picture of the humanitarian impact

July 2023 | Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan, Sudan*

CONTEXT & RATIONALE

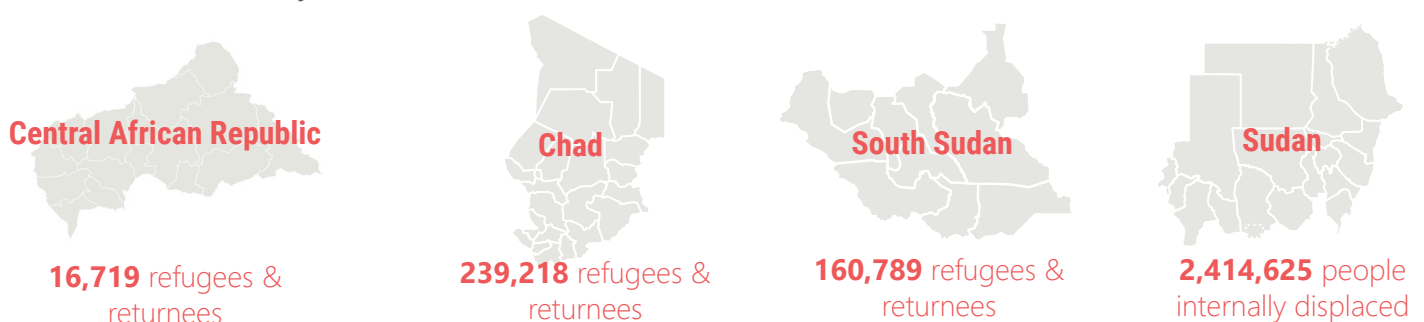
Fighting broke out in Khartoum on the 15th of April 2023, and quickly spread across the country. The conflict triggered waves of forced displacement, both internally and into neighbouring countries, including the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and South Sudan. The conflict, subsequent displacement, and its macroeconomic consequences have exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in the region at a critical time of the year – with many countries entering the peak of the typical lean season amid increased risk of flooding, severely constrained humanitarian access, and significant funding shortfalls.

Due to the volatility of the situation, three months into the conflict, updated information on the impact of the crisis on affected populations remains piecemeal. Yet, evidence that has started trickling through indicates widespread needs and increasing risks to safety and wellbeing both within Sudan and its neighbouring countries. This brief consolidates emerging evidence, including findings from recent REACH assessments conducted with displaced populations, host communities, and market actors in CAR, Chad, and South Sudan, to gauge the humanitarian impact of three months of conflict in Sudan.

KEY MESSAGES

- Three months into the conflict in Sudan, the scale and magnitude of humanitarian needs in Sudan and its neighbouring countries continues to escalate and we still do not have the full picture. **While the conflict has triggered mass displacement inside Sudan and across its borders, findings indicate that some people remain trapped into conflict-affected areas**, where they face a critical lack of access to basic needs and services, including healthcare and water supply, amid severe protection concerns.
- In neighbouring countries, the **combination of trade disruptions, subsequent price hikes, and displacement is considerably increasing pressure on already scarce resources in areas that were already among the most vulnerable and food-insecure places in the world**, exacerbating pre-existing needs and limiting access to basic services among displaced persons and host communities alike. Now heading deeper into the lean season, food security needs are expected to further increase in the coming weeks as remaining stocks run alarmingly thin.
- **Facing severe funding gaps, the capacity to respond to increasing needs among response actors in the region is extremely limited.** Additional funding is urgently needed to pre-stock supplies in light of seasonal flooding and scale up the response at all levels to prevent a further deterioration of the situation and avert large-scale loss of life.
- In addition, **bureaucratic impediments, access constraints, and security challenges inside Sudan continue to be significant blockers to the delivery of critical life-saving assistance.** High-level advocacy with all parties to the conflict is required to allow humanitarian actors to deliver assistance to the populations most in need.

Figure 1: Estimated total number of individuals displaced by the conflict in Sudan, by country
(source: [IOM DTM Round 12](#), July 11, 2023).



