

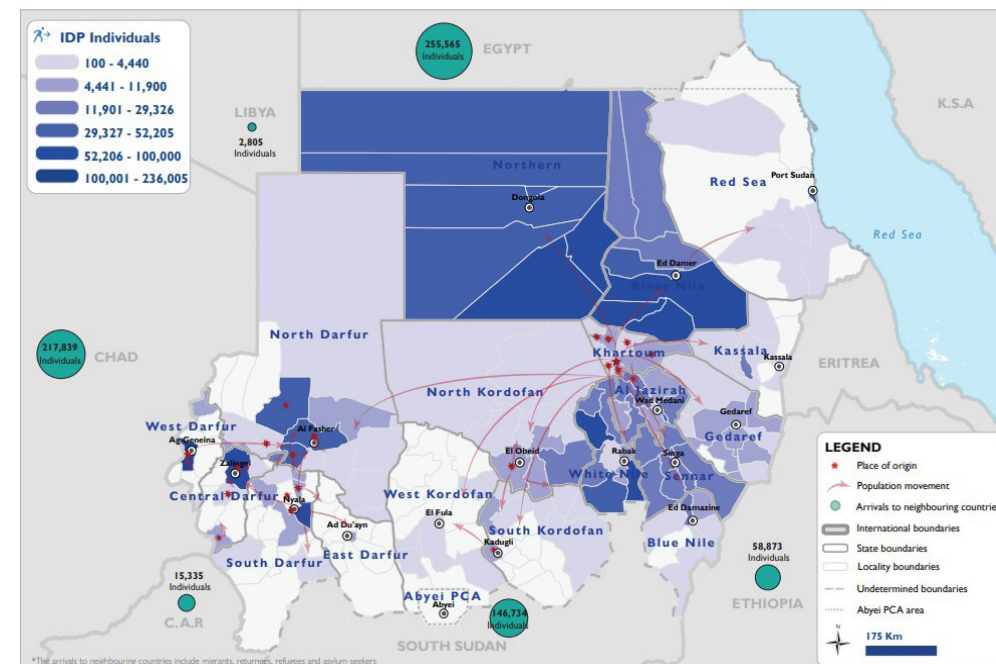
### HOW HAS THE CURRENT CONFLICT AFFECTED WEST DARFUR?

On 15 April 2023, the alliance between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) collapsed into violence over a power struggle. The conflict initially erupted in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, but has spread across the country (OCHA accessed 09/07/2023; ACLED 26/05/2023). The SAF and RSF had been recruiting and training fighters in Darfur since 2022. There have been reports of existing tensions between the two leaders of the forces, and they were both fighting over power and influence before signing a Political Framework Agreement in December 2022, which aimed at returning Sudan to civilian rule (ACLED 26/05/2023; RVI 05/2023; Ayin Network 26/03/2023).

On 24 April, fighting spread to North and West Darfur, and clashes between the SAF and RSF quickly included various communal militias (MSF 06/06/2023 a; The Guardian 30/04/2023). Darfur is an area that has long faced interethnic violence and marginalisation and has become a hotspot of fighting. The RSF formed in Darfur during the 2003 Darfur war and continues to draw significant support in the area from the Rizeigat and other Arab tribes, including former Janjaweed groups (ACLED 26/05/2023). El Geneina locality in western West Darfur has experienced the most severe fighting levels outside of Khartoum (IOM 27/06/2023).

Despite multiple ceasefire agreements, including most recent statement of the Sudanese Sovereign Council, which represents the SAF, on the intention to stop the war with RSF, the conflict has accelerated in West Darfur (SudanTribune 13/07/2023; Al Jazeera 27/06/2023 and 01/06/2023; Reuters 04/06/2023). On 14 June, the West Darfur Governor, Khamis Abdullah Abbakar, a member of the Masalit ethnic community, was violently killed, triggering more clashes and leaving Masalit communities without any representation. On 13 July, a mass grave was found outside El Geneina with at least 87 ethnic Masalit and others allegedly killed by RSF and their allied militia (OHCHR 13/07/2023; Le Monde 20/06/2023; The Guardian 15/06/2023). Since 2019, there has been a resurgence of conflict in West Darfur, which the October 2021 coup accelerated before the outbreak of civil war in April 2022 (USIP 04/2022). The situation in West Darfur presents a complex and intricate set of dynamics and stakeholders, setting it apart from other regions in Sudan.

