

IOM REGIONAL DATA HUB FOR THE EAST AND HORN OF AFRICA

“MY LIFE, MY PLANS AND MY DREAMS ARE FALLING APART”

Voices from the Sudan Conflict

November 2023



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Publisher: International Organization for Migration
Regional Office for East and Horn of Africa
Postal Address: P.O. Box 55040-00200, Nairobi, Kenya
Visiting Address: Sri Aurobindo Avenue off Mzima Spring Road, Lavington, Nairobi, Kenya
Email: Regional Data Hub (RDH) rdhronairobi@iom.int
Website: <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/regional-data-hub>

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Authors: Naomi Burnett, Laura Nistri & Iris Perigaud-Grunfeld

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Project funded by the European Union
Project implemented by IOM



ABOUT IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

ABOUT THE REGIONAL DATA HUB

Established in 2018, the Regional Data Hub (RDH) for the East and Horn of Africa supports evidence-based, strategic and policy-level discussion on migration through a combination of initiatives. In particular, the RDH uses multiple tools and processes to investigate the migration narrative in the region and gain a more in-depth understanding of the actors, dynamics and risks of migration. These initiatives aim to fill existing gaps by strengthening the regional evidence base on migration, which will further improve policymaking and programming. The [RDH strategy](#) is in line with the objectives of the [IOM Migration Data Strategy \(MDS\)](#). Publications can be consulted at <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/regional-data-hub>. The RDH and this research project are largely funded through the generous support of the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration in the Horn of Africa (EU-IOM JI) and IOM's Migration Resource Allocation Committee (MiRAC).

ABOUT THE EU-IOM JOINT INITIATIVE PROGRAMME

The EU-IOM JI programme was launched in December 2016 and is funded by the European Union (EU) Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The programme brings together 26 African countries of the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa, and North Africa regions, along with the EU and IOM around the goal of ensuring that migration is safer, more informed and better governed for both migrants and their communities. The programme enables migrants who decide to return to their countries of origin to do so in a safe and dignified way. It provides assistance to returning migrants to help them restart their lives in their countries of origin through an integrated approach to reintegration that supports both migrants and their communities, has the potential to complement local development, and mitigates some of the drivers of irregular migration. Also, within the programme's areas of action is building the capacity of governments and other partners; migration data collection and analysis to support fact-based programming; as well as information and awareness raising.



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Overcrowded tents in Wadi Halfa shelter thousands of people who have fled their homes for safety, hoping to cross to Egypt.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **armed conflict in the Sudan has significantly impacted the lives of civilians**, including foreign nationals such as Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants and refugees who were living in conflict-affected cities such as Khartoum when the violence broke out.

- Fighting has been particularly severe in Khartoum and **respondents interviewed for this research recounted horrific stories of getting caught in armed crossfire, acts of violence and a severe humanitarian situation.**
- Reports indicate that the **generalized lawlessness in the Sudan has resulted in conflict-related sexual violence against internally displaced, refugee and migrant women and girls¹** as well as other human rights violations against civilians including but not limited to attacks against civilians and civilian objects resulting in killings and injury; use of civilian areas as hideouts by parties to the conflict; threat of unlawful deportation, forced transfer and displacement; family separation; and challenges related to the right to leave territory and enter another during flight.

The conflict has resulted in **significant internal displacement and cross-border movement** as civilians continue to flee Khartoum and other areas of conflict. However, qualitative data highlight that **many individuals residing in conflict areas have been forced into involuntary immobility**, mostly due to lack of funds to travel.

- The price of transportation to leave the city has skyrocketed, while individuals have little to no access to their savings due to bank closures. Moreover, many respondents described risking their lives to move through areas of active conflict to reach transportation hubs on the outskirts of Khartoum.
- **Such dangerous journeys are particularly challenging for vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly and those with medical conditions.** Child protection in particular should be a priority to prevent, among others, child separation from family and child recruitment by armed groups.
- Respondents reported that **the living conditions of those left behind were continuously deteriorating as the conflict raged on**, and that the availability of basic resources such as food, water and fuel had become even more scarce.
- **Data also highlight a gendered element regarding who can flee to Egypt and who is left behind**, whether as a choice to look after family members or property or due to lack of resources. Moreover, previous entry restrictions on young men have resulted in family separations at the Egyptian border.

1 Africa Renewal, 2023.

The living conditions of those who have fled continue to be precarious once they reach their destination.

- Migrants have often **exhausted their resources** to flee Khartoum and experience challenges finding employment.
- Although many of the Sudanese interviewed in Egypt had social networks in the country and were receiving support from friends and family members or good Samaritans met in Egypt or during their journey, **the high number of new arrivals seems to have exhausted the resources of those assisting those who have fled.**
- **None of the respondents in Egypt had been able to find work** at the time of interview, although all of them wanted and needed to find employment to be able to sustain themselves. This challenge is further exacerbated by the collapse

of the Sudanese banking system and migrants and refugees not being able to access their savings.

- Likewise, Ethiopians and Eritreans interviewed in Madani mostly reported that they were living in overcrowded spaces such as schools provided by the host community, resulting in some considering migration to the refugee camps in Eastern Sudan to gain access to basic services.
- Respondents displayed mixed feelings regarding the future, with some wishing to return to Khartoum as soon as the security situation allows, while others expressed never wanting to return. **Data show a significant desire amongst Sudanese in Egypt to move on to other countries through resettlement, but also irregular migration along the Central Mediterranean Route if regular channels are not accessible.**

Displaced mother in Wadi Halfa, the Sudan.

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INTRODUCTION

On 15 April 2023, violent clashes erupted in Khartoum between the Sudanese Army Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).² Tensions had been escalating between the two groups since they joined forces in 2019 to overthrow former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, centring around questions on who would lead the consolidated military and the RSF’s subsequent refusal to integrate into the army, following which both sides geared up for violent confrontation, which broke out a few weeks later. Since the beginning of the conflict and as of 8 August, over 3.2 million people have been internally displaced and more than 968,000 people have been forced to flee the country, half of whom are children.³ The conflict erupted in Khartoum but rapidly expanded to other cities, including Al Fasher, Kebkabiya, Merowe, Zalingi, Nyala and El Obeid.⁴

Despite multiple ceasefire attempts and the Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect the Civilians of Sudan on 11 May, clashes continue and civilians are caught in the crossfire.⁵ Most ceasefires did not hold and for those that did, such as the 24-hour ceasefire declared on 10 June, fighting resumed and even intensified after the truce expired.⁶ Failed truce attempts prevent civilians from fleeing conflict areas safely and may even trap them in areas of active fighting.⁷ Failed ceasefires also affect civilians’ access to basic services as humanitarian actors’ ability to reach populations in need and safely conduct their operations is severely limited. As of 11 July, the Federal Ministry of Health reported that at least

1,105 people had died since the beginning of the conflict and 12,115 were injured, although the actual figures are likely far higher.⁸

The humanitarian situation in the Sudan in recent years had already been characterized by political instability, protracted conflicts, civil unrest, economic crisis and crippling drought before the current crisis. In April 2019, the SAF and RSF joined forces in carrying out a military coup that shook the country and overthrew President Omar al-Bashir, who had been in power for about 30 years. Following civilian protests, civilian and military parties agreed on a shared government transition and scheduled elections for 2023.⁹ However, in October 2021, political uncertainty skyrocketed as the SAF and RSF carried out another coup, seizing full control of the country and toppling the transitional government that had been overseeing the country’s democratic transition.¹⁰ Since jointly staging the military coups that overthrew Omar al-Bashir and the transitional government, generals from both sides have been unable to successfully negotiate how to integrate the RSF into the SAF and power struggles have ensued on who would lead a consolidated military. These struggles over control are at the heart of the conflict that erupted in Khartoum in April 2023.¹¹

Moreover, several years of economic and financial sanctions imposed on the country have weakened the Sudanese economy and led to spiralling inflation. The political instability that erupted in 2021 further deterred domestic and foreign investments and

- 2 The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are a paramilitary group that grew out of the Janjaweed militias that fought alongside the Sudanese Army to combat anti-government insurgency during the conflict in Darfur in the 2000s. The group was then renamed RSF in 2013 and, in 2017, it was recognized by the government as an independent security force (Al Jazeera, 2023a; Peltier and Dahir, 2023).
- 3 IOM, 2023a; UNICEF, 2023. In addition to the conflict between the Sudanese Army Forces (SAF) and RSF, intercommunal clashes emerged in West Darfur, especially between 23 and 27 April, 12 and 15 May and 14 and 16 June 2023. The situation added further stress on the population, leading to more internal displacements and significant cross-border movements, especially into Chad (Amnesty International, 2023a; Peltier, 2023; Pietromarchi, 2023).
- 4 FAO, 2023; IOM, 2023b; UNOCHA, 2023a.
- 5 Peltier, 2023; The Guardian, 2023; UNOCHA, 2023a; UNOCHA, 2023b; UNOCHA, 2023c.
- 6 Al Jazeera, 2023b.
- 7 Al Jazeera, 2023b; Greenall, 2023.
- 8 UNOCHA, 2023b.
- 9 Al Jazeera, 2021; IOM, 2021.
- 10 Al Jazeera, 2021; IOM, 2021; World Bank, 2023.
- 11 ACAPS, 2023.

contributed to destabilizing the economy.¹² Inflation was estimated to be around 254 per cent in 2022.¹³ Prior to the conflict, a third of the Sudanese population was forecasted to need humanitarian assistance in 2023. Since the crisis broke out, this estimate has risen from 15.8 million to 24.7 million, an increase of 57 per cent.¹⁴ The conflict has disrupted food, cash and fuel availability and increased the price of basic food commodities by around 25 per cent compared to 2022.¹⁵

The findings presented in this report draw on data collected as part of a larger research project looking at Ethiopian, Eritrean and Sudanese migrants on the Northern Corridor that runs from the Horn of Africa via the Sudan towards Northern Africa and onwards across the Mediterranean to Europe. In particular, the report intends to provide a snapshot of the migration and displacement dynamics of these migrant groups who were in the Sudan before the conflict erupted and have been internally displaced by the recent crisis or fled the Sudan to Egypt. The report looks at why people are migrating, their experiences in Khartoum at the time of their flight, who is migrating and who is unable to do so, how they fled Khartoum, the challenges they faced during their migration as well as their experiences at destination. Findings are presented using respondents’ own words to amplify the voices of those displaced by the crisis. [Key implications and recommendations](#) based on this study’s findings can be found in the conclusion.

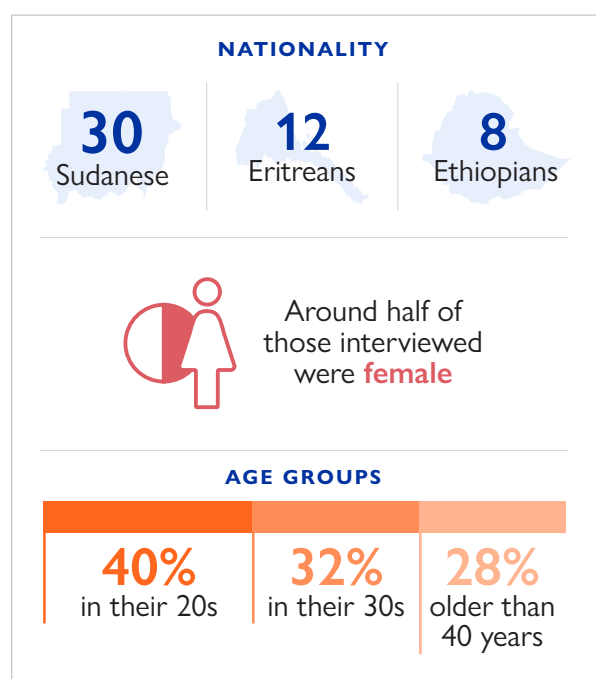
METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

This report builds upon an extensive desk review to contextualize findings as well as 50 interviews with civilians who have fled Khartoum in April or May 2023 to Madani town in the Sudan or to Egypt. Data for this research were collected in Egypt, as the country has received a large number of Sudanese refugees. The Sudanese diaspora in Egypt was already large and well-established before the current crisis, which could explain why it is one of the most common

countries of arrival.¹⁶ This study does not focus on displacement to other neighbouring countries such as Chad or South Sudan, or on return movements to these countries. The interview protocol was designed following the onset of the crisis to capture timely information on those displaced from Khartoum and translated into the relevant local languages to ensure interviewees could understand and respond to questions easily. Participants were identified through snowball sampling. Interviews were conducted remotely by telephone in Egypt and in-person by trained researchers in Madani.

Researchers identified an equal number of adult male and female respondents as well as interviewees of different nationalities and age groups to capture a wide range of experiences. Overall, 30 Sudanese, 12 Eritreans and 8 Ethiopians were interviewed. Around half of those interviewed were female, while 40 per cent were in their twenties, 32 per cent in their thirties and 28 per cent were older than 40 years.

Figure 1. Interviewee demographics



12 Aluoch, 2015; Bezuidenhout et al., 2019.

13 UNOCHA, 2022; World Bank, 2023.

14 UNOCHA, 2023d.

15 FAO, 2023; WFP, n.d. UNOCHA, 2023d. The local food basket refers to the food distributed by the WFP. Its size and composition vary according to local needs and context – from providing essential basic ingredients to distributing supplementary rations.

