

# The Sudanese Refugee Crisis could be a Humanitarian Catastrophe



On April 15, 2023, an armed conflict between the Rapid Armed Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces erupted in the capital city Khartoum, quickly spreading through the Darfur region. With more than 650,000 people fleeing the country and over 2.2 million internally displaced, this conflict has resulted in another major humanitarian crisis that could impact beyond Sudan.

Several of Sudan's neighboring countries reported several thousand people fleeing to their borders on bus, car, and foot through incredibly dangerous conditions. Looting is rampant and carjackings occur, even amongst humanitarian organizations. Due to the collapse of the Sudan banking system, these refugees also have no access to cash, leaving them unable to pay for basic needs, adding to their vulnerability. Refugees also face various issues as a result of overcrowding. At least 800,000 refugees had fled Sudan during previous conflicts, often settling across the border in Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt. With the increase from this conflict, the lack of supplies is destined to worsen. According to the UN, the humanitarian situation is dire with food, water, and fuel shortages, limited electricity and communications access, and high prices for essential items due to inflation. Gender-based violence prevention, child care for refugee children, and psychosocial support are also concerns within the most refugee camps. The UNHCR puts a strong emphasis on mental health needs amongst the refugees, as many have to cope with loss, family separation, separation from support systems and trauma from violence.