### Displacement figures for West Darfur state



Source: IOM (04/07/2023)

#### Key priorities

- **12% of the countrywide IDPs** (over 255,800 people) are from West Darfur, and 11% (nearly 248,100) are displaced within West Darfur.
- **100% of newly displaced people** in West Darfur stay with host communities in nine locations.
- The main priority of IDPs is **food**.
- There were **491,000 pre-existing IDPs in West Darfur** as at November 2022, including 83,000 IDPs in the state capital El Geneina.
- In 2022, **25 villages** were hosting IDPs.



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## INFORMATION GAPS

- There is limited up-to-date information specific to West Darfur, as reports often include it within data for the wider Darfur region.
- There is limited information on women, children, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups in West Darfur.
- Data on access to WASH and health services in West Darfur is scarce.
- Bank services are disrupted, and fuel prices have increased countrywide, but there is no up-to-date information on inflation or the economy in West Darfur.
- There is a lack of information on access to education, schools' infrastructure, and current illiteracy rates.
- There has been a lack of information on roads and infrastructure because of access constraints in West Darfur since the early 2000s.
- There is no recent data on how the conflict affects people with disabilities, but the number of people with disabilities in West Darfur is likely to be high because of protracted conflicts in the region.

As the armed Arab groups operating in this area are backed by the RSF, the Masalit and non-Arab communities face a higher probability of being displaced to neighbouring states and across the border into Chad. These circumstances strongly indicate that the humanitarian needs in the region will likely escalate, and the prevailing insecurity will continue to constrain access to the affected areas.

As at 4 July, the conflict had displaced an estimated 2,231,523 individuals (447,031 households) across Sudan since 15 April, and over 697,151 had crossed the border into neighbouring countries, including the Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, and South Sudan. Although people fleeing West Darfur usually move to Chad because of its proximity, people from West Darfur have also moved within the state and to North Darfur. As at 4 July, more than 217,800 people had arrived in Chad from Sudan (IOM 04/07/2023). Chad was already hosting over 583,000 refugees before the crisis in Sudan, limiting its reception capacity. Most refugees arriving in Chad from West Darfur arrive in the provinces of Ouaddai, Sila, and Wadi Fira. Arab and non-Arab communities also reside in Chad, so tensions will likely persist beyond the West Darfur border (IOM 20/06/2023 and 30/05/2023; IOM et al. 16/05/2023). Within West Darfur, the main localities hosting IDPs are Al Riyad, Al Shati, Al Zihour, Ardamata, As Salam A & B, and El Emtidata in El Geneina locality, Foro Baranga locality, and Kulbus locality (IOM 04/07/2023).

### Attacks on civilians

El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, has seen the most severe levels of conflict outside of Khartoum. As at 20 June, clashes between RSF-backed Arab militias and Masalit tribes had killed at least 1,200 people and injured over 2,000 in West Darfur (Le Monde 20/06/2023; SIHA Network 16/06/2023; MSF 06/06/2023 a; IOM 30/05/2023; ACLED 26/05/2023). Deaths and injuries are likely higher, but communication service disruptions prevent data collection and sharing. Some sources have reported 5,000 people killed and at least 8,000 injured since 24 April (CNN 19/06/2023). Attacks on civilians have been indiscriminate and have particularly targeted Masalit communities. There have been reports of summary executions of civilians on the road between El Geneina and the border with Chad, referring to situations where someone is accused of a crime and killed immediately. There have also been close-range and open-fire shootings in crowds (OHCHR 24/06/2023). Between April and mid-June, at least 200 children died in West Darfur alone (UNICEF 16/06/2023). A mass grave was found outside El Geneina on 13 July, with at least 87 ethnic Masalit and others allegedly killed by RSF and their allied militia (OHCHR 13/07/2023).



## Sexual and gender-based violence

Displaced women and girls are experiencing movement restrictions and are subject to psychological stress, mostly because they have been subject to physical and sexual abuse. The RSF has intercepted convoys of women and children trying to escape West Darfur. The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa reported 13 cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in El Geneina alone on 8–9 June. Communication constraints have prevented further reports. Psychosocial support services are unavailable because safe spaces for women and girls have been looted in conflict, and community-based protection networks are no longer functioning in affected areas (Sudan Tribune 18/06/2023; UNFPA 09/05/2023).