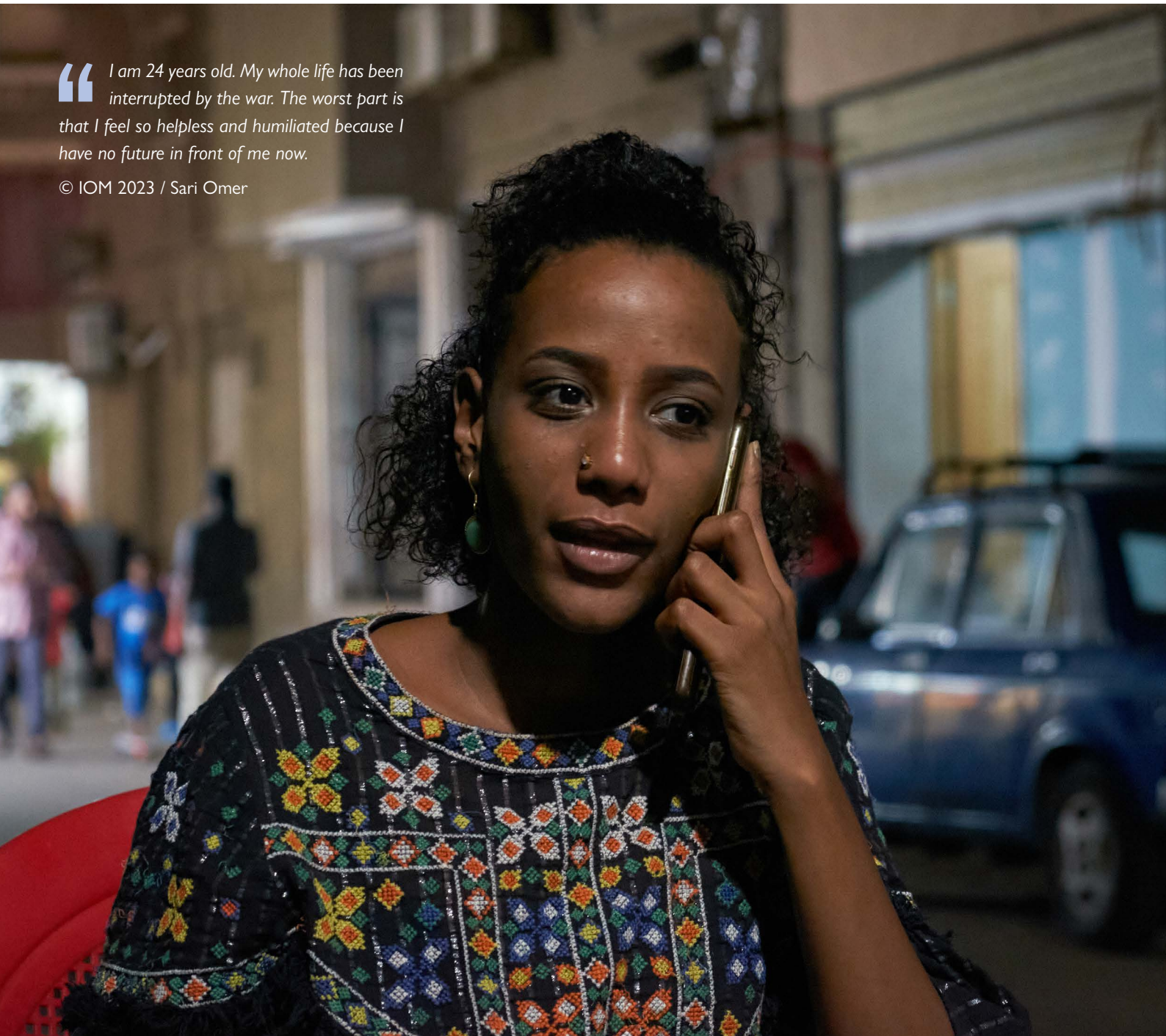
16 MMC, 2023.

The sample of interviewees is not representative of all migration that has occurred within and from the Sudan since fighting began in April 2023 and findings can therefore not be generalized across the population. Results are, however, indicative of some of the main challenges Ethiopians, Eritreans and Sudanese were facing in Khartoum and during their migration, as well as the conditions they are experiencing in Madani and Egypt. An overview of the demographic characteristics of interviewees can be found in [Annex 1](#).

All respondents consented to being recorded and recordings were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher who had conducted the interview. The transcripts and other relevant data sources were analysed by IOM using inductive coding to identify patterns and themes in the data and answer the core research questions. Qualitative findings were triangulated with other external and internal data sources to validate them. Thematic boxes offering insights on the impact of the conflict on different population groups are also included in the narrative to support contextualizing the research findings.

“ I am 24 years old. My whole life has been interrupted by the war. The worst part is that I feel so helpless and humiliated because I have no future in front of me now.

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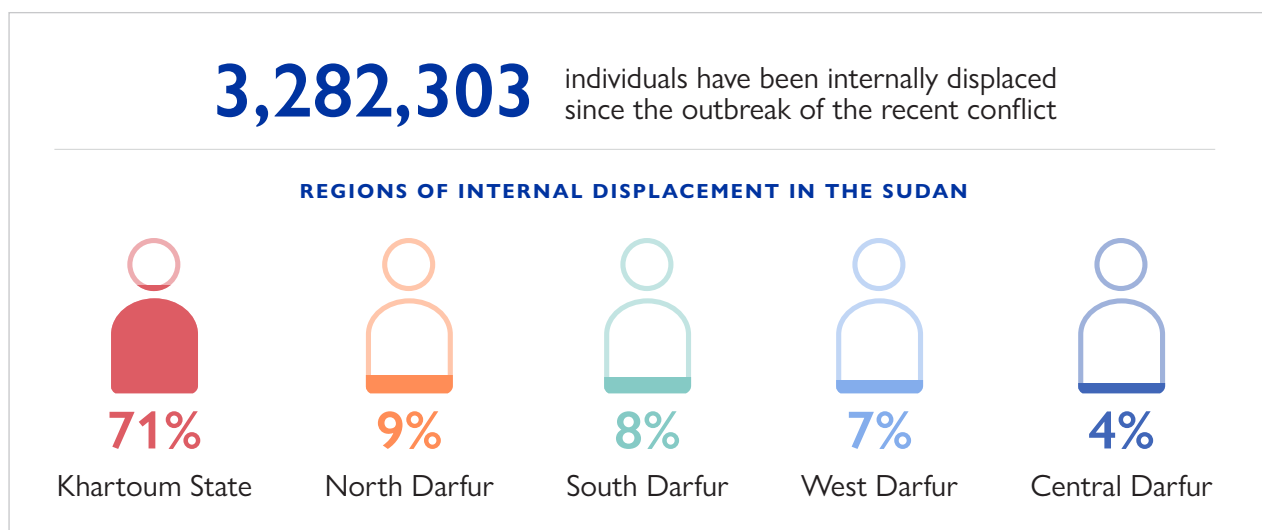
A Sudanese refugee stands on a hill overlooking Aswan. He says: "The view reminds me of Tuti Island in Khartoum, where I used to live."

© IOM 2023 / Sari Omer



CONFLICT-RELATED MIGRATION PATTERNS

Figure 2. Internally displaced persons by state of origin



Source: IOM, 2023a.

Since the outbreak of the recent conflict, 3,282,303 individuals have been internally displaced.¹⁷ The majority have been displaced from Khartoum State (71.24%); followed by North Darfur (8.54%), South Darfur (7.52%), West Darfur (7.24%) and Central Darfur (4.48%).¹⁸ Most internally displaced persons (IDPs) fled to River Nile (15%), Northern (11%), North Darfur (8%), White Nile (8%), Sennar (8%), Gedaref (7%), South Darfur (7%), Aj Jazirah (7%) or Central Darfur (7%).¹⁹ The city of Madani, situated 170 km southeast of Khartoum, in Aj Jazirah State, is a key destination and transit city for IDPs and refugees fleeing Khartoum State. As of 4 August, Aj Jazirah State was hosting 221,445 IDPs, nearly all of them (99.81%) from Khartoum State.²⁰

As of 15 July, about half of the displaced individuals were children.²¹ Since the outbreak of the conflict and as of mid-May, an estimated 285,000 school-aged children have been displaced.²² In addition to the recently displaced, the Sudan is also home to another 3.8 million IDPs who were forced to leave their homes because of past crises. Seventy-nine per cent of them are in Darfur and the current conflict has also triggered some secondary internal displacement, and, for some, cross-border displacements into South Sudan and Chad.²³ While some are displaced internally, others are forced into involuntary immobility because of the rising cost of transportation, the intensity of the armed clashes in their vicinity or due to a lack of resources to flee.²⁴

17 IOM, 2023a.

18 Ibid.

19 IOM, 2023a.

20 IOM, 2023a.

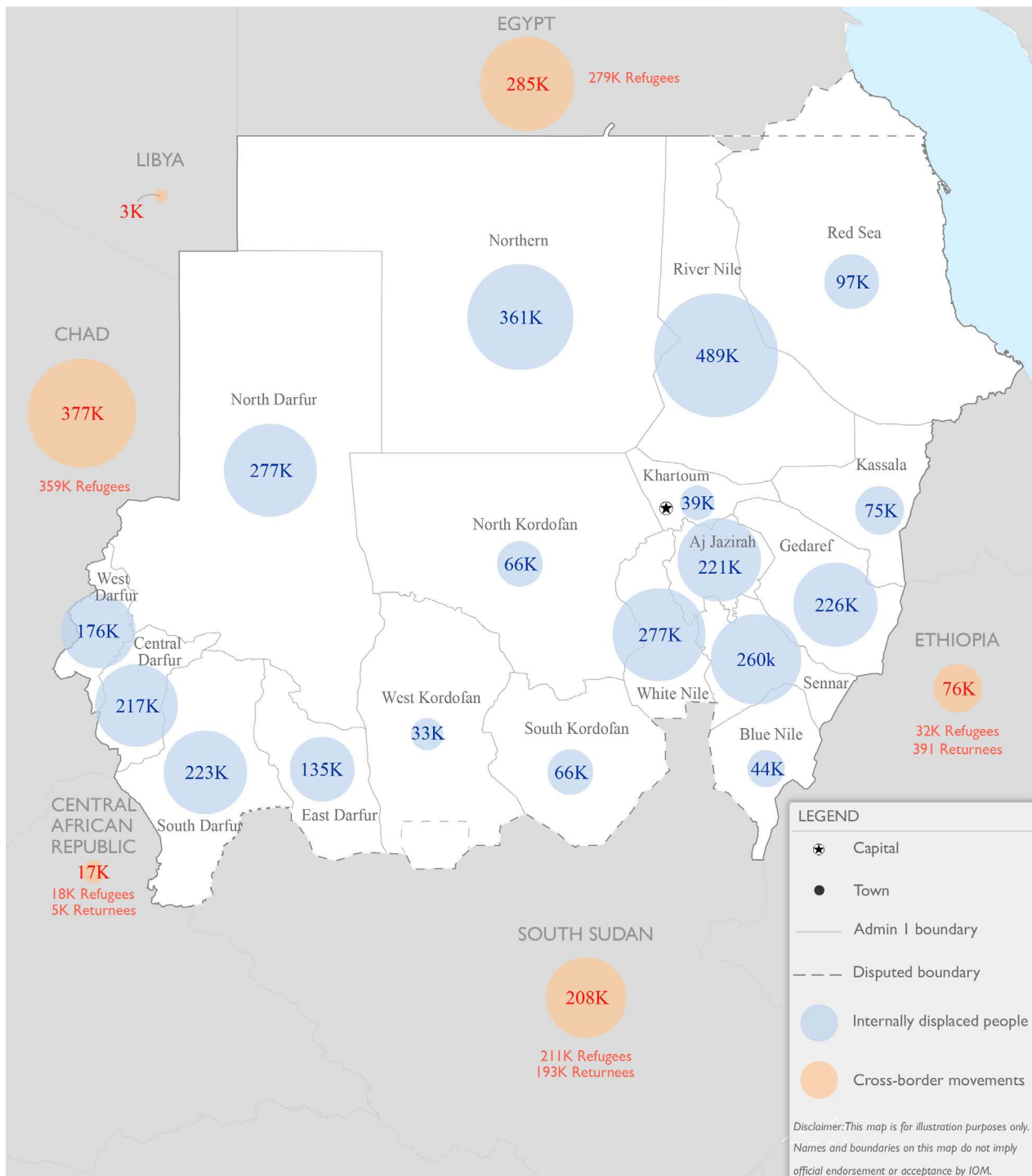
21 UNOCHA, 2023d; UNICEF, 2023.

22 UNOCHA, 2023d.

23 IOM, 2023b; MMC, 2023; UNOCHA, 2022.

24 FAO, 2023; MMC, 2023.

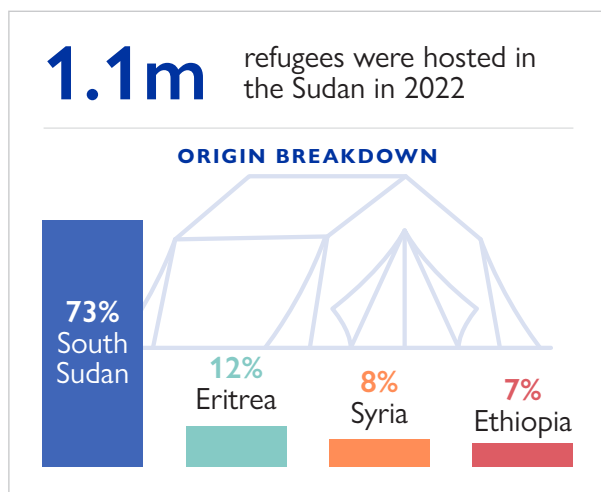
Map 1. Internal displacement and cross-border movements



Note: The IDP figures presented in this map were retrieved from the [DTM Sudan - Situation Report \(16\) | Displacement Tracking Matrix \(iom.int\)](#) (8 August 2023). The cross-border movements can be found in the [Sudan Crisis Dashboard](#) (last updated 6 August 2023).

In 2022, the Sudan hosted the second largest refugee population in Africa after Uganda, with over 1.1 million refugees (1,141,041). Most refugees were from South Sudan (807,532), Eritrea (131,191), Syria (93,480) and Ethiopia (72,215).²⁵ The Sudan was hosting nearly a quarter of the total population of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees and asylum-seekers (23% and 24% respectively) in 2022.²⁶

Figure 3. Number of refugees hosted in the Sudan



Source: UNHCR, 2023d.

The refugees and asylum-seekers in the Sudan are now trapped in another crisis.²⁷ Tensions are rising within the refugee camps but also with host communities due to the price of basic commodities and the lack of resources.²⁸ The absence of a strong support network in the Sudan puts them at higher risk of detention and extortion, human trafficking and abuses.²⁹ Refugees also often lack official documentation, making them more vulnerable to irregular migration and exploitation.³⁰

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that, as of 30 July 2023, 187,333 refugees and asylum-seekers have

been displaced internally due to the recent conflict, especially towards White Nile (144,469), Red Sea (16,000), Gedaref (8,315) and Northern (3,960) states.³¹ Eritreans and Ethiopians account for around 6 per cent of the refugees and asylum-seekers who are internally displaced.³² Most Ethiopians and Eritreans fled to Kassala (3,607), Northern State (3,500) and Gedaref State (3,393), while a minority left to Aj Jazirah (496).³³ Some refugees and asylum-seekers have also returned to their home or other neighbouring countries.

