

SUDAN'S EXODUS

INTERSOS REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE SUDAN DISPLACEMENT CRISIS

June 2024

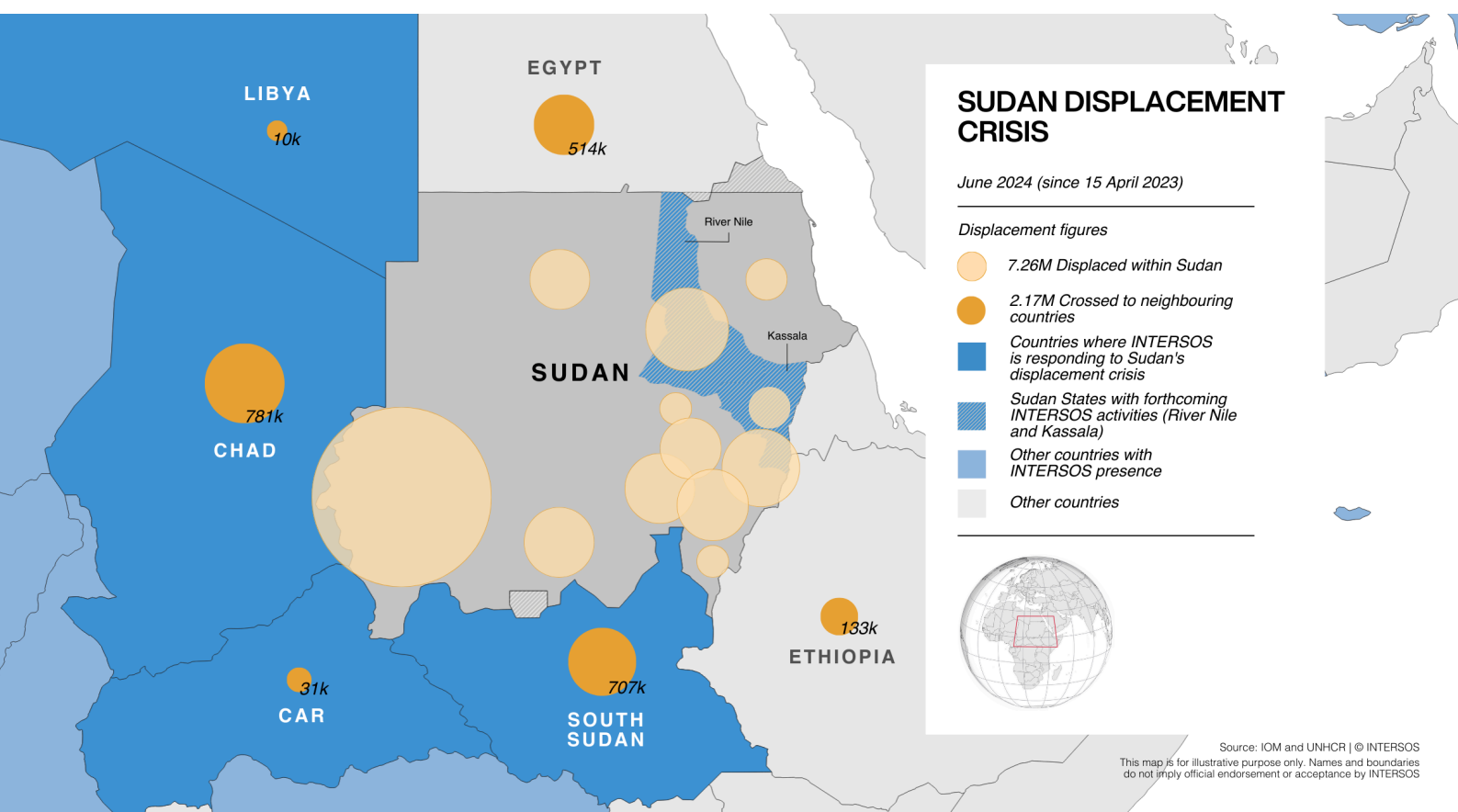
1. INTRODUCTION

Since the eruption of the conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in April 2023, violence has spread all over Sudan killing over 15,500 and making humanitarian assistance indispensable for those impacted by the conflict. Today, approximately **half of Sudan's population, totaling around 25 million people, is in dire need of humanitarian assistance and protection** and currently, over 18 million people, or 37% of the population, are acutely food insecure, with nearly **5 million at risk of famine and nearly 4 million children under 5 acutely malnourished**. These numbers underline the massive proportions of needs in Sudan, exemplifying one of the worst humanitarian crises in recent decades. At the same time, this protracted conflict has not only deepened pre-existing challenges within Sudan but has also reverberated across its borders, exacerbating regional instability and challenges.

