

Humanitarian situation in Guba woreda, Benishangul Gumuz

OVERVIEW

Thousands of people have crossed from Sudan into Benishangul Gumuz region, Ethiopia, since the outbreak of conflict in Sudan in mid-April 2023. According to local authorities, thousands of people have arrived via unofficial border crossings in Guba woreda, Metekel zone (OCHA accessed 16/06/2023). While some of them lived in Sudan as migrants, many fled conflict in Metekel zone over recent years and were registered in refugee camps in Sudan (KII 14/06/2023; KII 15/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023). Most of them are from the Gumuz ethnic group indigenous to the area (KII 15/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023). Some had already crossed into Guba before the outbreak of conflict in Sudan as the security situation in Metekel had improved (KII 21/06/2023).

According to local authorities, there are also thousands of IDP returnees in Guba woreda whom previous conflict in the area had displaced (KII 14/06/2023; KII 21/06/2023). The exact time frame of their return is unclear.

The arrivals in Guba are concentrated in Almahal, Aswar, and Mankush (OCHA accessed 16/06/2023; KII 15/06/2023). Most have been sheltering under trees with limited protection from the elements, and they have high humanitarian needs, including food and shelter (OCHA accessed 16/06/2023).

The conflict in Metekel zone, which has affected Guba, started in 2019 and has led to violence against civilians and large-scale displacement within the zone and into Sudan. Since the second half of 2022, the intensity of conflict has significantly decreased, and security has improved in the zone.

KEY MESSAGES

- Humanitarian presence and response capacity in Guba are currently limited and insufficient to meet the needs of the returnee population given the impact of two years of restrictions in the woreda.
- Around Almahal, poor road conditions and the rainy season restrict access to some kebeles (KII 28/06/2023). Insecurity also affects some kebeles (KII 21/06/2023; KII 27/06/2023).
- The verification and collection of disaggregated data are necessary to plan an adequately targeted response.

INFORMATION GAPS

- Baseline information on the population in Guba woreda, including the total population, is difficult to establish, and the latest available census data is from 2007.
- Precise figures of arrivals from Sudan and returning IDPs within Guba woreda are difficult to determine, and different sources work with different numbers.
- Local authority figures have not yet been verified, and different sources mention conflicting figures. The number of returnees from Sudan varies between 8,000–12,000, with the IDP returnee figure varying between 9,000–22,000 depending on the source, though the overall population estimate for Guba woreda is 23,600 in 2023.
- There is a lack of verified data on the precise locations and gender and age disaggregation of returnees and returning IDPs.
- There is limited information available about the host community in Guba woreda.
- It is unclear whether any refugees originating from Guba woreda remain in Sudan.

About this report

Aim: this report analyses the humanitarian situation in Guba woreda, Metekel zone, Benishangul Gumuz region, to support decision-making in the response to the crisis.

Methodology: the report is based on the secondary data review of public and non-public sources and key expert interviews with humanitarian staff.

Limitations: humanitarian assessments continue in Guba, and findings are not yet available. Public and non-public information on the crisis is highly limited. New information may invalidate some findings in this report.

Scope: this report only focuses on Guba woreda. For a broader analysis of the impact of the Sudan conflict on Ethiopia, please see ACAPS' analysis report published on 19 May.

Map 1. Guba woreda, Benishangul Gumuz region



Disclaimer: the boundaries, names, and designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by ACAPS.

Source: ACAPS using data from DIVA GIS (accessed 26/06/2023); GADM (accessed 26/06/2023)

GUBA WOREDA PROFILE

Conflict

The conflict in Metekel zone has affected Guba woreda. This conflict is rooted in historical grievances and started in 2019 along ethnic lines, with retaliatory attacks between Gumuz and Amhara communities. Gradually, armed groups and forces, including the Oromo Liberation Army, Gumuz and Fano militia, and neighbouring regional and federal forces, became involved (RVI/PRF 11/2022; EUTF 01/2023; OCHA 30/07/2021 and 19/11/2021). In late 2020, the Federal Government established a command post in Metekel zone to coordinate the operations of federal and regional security forces and to administrate the zone (OCHA 03/05/2022; OCHA/UNDSS 15/06/2022; RVI/PRF 11/2022). Tensions between indigenous communities (including the Gumuz) and non-indigenous Amhara and Oromo communities over ethnic representation and economic influence drove the conflict, drawing in armed groups and fighters from other regions. As the conflict escalated, clashes also erupted between different indigenous groups and between non-indigenous groups (RVI/PRF 11/2022; FP 06/01/2021).

Conflict intensity decreased in Metekel zone in the second half of 2022 following peace processes in the region involving communities, armed groups, and regional governments, as well as improved security following 'counterinsurgency' campaigns under the command post (OCHA 09/08/2022; RVI/PRF 11/2022; Addis Standard 12/12/2022 and 19/10/2022). Despite the decrease, the underlying causes of conflict remain, including political representation and self-rule (RVI/PRF 11/2022).