The crisis in the Sudan has not only resulted in internal displacements but also led to significant cross-border movements to neighbouring countries. Out of the 968,451 people who have fled the Sudan as of 8 August, 377,404 fled to Chad (39%), 285,300 to Egypt (29%), 208,194 to South Sudan (21%), 75,614 to Ethiopia (8%), 17,302 to the Central African Republic (2%) and 3,397 to Libya (<1%).³⁴ These cross-border flows are mixed in nature and include, amongst others, Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers, refugees who were hosted pre-crisis by the Sudan and who have returned to their home countries, and third-country nationals who were in the Sudan when the crisis began and had to flee to neighbouring countries. As of 13 August, and out of the 708,986 Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers registered by UNHCR in the Sudan’s neighbouring countries since the onset of the current crisis, 52 per cent fled to Chad and 39 per cent to Egypt, while the remainder crossed to Ethiopia (4%), South Sudan (3%) and the Central African Republic (2%). Simultaneously, 205,209 refugees and migrants who had been hosted in the Sudan before the conflict erupted left the Sudan and returned to their home countries, most of them (98%) returning to South Sudan.³⁵

25 UNHCR, 2023d.

26 The indefinite military conscription and the multiple human rights violations such as restrictions on freedom of speech and abusive detention pursued by the Eritrean government explain the refugee flows to the Sudan (HRW, 2022). The number of Ethiopian refugees in the Sudan increased in recent years due to the armed conflict in Northern Ethiopia since 2020 (UNHRC, 2021; UNHRC, 2022).

27 MSF, 2023.

28 UNHCR, 2023f.

29 UNHCR, 2023e.

30 MMC, 2023.

31 UNHCR, n.d.a.

32 UNHCR presents an estimate of IDPs per countries of origin but for some nationalities the disaggregated data are not available. A total of 6,135 Ethiopians refugees and asylum-seekers and 4,861 Eritreans are estimated to have been displaced internally. However, there is a third category (4,297) including, among others, Ethiopians, Eritreans and people from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

33 UNHCR, n.d.a.

34 IOM, n.d.a. At the time of writing this report, the data were last updated on 30 July for Ethiopia, Libya and South Sudan, 3 August for the Central African Republic, 2 August for Egypt and 23 July for Chad.

35 UNHCR, n.d.b.

TRIGGERS OF DISPLACEMENT – WHY CIVILIANS FLED KHARTOUM

“ *The shelling and exchange of fire never stopped during the week I spent in Khartoum after the clashes started. The army’s airplanes were pounding the neighbourhood targeting the RSF, but hundreds of innocent civilians lost their lives and houses due to these air strikes.*³⁶

While the onset of the conflict in Khartoum was reported as the main trigger for displacement by all respondents, around one in three interviewees reported having considered migrating from the Sudan prior to the onset of the current armed violence. Eritrean and Ethiopian interviewees reported twice as often that they had previously considered migration compared to Sudanese respondents interviewed in Egypt, with almost half of the Eritreans and Ethiopians interviewed reporting that they had either previously considered migration from the Sudan or had been actively planning to migrate when the armed conflict erupted. These respondents mostly reported that they had planned to migrate to Europe via Libya but had been waiting to collect enough funds to cover the journey. Interviewees who had been planning to migrate explained that their living circumstances in Khartoum had deteriorated in recent years due to the political and economic turmoil the country has experienced.

36 Respondent 30 (Sudanese, female).

37 Respondent 35 (Eritrean, male).

In contrast, most Sudanese nationals interviewed for this research had never considered migration prior to the conflict, despite several interviewees reporting that life had been challenging in the Sudan in recent years. Many emphasized that they had enjoyed their lives in the Sudan and that, despite the challenges the country was facing, they had had good jobs, earned a decent income that allowed them to support their families and appreciated living close to their friends and family.

“ *I have been planning to leave the Sudan for Libya for the past eight years, but I don’t have enough resources to fund the trip. The situation in the Sudan has been deteriorating since 2020. The prices were rising, the daily income could barely cover food expenses, and I suffered to cover our daily needs, such as access to medication, education and other basic needs. I could not support my family who is suffering to survive at home in Eritrea. I have dreams that I am working to achieve like starting a business, buying a house and I want to marry the woman I love. I don’t think the situation in the Sudan can help me to achieve my goals. Therefore, I am working on my migration journey.*³⁷

“ *I had dreams in the Sudan, but the war crushed all of them. The trip from Khartoum to Egypt was very bad. If I had known it would be so bad, I would not have left the Sudan. Many things happened to us that were not humane. We got stuck for eight days during the journey, without access to any of the most basic necessities of life. There were no bathrooms, no places to sleep and no food either.*



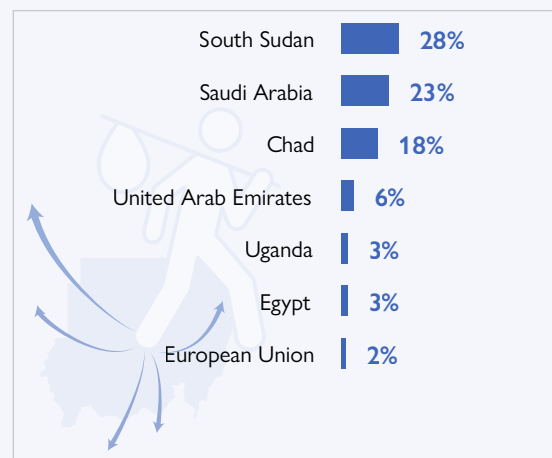
OVERVIEW OF THE PRE-CRISIS SUDANESE MIGRANT POPULATION

Since 2019, the political and economic situation in the Sudan has remained unstable and is characterized by several internal conflicts, extreme climatic events and skyrocketing inflation. This instability has triggered both internal displacement and emigration of Sudanese nationals abroad. IOM Sudan implemented a large-scale migration survey in July 2022, during which nearly 17,000 households and their migration patterns and intentions were assessed across 18 states in the Sudan.³⁸ Sixteen per cent of the households interviewed reported having a household member who had attempted to migrate abroad and 17 per cent stated that one member was taking concrete steps to migrate. More than a third (35%) planned to migrate within the Sudan, especially to Khartoum State (27.4%), South Darfur (21.6%) and East Darfur (5.85%), while 65 per cent intended to migrate abroad. Countries in the European Union were the intended target destination for around 10 per cent of the households planning to migrate.

According to UN DESA’s latest migrant stock estimates (2020), most of the over 2.1 million Sudanese migrants living outside of the Sudan lived in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries (34%), the East and Horn of Africa (33%) and on the rest of the African continent (23%).³⁹ Most Sudanese were living in South Sudan (587,668), Saudi Arabia (481,215), Chad (372,594), the United Arab Emirates (133,226), Uganda (62,670) and Egypt (60,066), while only

2 per cent were established in the European Union.⁴⁰ The number of Sudanese migrants in Egypt seems to have significantly increased in the past two years, with IOM estimating that around 4 million Sudanese were living in Egypt in 2022.⁴¹

Figure 4. Destination countries of Sudanese migrants (2020)



Source: DESA, 2022.

According to the 2022 IOM Sudanese Migrant Survey, the predominant drivers of migration were economic in nature. The top three reasons for both planned migration and previous migration activity were supporting the household (42% and 38% respectively), accessing new economic opportunities (25% and 35%) and starting a business (19% and 19%).⁴² Only 3 per cent of the respondents cited conflict as a driver of migration.⁴³

38 IOM, 2022a.

39 DESA, 2022.

40 DESA, 2022.

41 IOM, 2022b. IOM used a mixed methodology to obtain the estimate of migrants in Egypt. This included consultations with embassies that provided disaggregated data on their nationals including information on age, gender, location, duration of stay and purpose of stay; and surveys with community leaders to assess the accessibility of migrants to basic services in Egypt. The survey included questions on the estimated number of populations of each nationality and information about migrants’ demographic characteristics; a desk review of official statements; and IOM Protection Officers’ daily monitoring.

42 IOM, 2022a.

43 IOM, 2022a.

“ I’m originally Sudanese, but I was born and raised in Libya before moving to the Sudan in 2006. Before the war broke out, I had many opportunities to leave the Sudan, but I am patriotic and didn’t want to repeat my parents’ experience of living without a homeland. I stayed in Khartoum for five days as bullets showered around me, but I had learned a lesson from the war in Libya that if conflict extends for more than three days, it means that the war will not stop soon. While I was leaving Khartoum, I heard the screams of children in the street, crying and pleading with their mothers for drinking water. I wept as I was driving away and decided in that moment that I would never return to the Sudan. I felt so hopeless seeing children crying for water and not being able to provide them with water and safety. The road to Egypt was very long and tiring and there were no services. To make things worse, when we got to Wadi Halfa, the locals threatened us in the streets saying things like ‘you’re afraid of death, let the RSF rape and kill you’. For me, home is a place that provides you with safety, security and job opportunities. The Sudan is not this place for me anymore.

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ACTIVE FIGHTING

“ Since the war started, we didn’t feel safe. We could not go to work. We could not go out to buy our daily needs. We could not visit our friends. We could not see our family members. Instead, we spent all day hiding under our beds. We could hear the shooting and bombing in the neighbourhood. Every day we received news about people we know who have been killed and/or looted. Every day I woke up in the morning and was not sure if I would survive that day.”⁴⁴

Respondents unanimously reported that the main trigger of their displacement was the armed clashes that broke out in Khartoum on 15 April 2023 and the escalation in violence that followed. Interviewees described hearing and/or witnessing heavy shooting and gunfire and many recounted that buildings were hit by shells and collapsing around them: *“My wife woke me up and told me that there was shooting around the airport. I thought it was not a serious issue, but suddenly the house was shaking, and I heard heavy shooting. I moved close to the window to see what the issue was and saw some parts of our house had collapsed and were burning.”*⁴⁵ Interviewees reported that the shelling, air strikes and gunfire were “continuous” and “non-stop”, and some respondents even reported getting caught and injured in the crossfire: *“The sound of the shelling was deafening. We left suddenly because one of the shells hit our house and broke all the glass in the windows. It injured four people. My sister who lives downstairs fell when the shell shook our house, and her son was hit by snipers and got a big piece of glass stuck in his neck from the window shattering.”*⁴⁶

Some interviewees reported spending entire days “hiding under beds to protect [themselves] from continuous shelling”⁴⁷ and several expressed that they were fearing for their life and felt that they

“would have been killed”⁴⁸ and there was “no way to survive”⁴⁹ in their neighbourhoods. Many participants also reported seeing dead bodies in the streets and hearing stories of – or witnessing – friends and neighbours dying.

Most interviewees suggested that the sudden outbreak of violent conflict had caught them by surprise: *“The situation was devastating. Everything was going well and suddenly, our life turned into a nightmare. We were living close to the RSF base and air strikes smashed the glass of our windows and our house was shaking all the time from the bombs hitting the base.”*⁵⁰ Many respondents also reported having initially assumed that the fighting would stop quickly: *“When the war started, we thought it would last for a day or two and then end. But day after day we woke up to the sound of shooting and warplanes. It was something no one could have imagined.”*⁵¹

The impact of the armed clashes on children was particularly emphasized by respondents, many of whom reported that their children had been “terrified” of the sounds of fighting and that they “could hear children screaming in terror” in the neighbourhood.⁵² Several parents reported that their children had been so afraid that they had refused to eat and sleep. Respondents also explained that the sounds of gunfire and shelling had traumatized their children and that their children continue to struggle emotionally when they hear sounds that they associate with conflict (such as the sound of airplanes), since fleeing the conflict in Khartoum.

Several interviewees also reported that they had come face to face with armed forces and many participants reported fleeing as armed forces had entered their neighbourhoods in preparation for battle and were taking over civilian homes as hideouts during violent clashes: *“Insurgents entered our civilian neighbourhood and parked their vehicles near our homes. The vehicles were loaded with artillery and ammunition,*

44 Respondent 41 (Ethiopian, male).

45 Respondent 15 (Ethiopian, male).

46 Respondent 42 (Sudanese, male).

47 Respondent 32 (Sudanese, female).

48 Respondent 45 (Eritrean, male); Respondent 31 (Ethiopian, female).

49 Respondent 5 (Eritrean, female).

50 Respondent 17 (Ethiopian, female).

51 Respondent 22 (Sudanese, male).

52 Respondent 5 (Eritrean, female).

and it was very dangerous. One evening, just before we left, the insurgents went to people’s homes at night and told them to leave immediately because they were going to use the houses as posts for their snipers. They kicked people out of their homes. The following day, the fighting was more intense, airplanes were targeting the insurgents, and they fired back. During the exchange of fire, ammunition fell on homes, including our neighbours’ house, which was extremely dangerous for me and my children.”⁵³

LACK OF ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

Another key trigger of displacement from Khartoum was the lack of access to basic services, including food, medical care and medicine. Around two thirds of respondents reported that the electricity and water infrastructure in their neighbourhoods were hit and damaged and they spent days, in some cases weeks, without electricity and water. In addition, one in ten interviewees reported that either they or a family member had a medical condition that required medicine and/or treatment they were not able to receive. Most pharmacies and hospitals in respondents’ neighbourhoods had been “bombarded, severely damaged or closed”⁵⁴ and for some participants the lack of access to medical services was the primary trigger of their displacement.

Interviewees also reported an increasing lack of access to food and drinking water over the course of the first week of the armed clashes. While some supermarkets were still open in the early days of the clashes, they quickly ran out of goods and were not getting restocked: *“There were some food commodities in the small groceries in the early days of the fighting, but, after a week, the shelves were empty.”*⁵⁵ Respondents described living off of the food they had stocked for Ramadan and adopting other coping strategies such as skipping meals once their food supply began running low. Some also reported that neighbours were pooling food and other resources together to make stocks last longer and ensure no one would starve.



