



Sudan: Different Needs, Ignored Priorities

October 2024

The Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, youth, and other people who are often overlooked, undervalued, and underserved in humanitarian responses to displacement and crises. We work in partnership with displaced communities to research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for gender-transformative and sustained improvement in humanitarian, development, and displacement policy and practice. Since our founding in 1989, we have been a leading expert on the needs of refugee women, children, and youth and the policies that can protect and empower them. www.womensrefugeecommission.org.

The Sudan Family Planning Association (SFPA) is dedicated to improving the status of women and closely aligning sexual and reproductive health with development initiatives. SFPA advocates for financial and political support for sexual and reproductive health and rights. During humanitarian situations, SFPA collaborates with partners to provide SRHR services to IDPs and refugees through various health service modalities. SFPA's main mission is to provide high-quality sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) according to targeted quality standards, focusing on vulnerable groups in areas of poverty, IDPs, refugees, crisis, and lack of SRH services.

www.ippf.org/about-us/member-associations/sudan

The Gender in Emergencies Group is helping humanitarians to put gender equality into practice. The GiE Group is a feminist social enterprise dedicated to advancing gender equality in humanitarian action. www.giegroup.org

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Overview of the Situation

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in a severe conflict, intensifying years of political instability, economic hardship, and underdevelopment. Since February 2024, the situation has dramatically worsened, and has only intensified with the recent **dam break and associated flooding**. Nearly 26 million people **require urgent humanitarian assistance**. The areas with the most critical needs include Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Khartoum. The flooding has increased displacement and health risks in the north and east of the country. The immediate priorities are shelter, food, nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), health, and protection. Contributions to the Sudan response are significantly under funding this response with **only 50 percent funded**. According to **UN OCHA**, there are currently 10.7 million internally displaced people (IDPs), and 2.1 million refugees, including a new influx in Libya.

At the end of September 2024, there were **over 503,000 Sudanese refugees living in Egypt**, largely concentrated in urban areas. An **additional 860,000** Sudanese refugees have entered Chad, along with over 180,000 refugees moving into South Sudan. Libya, Uganda, the Central African Republic, and Ethiopia are **hosting more than 200,000 refugees**. As of mid-August only 27 percent of UNHCR's Regional Response Plan was funded, leaving a **tremendous gap in resources and services** for refugees across the region.

Before the crisis, Sudan faced **significant gender disparities**, with deeply entrenched gender roles and barriers for women in public life. In December 2018, Sudanese women played a crucial role in the **uprising** that ousted President Omar al-Bashir in April 2019 under the banner "freedom, peace, and justice." Despite their pivotal role, women were **underrepresented in subsequent negotiations** and **sidelined** in the formation of the transitional government, securing less than 25 percent of cabinet roles, in spite of a quota calling for 40 percent.

At the same time, in the most recent World Economic Forum's **Global Gender Gap Report** for 2024, Sudan is ranked last, at 146th out of 146 countries, with a gender gap score of 56.8 percent.¹ The conflict has further **exacerbated these inequalities**, with women and girls facing increased risks of violence, limited mobility, and reduced access to essential services. Recent reports indicate that while the **full scope and impact** of the conflict in Sudan remain complex and are evolving, it is evident that women and women's organizations are being **disproportionately targeted**, a strategy that goes back decades.

This scoping paper reviews to what extent assessments of the crisis in Sudan reflect findings of the different impact of the crisis on women, men, girls, and boys. The purpose of the scoping paper is to determine whether a further gender assessment is required or if existing assessment data will suffice to explore the gendered impact of the crisis.

This work is the result of a joint effort by the Women's Refugee Commission and the Sudan Family Planning Association (SFPA), with support from the Gender in Emergencies Group,

¹ It is important to acknowledge that the data quality underpinning this assessment is recognized as being below the ideal standards <https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Africa/Attachments/Publications/2021/12/Assessment%20of%20Sudan%20National%20Gender%20Statistics%20System%2007102021.pdf>

to analyze the assessment reports, data, and analysis currently available in English with a gender lens to find out how much information is already available comparing pre-conflict gender relations to changes that have happened during the crisis. The scoping paper comprises three sections: pre-crisis gender analysis; current assessments and analysis; and gaps. This study informed the storytelling project [***In Her Own Words: Voices of Sudan***](#).