## Attacks on civilian infrastructure and services

Since 24 April, there have been reports of indiscriminate shooting in residential areas and looting of healthcare facilities and warehouses in West Darfur. The burning down of infrastructure was also reported in El Geneina, where clashes reduced 89 sites to ashes, re-displacing over 85,000 people, and a local market was destroyed by fire. Clashes have also affected electricity networks and other utilities and caused the closure of hospitals. The destruction of these essential services has worsened the existing humanitarian crisis and slowed the delivery of much-needed assistance to those affected (OCHA 24/05/2023; IOM 30/05/2023; SIHA Network 16/06/2023).

The population cannot access basic services. As at 16 June, water provision in El Geneina relied on tanker deliveries following the destruction of water utilities. The situation outside was often too dangerous for people to gather in public places while waiting for water. Water scarcity has further intensified people's needs (REACH 07/07/2023; SIHA Network 16/06/2023; BBC 15/06/2023). As at 20 June, water was still limited in many areas of El Geneina (Le Monde 20/06/2023; OCHA 13/06/2023; CNN 22/06/2023). Electricity networks have not been operating since the end of May, preventing telephone communication and constraining information-gathering about the state of infrastructure and access to services (REACH 07/07/2023; Le Monde 20/06/2023).

## Health

Many unburied dead bodies remain exposed in public places, increasing the risk of spreading diseases (CNN 22/06/2023). As at 16 June, 37 women had died from childbirth complications and almost 200 dialysis patients had died in El Geneina because of the collapse of health services and attacks on hospitals (SIHA Network 16/06/2023). The number of deaths caused by disruptions to medical services is likely higher than reported. In West Darfur, the medicine

supply for treating obstetric haemorrhage, pregnancy-induced hypertension, eclampsia, and preeclampsia was only enough to last until the end of May (UNFPA 09/05/2023). Medicines and health supplies usually come from Khartoum, but the conflict is disrupting the supply chain to all states, including West Darfur. There is no updated information on the situation.

There has been looting of West Darfur hospitals and health facilities, and health practitioners cannot access supplies and medicines. Many injured people cannot receive treatment or be transported to places with medical capacity. Chad is usually the closest option for treatment, but fighting and patrolling armed groups stop aid workers en route, preventing this. There is no security guarantee for humanitarian organisations transporting patients (MSF 07/06/2023). As at 6 June, the hospital in Kereneik town was the only one providing some services, but it was running out of supplies. This healthcare facility was the only one available for over 480,000 people in the area (MSF 06/06/2023 a and 23/02/2023). As at 6 July, health facilities in Foro Baranga, Kulbus, Jebel Moon, and Morni were functioning despite the challenges (UNICEF 09/07/2023). The Sudan Doctors' Union is present in the area and is reporting the death toll in El Geneina. As at 6 June, some Médecins Sans Frontières staff remained in Kereneik Hospital, but there is no updated information on how many staff remain in the area (HRW 21/06/2023; MSF 06/06/2023 b).

## Humanitarian operations and access

Armed groups targeting health facilities, shelters, and humanitarian workers constrain access. Between 15 April and 22 June, the conflict killed at least 22 health workers countrywide (OCHA 22/06/2023). Between 15 April and 28 May, violence in the Darfur states killed eight humanitarian workers and injured 18 (OCHA 28/05/2023; WFP 16/04/2023; UN News 16/04/2023). Information for West Darfur specifically is not publicly available.

The start of the rainy season also causes some access constraints. On 6 June, some 'wadis' (temporary rivers) were full, preventing humanitarian responders from accessing certain areas along the border between West Darfur and Ouaddai (UNICEF 12/06/2023).

Humanitarians face administrative and bureaucratic access impediments and physical access constraints such as insecurity and flooding. Aid workers report challenges obtaining visas to enter Sudan and receiving the necessary permissions to move staff and supplies throughout the country (OCHA 28/05/2023 and 08/12/2022).

As at 20 May 2023, eight protection cluster organisations were operating in West Darfur (Global Protection Cluster 20/05/2023). The total number of organisations present is limited; most have evacuated their humanitarian staff, constraining the capacity to respond to the needs of affected people. Before the recent conflict, 39 organisations were present in West Darfur (OCHA 25/03/2022).