THE SCENES IN THE STREETS WERE HORRIFYING⁵⁶

I was in my office at the Arab Market in Khartoum when the clashes started. The shelling and air strikes were so intense that my two colleagues and I couldn’t leave the office for seven days. We were very hungry and thirsty. Once, I tried to go out to find something to eat, but I was bombarded with bullets and ran back to the building. On the seventh day, a truce was declared between the army and the RSF forces so we were able to leave the building. I headed to Omdurman where I lived.

The scenes in the streets were horrifying. There were dead bodies and blood everywhere. I have never been that shocked in my life. I was shivering and my heart was pounding very fast. My mind froze and I was not able to process what I was seeing. I finally reached the church, but continued to have the worst experience of my life. The shelling was continuous and the sound was terrifyingly high and so close to us. Even the two deaf people staying with me at the church felt the building shaking and were as terrified as if they could hear everything. I spent three nights on the floor under my bed because I was afraid something would hit the building or debris would break the windows. On the second day, soldiers broke down the church door and entered, searching for insurgents. The feeling that you are unsafe is awful and it was on that day that I decided to escape for my life.

53 Respondent 21 (Sudanese, male).

54 Respondent 32 (Sudanese, female).

55 Respondent 25 (Sudanese, male).

56 Respondent 15 (Sudanese, male).

The lack of access to food and other resources was exacerbated by active fighting in civilian neighbourhoods that hampered people’s ability to leave their homes to search for available goods. The majority of respondents interviewed for this research recounted being trapped inside their homes for prolonged periods of time due to active fighting in the streets around them. Interviewees reported feeling like “prisoners in [their] own homes”⁵⁷ and being terrified for their lives: *“We were starving and spent the days with empty stomachs as we couldn’t go out to buy food and even if we could have gone to get groceries, the shops did not have anything to sell. We spent sleepless nights under the beds and tables to protect our bodies in case bullets or shells hit the building. The streets were unsafe because of the gunfire, air strikes and looters everywhere. It was chaos.”*⁵⁸

LOOTING AND VIOLENCE

In addition to the challenges and risks posed by armed fighting, looting and violence were also commonly reported as triggers interviewees faced before they fled Khartoum. Participants recounted that members of the armed forces as well as opportunistic individuals not associated with the warring parties were looting shops and robbing and threatening civilians in their homes and in the streets with impunity. Respondents revealed that they had felt terrified for their lives both inside and outside of their homes and around a third of interviewees reported experiencing at least one incident of theft. One participant reported that soldiers had broken into his house demanding clean clothes, while others described how armed soldiers had entered their homes asking them to hand over their last supplies of drinking water and food. Respondents also highlighted that armed forces were stopping civilians in the streets and robbing them of their belongings.

“ We woke up to find armed forces settling in the square with the largest mall in Bahri. They had looted the mall and were roaming the surrounding streets, robbing residents, stealing

*our cars from the garages and even stopping moving cars. They were asking the drivers to step out and hand over all their belongings, and then taking their cars. In some cases, they also kicked people out of their own homes and occupied their buildings. These scenes of chaos in the street made me feel very unsafe.*⁵⁹

Respondents also described a rise in other forms of violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, which often occurs during times of conflict when the rule of law is compromised and when it is used as a weapon of war. Interviewees reported that women and girls were at heightened risk of sexual violence while moving through insecure areas controlled by armed actors, as well as when armed actors sought refuge in civilian homes. Several participants interviewed for this research recounted hearing about incidents of rape. Some respondents also reported taking precautionary measures to protect their loved ones from sexual violence, such as limiting girls’ movements inside and outside of their homes.

“ We heard stories about rape cases in our area. I could not think of anything other than my daughters’ safety. My husband and I agreed to hide the girls under the bed in a back room. We only allowed them to move at night when the situation was calm. We stayed like that for a week, sleep deprived and terrified of being killed or attacked. Even the day we fled Khartoum, I was so afraid something might happen to my daughters. Every time we reached a checkpoint, I tried to hide them away from the eyes of the soldiers. Before we left our house, we advised the girls to dress like old women so no one would pay attention to them.”⁶⁰

57 Respondent 30 (Sudanese, female).

58 Respondent 19 (Sudanese, male).

59 Respondent 40 (Sudanese, female).

60 Respondent 31 (Ethiopian, female).

Ali, originally from Khartoum, is now forced to sleep in the open air in Wadi Halfa.

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WHO IS FLEEING KHARTOUM?

When asked about how many people they personally knew who had fled Khartoum since the crisis began, most respondents stated that they knew more people who had fled their homes than they could count. Interviewees used words such as “many”, “lots”, “huge numbers of” and “hundreds” to try and quantify the number of relatives, friends and acquaintances they knew who had fled. Several participants reported that by the time they fled their neighbourhoods, the areas they lived in felt deserted: *“During the three days I spent in the open area, I discovered that most of the people in my neighbourhood, Al Mamoura, had already left. I used to know the residents of dozens of houses that were now abandoned. Whole families had left. I think the percentage is no less than 80 per cent of the residents from my neighbourhood alone. Khartoum felt like a ghost city.”*⁶¹

More than half of those interviewed said that they had fled together with family members, often in larger groups including other families and neighbours. Around one in five interviewees reported fleeing Khartoum with their friends, most of whom were Eritreans and Ethiopians in their twenties. Seven respondents reported that they had fled Khartoum alone, although several of them reported having met and befriended other travellers during their migration, with whom they completed the journey. In addition, five female interviewees reported fleeing alone with young children. While some of these women reported that their family had decided to separate and prioritize women and children for evacuation due to scarce resources, others were forced to flee without their husbands because they were not in Khartoum at the time of flight, or their whereabouts were uncertain due to the conflict.

61 Respondent 28 (Sudanese, female).



I DON'T KNOW IF HE IS ALIVE OR DEAD⁶²

Before the conflict started, we lived in Omdurman. I was a pharmacist and my husband owned a jewelry shop, so we were well off. Our house was very close to a military base and, in the early days of the war, my husband and I decided to stay because we thought the proximity to the military base would protect us. But the city turned to a ghost city, with all our neighbours leaving their homes to seek refuge in open areas. The sound of shelling was terrifying, especially for my 2-year-old son who used to cry hysterically in the first days of the war, and then developed the habit of sucking his thumb all the time. There were dead bodies everywhere; they started decomposing and the smell was awful. There was no electricity, shops were empty, and we depended on the food we had stocked for Ramadan. When we finished our food stocks, we hardly found anything to eat. Armed groups and street gangs looted shops, and my husband's gold shop was attacked. Not one gram of gold was left.

My husband and I decided to leave the Sudan and he left the house to meet one of his clients to secure money for our trip. He promised to return in 15 minutes at most and I prepared to leave immediately after he returned. As soon as he left, our house was hit by shelling that split it in half, with one side totally destroyed. I

was in the other half of the house with my son. I left the house as quickly as I could, carrying one bag with our passports and the little gold I had, and another bag with my son's baby formula, clothes and diapers. I went to an open area near the house and waited for my husband. In front of my house, a group of soldiers stopped me and took the bag with our passports, money and gold. Another took my son and one tried to take off my veil. Luckily, an armed forces car showed up and terrified the soldiers, so they ran away with my bag only. After waiting for two days for my husband, I decided to leave to save my son.

It was a very difficult decision as I didn't know whether my husband was alive or dead and whether I should wait for his return or not. I told myself that I should go, and even if I died, I would not die alone. I did not have money to get to Egypt, but I was wearing earrings, my wedding ring and a necklace. I gave the first bus driver the ring to take me from Omdurman to Aswan. The bus driver from Aswan to Cairo took my earrings in exchange for the ticket. My plan is to stay in Egypt until I know the whereabouts of my husband. I go to the UNHCR headquarters every day hoping he might contact them. I just want to live without fear. I want to find my husband and live somewhere safe together.

Respondents interviewed in Egypt recalled that those who were travelling alongside them were mostly entire families, women with their children or young individuals with sufficient financial capacity to afford the high cost of the trip. Interviewees also reported seeing co-travellers with underlying health conditions who were fleeing Khartoum to find medical support: *“Another important category among travellers includes those who are ill and cannot get treatment in the hospitals anymore. I saw dozens of people who are on dialysis going to the hospitals in Wadi Halfa to get drips to deal with the consequences of spending four to five days on the road without dialysis. Most of the hospitals*

in Khartoum were destroyed”.⁶³ Participants explained that the key distinguishing factor between those who stayed in Khartoum or fled to other parts of the Sudan and those who fled to Egypt was not only having the financial capacity to afford the journey, but also having sufficient funds to support themselves in Egypt after arrival. Although none of the respondents reported that personal networks in Egypt had influenced their choice of destination, two in three participants had friends and/or family members who had already been living in Egypt prior to the conflict, and several interviewees received support from their networks once they arrived in Cairo.

62 Respondent 26 (Sudanese, female).

63 Respondent 32 (Sudanese, female).

“ Most of the people I saw on the buses were travelling with their families and thus I saw all age groups, from grandparents to youth and even newborns. The educated and the well-off form the majority of people leaving the Sudan and, of course, those who had been living in Khartoum, Bahri and Omdurman, the locations where the clashes were most intense. When we saw all these people at the border crossing, we cried because they were people we never thought we would see leaving the Sudan. There were doctors and engineers, people who have homes.⁶⁴

SUDANESE MIGRANTS IN EGYPT

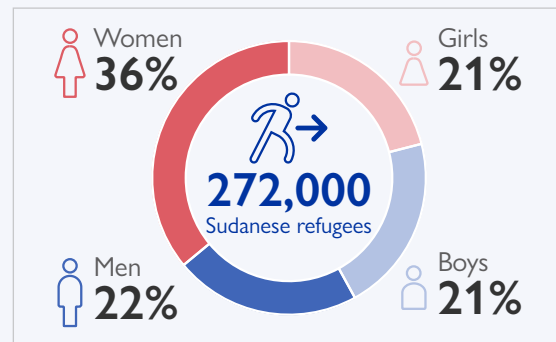
According to the latest UN DESA international migrant stock data (2020), the number of Sudanese migrants in Egypt has significantly increased in the last 30 years (from 15,184 in 1990 to 60,066 in 2020), making Egypt home to the sixth largest Sudanese diaspora in the world.⁶⁵ Sudanese migrants represented the third largest migrant community in Egypt in 2020.⁶⁶ The large and growing Sudanese diaspora in Egypt can be explained by the geographic proximity of the two countries, their historic ties and the low cost of transportation – before the crisis – compared to destinations in the Middle East.

Prior to the current conflict, the deteriorating economic and political situation in the Sudan had already led to an increase in the migration flows towards Egypt.⁶⁷ In 2022, IOM estimated that the international migrant stock in Egypt was around 9 million, around 4 million of whom were Sudanese.⁶⁸

Since violence escalated in April 2023, 272,000 Sudanese refugees have crossed the border with Egypt, representing 97 per cent

of all new arrivals in the country.⁶⁹ Pre-existing ties and social networks between the Sudanese diaspora and Sudanese escaping the Sudan may help explain the large number of Sudanese fleeing to Egypt.⁷⁰ More than half (57%) of all new refugee arrivals were female and 42 per cent were children.⁷¹

Figure 5. Demographic breakdown of new arrivals in Egypt



Source: UNHCR, n.d.b. (as of 8 August 2023).

64 Respondent 16 (Sudanese, female).

65 UN DESA, 2020.

66 Ibid.

67 Abdelaziz and Eltahir, 2022.

68 IOM, 2022b. IOM used a mixed methodology to obtain the estimate of migrants in Egypt. This included consultations with embassies that provided disaggregated data on their nationals including information on age, gender, location, duration of stay, and purpose of stay; surveys with community leaders to assess the accessibility of migrants to basic services in Egypt. The survey included questions on the estimated number of populations of each nationality and information about migrants' demographic characteristics; a desk review of official statements; and IOM Protection Officers' daily monitoring.

69 UNHCR, 2023j.

70 MMC, 2023.

71 UNHCR, n.d.b. The age and sex breakdowns are not available per nationality.

VOLUNTARY AND FORCED IMMOBILITY

“ Fleeing is a luxury not everyone can afford, although they all want to. War can push you to do anything. I had to send my children away by themselves and then left my parents back home. We worry about anyone left behind because every day we hear someone was killed by the shelling.”⁷²

Over two thirds of respondents reported that family members and/or extended relatives were still in Khartoum at the point of interview. Eighty per cent of interviewees explained that the main reason their relatives had stayed behind in Khartoum was the lack of money to cover the high transportation fees to escape the city. Particularly members of large families reported that they had to prioritize evacuating some family members, oftentimes women and children, as they could not afford to evacuate the entire family. Interviewees described leaving family members both in Khartoum and along the way, in locations such as Wadi Halfa, when the funds the family had been travelling with became insufficient for the entire family to proceed.