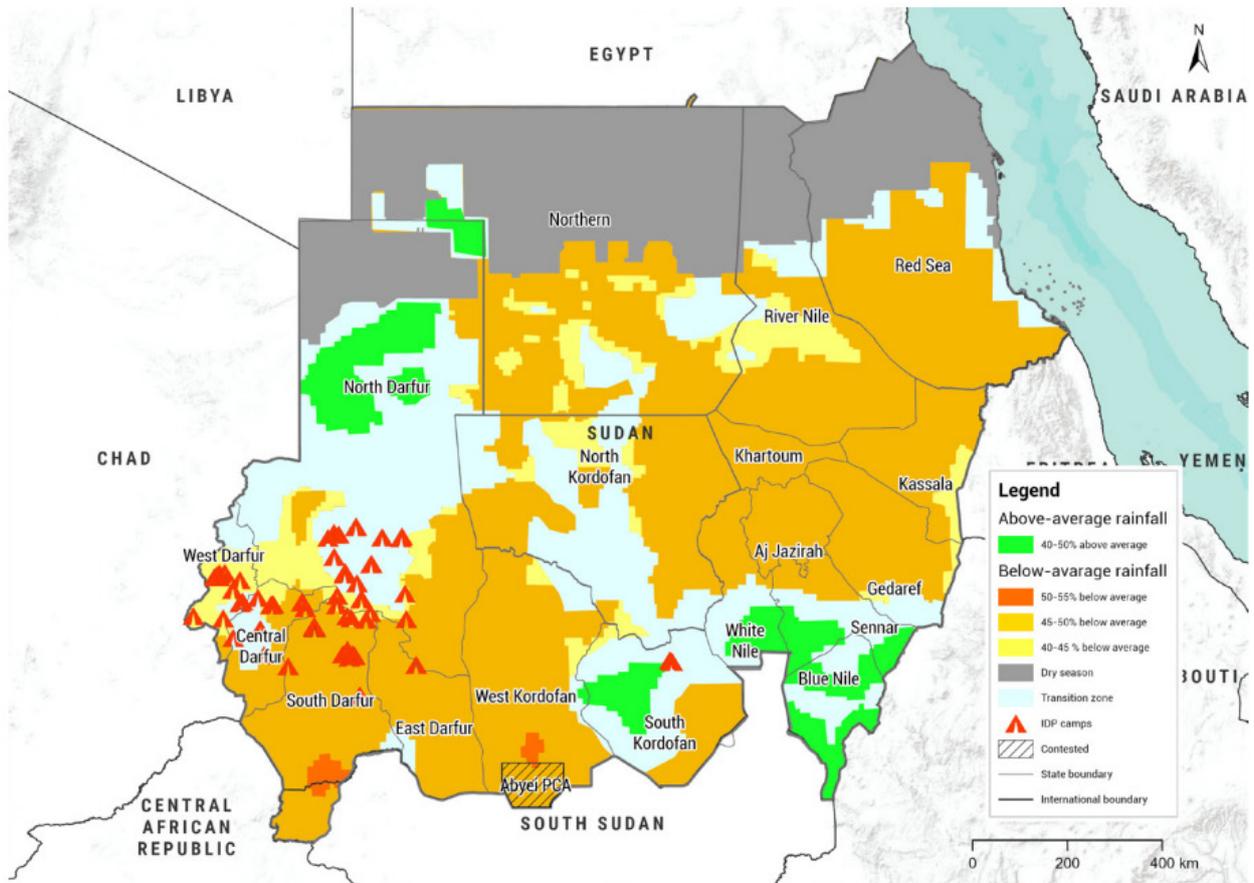


Direct attacks on healthcare facilities and severe shortages of medicine and medical supplies have made healthcare incredibly difficult. With an already weak healthcare system, Sudan's healthcare services have taken a major hit as a result of the war with a severe lack of supplies, 70% of hospitals closed, and a lack of body disposal within Sudan. Those fleeing the conflict will rarely find improvement. Demands for more nutrition and hygiene promotion programs have increased in these camps. With a lack of clean water, water borne illnesses can emerge. Malnutrition is likely to appear due to a lack of food, especially amongst children. With food, medicine, and drugs being cut off since the start of the conflict, many who suffer from conditions like diabetes are now suffering. Malaria and dengue fever are still affecting the population, especially children. Doctors Without Borders have been primarily focusing on pediatrics, maternity care, and malnutrition. Despite this, not even 10% of the UN's planned budget to help Sudan has been approved, and humanitarian organizations have made it clear that they need more funding.

The upcoming rainy season is expected to further complicate the situation. Floods are known for impacting the region, Heavy rains in Ethiopia have caused damage to shelters and created a possibility for disease outbreak. Between May and October of 2022, heavy rains and flooding affected roughly 349,000 people, damaging over 48,250 homes, and destroying 24,859 houses. The White Nile region is particularly vulnerable to flooding, and scientists predict above average rainfall for this year. Last year, over 1,000 water sources, 500 healthcare facilities, and 2,500 latrines in Sudan were damaged by flooding, leading to decreased sanitation practices that open the doors to diseases such as cholera, dysentery, and polio. Floods also destroy crops and cut off supply chain access, making an already dire food security situation even worse.



**Figure 3. Map of rainfall forecast between June–September 2023 and locations of IDP sites**



**Map of rainfall forecast for June through September 2023 with locations of IDP camps.**

As of May 5, the UN has reported **115,000** refugees in Chad, **115,000** in South Sudan, **210,000** in Egypt, **45,600** in Ethiopia, and **12,000** in the Central African Republic (CAR). With an estimated **860,000** more refugees estimated to flee, the current situation in these countries requires urgent attention.