* While the conflict in Sudan has affected the entire region, with people displacing into Egypt, Libya, Ethiopia, Chad, CAR, and South Sudan, this brief only focuses on the impact of the conflict in CAR, Chad, South Sudan and Sudan since these are the countries where REACH has been able to conduct in-person data collection in the past weeks. REACH will continue to closely monitor the evolution of the crisis through data collection and analysis. All findings related to REACH assessments in the region will be made available on the [Sudan Crisis Thread](#).

Findings suggest widespread displacement out of conflict areas, where access to critical services is rapidly deteriorating.

Findings from the regional cross-border assessment echo reports of mass displacement out of conflict-affected areas in Khartoum and Darfur, with nearly one in three key informants – individuals who have themselves been displaced from these areas and deemed themselves knowledgeable on the situation in their communities of origin* – reporting that everyone had left their settlement of origin, directly fleeing armed conflict. Many key informants, however, reported that **not everyone who wanted to leave had been able to leave**. Vulnerable populations, including those with physical impairments and those who cannot afford the cost of displacement, reportedly **remain trapped in areas that are increasingly dangerous and lack of critical basic services**.

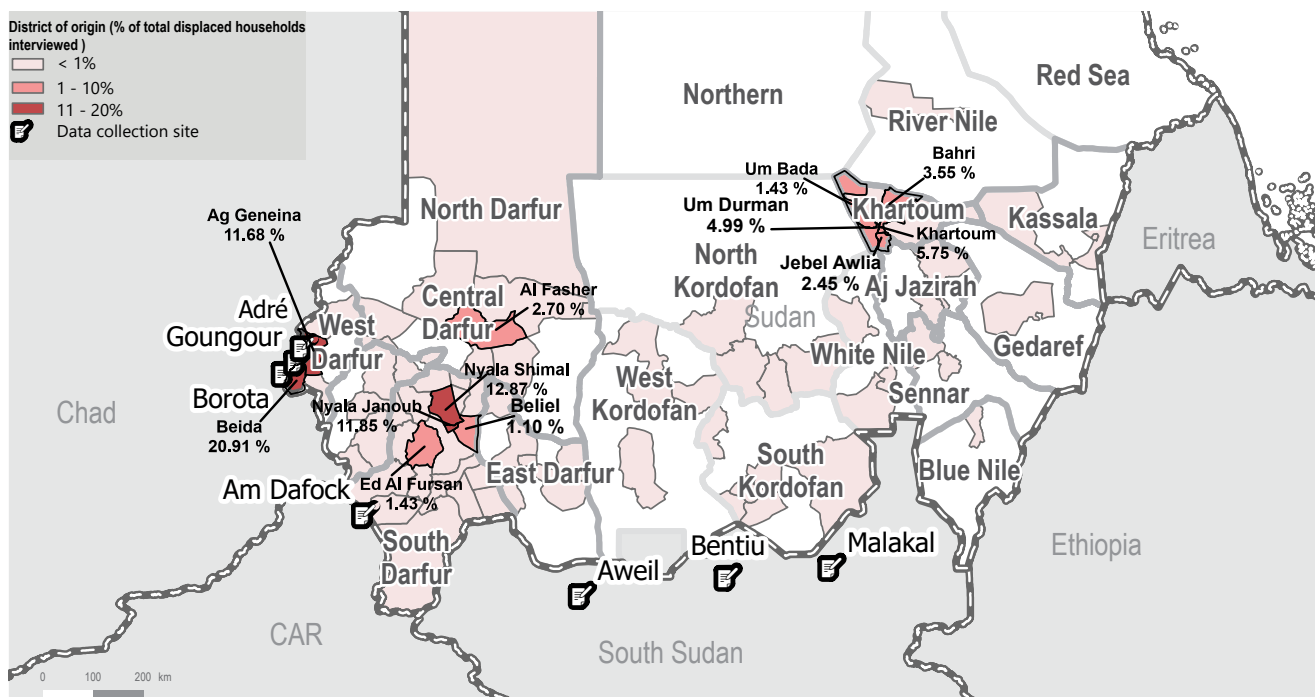
Nearly all key informants reported that access to services has significantly worsened in their area of origin since the conflict started, citing total destruction, occupation by parties to the conflict, and cessation of services due to insecurity as main reasons. Markets and shops, healthcare, and education were most often reported to no longer be available since the start of the conflict. Two weeks into the crisis, the Sudanese doctor's union already warned of a **near-total collapse of the healthcare system** as a result of targeted attacks, displacement of staff, and an acute lack of medical supplies, amid increasing demand for emergency care of conflict wounds and a mounting risk of disease outbreaks resulting from limited access to food, clean water, sanitation, and overcrowding in places of shelter.