## WHICH STAKEHOLDERS AND ALLIANCES ARE AFFECTING OR DETERMINING THE SITUATION?

### Main ethnic groups

West Darfur has a complex dynamic that differs from the rest of the country, and it is necessary to understand the stakeholders in the region to understand this dynamic. The main ethnic groups in the state are the Rizeigat (the Arab tribes) and the Masalit, who have dominated the political and security space since the 1970–1980s. West Darfur also has strong links to Chad, with both ethnic groups having cross-border kinship ties. These links and regional political dynamics have embedded conflict in West Darfur. Other ethnic groups in West Darfur include the Borgo, Dajo, Erenga, Fur, Gimir, and Zaghawa (UN Sudan 06/2021; Small Arms Survey 06/2009; HRW 05/2004).

### The Masalit

The Masalit (or Massalat) are a non-Arab ethnic tribe. They tend to live in remote areas of Sudan, specifically Dar Masalit, and are usually located around El Geneina. They comprise approximately 60% of West Darfur's population (UN Sudan 06/2021; HRW 05/2004). Today, most of the tribe's members are dedicated to agropastoral activities, farming millet, sorghum, peanuts, sesame, okra, and various fruits and raising cattle, sheep, and goats (WFP 31/08/2022; Joshua Project accessed 09/06/2023). Violent encroachment on farming areas and increased pressure to share their traditional lands led to the Darfuri rebellion in 2003, in which the Fur, Gimir, Masalit, and other African tribes fought against Khartoum-backed Arab militias in a violent civil war that remains largely unresolved. Unity among the African tribes was difficult to maintain, and the various armed factions have broken into different groups competing for access to political and economic power (UN Sudan 06/2021). The Masalits do not feel politically represented, even though the last Governor of West Darfur, Khamis Abdullah Abbakar, was a Masalit. Abbakar was assassinated on 14 June, demonstrating the vulnerability of this ethnic group (The Guardian 15/06/2023). Most IDPs in West Darfur are Masalit and continue to report that armed nomadic communities restrict access to their farmlands, increasing their dependence on humanitarian aid (UN Sudan 06/2021).

### Arab tribes (Rizeigat)

The Arab and African communities have been fighting for decades over resources and access to land. The main Arab tribes in West Darfur are known as the Rizeigat subgroups. Under environmental pressures, which have intensified over the past few decades, these groups have migrated towards the south and east. The Rizeigat are divided into several

large clans, including the Mahamid, Mahariya, and Nawaiba. The current leader of the RSF, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (commonly known as 'Hemedti') is part of the Mahariya ethnic group (DBpedia accessed 23/06/2023; Al Jazeera 16/04/2023). The Arab groups have cross-border lineages in Chad and Libya, engaging in nomadic pastoralism and trade. As a pastoralist community in peripheral areas, they have faced decades of landlessness and marginalisation in Chad and Sudan. The former National Congress Party regime organised Arab-dominated local security and militia forces to counter the demands of African groups for increased autonomy, setting Arab groups against the Masalit and other African communities in West Darfur. Tensions between Rizeigat subgroups contribute to tension in the area, as some Arab communities in El Geneina support RSF General Hemedti's rival, Musa Hilal (Al Jazeera 03/05/2023; UN Sudan 06/2021; WFP 01/07/2019).

### The Fur

The Fur community are Nilo-Saharan-speaking, Islamic, sedentary farming people who rely mainly on millet cultivation during the rainy seasons. The Fur were an independent sultanate until the British abolished it in 1916. They predominate in Jebel Marra, Wadi Salih, and Zalingei provinces (WFP 31/08/2022; HRW 05/2004). They are Muslim and long ago adopted Arab names and dress styles (Minority Rights accessed 09/06/2023; Al Jazeera 26/02/2023). Fur communities struggle to retain their land from nomadic communities. Since the mid-1980s, they have formed their own militias against Janjaweed militias and the Janjaweed declaration of war against Darfur's black and non-Arab groups (Minority Rights accessed 09/06/2023).