After over a year of conflict, Sudan has become the **world's largest and one of the most complex displacement crises**. Continued violence within the country has resulted in a staggering toll: according to UN data, between April 2023 and June 2024, **approximately 9.4 million people, including 4 million children, have been forcibly displaced from their homes**, with 7.26 million displaced internally and 2.17 million seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. People have fled in large numbers to Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, as well as

Ethiopia, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Libya. The massive displacement has left countless people in Sudan and neighbouring countries struggling to meet their basic needs and every day that passes it becomes harder for them to access the assistance and support they need as the situation continues to worsen.

Those crossing Sudan's borders often do so in a state of profound poverty, having left their homeland with only the most essential possessions. Then, upon arrival in neighbouring countries, they often find themselves in regions marked by pervasive poverty or that have suffered from conflict and instability. The influx of refugees from Sudan into fragile states is posing significant challenges for host countries already grappling with their own humanitarian needs. These countries, often burdened with pre-existing challenges, now face overwhelming demands to provide basic services such as food, water, shelter, sanitation, education, healthcare, and protection to the vulnerable refugees. Equally, displaced persons camps in these areas lack the necessary infrastructure to provide for these essential and basic needs. Whether residing in camps, host communities, or informal settlements, **refugees and returnees lack essential necessities, highlighting the urgent need for critical humanitarian assistance** and support to alleviate their suffering and improve living conditions.



2. INTERSOS EXPERIENCE IN SUDAN'S NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

INTERsos runs humanitarian programs in four states neighbouring Sudan: **Libya, Chad, CAR, and South Sudan**. Since the onset of the conflict, our humanitarian personnel on the ground have observed the extent of displacement across various regions of Sudan's neighbouring countries and provided assistance to those fleeing the violence.

CHAD

Of Sudan's neighbouring countries where INTERsos is present, Chad has seen the largest number of Sudanese refugees crossing its border. As of June more than **781,000 refugees and returnees have entered the country** and are now facing increasing challenges. INTERsos teams have been providing emergency shelters and protection assistance in three different locations along the Eastern border: **Zabout, Kerfi, and Daguessa camps**.

Collaborating closely with UNHCR, we contributed to the construction of the Zabout refugee camp, situated along the border with Sudan, capable of accommodating approximately 60,000 refugees. Additionally, in partnership with UNHCR and ShelterBox, we are currently constructing new emergency shelters inside the Kerfi camp while within the Zabout and Daguessa camps, we are also conducting vital protection activities, including the establishment of 12 safe spaces dedicated to women and children, facilitation of family reunification processes, and child protection and gender-based violence case management.

INTERsos field protection teams have observed a myriad of challenges affecting refugees, returnees and host communities in Chad. For instance, displacement-driven tensions loom large, as limited resources strain under the weight of an expanding population. Consequently, inter-communal disputes often erupt over the sharing of resources, competition over already scarce economic opportunities, and pervasive discrimination exacerbates these tensions. Of particular concern is sexual and gender-based violence, particularly impacting women and girls, along with domestic violence and early marriage. Further protection concerns include lack of access to civil and legal documentation, the risk of family separation, child recruitment by armed groups, unaccompanied children, as well as difficulties in accessing mental health and psychological services,



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"I am truly exhausted. Since fleeing Sudan for refuge in Chad, leaving my husband behind, our family's lives have never been the same. We departed under harrowing circumstances, amidst intense fighting where my sister lost her husband. Our sole thought was to escape our country to save our lives. Even upon arrival in Chad, our challenges persist, though the sounds of gunfire have ceased. Initially, we spent two months in Arara, then eight months in Addé, before arriving here in Kerfi, hoping for shelter in the new camp under construction. It has been two months since our arrival, and the difficulty of losing everything and living without means in a foreign land remains palpable. I yearn to see my husband again, alive, and dream of returning to my country if peace returns."

Haloum in Kerfi, Chad



education, healthcare, and hygiene and dignity kits. The situation will be further aggravated with the approaching summer rainy season that will significantly hinder access to the camps, further complicating access to already limited services, family tracing missions, and logistical deliveries, thereby exposing the ever-growing refugee and returnee population to even greater needs. As further

explained below, these challenges are not exclusive to Chad but are also prevalent in other contexts, such as CAR and South Sudan.