Gender: Pre-2023 Conflict Overview

The violence in 2023 followed years of upheaval, including the 2019 revolution driven by decades of political turmoil and military violence. Before the current conflict, Sudan had complex and diverse gender inequalities. Women faced significant barriers in public life, and gender roles were deeply entrenched. The United Nations Humanitarian Response Plan of 2023 noted that an estimated 3.1 million women, girls, and other at-risk populations were [**exposed to the risks of GBV**](#) before this crisis. Despite these challenges, Sudanese women have a [**rich history of leadership**](#), particularly in freedom and peace movements throughout the nation's history.

Historically, women in Sudan have actively [**organized against colonization and advocated for their rights**](#) since the late 19th century, leading the way to significant movement organizing in the [**1940s and 1950s**](#) that resulted in a strong and widely admired women's movement in the region. This crucial role continued into the 2019 revolution, which was fueled by 30 years of grievances stemming from the military regime. Laws like the Public Order Law and Criminal Code of 1991, along with widespread conflict-related sexual violence and rape during the Darfur conflict, were designed to [**suppress women and feminist movements**](#).

Since 1993, women have formed [**resistance groups**](#) to combat these injustices. Despite obstacles, women, especially young women, were [**central to the 2019 revolution**](#) that ousted the military regime, with the goal of the revolution to reject military partnerships and flawed constitutions while demanding a civilian-led transitional period. However, conservative norms were used to [**argue against female leadership**](#), limiting women's roles in political processes and [**undermining their contributions**](#) to a stable and just society during negotiations in 2020. As the current conflict rages, women across the country are [**building on this past**](#) to support one another and their communities while also [**calling for peace**](#).

Post-2023 Conflict Assessments

Since April 2023, many assessments have taken place throughout Sudan to reflect on the impact of the crisis and the needs. This scoping study was aware of 18 assessments that have taken place over the last 18 months, a majority of which were rapid assessments carried out by NGOs and in some cases a mix of organizations and in Sudan Armed Forces (SAF)-controlled areas including the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC). Some of the assessments highlight the specific safety needs of women but little else. The large number of assessments that have already been carried out is one of the main reasons for

conducting the scoping study—to ascertain whether existing information is sufficient to understand the impact of the crisis on gender relations, as well as on the different needs of women, men, boys and girls.

WRC reviewed the available assessments from April 2023 to September 2024 with a gender lens. Out of the **18 assessments reviewed**, just six contained gender-disaggregated information. In the case of REACH, some of that information was included but a majority was not. There were four Rapid Gender Analysis studies by UN Women, Care, and Plan International. Seventeen of the 18 assessments include some mention of women, but with varying degrees of information, quality, and usefulness.

General Assessments

The key issues emerging from the general assessments are:

- **Significant Host Family and Community Support:** The extensive support from host families and local communities is diminishing as resources become increasingly scarce.
- **Overburdened Women:** Women are facing significant burdens that limit their ability to participate in community and economic activities. There is a significant number of female-headed households, which face particular challenges.
- **Food Insecurity and Malnutrition:** Food insecurity remains a primary concern, with widespread malnutrition affecting children, pregnant women, and lactating mothers.
- **Limited and Unsafe Water and Sanitation:** Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services is particularly challenging for women, who are traditionally responsible for fetching water. The lack of gender-segregated latrines increases their vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Additionally, limited access to safe water sources poses significant health risks.
- **Increased Number of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) cases:** There has been a notable rise in incidents of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), particularly during cash or food distribution events, where the risk is heightened.
- **Economic Disruption:** The disruption of livelihoods has severely impacted economic opportunities, particularly for female-headed households.
- **Displacement Issues:** The population has experienced numerous displacements, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and straining available resources.
- **Inadequate Health Services:** Access to health services, especially maternal health care, is severely restricted due to insecurity, high costs and distance, resulting in extreme gaps in care for pregnant and lactating women.
- **Psychosocial Trauma and Mental Health Challenges:** The psychological impact of the conflict on women and girls is profound, with many experiencing severe trauma from violence, loss, and displacement. **Mental health services are scarce**, leaving a

significant gap in addressing the psychosocial needs of the affected populations.

- Educational Disruption: The conflict has led to the **disruption of education** for millions of children, with girls being particularly affected. Many girls are forced out of school due to safety concerns, economic pressures, and cultural practices such as early marriage, which have seen a resurgence due to the instability.