### Armed stakeholders

#### Rapid Support Forces

The RSF has its roots in the 2003 Darfur war and the various Arab militias and security forces that Khartoum created, including the Border Guard and Janjaweed forces. Recruitment initially focused on the Mahariya clan of the Rizeigat community, which resides mainly in Darfur, with strong kinship links to communities in Chad. Until 2017, the group operated under the National Intelligence and Security Services (now General Intelligence Service) before coming under the office of the Presidency. The RSF supported the 2019 revolution and the October 2021 coup. Their control of gold mining and expansion of economic opportunities have accompanied their rise to political dominance. RSF fighters fought for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Yemen and maintain relations with Russia and the Wagner Group. Like other Darfuri armed groups, the RSF also participated in the conflict in Libya (LRB 18/05/2023). Currently, Brig. General Dagalo, a former commander of the paramilitary Border Guards and Janjaweed militia leader, commands the force (Dabanga Sudan 2015). There are reports that various formal security forces and militia groups, including the Border

Guards and Central Reserve Police, are uniting under the banner of the RSF (The Conversation 19/04/2023; HSBA 04/2017). As at May 2023, the RSF had around 70,000–150,000 members (Al Jazeera 18/05/2023).

The RSF is linked to the Janjaweed, and the sense that the Government in Khartoum neglects them is a founding motivation for both groups. In the case of the Janjaweed, there was a feeling of resentment towards the Government for not responding appropriately to the severe drought in the Sahelia, the subsequent starvation, the outbreak of war between north and South Sudan, and the weakening of indigenous dispute-solving mechanisms (Britannica 13/07/2023; The Conversation 18/06/2019).

### Sudanese Armed Forces

The SAF is the national armed forces; General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, a military commander, is their leader (The Guardian 27/04/2023). Estimates indicate that the SAF has at least 200,000 soldiers. It has an advantage over the RSF since it has an air force and access to heavy weaponry, tanks, and armoured personnel carriers (Al Jazeera 18/05/2023). The SAF has many business interests, including large-scale agricultural, weapon, and ammunition production, as well as banking. The SAF has strong ties with Egypt. Government officials in Port Sudan have mediated humanitarian access, with the Humanitarian Aid Commission, General Intelligence Service, and the SAF controlling the movement of all aid assets and staff (C4ADS 29/06/2022; RVI/Xcept 10/05/2023; Logistics Cluster 06/06/2023).

### Sudan Liberation Army, later Sudanese Liberation Movement

Predominantly Fur and Masalit communities officially organised the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM) in February 2003 against the Khartoum Government, but the origins of the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) trace back to the late 1980s when African tribes joined forces to oppose a government-backed Arab alliance harassing farming communities in the region. The SLM primarily comprises people from the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa tribes (Sudan Tribune accessed 06/06/2023; PBS accessed 06/06/2023). SLM groups and their supporters demanded a secular state after the violence and marginalisation that the Bashir-era Islamist regime was seen to be perpetrating in Darfur. In October 2005, the SLM split into a mostly Fur faction, under the leadership of the original leader Abdel Wahid al Nur, and a group under the leadership of Minni Arkou Minnawi, which mostly drew support from his Zaghawa tribe. Minni Minnawi is the current Governor of the Darfur region (Al Jazeera 01/06/2023; Minority Rights accessed 09/06/2023). During the Juba Peace Agreement in 2020, the SLM did not agree to the conditions and did not recognise the transitional government as legitimate because it contained a military component. Because of this disagreement, the SLM did not participate in negotiations (IDEA 2021).

## Main alliances

The conflict and alliances in West Darfur are complex, as more stakeholders are involved than in Khartoum. Arab armed groups and non-Arab communities claim ownership and political control of the land. In West Darfur, Arab armed groups, particularly the Rizeigat Abbala, have allegedly provided the RSF with weapons. The RSF is fighting to gain control of the region over the Masalit and non-Arab communities (Al Jazeera 27/04/2023 and 01/06/2023). The current RSF includes many former members of Janjaweed militia. In 2022, the RSF and Janjaweed militia attacked the Masalit community in Kereneik town, killing at least 200 people (The Guardian 26/04/2022; Britannica 13/07/2023). During recent clashes, the local West Darfur police, mostly consisting of non-Arabs, called on community members to arm and defend themselves (France24 19/05/2023; Al Jazeera 27/04/2023 and 01/06/2023). The situation in West Darfur is much more complicated than simply confrontations between the RSF and SAF. There does not appear to be any stakeholder in West Darfur that can counter the RSF, leaving the Masalit incredibly vulnerable and resulting in displacement within the state and to Chad.

## PRE-CRISIS CONTEXT

Even before the current increase in conflict, environmental conditions and widespread insecurity have driven significantly high levels of humanitarian need in West Darfur for several decades.