**1,234,000**  
Total planning figure

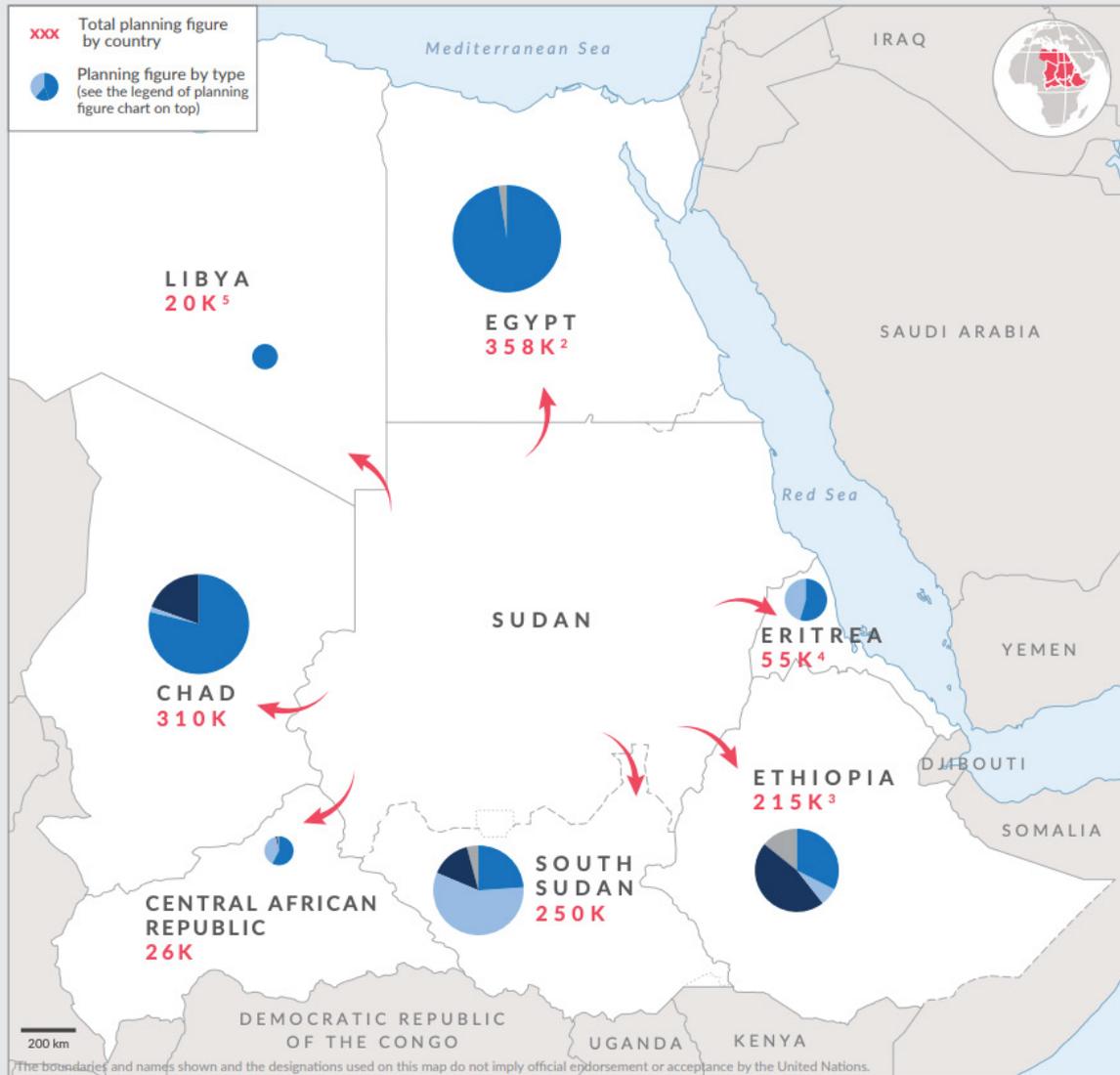
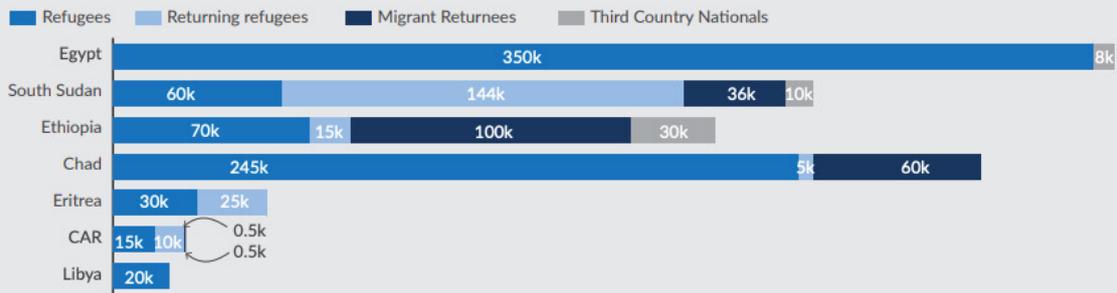
**790,000**  
Total projected Refugees<sup>1</sup>