Respondents also suggested that who can flee Khartoum towards Egypt has a gendered component. Many interviewees reported that male friends and relatives had stayed in Khartoum to take care of and protect property such as vehicles and houses. Respondents also suggested that in families with insufficient resources to evacuate all family members, male family members are commonly the ones who stay behind: “It is always husbands who prefer to stay in danger to save money for their children and wives to go to a safe place.”⁷³

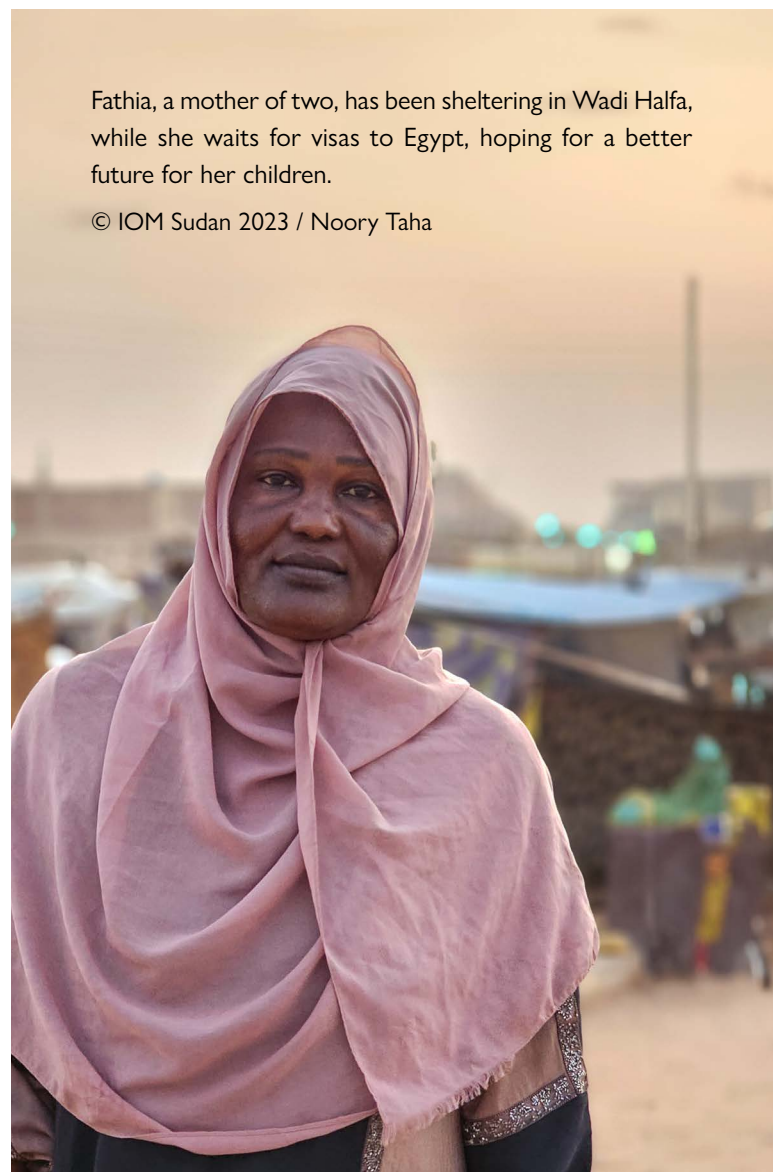
Another factor that reportedly influenced some families’ decisions on who had to stay behind in Khartoum were Egyptian pre-conflict rules of entry requiring men between 16 and 50 years of age to obtain a visa before entering Egypt, while females, boys below 16 years and men above 50 years were granted visa-free entry. Around one in three respondents reported either leaving young male relatives in Khartoum as they did not have a passport

and would not be able to get a visa for Egypt even if they fled to Wadi Halfa, or separating from them at the Egyptian border where they had to apply for a visa while the rest of the family was allowed to proceed. Almost 50 per cent of respondents interviewed in Egypt reported that family members had stayed behind because they did not have a passport to travel to Egypt and could not apply for a passport as government offices were not operating.

“ My sons needed a visa to enter Egypt so they stayed behind in Wadi Halfa waiting for it to be processed. There were thousands of Sudanese who were trying to get entry visas there. It has been two weeks since we arrived, and they still have not obtained their visas. We decided to cross without them because we feared that the rules would change any minute and we would be stuck. We also had seniors and young children with us and could not wait longer.”⁷⁴

Fathia, a mother of two, has been sheltering in Wadi Halfa, while she waits for visas to Egypt, hoping for a better future for her children.

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72 Respondent 19 (Sudanese, male).

73 Respondent 50 (Sudanese, male).

74 Respondent 43 (Sudanese, male).

THE JOURNEY – HOW CIVILIANS FLED KHARTOUM

“ When the fighting began outside our home, we spent two full days under the bed. There was still fighting outside when we left our house, but we saw others leaving their homes and decided to follow them. We were almost hit by a bullet. We left on foot for an area called Shambat. We stayed in a school for a couple of days until the school was hit too and we had to hide.”⁷⁵

Most respondents interviewed for this research stayed in Khartoum for several days or even weeks before making the decision to flee the city. Several interviewees reported that they had initially tried moving to other parts of Khartoum that they had deemed safer before leaving for Egypt or Madani. Participants described risking their lives travelling between neighbourhoods in Khartoum in search of more secure areas to stay in. Respondents also spoke about the emotional challenges of leaving their homes and, in some cases, loved ones behind. Some participants were forced to flee their homes for safer parts of the city without knowing the whereabouts of their family members and whether they were still alive, as communication and internet connectivity was down most of the time. Several respondents interviewed for this research had been separated from their loved ones during the fighting and described having to make impossible choices about whether to leave or stay: “When our house was hit, a part of the wall collapsed and the loud sound of the shelling was deafening. My four children and I rushed out of the house and we were separated as we all sought refuge in different places. I found my daughters, but this was the last time I saw my sons. I spent three days in an open area waiting for my sons to appear before I decided to leave to save my daughters. Every day I go to UNHCR to ask if they have any news about my sons, but no luck so far.”⁷⁶

More than a quarter of the Ethiopian and Eritrean interviewees reported that the decision to flee Khartoum had been difficult as they had plans to migrate to Europe and had, in some cases, already

paid smugglers for their journeys – which had then been postponed after the fighting broke out. These respondents expressed frustration and regret that the fighting had derailed the plans they had worked on so hard for many years, and that they would have to start gathering money from scratch once the fighting ended and they could return to Khartoum: “My life, my plans and my dreams are all falling apart. My friend and I were planning to move to Europe and we worked so hard to save money for our journey.”⁷⁷

PLANNING THE MIGRATION JOURNEY

“ It was a nightmare. I could not move inside or outside the house and I was so afraid of the bullets. The warplanes were moving in the sky, we could hear bombing and the whole area shook whenever bombs hit an object. I was terrified and I thought it was the end for me. Therefore, when I heard from a friend that there was a truck travelling to Madani, I jumped on that truck without thinking about what could happen during the journey. On the road, we saw houses destroyed, and armed troops everywhere. The streets were deserted. Khartoum suddenly became a ghost city.”⁷⁸

The main challenges interviewees reported facing when planning for their migration were collecting the necessary funds to pay for the journey and the dangers of getting to bus stations and arranged pick-up points during active fighting. Participants reported that bus companies and vehicle owners in Khartoum were exploiting the situation and had more than doubled ticket prices to move both within and out of the city, and the availability of buses was far lower than the demand. Some respondents explained that they found trucks willing to take them out of Khartoum but respondents had to search for fuel themselves before they could start their journeys. Others reported that they had arranged

75 Respondent 8 (Sudanese, female).

76 Respondent 28 (Sudanese, female).

77 Respondent 42 (Eritrean, male).

78 Respondent 3 (Eritrean, female).

for transport and agreed on a fee with bus drivers who then refused to take them when other people who were willing to pay even more arrived at the bus station.

A factor that further compounded interviewees’ challenges to pay for transportation was that most could not access their savings and/or transfers from friends and relatives abroad who were trying to support them. Participants reported that banks were closed and bank transfers were not working so they had to rely on cash they had withdrawn prior to the conflict or donations and loans from family and friends in Khartoum. Respondents also reported paying for their journey in non-monetary items, such as gold and jewelry, as well as selling assets, such as vehicles, to collect enough money to be able to travel.

Respondents interviewed for this research paid between 7,000 and 50,000 Sudanese pounds (SDG), that is, around 12 to 83 United States dollars (USD) to reach Madani, most commonly between SDG 25,000 and 30,000 (around USD 40–50)⁷⁹ per person. To reach Egypt, most interviewees paid between SDG 120,000 and 420,000 (around USD 200–700) per person. Participants reported that prior to the current crisis, a bus ticket to Egypt would have cost them approximately SDG 15,000 (around USD 25). The large variation in ticket prices from Khartoum to Egypt depends on when the migrant fled, with respondents who fled very early on during the crisis paying significantly less than those who waited a week or longer before departing.

Most respondents made their travel arrangements together with other people, such as family members, friends and neighbours, and relied on their networks in Khartoum to find information on how best to flee the city. Several interviewees also explained that they had joined a group of strangers while trying to cross the city as they felt safer travelling in a larger group. One in three interviewees had not planned their trip as they were too afraid to spend additional time in Khartoum making arrangements. Instead, they fled their houses towards the bus station, trying to escape the fighting in their neighbourhoods:

“We made no arrangements before leaving. When you are in great danger you don’t stop to think and plan.”⁸⁰

Several others reported deciding spontaneously to flee Khartoum when given the opportunity by relatives or friends who had already made arrangements and were in the process of fleeing the city.



**IT WAS THE LONGEST
THREE DAYS OF MY LIFE⁸¹**

I had been living in Khartoum for the past year with the idea of moving to Europe as soon as I had enough savings. When the war started, I was alone at home. My friends had left for work and didn’t come back. I didn’t receive any messages from them, and I wasn’t sure what had happened to them. The house had no electricity and my phone was out of battery. In the evening, I tried to talk to my neighbours. I knocked on their doors, but no one responded. I could hear people screaming in the street.

The situation was very dangerous; people were killing each other in the street, and shelling and shooting was reaching our house. I was alone in the house for three days with no one to talk to and nowhere to go. It was the longest three days of my entire life. On the fourth day, my friends showed up. I was very happy and cried, because finally there was someone that I could talk to. My friends came back for me and organized the journey to Madani. They were the ones who told me that people were fleeing Khartoum and that we had to leave that day. We packed some clothes and our savings and left immediately.

79 Exchange rate of USD 1 = SDG 0.0017 (20 April 2023).

80 Respondent 19 (Sudanese, male).

81 Respondent 10 (Ethiopian, female).

“ I am originally from Tigray in Ethiopia, and I fled to the Sudan during the Tigray Crisis with my two sons and my wife. When the crisis broke out in Khartoum, we were displaced again. I paid USD 800 for my family and I to be smuggled to Cairo. The trip from Khartoum to Cairo took 12 days and was full of suffering. We saw many dead people along the way. No one had buried them and it was a horrible sight to look at. Some people also fled from the Sudan through Libya, but I chose to go through Egypt as I was told it was safer. Life in Egypt has been even more difficult than life was in the Sudan, where I used to work and we had a decent life. My dream is for my family to move to Canada so my children can get a good education and can grow up in a safe place.

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THE JOURNEY

Almost all respondents interviewed for this study reported that their journeys to Madani or Egypt were fraught with danger. Around one in five interviewees suggested that the most dangerous part of their journey was reaching Kandahar bus station on the outskirts of Khartoum (a main point of departure to Egypt). Several participants reported having no choice but to try and reach the bus station on foot, despite knowing the dangers of moving through areas with active fighting: *“We decided to take the risk because for us, at that time, it was better to die trying to survive than wait for death to come inside the house.”*⁸² Interviewees also reported incidents of robbery and extortion during their trip to the bus station, including having to pay bribes to be allowed to pass checkpoints safely.

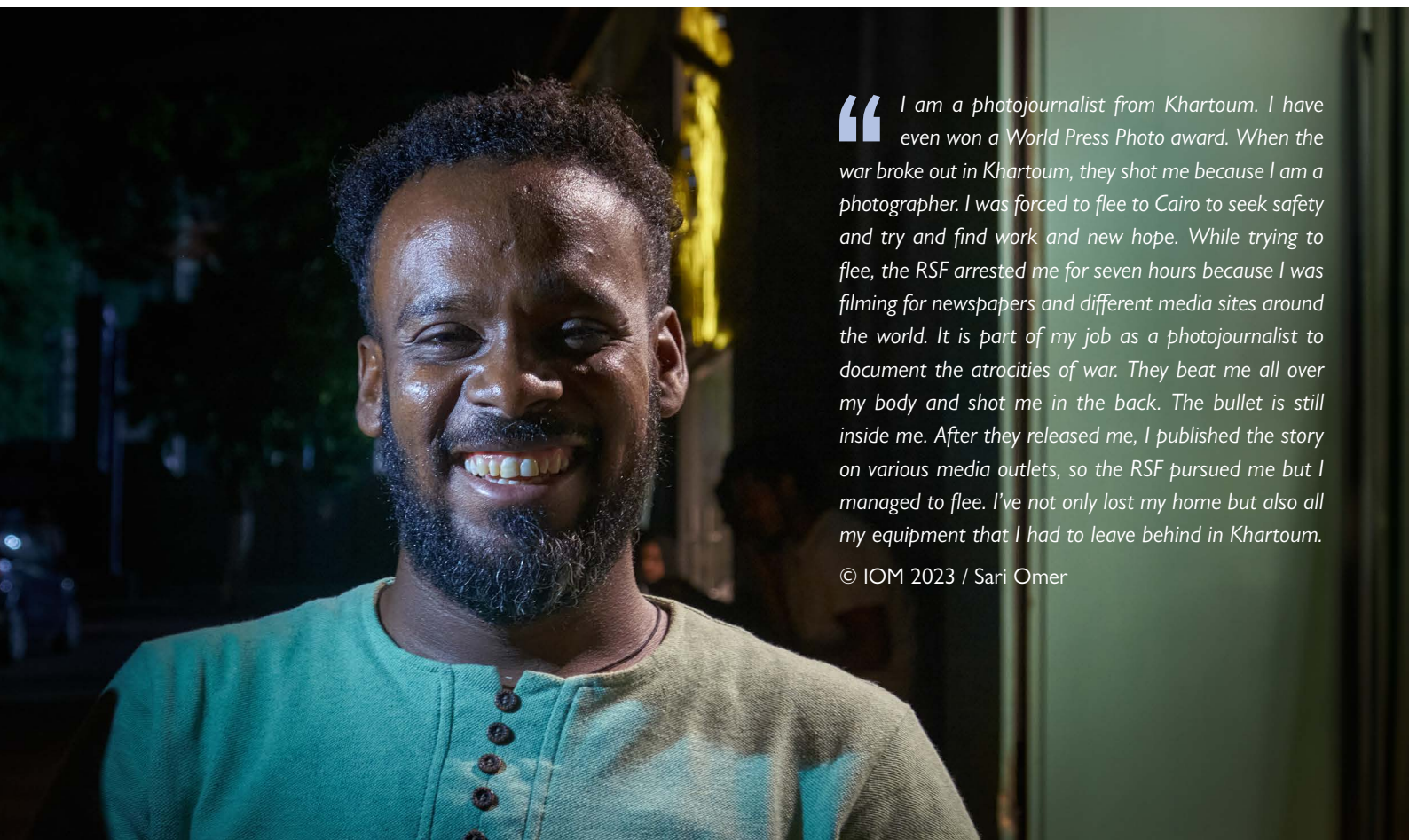
Three participants reported that they had been caught in crossfire while trying to reach the bus station. Interviewees also often explained that their journey to the bus station was prolonged as they had to avoid armed clashes in neighbourhoods they were moving through and find their way through

backstreets and areas that they were unfamiliar with. Prolonged journeys expose IDPs and refugees to additional risk of getting caught in crossfire, putting their lives in severe danger: *“The journey to the bus stop, which should take an hour on a normal day, took a day and half due to the security barriers and some areas that were closed because of the clashes. In one of these areas, the minibus driver refused to continue, and we had to run to hide in a building to protect ourselves from the bullets until things calmed down. We took another minibus and were caught in the fighting again, so we had to spend the night sheltering in the house of people we didn't know. We arrived at the bus stop after a 27-hour journey. When we reached the bus stop, there were no buses, which led to a huge increase in ticket prices, so instead of paying USD 25 for each member of my family, I had to pay USD 700 for each.”*⁸³

The vast majority of Sudanese respondents left Khartoum by bus or on trucks they had rented together with other families or friends who were fleeing. The journey from Khartoum to Egypt took three to five days. Most respondents explained that

82 Respondent 13 (Eritrean, male).

83 Respondent 34 (Sudanese, male).



“ I am a photojournalist from Khartoum. I have even won a World Press Photo award. When the war broke out in Khartoum, they shot me because I am a photographer. I was forced to flee to Cairo to seek safety and try and find work and new hope. While trying to flee, the RSF arrested me for seven hours because I was filming for newspapers and different media sites around the world. It is part of my job as a photojournalist to document the atrocities of war. They beat me all over my body and shot me in the back. The bullet is still inside me. After they released me, I published the story on various media outlets, so the RSF pursued me but I managed to flee. I've not only lost my home but also all my equipment that I had to leave behind in Khartoum.