Overall, and as reported by different testimonies, refugees arriving in Chad from Sudan often share a common motivation: to **escape conflict and violence and seek safety**. This driving force is echoed among refugees and returnees in other countries as the pervasive violence across key cities in Sudan has forced residents to abandon their belongings and seek refuge elsewhere.



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"We are originally from Oum Kharouba, Sudan, but fled our country due to the conflict. Along the way, we were attacked, and the soldiers seized the few goods and provisions we had managed to carry. Tragically, my husband lost his life in the conflict, leaving me here in Chad's Zabout camp with our four children. Despite the assistance provided by NGOs, we are struggling to survive due to the overwhelming number of people in this camp. The water situation is particularly dire; it can take an entire day just to secure a couple of containers of water from the overcrowded water points. Looking ahead, I am deeply concerned about the worsening situation in Sudan, as it leaves us with no hope of returning and living in peace. Here in Chad, I feel overwhelmed trying to meet the needs of my fatherless children."

Sadié in Zabout, Chad



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Although the number of arrivals in the Central African Republic (CAR), has been much lower compared to neighbouring Chad and South Sudan, as of June 2024 more than **25,000 refugees and 6,000 returnees have registered their presence** in the country through UNHCR, primarily in the northeast province of Vakaga. In CAR, INTERSOS has been providing assistance to the Central African population since 2014, and has recently expanded its efforts to support the displaced population from Sudan.

The humanitarian needs of those who have fled Sudan and arrived in CAR remain particularly acute.

In addition to the challenges of resettling in a country that see the presence of armed groups and that has also experienced conflict and a difficult economic situation, humanitarian needs and risks related to protection and gender-based violence are particularly high.

In the Vakanga prefecture INTERSOS is operating with a specific focus on supporting and delivering assistance to children facing **significant protection risks**, including family separation, child abuse, sexual and gender-based violence, and recruitment by armed groups. Family separation has affected a large number of Sudanese refugee children, many of whom are unaccompanied and separated from their families. Child abuse, primarily characterized by neglect and physical abuse, is prevalent due to socioeconomic factors and harmful cultural practices while cases of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and forced marriage, can be linked to armed conflicts and socio-cultural environments harmful to children's rights. Moreover, the recruitment of children by armed groups remains a major concern, particularly affecting vulnerable demographics such as orphans, out-of-school children, and those from economically disadvantaged families.

Additionally, with the arrival of Sudanese nationals towards the Vakaga prefecture, insecurity, fuel shortages, and impassable roads caused by heavy seasonal rains have made economic exchanges challenging between CAR, Chad, and Sudan, resulting in major price increase of basic necessities. Due to this and other reasons, INTERSOS protection teams have observed the emergence of minor tensions and disputes among

refugees, returnees, and the host community, underscoring the challenges faced by countries grappling with already precarious political and economic environments in accommodating those fleeing from Sudan.

LIBYA

Libya has received **more than 10,000 individuals** (both Sudanese and non-Sudanese) between April 2023 and June 2024. The majority of Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers bound for Libya typically arrive from Sudan in Alkufra, situated in the southeastern region of the country. From Alkufra Sudanese move towards Ajdabiya and Sabha, but refugees typically attempt to reach Tripoli to register with UNHCR or join relatives already living in Libya. This is because UNHCR registration and most essential services, such as cash assistance and medical care, are primarily available in Tripoli. As a result, **those living outside Tripoli encounter increased challenges in accessing services and are exposed to greater protection risks.**