**199,000**  
Total projected Refugee Returnees

**196,500**  
Total projected Migrant Returnees

**48,500**  
Total projected Third Country Nationals

**Planning figures** | in thousands



**Map of Estimated Future Refugee Figures**

Chad, already hosting hundreds of thousands of displaced Sudanese from previous conflicts, is struggling with an influx of 115,980 new arrivals from Sudan, adding to the 407,000 refugees already packed into 14 camps. Chad has received the most refugees of Sudan's neighbors. During the beginning of May, Chad was severely ill-equipped for these refugees due to a cut in international aid, and healthcare providers reported that in current refugee sites, acute malnutrition treatment program admissions increased by 65%. Shelter and water remain the most critical needs. With lack of shelter, some refugees reside in the open or under trees, while others make shelters near the border. The UNHCR's \$214 million plan to fix these humanitarian issues is only 16% funded, and they state that they are running out of resources. This urgent situation is being further complicated by inter-community tensions because the conflict has disrupted Chad's supply chain, leaving Chadians vulnerable to economic hardship. Food and fuel prices in Eastern Chad have already increased and the price of sorghum doubled due to the conflict, increasing tensions between the local populations and the arrivals. Both impoverished Chadians and Sudanese will face food issues, and already overwhelmed services will fall under more pressure. As a result, hesitancy to help is taking root in Chad. While authorities have requested assistance to relocate camps away from the border, most existing camps are full and have no resources for new arrivals.



Even though the official border is closed, the Chadian government is keeping the border open to Sudanese refugees. Response efforts in the area include protection, registration, distribution of core relief items and shelter assistance at 27 border crossings. There have also been registration, border and protection monitoring, and humanitarian training. Due to low resources, aid distribution is being prioritized to vulnerable groups like the elderly, expectant women, and unaccompanied children. Clean water efforts, relocation services, and new camp establishment efforts are also increasing. In May, the UNHCR sent mobile clinics, providing medical screenings, pre and antenatal care, measles vaccinations, child deliveries, and mental health services. The UN has also provided some relief through protection services, core relief items, water trucking, and nutrition screenings. The refugees in Chad are most vulnerable during the rainy season. The rainy season will also make supply chains a nightmare, isolating many refugee communities in Chad. Humanitarian organizations are rushing to relocate as many as possible, but relocating all the refugees from the affected areas will be almost impossible.

For those that want to relocate, there are not many camps to relocate to, and the increasing new arrivals further adds to the uphill battle these relocation efforts face.

South Sudan, a country with a crisis of its own, has taken in thousands of Sudanese, including 200,000 returnees. The majority of returnees are arriving by boat along the Nile, complicating emergency response logistics. South Sudan is an incredibly turbulent country with its own issues. According to the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, 9.4 million people in South Sudan are in need of humanitarian assistance, not including refugees and returnees.