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Two young boys, displaced by conflict, sleep near the river in Wadi Halfa, so their mother can have a spot to sleep in the overcrowded shelter.

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the journey was extremely tiring and physically challenging as it was very hot on the buses and trucks and interviewees did not have adequate access to food and water, making it particularly difficult for vulnerable migrants such as the elderly and those with health conditions. Although the buses stop during the journey for passengers to purchase food and drinks, many had exhausted their resources to pay for their bus tickets and vendors at bus stops were reportedly taking advantage of passengers and charging prohibitive prices. Many respondents therefore said they consumed little to no food and water during their trip. Moreover, despite buses taking longer breaks for drivers and passengers to rest in cities such as Dongola, interviewees reported that they could not afford paying for a bed during these stops and often ended up sleeping on the ground or on the buses.

Interviewees also reported that the journey had been emotionally exhausting for them as they had lived in constant fear of encountering fighting along the route: *“We were terrified that we might be killed during the journey, as we had heard that a bus on the same route as ours was bombed and its passengers died.”*⁸⁴ Another commonly reported challenge were the checkpoints they encountered along the route. Most interviewees reported having to stop at several checkpoints during their journey while their bus

was searched for members of the opposing forces. Several interviewees reported that their money and phones had been taken from them at checkpoints, further aggravating the challenges they were already facing during their journey to pay for basic goods.

There are three main entry points into Egypt from the Sudan: Argeen, Wadi Halfa and Qustul crossings.⁸⁵ However, the conditions on the Sudanese border with Egypt are deteriorating, as the Egyptian authorities do not allow those who do not meet the entry requirements through the crossing.⁸⁶ As discussed in the previous chapter, male respondents interviewed in Egypt reported that restrictions on entry had challenged their ability to safely cross the border and, in some cases, separated families fleeing the conflict together. Many reported having to leave male relatives behind in the Sudan to wait for their visas to be processed: *“We stayed in Wadi Halfa for one night. We rented a bed for our children. Those who could not afford to rent a bed just slept on the floor. My husband is still in Wadi Halfa because he is waiting for the visa to enter Egypt. He told us to leave him behind because we did not have money to rent a bed every day and pay for food.”*⁸⁷ Respondents also described that the border crossing was very crowded, with several interviewees reporting having to stay in Wadi Halfa for approximately three to five days to cross the border.⁸⁸

84 Respondent 30 (Sudanese, female).

85 UNHCR, 2023a.

86 UNHCR, 2023a; UNHCR 2023b.

87 Respondent 6 (Sudanese, female).

88 Between April and June, women of all ages, children younger than 16 years and adults older than 50 years were exempt from visas, which led to family separation and an increased number of men aged between 17 and 49 years to become stranded at the border (Guergues and Amin, 2023). On 10 June 2023, the Egyptian authorities announced that they would be requiring all Sudanese nationals regardless of their gender and age to obtain an entry visa at an Egyptian consular office in Wadi Halfa or Port Sudan to better manage the arrival of Sudanese nationals in Egypt, resulting in severe delays and further overcrowding border crossings, where facilities were already severely strained (Amnesty International, 2023b).

One participant explained that he had to find a way to enter Egypt irregularly with the help of smugglers as his passport had expired and he couldn't obtain an entry visa. Many refugees move to urban centres after entering Egypt. The Egyptian Red Crescent estimates that 90 per cent of Sudanese refugees move to Cairo and other urban areas once they are in Egypt.⁸⁹

Despite all the challenges interviewees reported facing during their journeys, one in four respondents emphasized that their journey had been made easier thanks to the kindness of strangers they met along the way. Some respondents recounted that strangers had offered them food and drinks, while other respondents had been offered shelter from the fighting or a place to sleep at night during the journey or while they were waiting in Wadi Halfa to cross the border into Egypt. Participants also reported a strong sense of solidarity between travellers and several stated that co-travellers had given them food or lent them money when they were starving because they could not afford to buy food or unable to pay for

onward transportation: *“I spent 17 days in Wadi Halfa to get a visa. I slept on the floor on the street. I met a group of other young Sudanese men and we pooled the little money we had to buy food, eating one meal a day.”*⁹⁰

Eritrean and Ethiopian respondents interviewed in Madani did not report experiencing such strenuous journeys, likely due to the significantly shorter distance they had to travel to reach their destination. Respondents who fled to Madani did, however, experience challenges upon arriving in Madani, where the police was reportedly stopping buses that were entering the city and checking passengers' identification documents to identify the non-Sudanese: *“At the entry point of the town, the police were asking all passengers to show their IDs and legal status of those who were not Sudanese. They asked us to stay in a corner at the entry point, while the Sudanese were allowed to continue. We have heard from some people that they will send us to the border with our country, which is something we were not willing to do. After many hours at the entry point, they finally allowed us to enter the town.”*⁹¹

89 UNHCR, 2023a; UNHCR, 2023c.

90 Respondent 14 (Sudanese, male).

91 Respondent 31 (Ethiopian, female).

“ Before the war broke out, I lived on Tuti Island in Khartoum. I fled my house to save the lives of my daughters and grandchildren and prevent them from experiencing more of the horrors of war. The road to Egypt is lonely and painful. It is not easy to travel from Khartoum to Egypt and I suffered a fracture from sitting too long on the bumpy roads. The journey is not suitable for elderly people like me. There is nowhere to sleep and people sleep on the floor without any mattresses, risking their lives in the middle of the desert full of poisonous scorpions. My aunt, who was travelling with me and the children, passed away while we were on the way from Aswan to Cairo. When we entered Cairo, I thought she was sleeping on my shoulder because she was tired from the road and had passed out from exhaustion. But when she didn't wake up, I realized she'd been dead for hours. War is destruction. It destroys life and there is nothing good that comes from war.



Map 2. Migration routes along the Northern Corridor



IRREGULAR MIGRATORY ROUTES THROUGH THE SUDAN ALONG THE NORTHERN CORRIDOR

The Sudan has historically been a transit and origin country of mixed migration movements along the Northern Corridor.⁹² Irregular migrants from the Horn of Africa seeking to reach Europe, particularly nationals of Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, often travel via the Sudan towards northern Africa and Europe. Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants start their journeys in Eastern Sudan. Both Kassala and Gedaref states host large refugee camps and are usually the first point of entry for Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants on the Northern Corridor.

From Eastern Sudan most migrants used to make their way to Khartoum, where they often worked until they were able to afford the smuggling costs for onward travel. Some migrants were also smuggled directly from Kassala towards Port Sudan and Egypt or via Ed Damazine and Ed Daein towards Al Fasher in Darfur. A popular route from Khartoum to Libya, more commonly undertaken by Sudanese migrants due to increased policing on smuggling along the route, runs via Ad Dabbah and Dongola. Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants interviewed before the current crisis reported that non-Sudanese migrants headed to Libya were therefore more commonly travelling via Al Fasher in Darfur from where they travelled via Mellit or Al Malha towards the Libyan border or via At Tina into Chad and then onwards to Libya.

As a major transit country along the Northern Corridor, the Sudan has well established smuggling

and trafficking networks, particularly in transit hubs such as Kassala, Gedaref and Khartoum. These networks are constantly adapting their routes in response to law enforcement activities and changing dynamics on the ground. Although the current conflict in the Sudan has forced smugglers and migrants to reassess the safety and feasibility of certain routes, and respondents interviewed for this research reported that journeys they had planned had been cancelled as smugglers were reassessing the situation, the smuggling of migrants has not ceased and may have even increased.

The increased vulnerability of conflict-affected populations in the Sudan who are seeking safety and better livelihood opportunities is therefore likely to result in an increased risk of smuggling and trafficking. According to UNHCR, smuggling networks operating in Kassala and Gedaref have adjusted their routes and mode of operating to cater for a rising demand to leave the Sudan, charging between USD 1,000 and 2,000 to facilitate irregular movement from refugee camps such as Shagarab to neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia and Egypt. The rise in demand for smuggling services is particularly evident amongst undocumented individuals and refugees who lack legal pathways to access neighbouring countries, as they often are unable to comply with the legal requirements of entry into countries such as Egypt.⁹³

92 MMC, 2023; World Bank, 2023.

93 UNHCR, 2023f.

LIFE IN EGYPT AND MADANI

“ I am staying with friends, as my mother and two brothers are staying with a family we know and there is no place for me there. I don't have money to pay rent and I go out once a day to have very little food, so they don't feel that they must feed me. I am looking for a job as I have technical education. I will also go to the UN and apply to be included in their humanitarian aid list. Hopefully they will help me.”⁹⁴

After facing great challenges to leave Khartoum and make the journey to Egypt, difficulties persist for interviewed migrants after their arrival in the country. Interviewees particularly spoke about financial challenges as many had exhausted their funds to cover the costs of their journey to Egypt and did not have access to money they had saved in the Sudan prior to fleeing, while they did not have a job and were not receiving financial support in Egypt. Most respondents expressed that they urgently needed to find employment, although many reported that they did not know how or where to start looking for work. Others had been trying unsuccessfully to find work for several weeks. None of the 30 respondents interviewed in Egypt had found employment at the point of interview, although all of them reported wanting and needing to work: *“I am trying to find a job. My friend with whom I am staying pays for my food and I hardly sleep at night as I keep thinking about what I should do to support myself. So far, I have found nothing I can do.”*⁹⁵ Several interviewees reported that their challenges in finding employment were further compounded because they did not have access to their documents certifying the degrees they hold and their previous work experience.

Most respondents interviewed in Egypt were relying on their pre- and post-crisis networks as well as the kindness of strangers to cover their basic needs such as housing and food. Two out of three interviewees reported that they had family or friends who had been living in Egypt before the crisis broke out in

the Sudan and most were receiving various forms of support from them, including a place to live, food and financial support. Some participants also reported that they were being hosted by other Sudanese refugees that they had met during their journey to Egypt. Several respondents expressed feelings of shame that they were dependent on family, friends or strangers to cover their basic needs: *“I am staying with a guy I met on the street and he offered to host us and is paying for our food as well. Most of the Sudanese staying in Egypt, even the poor ones, offer shelter to those who left after the crisis. I am so embarrassed and ashamed to be a burden on him and his wife and hope we can relieve them of this burden soon. I urgently need a source of income to be able to live.”*⁹⁶ Some interviewees also reported that they were receiving support from family members living abroad in other countries such as the United States.