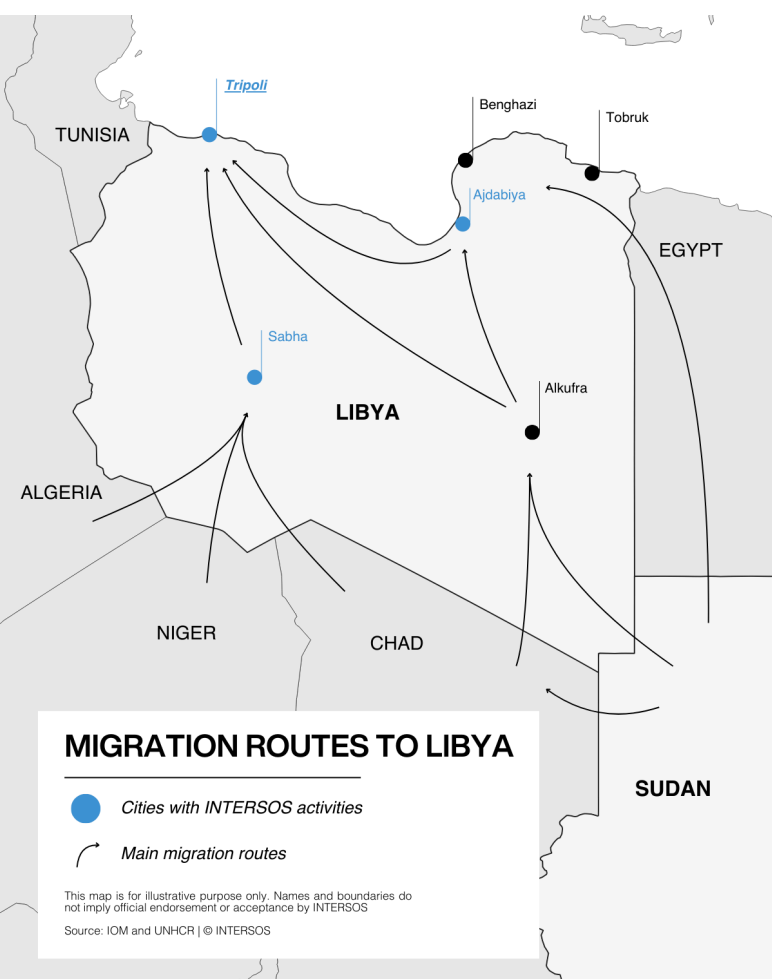
The situation for Sudanese refugees in Libya reflects that of those in other neighbouring countries, with similar needs for basic necessities. Through case management, INTERSOS has identified **various humanitarian needs**, including registration with UNHCR, request for identity documents, access to health services, emergency cash assistance, shelter, food, hygiene items, as well as a demand for psychological support and education services.

The majority of cases addressed at the INTERSOS community centres involve registered (Tripoli) and unregistered (Sabha and Ajdabiya) female-headed households and families. In this context, **key protection risks** include lack of identity documents creating barriers for displaced individuals to access essential services, including access to education leading to potential school dropout of children, increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, unmet basic and medical needs, protection risks for unaccompanied and separated children, harmful practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation, as well risks related to human trafficking. Outside Tripoli, risks of exploitation and abuse are even higher due to the limited number of service providers.

In Sabha, Ajdabiya, and Tripoli, INTERSOS has been supporting Sudanese refugee communities and other groups through a range of activities. In practice, these include protection services such as integrated case management, psychosocial support, and legal assistance. Additionally, INTERSOS provides non-formal education, distributes non-food items and kits to children, and conducts outreach activities to newly arrived Sudanese refugees in unofficial settlements.

Sabha, in particular, has traditionally served as a key entry point for individuals migrating to Libya from Niger and Chad. However, the challenging political and security situation has limited the number of active humanitarian organisations in the city, making it increasingly difficult to address the needs of those seeking assistance. Notably, despite non-Libyans constituting only about 20% of those accessing the INTERSOS community centre in the city, the local **INTERSOS team has witnessed an increase in the number of Sudanese individuals arriving in Sabha since 2023, highlighting the impact of the conflict in Sudan.**

INTERSOS also operates in the northeastern part of the country, managing a community centre in Ajdabiya, a transit city for those on the move, with support from UNICEF and the European Union. This centre is one of the few safe havens where Sudanese refugees can request life-sustaining support and assistance. The limited presence of INGOs and UN agencies in the area, combined with the complex security context and the tribal nature of the community, makes this centre particularly crucial. In this context, while in Ajdabiya, many refugees aspire to reach Tripoli but lack the financial means and valid documentation to do so, putting them at risk of arrest and exploitation on the route if they decide to reach the city. This difficult situation underscores the **urgent need for increased presence and engagement from the national and international humanitarian community to address the high protection risks** faced by people on the move in the country.



SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan is characterised by a high number of returnees. According to IOM, as of June, **around 707,000 individuals have crossed the border** through 21 designated points of entry into South Sudan from Sudan. Among these, non-Sudanese nationals constitute about 80% of the total, mostly South Sudanese nationals fleeing back to their country of origin, South Sudan, while 20% are Sudanese refugees.