Displacement

The conflict has caused displacement both within the woreda and to Sudan (OCHA 29/01/2021 and 03/05/2022). Until early 2022 and at the height of the conflict, 350,000 people were displaced within Metekel zone, including Guba woreda, and 77,000 were displaced to Amhara region (OCHA 10/01/2021 and 29/01/2021). As at April 2022 and according to the latest publicly available figure for Guba woreda, 19,000 people remained displaced (OCHA/UNDSS 15/06/2022). UNHCR reported that around 7,000 people fled to Sudan in 2021 (OCHA 03/05/2022; UNHCR 31/05/2021).

As the security situation has improved, there has been an overall decline in the number of internally displaced people in Metekel zone. The latest round of data collected by IOM/DTM in January 2023 indicates that over 94,000 people remained displaced within Metekel zone, while over 67,000 had returned (IOM 07/06/2023 a and 07/06/2023 b). Given access challenges linked with the security situation at the time, neither figure includes Guba woreda.



Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD)

Guba woreda is the site of the GERD, which the Government states is almost complete. The USD 4 billion project is expected to double Ethiopia's energy output and provide energy for the population not yet connected to the grid (DW 08/04/2023). It started producing energy in February 2022 (Al Jazeera 20/02/2022). The dam has been a source of tension between Ethiopia and countries downstream. In 2021, the Ethiopian Government accused Sudan and Egypt of supporting non-state armed groups in Metekel zone to destabilise the region (ICG 24/06/2021).

The filling of the dam reservoir since mid-2020 has necessitated the resettlement of some communities in Guba and Wembera woredas, although it was unclear if the resettlement process had been finalised as at June 2023 (EU/IMMAP 02/04/2022).

HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Arrivals from Sudan and IDP returnees in Guba woreda have significant humanitarian needs. While the Government and humanitarian organisations have provided some cash, shelter, and NFI assistance, overall humanitarian, government, and community support is limited.

There have been reports of high **shelter** needs, with arrivals staying in makeshift shelters or under trees, some of them for weeks (OCHA accessed 16/06/2023). The damage and poor conditions of infrastructure resulting from the conflict over the last years have caused difficulties in accommodating displaced people in community structures (KII 21/06/2023). Some returnees have arrived at their homes to find that the conflict had destroyed these and need materials for rebuilding (KII 21/06/2023; KII 27/06/2023).

The affected population is also in need of **food**. The conflict has severely damaged **WASH** infrastructure (KII 14/06/2023). There are health risks associated with the lack of safe drinking water in the area, combined with a lack of **health** services (OCHA accessed 16/06/2023). The nutritional situation of the affected population is unclear. **Protection** services, such as child protection and sex and gender-based violence response, are needed (KII 21/06/2023; OCHA accessed 16/06/2023). High levels of violence against civilians characterised the conflict in Metekel zone, which means that many people likely need **mental health** support (FP 06/01/2021).

The conflict has also disrupted **education**, causing damage to schools and the displacement of teachers and students (KII 14/06/2023).

IDP returnees and returnees from Sudan will largely intend to return to their places of origin within Guba woreda. Upon return, they will need further support, such as **agricultural inputs** and **livelihood support** (KII 27/06/2023).

There is little information available about the situation and specific needs of the host community.

ACCESS CONSTRAINTS

Access to Guba woreda was only re-established in the past months, as it was inaccessible during the height of the conflict in Metekel zone. Access to Guba woreda in convoys has become possible via the road from Asosa (KII 21/06/2023; KII 14/06/2023; OCHA 14/06/2023). Insecurity and the rainy season prevent access to some of Guba's 17 kebeles, including around Almahal (KII 21/06/2023; KII 28/06/2023). The *Kiremt* rainy season in Guba woreda usually lasts from June–September (NMA 2023).

The security situation in Guba woreda remains fluid and unpredictable despite an overall reduction in conflict across Metekel zone since the second half of 2022 (KII 21/06/2023; KII 27/06/2023). Connectivity issues challenge the exchange of information among responders (KII 21/06/2023).

KEY FIGURES

| | GUBA WOREDA | METEKEL ZONE | SOURCES |
|----------------------------|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Population (2007 census) | Urban: 16% Rural: 84% Total: 14,907 | Urban: 14% Rural: 86% Total: 276,367 | WB accessed 26/06/2023 |
| Population (2023 estimate) | Total: 23,618 | Total: 514,251 | OCHA accessed 26/06/2023 |
| Main ethnic groups | N/A | Gumuz: 37% Shinasha: 22% Amhara: 17% Agew-Awi: 11% Oromo: 11% | WB accessed 26/06/2023 |
| Religion | Islam: 87% Orthodox: 13% Other: 0.2% | Orthodox: 54% Traditional: 18% Islam: 20% Other: 8% | WB accessed 26/06/2023 |
| Livelihood zones | Sorghum, maize, and millet farming Mining | Sorghum, maize, millet, teff, and coffee farming Mining Highlands cereal and pulses farming | FEWS NET 2018 USAID/GOE 02/2016 |
| IDPs | Security factors prevented access to Guba woreda at the time of data collection | 94,768 IDPs (this figure does not include Guba woreda) | IOM 12/06/2023 IOM 07/06/2023 a |
| Returns | Security factors prevented access to Guba woreda at the time of data collection | 67,735 returnees (this figure does not include Guba woreda) | IOM 07/06/2023 b IOM 12/06/2023 |