INDICATORS AS AT 2022	WEST DARFUR	NATIONAL
Population 2022	1.9 million	47.9 million
IDPs	323,469	2.9 million
Refugees	448	1.2 million
Food security	42% of the state population in IPC 3 and IPC 4	24% of the population in IPC 3 and IPC 4
Chronic malnutrition (severe and moderate) prevalence among children under five	35%	38%
Global acute malnutrition prevalence among children under five	19% (around 80,000 children)	16%
Access to sanitation	76%	72%
Access to drinking water	63%	60%
Poverty rate	55%	32%

Sources: UNICEF 21/03/2023; OCHA (25/09/2022); IPC (21/06/2022)

## Demographics

West Darfur is located in the western part of Sudan, bordering Chad. Beida, El Geneina (the capital city), and Kereneik are the largest localities in West Darfur in regard to population, farming, pastoral activities, and trade. People are often known as 'African farmers' or 'Arab nomads'; such categorisations miss the nuances of shifting livelihood patterns and tribal affiliations (UN Sudan 06/2021).

## Population

As at 2022, 1.9 million people lived in West Darfur, equivalent to only 4% of the 48 million countrywide population. 40% of the population of West Darfur were under 18 years old (755,700 aged 0–18), with an additional 215,934 aged 18–24 (UNICEF 2022). The ethnic groups present in the state are Aarb, Bargo, Dago, Eringa, Fallata, Fur, Howsaa, Mararit, Masalit, Misseriya-Jebel, Moon, Tama, and Zaghawa, but the predominant groups are the Masalit and the Fur (UNICEF 2022; HRW 05/2004).