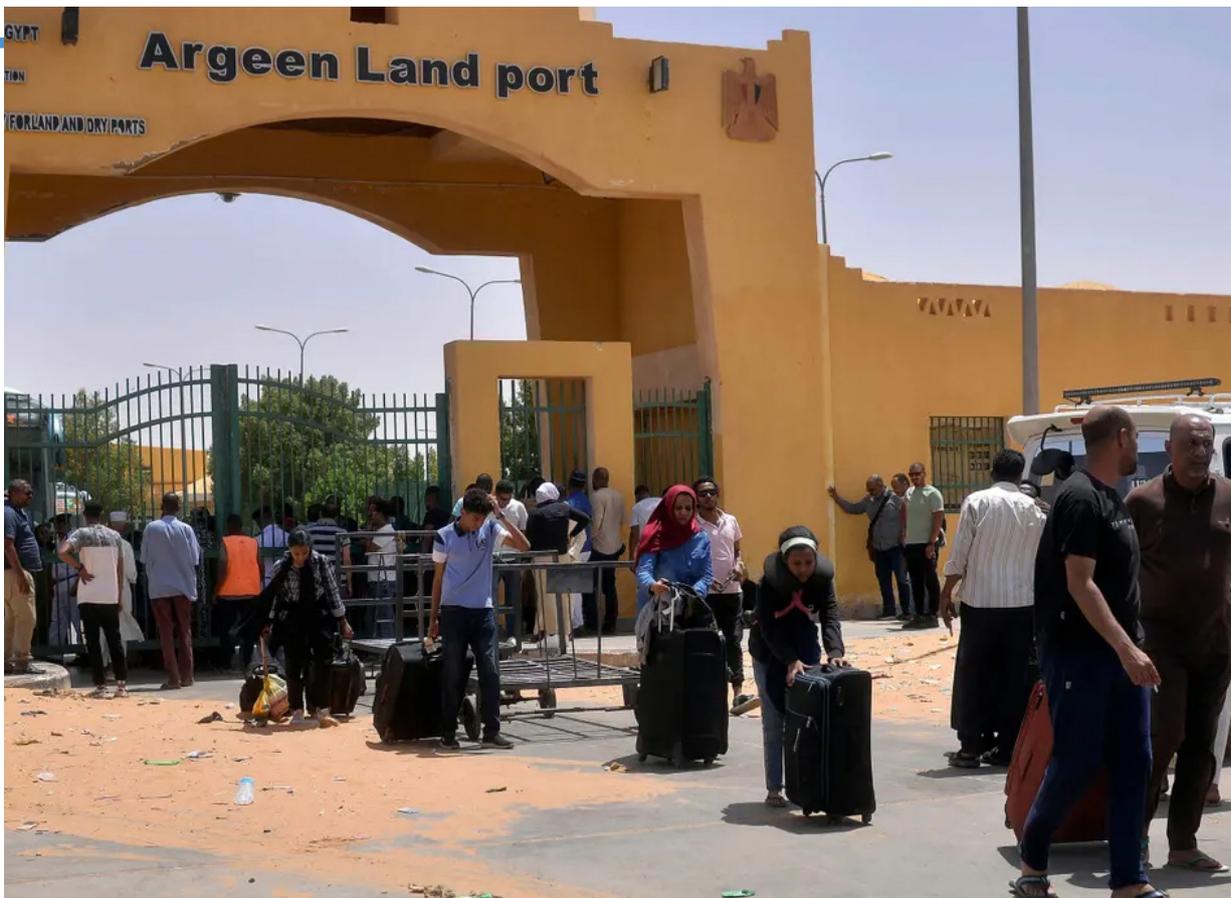
Operating in South Sudan is difficult due to low quality of basic services, connectivity, infrastructure, security, and weather conditions. There is also a measles outbreak amongst the refugees. As a result of the conflict, South Sudan will face economic difficulties, as it is reliant on Sudan for its fuel supplies and 90% of its revenue. This will devastate South Sudan, further diminishing economic opportunities, services, and infrastructure, and increasing food insecurities, putting more strain on the local and arriving population. The South Sudanese government has been cooperative, granting prima facie status to all refugees from Sudan. The government and humanitarian efforts are present at 27 border points, providing critical medical assistance. The UN is currently regulating congestion and helping families reunite, but are still struggling to foster predictable and steady movement, resulting in overcrowded sites and people stranded in the Upper Nile State.

Ethiopia, already hosting over one million refugees from other conflicts, is still healing from a long conflict in the Tigray region that ended in November 2022, with the resulting refugee crisis still ongoing. Now, refugees are arriving at the border at a rate of almost 1,000 people per day. Of the 45,600 refugees that arrived in Ethiopia, only 8,000 are Sudanese. 25,800 are Ethiopians returning home and 11,500 are foreign nationals seeking international transport. About 90% of those fleeing to Ethiopia are Eritrean refugees, who worry they will be kidnapped back to Eritrea. Despite limited resources due to decreases in funding, government and humanitarian efforts provide meals, healthcare, nutrition programs, transport, new settlements, and protection services. The International Organization for Migration has implemented a presence at the border, providing health care, WASH, protection services, and further transportation, greatly upscaling their previous efforts. However, Ethiopia has also reportedly blocked some humanitarian aid groups from entering, regardless of visa status. While Ethiopia claims it welcomes Sudanese refugees all those who enter Ethiopia must pay \$80 for an e-visa. Sudanese border officials further complicate the flow of refugees, harshly interrogating all who are leaving, accusing them of betraying their country and taking their baggage, causing the number of refugees fleeing to Ethiopia to drop.

Eritrea expects a much smaller number of refugees due to its brutal authoritarian regime, with most of those arriving being Eritrean returnees. However there are reports of 3,500 Sudanese refugees fleeing to camps near Kassala, a majority-Eritrean town in Sudan at the Eritrean border, being deported to Teseney, Eritrea. Those allegedly deported were turned away from camps due to a lack of food. The UNHCR claims that they haven't received reports of this, but are investigating the matter. Allegedly, among those deported, 95 were imprisoned, some of which were activists who stood against the current dictator, Isaias Afwerki.