As some of its neighbours, South Sudan was experiencing challenging times even before the conflict in Sudan began in April 2023. **The country has reached alarming levels of humanitarian needs** as a result of prolonged conflict, and worsened by endemic violence, public health challenges, food insecurity, displacement, and climatic shocks resulting in extraordinary flooding and localised drought.

In 2024, including refugees, it is estimated that 9 million people in South Sudan currently require humanitarian assistance, accounting for more than 70% of the total population, and a staggering 7.1 million people are acutely hungry. In this challenging context, the war in Sudan has severely impacted South Sudan's economy, causing a massive economic crisis, depreciation of the South Sudanese Pound against the US Dollar, and a surge in the prices of essential commodities. As a consequence, **South Sudan is increasingly overwhelmed by the arrival of thousands of refugees and returnees.**

In the country, INTERSOS has been actively involved in supporting Sudanese refugees and South Sudan returnees by working in different locations. Firstly, Between June 2023 and January 2024, INTERSOS provided essential services at Bulukat Transit Camp, including case management for children, arrival kits for women and girls, psychosocial services, material assistance, counselling, and family tracing and reunification for unaccompanied children at two child-friendly spaces.

Following this initial intervention, INTERSOS has been providing assistance in the Renk border area since June 2024, focusing on two transit centres and the Joda border point. These activities include protection services, such as risk monitoring, awareness raising, and managing information desks in the transit camps, as well as the distribution of non-food items, shelter assistance, and cash provisions aiming to contribute to life-saving assistance of the vulnerable returnees and refugees in these areas. **INTERSOS' team in Renk reports a dire situation in overcrowded transit centres, refugee camps, and other border towns, underlying the urgent need for increased engagement to support those most in need.**

Additionally, outside of transit camps, in the destination area of returnee's families, INTERSOS conducts regular monitoring to identify the most vulnerable South Sudanese returnee families. Upon identification, these

families receive in-kind materials, including food items such as maize, wheat, and cooking oil, as well as non-food items like plastic sheets, mosquito nets, blankets, and mats, tailored to their specific needs. As in other countries, INTERSOS activities in South Sudan prioritise protection in its monitoring activities, ensuring that vulnerable individuals are identified and referred to appropriate service providers. These referral pathways facilitate access to essential and much-needed services such as healthcare, education, and nutrition for those in need.



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"Responding to this situation is incredibly challenging; it requires dedicated self-sacrifice, determination, and a deep sense of humanity. Nothing is easy, starting with the dire need for child protection services and mental health and psychosocial support. Many are distressed, sick, hungry, and dealing with extreme heat waves. Some individuals become aggressive and eventually start fighting. Food and shelters are scarce, with up to 15 family members sharing a single room. There is a severe lack of hygiene and sleeping materials. Additionally, family separations are very high"

INTERSOS Project Manager Lino Ghum, currently working in Renk, South Sudan



3. RECOMMENDATIONS

After more than one year of conflict, the situation for civilians, refugees and returnees in both Sudan and neighbouring countries is worsening day after day. INTERSOS teams on the ground have experienced and witnessed extremely dire situations for refugees and returnees in all their countries of operations: Libya, Chad, CAR, and South Sudan. At INTERSOS, we strongly believe that **much more needs to be done to support those currently experiencing displacement**. As the crisis continues to unfold, it is imperative that immediate action is taken in order to assist those most in need, not only within Sudan but also across neighbouring nations. Therefore, in response to humanitarian needs, INTERSOS strongly advocates for the following recommendations:

Recommendations for involved parties to the conflict in Sudan:

- Prioritise negotiations and commit to a sustainable ceasefire to protect civilians from further harm.
- Uphold legal frameworks and respect both International Humanitarian Law, and Human Rights Law as also outlined and committed at the Jeddah declaration, safeguarding the rights and safety of civilians, humanitarian personnel, aid operations, as well as civilian infrastructures, healthcare facilities, and supplies.
- Allow full, rapid, and unimpeded humanitarian access ensuring unhindered delivery of aid and personnel to affected populations without discrimination, in compliance with humanitarian principles, regardless of territorial control.

Recommendations for countries hosting refugees and returnees:

- Continue to provide temporary protection and humanitarian assistance to the civilians fleeing the conflict in Sudan.
- Support the strengthening of public services, community actors and non-governmental organisations to enable effective response to the influx of refugees and displaced persons, ensuring basic needs are met.
- Ensure access and inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers into public services and promote social cohesion initiatives aimed at fostering understanding and collaboration between refugees and host communities to mitigate tensions and promote peaceful coexistence.
- Integrate refugee and host community needs into national development plans and broader development strategies to foster long-term stability and resilience.
- Ensure conflict sensitivity is incorporated in humanitarian and development assistance.