In addition, key informants reported that the conflict led to **significant damage to electricity networks and telecommunications infrastructure, as well as water supply networks and community wells**. [Nearly all key informants reported water access had worsened](#), with some people reportedly resorting to emergency coping strategies such as relying on surface water for drinking purposes, posing considerable risks to people's health. The latter was particularly reported by key informants from West Darfur, where access to [WASH and healthcare has historically already been far below the national average](#) – the combination of increased consumption of unimproved water and a collapse of healthcare services, as suggested by the findings, indicates an increased risk of large-scale loss of life among remaining populations in this region.

While it is difficult to gain a comprehensive overview of the full degree of damage and its implications at this stage, the above findings are in line with satellite-imagery based analysis suggesting [extensive targeting and destruction of facilities such as schools and other civilian infrastructure](#).

Access is further constrained by insecurity, with findings corroborating [horrific accounts of violence against civilians](#). Key informants commonly reported that people who remain in their area of origin are at high risk of being robbed, kidnapped, and killed – the latter being particularly reported by key informants from Darfur. Moreover, according to partners, [sexual violence, including against children, is rampant in conflict-affected areas and poses a significant threat to people on the move](#), although the sensitivity of the topic means that cases likely remain severely underreported. In addition to direct violence, the widespread use of weapons has likely resulted in **extensive mine contamination**, further increasing the risk of casualties and limiting people's freedom of movement and access to services.

Map 1: Reported district of origin among households interviewed for the cross-border assessment.



* KIs were selected if they reported feeling knowledgeable of the situation in their area of origin, and if they had 1) left their settlement of origin within the 30 days prior to data collection OR 2) been in recent (within the last 30 days) contact with people who stayed behind in the settlement

Disrupted livelihoods, trade flows, and skyrocketing prices further ignite food insecurity in Sudan and across the region.

Along with active conflict and the significant damage to basic infrastructure and services also came **the destruction of local livelihoods, which exacerbated by widespread looting, is reportedly driving a severe deterioration of access to food.** Key informants from Khartoum and West and South Darfur, often reported that loss of property, destruction of markets, and mobility constraints as a result of insecurity were negatively affecting livelihoods in their area of origin. In urban areas, where conflict is mostly concentrated and where most people are dependent on market purchases to access food, reporting suggests that people are unable to generate income or access cash needed to access sufficient food. In rural areas affected by conflict, the destruction of crops was also a commonly reported reason for a lack of access to food, according to key informants, in addition to stocks having been consumed.

Consequently, nearly all key informants reported access to food had worsened since the onset of the conflict on 15th of April. Most key informants perceived that hunger among the remaining population was reaching severe levels, with people becoming exhausted due to a lack of food. Some informants, particularly in Nyala, even reported that, since the start of the conflict, hunger was approaching the “worst possible levels.”

Reported coping strategies used by remaining households to access food include borrowing from friends or strangers (particularly in South Darfur) or even consuming seed stocks meant for next season (West Darfur). This is particularly the case in areas experiencing high displacement, where pressure on scarce resources is mounting and where reliance on social networks will likely become less and less viable without further support, which in turn could lead to increased reliance on irreversible coping mechanisms.

