

Backgrounder to the crisis in Sudan (published in November 2024)

The current conflict in Sudan is primarily between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), respectively headed by 'Hemedti' and General El-Burhan. Together, they seized power in a 2021 coup on the cusp of a promised handover of power to a civilian-led transitional government. Both forces carried out well-documented abuses against civilians during this period.

Their allyship came to an end in April 2023, and each is fighting for control over the country and its significant resources, which include gold and pasture. Since then, 11 million people have been forced to flee their homes, and over 2.2 million have fled to neighbouring countries. This is the largest displacement crisis in the world. Conservative figures place the number of people killed at 20,000, but others [estimate around 150,000 civilians have died](#) from conflict, starvation, disease, and the consequences of the collapse of infrastructure. [Up to 25 million people – half the country's population – are in need of aid.](#)

U.N. experts have found [credible](#) evidence that the UAE is supplying large quantities of weapons and ammunition to the RSF via eastern Chad. Egypt has offered significant support to the SAF. And while Russia's mercenary Wagner Group has supported the RSF, Russia has more recently drawn closer to the SAF in exchange for a deal to establish a port on the Red Sea.

Both warring parties are using food as a weapon of war by routinely blocking deliveries of humanitarian aid, [including to besieged and displaced populations](#) already suffering famine conditions. Insecurity and looting [has compromised](#) the ability of humanitarian agencies to operate. [Famine is already underway](#) in areas of Northern Darfur, meaning that deaths from starvation have reached extreme levels. Warring parties have targeted aid workers and local volunteers, and civic space has been closed; this has hindered humanitarian operations across Sudan. Health sector collapse and systematic attacks on health facilities and workers have resulted in limited services to those in need. Widespread disease outbreaks such as cholera, dengue fever, and malaria are now killing hundreds every day. More than half of those displaced are women, and more than a quarter are children under the age of five. [Women and girls are experiencing the worst impacts of the conflict](#), subjected to violence, atrocities, and rampant gender-based violence, including sexual violence used as weapon of war. A growing number of women and girls have been abducted and subjected to rape, forced marriage, and sexual captivity. People with disabilities, and [LGBTQI+ people – especially gender-diverse and trans people – are particularly at risk during war and conflict](#). They face additional risks during their journeys of displacement, and additional barriers to accessing humanitarian aid and medical services.

Civilians are being subjected to systematic and unchecked atrocities by both warring parties. This includes the [widespread use of rape and conflict-related sexual violence](#), and [ethnically-targeted violence and massacres](#) against members of Masalit, Zaghawa and other tribes. It must not be forgotten that the RSF emerged from the *Janjaweed*, a militia that carried out genocide in Darfur 20 years ago. RSF committed mass killings of [over 120 civilians in October 2024](#) in Al-Jazeera state. Concurrently, SAF's indiscriminate bombardment of residential areas [in Khartoum](#), Darfur and Kordofan destroyed hospitals and killed and injured dozens of civilians.

The situation is expected to worsen in 2025 due to expansion of the conflict, conflict-related food insecurity and famine, access constraints, displacement, lack of healthcare, and major disease outbreaks. More armed actors are being drawn into the fighting as it continues. Refugees have crossed borders to neighbouring countries including Ethiopia, Chad, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic, countries that are facing their own stability challenges. The war in Sudan could further destabilize the entire region, and there is risk of the crisis spilling over, particularly into Chad and South Sudan.

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