Recommendations for donors:

- Funding is urgently needed to address the severe funding gap to meet the escalating humanitarian needs of affected populations, including refugees, internally displaced persons, and host communities.

We urge donors to immediately release the \$2.1 billion pledged at the 15 April Paris Conference on Sudan, as the current Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan 2024 is only 16.4% funded, as well as ensuring proportional funding that addresses the needs of those arriving in neighbouring countries from Sudan as part of the regional Sudan response.

- Enhance collaboration and engagement around the crisis response expanding involvement in addressing the multifaceted challenges of the crisis, including support for conflict resolution in Sudan and development initiatives in neighbouring countries.
- Step up diplomatic efforts and advocate for political solutions to the root causes of the conflict by engaging all relevant stakeholders to facilitate peace negotiations in order to address the original causes of displacement.

Recommendations for humanitarian and UN leadership:

- Expand advocacy efforts to raise awareness of the Sudanese displacement crisis, its root causes, and the critical situation of those displaced both within Sudan and in neighbouring countries.
- Broaden advocacy on humanitarian access in both Sudan and neighbouring countries to pressure all actors to allow the flow of essential and life-supporting humanitarian aid.
- Enhance collaboration and foster stronger partnerships with local and international actors to improve humanitarian coordination and response mechanisms in order to maximise efficiency and effectiveness.
- Engage with stakeholders facilitating dialogue and engagement with governments, non-state armed groups, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders to promote dialogue, mediation, and community reconciliation initiatives.
- In Sudan, the Humanitarian Country Team should adhere to the existing joint operating principles and rules of engagement with parties to the conflict and further agree on an engagement strategy with them. Furthermore, all possible avenues to expand humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas, to provide urgent humanitarian assistance, especially in the areas that are in IPC 4 and 5, should be pursued.

INTERSOS response to the Sudanese displacement crisis in brief

INTERSOS has been responding to the Sudanese displacement crisis in neighbouring countries by providing emergency assistance and protection to those displaced by the conflict. In Chad, where since April 2023 more than half a million Sudanese refugees have sought shelter, we are constructing refugee camps, providing emergency shelters, and conducting protection activities to support vulnerable women and children. In South Sudan, we assist returnees from Sudan by offering child protection services, psychosocial support, cash, non-food items, shelter, and general protection, including protection risk monitoring and managing information desks in transit camps and Joda's border. In the Central African Republic, we provide aid to Sudanese refugees and host communities, including access to water and delivering psychosocial support, especially for women and children. Lastly, in Libya we support Sudanese refugees by addressing protection risks and vulnerabilities in our existing community centres and through outreach activities. As of June 2024, INTERSOS is in the process of activating operations in Sudan's River Nile and Kassala States to support conflict-affected internally displaced persons and host communities by providing health services, cash assistance, and protection.

Methodology

This policy paper was created with input from INTERSOS missions in Libya, Chad, CAR, and South Sudan. The insights come directly from the experience and testimony of our staff, as well as analysis of INTERSOS internal data. Displacement numbers and other relevant figures have been sourced exclusively from OCHA, UNHCR, IOM, and ACLED as of June 2024.

Limitations

It is important to note that this policy paper is not meant to fully and comprehensively represent all the needs of displaced people. Instead, it aims to highlight, through the direct experiences of INTERSOS teams, some of the challenges faced by those fleeing the conflict in Sudan. This paper should be therefore considered as part of a broader analysis of the situation resulting from the conflict. Additionally, the final recommendations are based on INTERSOS's hands-on experience in assisting displaced individuals and should not be considered comprehensive. Consequently, both the analysis of needs and the recommendations should not be viewed as fully statistically representative of the diverse and constantly evolving context across different countries.

Cover photo: Adré, Chad (July 2023)
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INTERSOS - Humanitarian Organisation

Via Aniene, 26/A, 00198 Rome, Italy

Established in 1992, INTERSOS is an international humanitarian organisation dedicated to delivering aid to the most vulnerable populations in the world's most challenging crises. INTERSOS currently provides humanitarian assistance in 23 countries worldwide, primarily focusing on protection, health, and nutrition, as well as water & sanitation, shelter, non-food items, and education.

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