In addition to the direct impact of conflict on food access and availability in areas directly affected by conflict, it is fair to assume that ripple effects are likely felt across the country. In rural areas of Sudan that are less directly impacted by active fighting or displacement, food stocks remaining from the previous harvest are running thin, with increased numbers of people projected to become reliant on purchasing food from markets as the lean season progresses. Damaged value chains and demolished warehouses and stocks, particularly those located in Khartoum’s trade-hub, will likely severely impact not only people’s access to food at markets but also their ability to access agricultural input for the ongoing planting season, threatening longer-term food security in the region. The onset of the rainy season is expected to further decrease mobility to and from production areas, which will in turn compromise food security.

In a similar vein, disrupted supply lines and a dampened activity from Sudanese suppliers seem to have contributed to considerable price hikes in areas largely dependent on imports from Sudan in neighbouring countries. In Malakal Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Malakal Town (South Sudan), both key reception sites for refugees and returnees from Sudan, the Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) found the cost of the Multi-Sectoral Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (MSSMEB)* to have increased with 78% and 18%, respectively, between April and May 2023. This appears to be much in line with price increases observed in other locations with cross-border trade flows to Sudan. In CAR, prices for some key food items such as sugar and millet have reportedly doubled as well since the start of the conflict, with a similar trend unfolding in Chad, where cereal prices were already atypically high prior to the conflict due to the 2022 flooding and high interest rates.

Figure 2: Cost of MSSMEB (SSP) in Malakal and Renk markets, June 2022 - June 2023 (REACH JMMI).



While prices usually increase towards the end of the lean season, currently observed increases are atypically early and a likely consequence of the conflict. Market representatives interviewed for a REACH Rapid Assessment in Malakal directly linked the price increases to supply disruptions caused by the Sudan conflict, in addition to the continuous devaluation of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP). Vendors interviewed in Birao for the JMMI assessment in CAR reported that, along with the limited accessibility of roads during the rainy season, increased insecurity in the region as a result of the conflict in Sudan is causing business closures, restocking difficulties, and shortages.

Due to their location close to the border with Sudan, these same areas are also generally receiving the highest numbers of new refugees and returnees. People fleeing active conflict have often not been able to bring anything more than the clothes they were wearing when fighting erupted, let alone any livelihoods assets. As a result, many of those who can work are seeking to engage in low-waged labour and/or small trade (e.g., selling firewood), saturating labour markets, which is further driving down wages and limiting purchasing power.

* The MSSMEB is an indicator representing the cost of the minimum culturally adjusted group of items required to support a six-person household for one month.

Others are reportedly solely dependent on assistance, including from host communities and aid agencies (where available), for their survival. Host community members who participated in focus group discussions (FGDs) for a REACH rapid assessment in Renk Town, another common reception area in South Sudan, commonly reported that [many people are actively providing food, water, or shelter to displaced persons](#) (or would like to if they could).



Host community members reported that those who work share food, money, and shelter with recent arrivals at the expense of the household, explaining **“we cannot eat if these people are not eating.”** (FGD, Renk June 2023)