Despite the support all respondents interviewed in Egypt reported receiving from individuals in their personal networks, many reported that their housing and living conditions were dire as the families hosting them, oftentimes newly arrived refugees themselves, were struggling to support themselves as well. Several interviewees reported that they were living in apartments entirely devoid of furniture and basic cooking utensils and appliances such as stoves: *“The apartment we live in is completely empty: we don't have chairs, sofas or beds, we don't even have a kitchen, soap or cooking utensils. Some of our Sudanese friends provide us with food every day. I hope my son can find a job soon because I have five children to take care of.”*⁹⁷

Some respondents also reported that the families they were staying with were experiencing problems with their landlords due to the large number of individuals living in the apartment. Some landlords have also reportedly hiked rental rates, in some cases by 400 per cent.⁹⁸ Households with children struggle to register them in schools as the latter often require some form of contribution to enrol their children

94 Respondent 50 (Sudanese, male).

95 Respondent 14 (Sudanese, male).

96 Respondent 14 (Sudanese, male).

97 Respondent 29 (Sudanese, male).

98 Guergues and Amin, 2023; UNHCR, 2023l.

– which is not required for Egyptian nationals.⁹⁹ A near-future challenge will be the renewal of residency, especially as an increasing number of Sudanese are only granted a three-month renewal period compared to the six-month renewal that was given at the beginning of the recent conflict.¹⁰⁰

Eritreans and Ethiopians interviewed in Madani also reported that their living situation was challenging as they were lacking access to basic necessities such as shelter, food and health care. Most of them were living in public buildings such as schools and churches, while some had pooled their resources with other migrants and were renting houses around Madani town. Those living in gathering areas reported that they were receiving support and basic necessities from the host community, but that these spaces were overcrowded (some respondents reported sharing small rooms with more than 20 individuals) and often lacking basic amenities such as electricity and adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities. Similar to the findings in Egypt, some interviewees also reported that the facilities or apartments they were living in were completely lacking in basic furniture and other items such as kitchen appliances: *“Life in Madani has been difficult. We left everything behind in Khartoum, so we don’t even have basic kitchen items for cooking, no beds and no food items. My children are sick because of the hot weather. They have respiratory infections and we don’t have access to medicine. We are using plastic mats for sleeping and we don’t have enough food to eat. We have no plan, no money and no access to basic needs.”*¹⁰¹

Half of the Eritreans and Ethiopians interviewed in Madani expressed concern over threats of unlawful deportation, displacement and forced transfer/relocations to refugee camps in Eastern Sudan. They explained that the authorities in Madani had formed a committee to organize displaced persons and established gathering places for them, but that they were only accessible to Sudanese IDPs. Third-country nationals are reportedly not permitted to be hosted in these gathering areas, and Eritreans and Ethiopians are being defined as refugees who have escaped the camps in Eastern Sudan, rather than displaced

persons who have fled Khartoum. As a result, they were not receiving humanitarian support and were told by authorities that they will be forcibly deported to the refugee camps in Gedaref or to the border of their home country. The schools and apartments that respondents were staying in had been made available by the host community, but interviewees reported that the authorities were urging hosts to expel Eritreans and Ethiopians from the shelters they were providing. Some respondents also reported having heard stories of other Eritreans and Ethiopians who were forcibly sent back to the borders of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

“ We don’t feel safe because we have heard that the government wants to forcibly transfer us to the refugee camps in Gedaref. After three days in the camp, an armed police officer accompanied by some government officers came and asked all the Ethiopians and Eritreans to collect their belongings immediately. They said we had two options: we could either get transferred to the refugee camps in Gedaref or get deported to the borders of our countries. All of us were shocked and some of us started crying. No one is ready to go back to Eritrea or Ethiopia now. We left everything we have, everything we worked hard to get, including our savings in Khartoum. Therefore, going back home was not an option for us. The good thing was that the camp committee was not happy with the government’s decision, and they pushed back. After a long discussion, the authorities left the camp with empty vehicles. It was a horrible moment.”¹⁰²

99 UNHCR, 2023I.

100 UNHCR, 2023I.

101 Respondent 1 (Eritrean, female).

102 Respondent 31 (Ethiopian, female).

CHALLENGES FACED BY THIRD-COUNTRY NATIONALS AND REFUGEES FLEEING CRISIS WITHIN THE SUDAN

Since the onset of the current crisis, 187,142 refugees who were hosted in the Sudan pre-crisis have become internally displaced, especially to White Nile (144,469), Red Sea (16,000) and Gedaref (8,124) states.¹⁰³ Prior to the current conflict, the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, used to host the largest refugee population in the country (308,955 individuals as of 31 March 2023).¹⁰⁴ However, since the escalation of conflict and with most of the violence occurring in urban centres such as Khartoum, more than half (186,473) of the refugees previously residing in Khartoum have fled the city.¹⁰⁵

Madani, the capital of Aj Jazirah State, situated 200 km from Khartoum, has become a transit point for both refugees and IDPs fleeing Khartoum. As of 25 April 2023, the displaced population in Madani was comprised of 75 per cent IDPs and 25 per cent refugees.¹⁰⁶ The research team collecting data for this study in Madani found that, due to the influx of refugees and IDPs from Khartoum, local authorities established gathering sites that are only accessible to Sudanese IDPs, therefore excluding refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia and other nationalities who have also fled to Madani from accessing humanitarian services. Foreign-born displaced persons are thus defined by local authorities as refugees who have fled the refugee camps in Eastern Sudan. This strict terminology echoes the broader, pre-crisis Sudanese refugee policy stipulating that refugees need a permit to leave their place of registration.¹⁰⁷ Despite the current situation and UNHCR’s call to lift this requirement, such authorization is still required.¹⁰⁸ The need for a travel permit is a barrier for refugees to cross

international borders but also to move within the Sudan to flee conflict.¹⁰⁹ In Gedaref, 49 refugees were detained for not having permits to stay in this state.¹¹⁰ Refugees in Aj Jazirah State, and especially in Madani, also fear such police check-ups.¹¹¹

In addition to detention, displaced Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees also face forced transfers to existing refugee camps in Gedaref and Kassala by local authorities.¹¹² Worrying reports of Eritreans forcibly returned to the borders of Eritrea have also emerged. As of May 2023, over 3,500 Eritreans have gone missing, most of them around Kassala, a town close to the Eritrean border and near the Shagarab refugee camps that host many Eritrean nationals.¹¹³ There have also been reports of passengers being told they were heading towards existing refugee camps on buses, only to find themselves en route to the Eritrean border instead, thereby violating the principle of non-refoulement.¹¹⁴

Refugees’ lack of access to services in towns such as Madani has forced displaced refugees to choose between staying in areas where they have few options to cover their basic needs and are mostly reliant on the kindness of individuals in the host community or relocating to refugee camps in Eastern Sudan. Some refugees have accepted relocation to refugee camps in the hope of having better access to humanitarian services. However, the relocation of refugees has also put added pressure on pre-existing refugee camps that were already overstretched and overcrowded and, in some cases, led to tensions between refugee groups.¹¹⁵

103 UNHCR, n.d.b.

104 UNHCR, n.d.a.

105 UNHCR, n.d.a.

106 NRC, 2023c.

107 NRC, 2023d.

108 Ibid.

109 UNHCR, 2023i; NRC, 2023d.

110 UNHCR, 2023i.

111 Ibid.

112 NRC, 2023d; NRC, 2023c.

113 Salih, 2023.

114 Ibid.

115 NRC, 2023d.



“ I was registered as a refugee in the Sudan when I was nine. Now I am 46 years old. I have spent most of my life as a refugee. My whole life I have fled from one country to the next. I left Khartoum in early May to flee the war. I used the services of smugglers to get to Cairo and the journey took 10 days. I used to work as a tea lady on the streets in Khartoum. It was a hard life and there were many police roundups, but I managed to get by. Life in Egypt has been very difficult as I have no one who can support me and no community that extends a helping hand. I also worry that my son will be arrested by the police, as he has no identity papers. The only good thing about my new life is that I was able to reunite with my daughter who was smuggled to Egypt three years ago. I was so happy to see her again.

STAYING IN TOUCH

“ They say it is getting worse every day and that they feel totally unsafe. They are suffering. They can barely eat one meal a day, and they spend all day hiding under beds. They are living in very bad conditions, with no money and no food. They are depending on the support that they are getting from their neighbours. We are praying for their safety day and night.”¹¹⁶

More than a third of the interviewees who reported having left loved ones behind reported not having been able to reach them since they left Khartoum. Another third of respondents stated that they were occasionally able to reach their relatives and friends in Khartoum, although it was challenging for them to keep in contact regularly because mobile networks and landlines were often down due to the fighting. Moreover, electricity is only sporadically available in Khartoum, posing further challenges to communication as mobile phones and other communication devices cannot be charged. Several interviewees expressed that their inability to regularly communicate with loved ones and confirm that they are safe was causing them distress.

Respondents who had been able to communicate with friends and family reported that their loved ones’ living conditions were “unsafe,” “miserable” and

“continuously deteriorating,” as the violent clashes are ongoing and basic commodities and services such as medical care continued to be scarce or unavailable. Interviewees also stated that their relatives and friends were anxious about securing their basic needs, as they were running out of money to buy basic commodities and had no access to their savings and bank accounts and had not received their most recent salaries. Several participants also said their loved ones were dependent on their neighbours or friends for survival as food and drinking water prices had continued to skyrocket.

All but one interviewee reported that their friends and relatives who had remained behind would flee Khartoum if they had the opportunity to do so, although most stated that the main reason their loved ones were still in Khartoum was that they did not have enough money to escape. Respondents explained that even those who had been well-off prior to the current crisis were struggling to evacuate as they could not access their money and could not monetize their assets: *“Even before I left, they wanted to leave for Egypt as well, but they did not have the money. Even if they wanted to sell something, nobody has the money to buy anything.”*¹¹⁷

116 Respondent 3 (Eritrean, female).

117 Respondent 12 (Sudanese, female).



Mohandiseen, Cairo, where many Sudanese refugees live.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

“ I do not think I will ever go back to the Sudan. I cannot. We have been living one ordeal after another in the Sudan since the revolution. The Sudan has been unstable for a long time. We suffered a lot. Whenever we think it will be stable, something else happens and it keeps getting worse. I don't trust things there anymore, even if things calmed down for a while, nothing guarantees it won't get worse again soon.”¹¹⁸

Only around a third of all respondents said they were planning to return to Khartoum as soon as the situation settles down. They explained that their living situation in Khartoum had been good prior to the crisis and that they felt at home there. Some interviewees believed the crisis to be temporary and were hoping to return to Khartoum in a couple of months, while others said they wanted to go back to reunite with family and friends they had left behind and to recover their assets and restart their jobs once the security situation is safer. Several Eritrean and Ethiopian respondents explained that they had been in the process of applying for resettlement before the crisis began and were hoping to return to Khartoum to continue the process and eventually get resettled.

Amongst Eritreans and Ethiopians, three reported that they were considering relocation to the refugee camps in Eastern Sudan because they had completely exhausted their resources and would get support to cover their basic needs there. The data point to a generational component in terms of who wants to return to Khartoum and who would like to migrate elsewhere, with particularly older respondents planning to return as soon as the conditions were safe enough to do so: “I definitely want to return to the Sudan. It is my country; my home and my family and friends are there. At my age I would not want to go anywhere else. A younger person might see this as an opportunity to migrate to other countries, but not me.”¹¹⁹

One in five interviewees reported that they were planning on staying in either Egypt or Madani, while one in four respondents, all of whom were Sudanese, said that they were hoping for resettlement through UNHCR from Egypt, mostly to the United States, Europe, Canada or Australia. Several interviewees reported having family members who had already settled in these countries. Interviewees explained that they preferred those countries over Egypt as they felt they would have a better life and future there, including access to work and services such as health care and education for themselves or their children. Some of the interviewees who reported that they were hoping for resettlement suggested that they would consider irregular migration if resettlement did not work out for them: “I want to go somewhere other than Egypt, such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom or Germany. They have better living standards and better education, so a better future. My relatives also went through refugee resettlement, and I hope the UN will fund my trip and help me get asylum. If I have to, I will go illegally by sea. The aim is to secure a better future for my children.”¹²⁰

Around a third of respondents were planning to migrate onwards from Madani or Egypt to Libya and Europe. This was especially the case for Ethiopian and Eritrean respondents, some of whom had already made plans to migrate to Europe before the crisis broke out and whose conviction to leave the Sudan had been strengthened by recent events. Most interviewees reported that they wanted to leave ‘as soon as possible’ once they had gathered enough funds to travel. Eritrean and Ethiopian interviewees also reported witnessing other migrants leaving Madani towards Libya on a daily basis: “Since we arrived in Madani, every day people are disappearing without communicating their plans, but we know that they are planning to leave the country. To be honest, many people wanted to leave, even before the war, especially after the deterioration of the socioeconomic situation of the country. And now after this war, I think the number has increased. The Sudan is no longer attractive for sure.”¹²¹

118 Respondent 6 (Sudanese, female).

119 Respondent (Sudanese, female).

120 Respondent 23 (Sudanese, male).

121 Respondent 41 (Ethiopian, male).

The cross-border movements from the Sudan into Egypt also contribute to the migration movements along the Northern Corridor and follow historical patterns of movement that preceded the crisis. In 2022, 1,722 Sudanese were registered at disembarkation points in Europe after crossing the Mediterranean along the Central Mediterranean Route.¹²² In the same year, 4,935 Sudanese were first-time asylum applicants in member countries of the European Union.¹²³ Research conducted by the Regional Data Hub in 2022 and early 2023 found that many Eritreans and Ethiopians

living in the Sudan also intended to travel toward Libya, Egypt and Europe, mostly due to the poor economic situation in the Sudan and experiences of violence from local authorities. In 2022, 2,226 Eritreans and 424 Ethiopians were recorded at European disembarkation points along the Central Mediterranean Route, and 10,810 Eritreans and 3,120 Ethiopians were first-time asylum applicants in European Union Member States in 2022.¹²⁴ The Sudan crisis is likely to increase migration flows on the Northern Corridor, with current arrivals to Libya already higher compared to pre-crisis trends.¹²⁵

122 The Central Mediterranean Route refers to the migration route from North Africa to Italy and Malta across the Mediterranean Sea. IOM, n.d.b; UNHCR, n.d.c.

123 EUROSTAT, 2023.

124 EUROSTAT, 2023; IOM, n.d.b.

125 IOM, 2023d.

“ I am 23 years old and used to work as a photographer in the Sudan. Because of the war, I have lost all my dreams and plans for my future. I am no longer in a good psychological state, because I do not know how I will spend my life. I want to try and spend my time in Egypt working on developing my skills and improving my work through specialised courses in the field of photography and creative creation. I hope to return to the Sudan one day with more experience, but I am pained by what has happened there.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are key implications and recommendations based on this study’s findings:

1. Interviewees reported facing grave human rights violations before fleeing the Sudan, while the situation for those who continue to be trapped in places with active conflict is continuously deteriorating. Many Sudanese who wish to leave are unable to do so for various reasons including lack of access to resources to fund travel, lack of safety due to ongoing conflict or because they are vulnerable and unable to make the journey. Living conditions are expected to deteriorate as supply lines remain interrupted and basic resources such as food, water, medical supplies and fuel become even scarcer and problems accessing commodities are further aggravated by soaring prices.

a. The international community, including partners and donors, should increase humanitarian support for the Sudan as fighting continues to displace civilians. As of the end of September, about 5.4 million people have fled their homes and sought refuge within the Sudan or neighbouring countries since fighting started in mid-April 2023.¹²⁶ Special attention is called to increase humanitarian support to refugee camps in the Sudan that were already overstretched pre-crisis and are now experiencing severe overcrowding, with humanitarian actors struggling to provide essential services and assistance. The revised 2023 Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) requires 2.6 billion United States dollars to provide lifesaving, multisectoral and protection assistance to 18.1 million people in need, but the HRP is only one third funded.

b. Parties to the conflict should maintain humanitarian corridors to allow for the safe passage of civilians out of conflict areas and refrain from using civilian areas and objects as hideouts. In addition, parties to the conflict should facilitate the impartial delivery of humanitarian assistance including

through improving access to affected populations and guaranteeing protection for humanitarian workers.

c. Given reports of grave human rights violations perpetrated against civilians, human rights monitoring should be strengthened to ensure systematic documentation of human rights violations. The international community, parties to the conflict and civil society organizations should support the recently established fact-finding mission mandated by the Human Rights Council to investigate all violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and perpetrators held accountable.¹²⁷

d. The international community should support the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations to respond to the specific protection needs of civilians, migrants and those displaced. Relevant stakeholders should ensure that these services and specialized protection interventions are available, accessible, tailored, comprehensive and provided in a timely manner, in line with established standards. These interventions include but are not limited to medical assistance including clinical management of rape, mental health and psychosocial support, safe shelter, legal counselling and family tracing and reunification. Moreover, lack of access to financial resources was identified as a key barrier to fleeing conflict. It is imperative that individuals trapped in situations where they are unable to access their funds are assisted in reaching safety and/or provided with alternative solutions to access their money and/or remittances from local banks and money transfer systems.