Currently, Eritrea has had minimal involvement with refugees except for Eritrean returnees. As of early June, more than 210,000 Sudanese have fled to Egypt. At the two Egyptian border crossings, the humanitarian situation was rough, with delays lasting for days leaving refugees without food, water, or shelter. These long delays are due to slow processing on Egypt's side due to the Egyptian government's new crisis task force to monitor and thoroughly vet arrivals. Although Egypt is better prepared to take refugees, access into the country and asylum procedures pose challenges for many refugees without travel documents, resulting in family separation. In May, all males between 17 and 49 are told to apply for a visa, which is only available at one of the border crossings, while women and children were allowed to enter. Now, all Sudanese entering Egypt need to have a valid passport and visa which has significantly decreased those entering Egypt. As a result, about 12,000 families are stranded at Wadi Haifa, waiting for their visas to be processed. The Egyptian government does not provide camps or aid, but some local communities have been able to provide some assistance. Currently, UNICEF is providing latrines, food, medical equipment, tents, sewage trucks, and hygiene equipment to those waiting at the border. The Egyptian Red Crescent working at the border also receives support and is expanding their activities as a result, now providing psychosocial support.





In May, those fleeing to Egypt were typically well off, as arriving and residing in Egypt was costly. Some bus owners have reportedly inflated the price for rides to Aswan, Egypt to \$100-600. Some of these bus drivers are part of larger scams, dropping off people at other stations and charging them even more money to get to Aswan. In Cairo, where 90% of new arrivals go, rental prices and exploitation have increased and create significant challenges in finding housing, leading to homelessness among the displaced. In addition, these refugees have to pay for trains, buses, or planes to get to relative's homes once arriving in Egypt, with some hotels offering discounts to those from Sudan who are passing through. The majority of arrivals had friends or family in Egypt or could afford to move there. While the UN is working on a response team to send to Egypt, the Egyptian government's lack of cooperation, long delays, and the large wealth gap between individuals will likely cause issues in the foreseeable future.

Currently, there are about 10,400 Sudanese refugees and 4,700 Central African refugee returnees in Am Dafock, a remote region in Vakaga. There have been relocation efforts to another camp with family shelters and infrastructure, with about 536 individuals relocated away from the dangerous border so far. The CAR has made efforts to assist the displaced, distributing core relief items and WASH, registering new arrivals, sponsoring a gender-based violence prevention program, constructing communal shelters, and supporting a local health clinic.

Sudanese refugees will find difficulties in other neighboring countries as well. While there are a small number of new arrivals in Libya so far, Libyan militia groups are preventing Sudanese migrants from reaching Libya. Human traffickers in Libya are likely to take advantage of the situation, using these refugees for drug and human trafficking into Europe. If this conflict continues, refugees with resources and networks may attempt to continue striving towards North Africa or Europe. Sudanese are often among the top nationalities caught trying to reach Europe and are amongst the top 20 nationalities that arrive in Italy. With the increase in migration, an increase in xenophobia is to be expected. In recent months, xenophobic rhetoric and violence in Tunisia has increased, which may cause further issues for the Sudanese refugees. In May, the UNHCR estimated that 860,000 people will flee to Chad, CAR, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Eritrea, and Libya by October. Economic issues, due to inflation and the disruption of trade, are already creating problems for the host countries, which could create tensions between refugees and the host populations. With many of Sudan's neighbors underfunded, over capacity, and experiencing their own crises, and with rainy season on the horizon, the humanitarian situation regarding Sudanese refugees can become catastrophic if international aid does not increase its efforts.



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## CONTACT US

**Phone:** (708) 400-9542

**Email:**

General: [connect@medglobal.org](mailto:connect@medglobal.org)

Volunteer: [volunteer@medglobal.org](mailto:volunteer@medglobal.org)

Donations: [fundraising@medglobal.org](mailto:fundraising@medglobal.org)

**Address:** MedGlobal

1801 Hicks Road Suite D

Rolling Meadows, IL 60008

[@medglobalorg](https://www.instagram.com/medglobalorg)



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