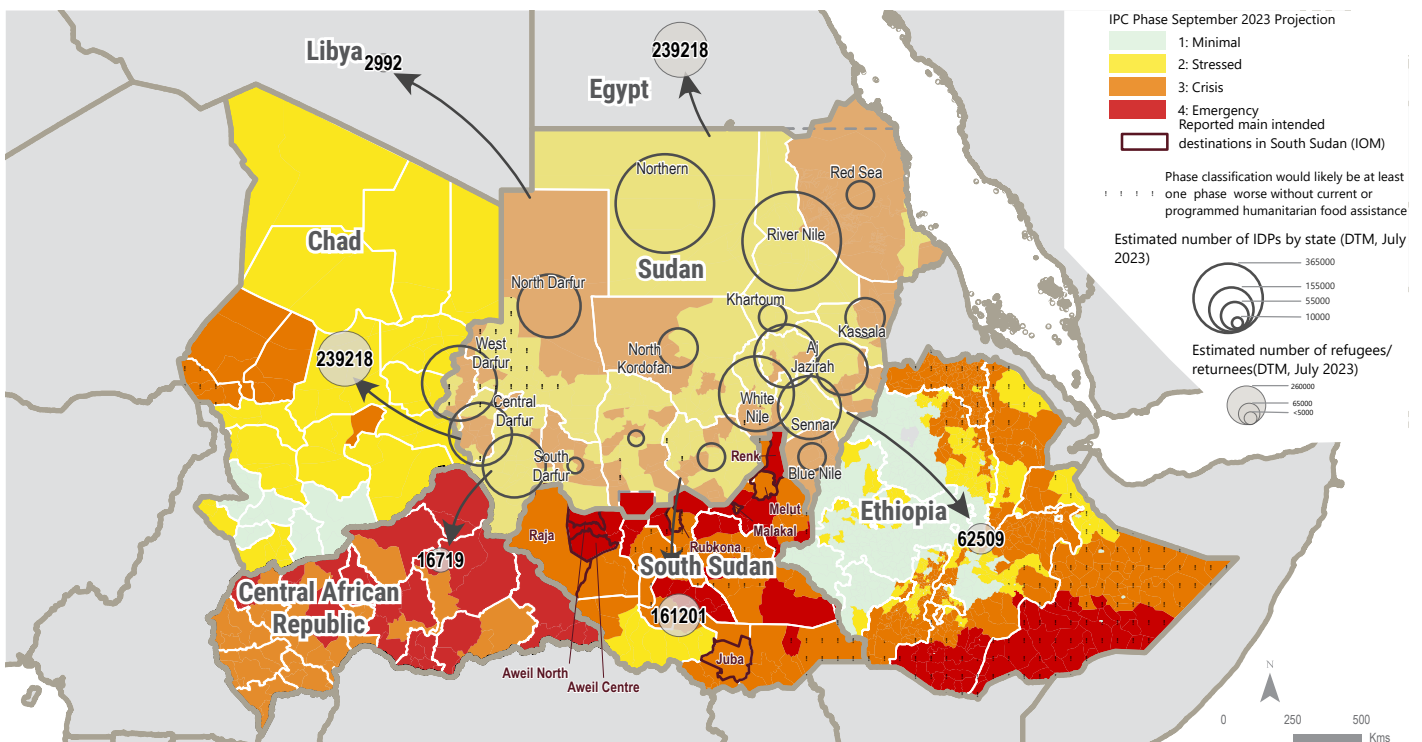
Yet here, too, communities are moving further into the lean season, and it will become increasingly difficult to share dwindling resources in the coming months. This is particularly worrying since in nearly all displacement-affected locations across Chad, CAR, and South Sudan, [access to traditional livelihoods has gradually eroded over time](#) following years of recurring shocks and stressors, including floods, conflict, increasing fuel prices, high inflation, and displacement. Food insecurity is projected to deteriorate, with Emergency levels of food insecurity (Integrated Phase Classification Phase 4) [expected in northern CAR](#) and [across affected areas in South Sudan](#) in the coming weeks. In addition, in some refugee-hosting areas in Chad, [tensions over water use are reportedly already rising](#) as community wells run dangerously low.

In addition, the rapid influx of displaced populations is straining basic services such as healthcare, access to which was already severely limited across the neighbouring countries prior to the conflict in Sudan due to years of compounding shocks. The demand for healthcare among recent arrivals is reportedly high, with many presenting [conflict-related injuries](#), which is corroborated by healthcare featuring among [the top reported priority needs](#) among households interviewed for the REACH Cross-border Assessment.

In Chad, for instance, [MSF field reporting](#) and [data from IOM](#) suggest that the high number of vulnerable people reaching Adré, across the border from West Darfur, puts a significant strain on local health infrastructure. This limits access to healthcare services for host and displaced populations alike.

With many people remaining in crowded informal sites with limited access to clean WASH infrastructure and the rainy season starting across the region, **the risk of disease outbreaks and an increase in acute malnutrition is mounting.** An anticipated [lack of access as a result of seasonal flooding](#) will likely further pose [critical barriers to providing and seeking care in the coming months](#).

Map 2: Projected IPC Phase (up to September 2023) with estimated number of IDPs by state and refugees/returnees per affected country (source: FEWS NET, IPC, IOM DTM).



Humanitarian partners report barriers to meeting needs of affected populations inside Sudan...