2. The crisis in the Sudan has triggered complex displacement patterns as many different categories of individuals are fleeing areas of conflict. The Sudan, and especially Khartoum, was home to many foreign nationals before the current crisis, including refugees and migrants

¹²⁶ OCHA, Sudan Humanitarian Update (28 September 2023).

¹²⁷ Human Right Council, Fifty-Fourth Regular Session (13 October 2023).



A young Sudanese working hard in Aswan to save money to pay for onward travel to Cairo.

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from Eritrea and Ethiopia. All Ethiopian and Eritrean respondents in this study reported experiencing a lack of assistance and lack of access to basic and humanitarian services at distribution sites.

- a. In line with the humanitarian imperative, the humanitarian community should ensure that assistance is provided to all affected populations based on their needs and should not discriminate based on status. Accordingly, refugees and migrants who are in the Sudan and may therefore face greater obstacles to accessing humanitarian assistance compared to other groups, must be included in the various response efforts.
- b. The international community should work together with local authorities in areas that have received displaced persons to find rights-based solutions, including protection-sensitive identification and screening of displaced refugees and migrants, and work with local authorities to prevent forced transfers and threats of expulsions within and outside of the Sudan.
- c. The protracted conflict severely limits the prospects for refugees and migrants to find safety and livelihood opportunities in the Sudan. Many refugees in the country, such as refugees from Eritrea, are unable to return to their home countries, while also struggling to find safety and assistance in the Sudan. Those who are financially able are moving onwards to other countries such as South Sudan, but many do not have the means to do so. The international community should facilitate identifying appropriate durable solutions for refugees who wish to leave the Sudan but are unwilling and/or unable to return to their countries of origin. Such support can include family reunification, resettlement to a third country, education opportunities and other assistance schemes to promote their safety and well-being.

3. The crisis in the Sudan has altered migration dynamics along the Northern Corridor and irregular migration along this route, both from the Sudan as well as from neighbouring countries, is likely to increase. Interviews show a significant desire amongst Sudanese in Egypt to move on to other countries through resettlement, but also show a desire for irregular migration along the Central Mediterranean Route if regular channels are not accessible. If the conflict in the Sudan persists, migrants and refugees with the necessary resources and those with ties to friends and relatives in Europe may increasingly migrate onwards along the Northern Corridor seeking opportunities in Europe. The number of Sudanese as well as third-country nationals displaced by the Sudan crisis crossing the Mediterranean is therefore expected to grow. Data also suggest that although smuggling and trafficking networks may have temporarily paused their operations during the initial days of the crisis to reassess the feasibility of certain routes, their activities have not stopped and have potentially even increased. These networks in the Sudan are well-established and highly adaptable, and are already responding to the rising number of individuals in the Sudan who are seeking to leave the country.

- a. To prevent an increase in irregular migration and associated risks, Member States, partners and IOM should collaborate in advancing regular pathways to ensure safe and orderly migration for affected populations including Sudanese nationals and non-nationals such as migrants and refugees.
- b. Migration protection services along the route should be strengthened, including the network of Migration Response Centres (MRCs) established by IOM in strategic border locations. The services at these MRCs should include identification of the specific needs of migrants, provision of basic needs and services, protection intervention, assisted voluntary returns, post-arrival assistance and reintegration support.
- c. IOM and other stakeholders engaged in mixed migration evidence generation should coordinate efforts on data collection and analysis along this

corridor, with a particular focus on monitoring the impact of the Sudan conflict on the various migrant groups, including Sudanese refugees as well as third-country nationals whose capacity to migrate, risk exposure and related vulnerabilities might be affected differently by this crisis. Protection monitoring tools and mobility analyses in key transit countries should be enhanced and strengthened to inform the humanitarian response and support with advocacy and fundraising.

4. The Sudan’s neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Chad and South Sudan have all received large numbers of people fleeing conflict. However, visa policies regarding entry into Egypt for Sudanese refugees have led to family separations and a dire humanitarian situation at the Egyptian-Sudanese border. The situation remains critical as thousands of Sudanese are unable to meet the country’s visa requirements, with IOM estimating in August 2023 that at least 120,000 individuals had become stranded in Wadi Halfa. As a result of the restrictions on visa issuance and the lengthy visa processes, the number of people fleeing to Egypt irregularly has increased in recent months. Refugees are using smugglers in Wadi Halfa to reach Egypt, but many end up getting arrested by authorities while crossing into Egypt and detained before being returned to the Sudan. The deportees often arrive in the Sudan in dire condition due to the time spent in prison and the conditions they faced during their journeys, further exacerbating the need for humanitarian assistance in border areas such as Wadi Halfa.
 - a. Acknowledging that States have the sovereign power to regulate entry of non-nationals, it is recommended under the current circumstances that neighbouring countries keep their borders open to those fleeing the Sudan, whether they are seeking protection or returning to their countries of origin. Persons seeking safety should be allowed to enter and referred to national asylum procedures for consideration of their individual protection concerns. Individuals who do not wish to seek asylum or whose asylum claims are rejected should be granted admission and stay based on human rights and humanitarian grounds

including through issuance of humanitarian visas and temporary residence permits.

- b. The international community should advocate with governments affected by this crisis to provide support to internally displaced persons and migrants stranded at the border to neighbouring countries such as Egypt. Such support should include access to humanitarian assistance and basic services in key areas to prevent risky decision-making such as the use of smugglers to cross borders irregularly, which can expose individuals to a multitude of protection challenges and put them at risk of detention and deportation.

5. All of the Sudanese migrants interviewed for this study were receiving support from their Sudanese social networks in Egypt. The ability of these networks to provide support is overstretched and many reported that they were struggling to meet their basic needs. As more Sudanese refugees continue to arrive in Egypt, the ability of these networks to absorb new arrivals will become increasingly challenged.

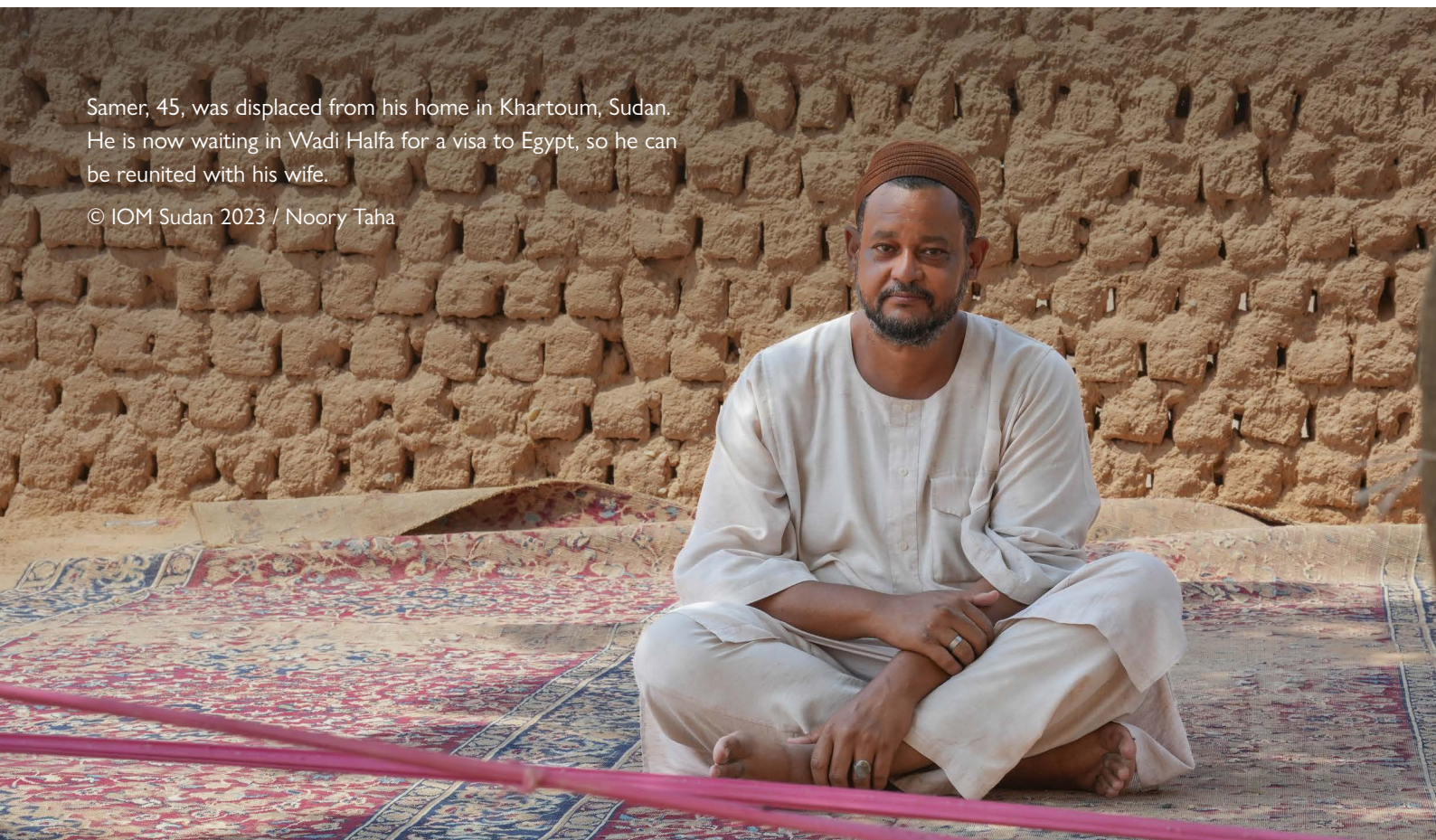
- a. The international community should provide support to national and local authorities, civil

society actors and partners working with refugees and migrants to ensure access to suitable housing and other basic services such as education. These efforts should also include special employment schemes to support Sudanese refugees to earn secure a livelihood and be less dependent on humanitarian assistance and their network.

- b. Host communities and other network systems are currently unable to support the large number of individuals who have fled the conflict and their resources are severely overstretched. The international community should identify ways to mainstream social cohesion into humanitarian aid to mitigate against the prospect of tensions between populations.
- c. Interviewees reported that their experiences while trapped in or fleeing conflict had profoundly impacted the mental health and well-being of their children. Interventions targeting children who have fled areas of conflict in the Sudan should include mental health services for those children as well as their caregivers.

Samer, 45, was displaced from his home in Khartoum, Sudan. He is now waiting in Wadi Halfa for a visa to Egypt, so he can be reunited with his wife.

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ANNEX I: OVERVIEW OF INTERVIEWEES

RESPONDENT #	INTERVIEW LOCATION	NATIONALITY	SEX	AGE GROUP
Respondent 1	Madani	Eritrean	Female	30s
Respondent 2	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	20s
Respondent 3	Madani	Ethiopian	Female	20s
Respondent 4	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	30s
Respondent 5	Madani	Eritrean	Male	20s
Respondent 6	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	30s
Respondent 7	Madani	Ethiopian	Male	40s
Respondent 8	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	20s
Respondent 9	Madani	Ethiopian	Female	40s
Respondent 10	Madani	Ethiopian	Female	20s
Respondent 11	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	30s
Respondent 12	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	50s
Respondent 13	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	20s
Respondent 14	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	40s
Respondent 15	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	20s
Respondent 16	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	40s
Respondent 17	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	60s
Respondent 18	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	30s
Respondent 19	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	20s
Respondent 20	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	30s
Respondent 21	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	40s
Respondent 22	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	50s
Respondent 23	Madani	Eritrean	Female	20s
Respondent 24	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	40s
Respondent 25	Madani	Ethiopian	Female	30s
Respondent 26	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	30s
Respondent 27	Madani	Eritrean	Male	20s
Respondent 28	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	40s
Respondent 29	Madani	Eritrean	Male	30s
Respondent 30	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	30s
Respondent 31	Madani	Eritrean	Male	20s

Respondent 32	Madani	Ethiopian	Female	20s
Respondent 33	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	60s
Respondent 34	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	30s
Respondent 35	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	50s
Respondent 36	Madani	Ethiopian	Male	20s
Respondent 37	Madani	Eritrean	Male	20s
Respondent 38	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	60s
Respondent 39	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	30s
Respondent 40	Madani	Eritrean	Male	30s
Respondent 41	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	30s
Respondent 42	Madani	Eritrean	Male	20s
Respondent 43	Madani	Eritrean	Female	20s
Respondent 44	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	20s
Respondent 45	Madani	Eritrean	Female	20s
Respondent 46	Egypt	Sudanese	Male	20s
Respondent 47	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	40s
Respondent 48	Madani	Eritrean	Female	30s
Respondent 49	Egypt	Sudanese	Female	20s
Respondent 50	Madani	Ethiopian	Female	30s

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International Organization for Migration
Regional Office for the East and Horn of Africa
Sri Aurobindo Avenue, off Mzima Spring Road, Lavington
P.O. Box 55040-00200
Nairobi, Kenya

🏠 <https://eastandhornofafrica.iom.int/regional-data-hub>
🐦 <https://twitter.com/RDHRONairobi>
✉️ rdhronairobi@iom.int
☎️ +254 20 422 1000