Gender-Focused Assessments

The key issues emerging from the gender-focused assessments are:

- Protection/Gender Based Violence: According to the Care Rapid Gender Analysis, while three-quarters of respondents initially dismissed GBV as a community issue, deeper inquiries uncovered a complex reality. Nearly half acknowledged harmful social norms perpetuating violence against women, with one-third highlighting sexual violence. Overall, the assessment revealed alarmingly high levels of sexual violence, kidnappings, child marriage, and domestic abuse. Women and women's rights organizations are increasingly targeted as instruments of conflict.
- Participation: Women are systematically excluded from decision-making processes, including critical peace negotiations, limiting their influence in resolving and addressing the conflict.
- Health: Sudan faces one of the highest maternal mortality rates globally, with 295 deaths per 100,000 live births. Maternity wards are frequently attacked, and access to the Sexual and Reproductive Health **Minimum Initial Service Package** (MISP) is severely restricted, with many facilities closed and others inaccessible.
- Economic Impact: The disruption of livelihoods due to ongoing conflict has disproportionately affected female-headed households, compounding their economic challenges.
- Division of Labor: Given the current challenges to accessing food and water, women are experiencing an increased burden from household chores and caregiving responsibilities, which have intensified due to the current crisis.

Gaps

Although much of the available information is likely to be gender-blind, there is a growing body of data on Sudan that, combined with additional research on the conflict's impact on gender relations, could support further gender analysis. This would help ensure that humanitarian programming in Sudan meets the **distinct but often unmet needs** of women, men, boys, and girls.

- Standardizing gender-disaggregated data collection and gender sensitive assessments
- Continuous comprehensive gender trend analysis of available data and updates to already administered Rapid Gender Analysis to adapt programs accordingly.

List of Assessments

Document for review	Type of Document	Who	When
<u>Inter-Agency Rapid Needs Assessment Abu Hamad Locality – River Nile State</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	InterAgency	11 - 12 August 2024
<u>The Humanitarian Situation of Internal Displaced Population in Nyala, South Darfur, Sudan</u>	Multisectoral Rapid Needs Assessment	InterAgency	June 2024
<u>Initial Gender Assessment Sudan Geographical coverage: White Nile, Blue Nile, Darfur, Red Sea, Khartoum States</u>	Assessment - Gender	UN Women	September 2023
<u>Sudan Crisis In-Depth Gender Assessment Report</u>	Assessment - Gender	UN Women	February 2024
<u>Sennar Displacement Crisis in White Nile- Rapid Needs Assessment by the Rapid Response Mechanism</u>	Assessment	NRC, Save, and DRC	July 2024
<u>Joint assessment mission to Batna-al Baida Village - Kulbus locality to verification of flood</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	IOM, SUDO, HAC, Concern, WR	July 2024
<u>Sudan Crisis: Needs assessment in hard-to reach areas of South Kordofan</u>	Assessment	Reach	March 2024
<u>Sinnar State – Sinnar Locality Rapid Need Assessment Report</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	Save the Children; HAC and MoH	March 2024
<u>Rapid IDP Assessment Report - Kordofan Region, Sudan</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	Samaritans Purse	April 2024
<u>Inter-Agency Rapid Needs Assessment Report - Blue Nile State</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	InterAgency	February 2024
<u>Sudan: Rapid Needs Assessment of Gathering Sites in Port Sudan</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	21 state government ministries, UN agencies, and NGOs	January 2024
<u>NRC Rapid Needs Assessment: White Nile State - Al Jazirah Conflict</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	NRC	December 2023
<u>Sudan Crisis: Assessment of hard-to-reach areas in in Nyala, South Darfur</u>	Assessment	Reach	September 2023

Document for review	Type of Document	Who	When
<u>Sudan Crisis: Assessment of Hard-to-Reach Areas in Zalingi, Central Darfur (September 2023)</u>	Assessment	Reach	December 2023
<u>Sudan: Inter-Sectoral Needs Assessment in Kassala State</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	HAC, NGOs, UN	November 2023
<u>NRC Rapid Needs Assessment: Sennar State - Al Jazirah Conflict, December 2023</u>	Rapid Needs Assessment	NRC	December 2023
RGA in White Nile	Assessment - Gender	Plan International	November 2023
<u>Sudan - Khartoum, Al Gezira, East Darfur, South Darfur: Rapid Gender Analysis</u>	Assessment - Gender	Care	October 23