As indicated by the findings presented in this brief, humanitarian needs are severe and widespread. Displaced households interviewed for the cross-border assessment in Chad, CAR, and South Sudan commonly reported **being in urgent need of lifesaving assistance, including food, shelter, water, and healthcare**. However, humanitarian partners report serious difficulty meeting needs inside Sudan and in neighbouring countries.

Pledges made at the high-level pledging conference for Sudan in Geneva fall critically short of the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, which is currently only 27% funded, with similarly critical shortfalls for the regional response. While the funding gap is a major impediment to providing adequate assistance in Sudan and across the region, it is not the only blocking factor.

According to partners, insecurity continues to severely undermine humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas inside Sudan. This reportedly includes both direct conflict, including targeted attacks on humanitarian personnel and assets as well as continuous shelling and high risk of life in areas of active conflict, and generalised insecurity following a breakdown of law and order. For instance, MSF reports having had to cease activities in some of the most affected areas in the country, including Nyala (South Darfur) and Ag Geneina (West Darfur) due to looting, violence, and insecurity. The impact of insecurity on operations is exacerbated by the fact that Darfur in particular remains an information blackhole due to a lack of functioning telecommunications, making it difficult to make a detailed assessment of the situation in the area. All the while, eyewitness accounts from those who fled into Chad suggest that **access of affected populations to humanitarian spaces remains equally limited**. The majority of key informants who were interviewed for the Cross-border Assessment in Chad (mostly fleeing from West Darfur) reported that people who had also been wanting to leave had become trapped in conflict due to insecurity and road closures, in line with evidence shared by the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) on violence against civilians and the establishment of checkpoints, particularly in West Darfur, as well as media reporting of killings and sexual violence against people attempting to flee Ag Geneina.

In addition to direct insecurity and damage to assets and infrastructure, partners have shared* **several additional bureaucratic impediments**, including operational, logistic, administrative, and financial barriers to aid delivery. Reportedly, while NGO activities have not commonly been met with outright denials, travel visas are often postponed, rejected, or lost in procedures that are unclear to the point of incapacitation, and newly enforced approval processes for programming requests (e.g., registration, distribution, assessment) are met with unclear procedures.

Moreover, fuel prices have reportedly skyrocketed while food and water supplies are becoming severely depleted in affected areas, significantly driving up operational costs against the already large funding gap. All the while, banking services are not available in most affected areas, and cash reserves are becoming depleted elsewhere in the country, further reducing operational ability of humanitarian actors.

Taken together, these barriers limit humanitarian activities in areas directly affected by conflict as well as areas of refuge where insecurity-related movement barriers are less prominent. Meanwhile, while local neighbourhood groups bear the brunt of the response, **such groups often reportedly remain almost exclusively reliant on local and/or diaspora funding**, which is equally impacted by dwindling financial resources and price hikes.

... and in neighbouring countries.

In addition to access barriers, operational constraints, and funding shortfalls for the response inside Sudan, **the humanitarian responses in affected neighbouring countries face equally severe funding gaps** and the capacity to absorb any additional needs at this critical time of the year is reportedly very limited among organisations in CAR, South Sudan, and Chad alike. In South Sudan, for instance, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recently issued a press release to reiterate that lifesaving activities across all sectors will have to be reduced, suspended, or fully terminated if funding is not increased. This will reportedly leave millions of the most vulnerable populations without access to humanitarian assistance or protection in the coming weeks, when needs are typically highest at the peak of the lean and flood season and at a time of already unprecedented needs in the country – a narrative that also reverberates in situation reports from partners in CAR and Chad.

Considering the sheer severity and magnitude of needs among displaced and host communities, and the anticipated loss of access to flood-prone areas across the region, **there is an urgent need for additional resources to pre-, and re-stock supplies and significantly scale up ongoing responses at all levels to avert large-scale loss of life**. Within this process, it is key to not lose sight of sustainable avenues to adequately support community-led responses.

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

* Information on accessibility was shared by humanitarian organisations with REACH bilaterally/through meetings and is not publicly available. For information requests, please reach out to IMPACTHQ-GlobalEmergencies@acted.org.