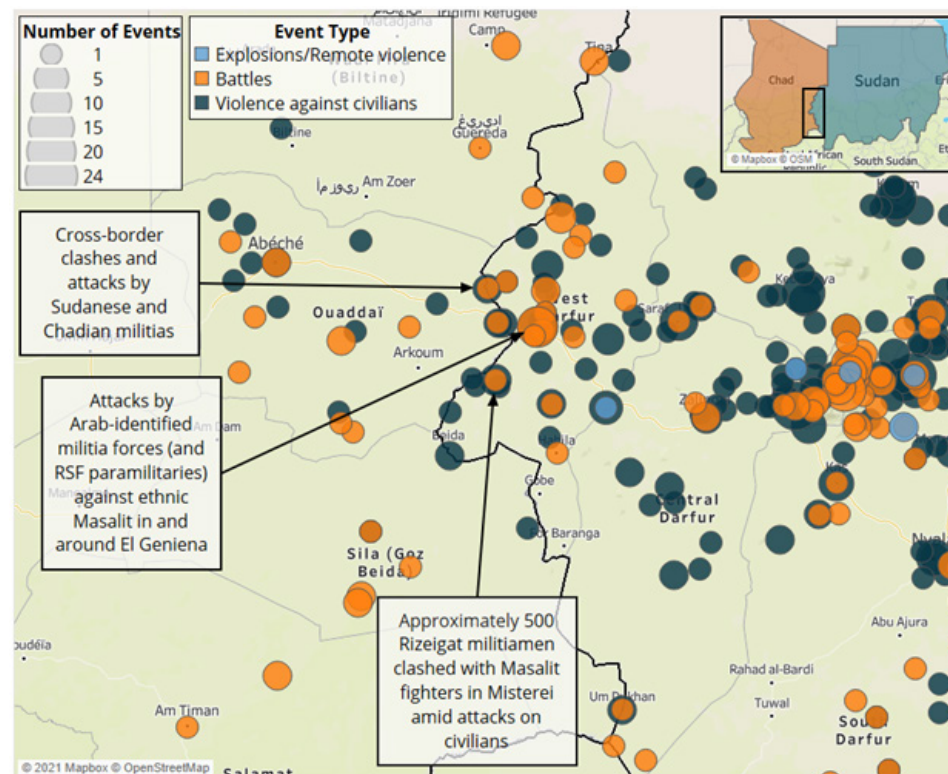
## Politics

For decades, the central Government has neglected and ignored West Darfur, as reflected in political representation. In past years, communities in West Darfur have relied on community dispute resolution mechanisms under the native administration, but non-compliance and tensions between traditional leaders and youth have been weakening this system since 2021 (Global Protection Cluster 05/2022). To stabilise the conflicts in Blue Nile, Darfur, and South Kordofan states, the transitional government, the Sudan Revolutionary Front, and an alliance of armed groups signed the Juba Peace Agreement (JPA) on 3 October 2020. The JPA aimed to address the root causes of marginalisation in Sudan by introducing a more decentralised form of governance and giving a more significant share of political power, participation, and wealth to the peripheries. The agreement incorporated a federal structure, granting different powers to each region, although the extent of those powers remains unclear. The JPA also emphasised the integration of individual members of armed groups into the national security forces (RVI 15/11/2022; IDEA 2021; Chatham House 07/12/2020). Attempts to establish transitional security arrangements lacked central organisation, with each region having its own mechanisms and institutions. As at March 2023, the implementation of the JPA remained challenged, and violence in the Darfur region continued, with retaliatory attacks between armed groups and rival communities over resources (Dabanga Sudan 07/03/2023).

Despite the former Governor of West Darfur, Khamis Abbakar, being Masalit, the community did not feel fully represented (Le Monde 20/06/2023; The Guardian 15/06/2023). The Governor and his militia remained aligned with the SAF and the RSF during the October 2021 coup and the decision to dissolve the country's transitional government. At the same time, Abbakar affirmed he was against a military government (BBC 22/04/2023; Middle East Eye 01/11/2021).

To protect civilians and support humanitarian response, the UN created the African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2007, which had a strong presence in West Darfur. Their activities ended between 2019–2020 because of pressure from Sudan's civilian-military transitional government and their intention to meet the region's needs. UNAMID's withdrawal left a security vacuum and many civilians unprotected (TNH 25/05/2021; UN 27/06/2021).

## Organised Political Violence near the Sudan-Chad Border (1) Jan 2019-15 Jan 2021



Source: ACLED (21/01/2021)

Confrontations between the Masalit and Rizeigat communities, which have continued for several years, affect local politics and dynamics. In 2021, the murder of a Rizeigat member, allegedly by a Masalit member, increased the violence. The Governor of West Darfur accused the Chadian militias of intervening during the confrontations, and his residence was consequently attacked. These cross-border tensions and clashes between Sudanese and Chadian militias have been recurrent over territory control and revenge for robberies and killings (ACLED 21/01/2021; Darfur24 19/01/2021).



## Economy

In 2022, West Darfur was among the states where the civilian population took the brunt of the macroeconomic effect of political instability and conflict in Sudan. This effect is seen in the increased cost of living, such as the 200% increase in staple food prices, 318% rise in inflation, and 600% increase in electricity tariffs compared to 2021 (Global Protection Cluster 05/2022). The prices of food basket items have been gradually increasing, and in the first quarter of 2022, these prices in West Darfur had increased by 31% since the last quarter of 2021 (WFP 21/08/2022). In 2021, in some remote areas in eastern and western Sudan, the availability of food commodities in the markets was below average. The scarcity of fuel and high transportation costs affected the food supply chain. Petrol prices rose by about 23%, and diesel prices increased by more than 8% (IPC 05/2021). According to the 2014/15 National Baseline Household Budget Survey, 64.1% of West Darfur's population lived in poverty (AfDB 06/2018). There are no updated figures on poverty in West Darfur, but the country and the state have undergone significant social and economic transformations as the conflict has affected livelihoods, markets have been looted, and fuel costs have increased. Poverty is likely to be above the 64% from 2014–2015 and remain high.

## Access to land and resources

The communities in West Darfur, often divided as 'African' and 'Arab', have had historical tensions over land tenure. Localised drought has worsened this, reducing the availability of fertile land. Desertification, population growth, and agricultural expansion in Darfur are worsening the scarcity of land and water resources – the recent causes of conflict (Climate Diplomacy accessed 06/06/2023). Climate change has heightened the competition for access to water sources, pastures, and traditional grazing lands, leading to fresh cycles of intercommunal conflict, particularly in West Darfur (SIPRI 05/2022). Research shows that approximately 40% of Sudan's internal conflicts in the past six decades can be attributed to the exploitation of natural resources, including competition over scarce resources such as fertile land and water (UNEP 04/11/2022). In Darfur, devastating droughts during the 1970–1980s increased the competition over scarce land and water resources. This competition worsened pre-existing ethnic tensions and, along with the country's deep political and economic imbalances and poor institutional land management capacity, was a significant trigger of the 1993 conflict (Climate Diplomacy accessed 16/06/2023).

The dispute over land and its resources increased in 2013 when different tribes began to claim rights to the exploitation of gold, adding a nuance to the conflict in Darfur. These disputes centred around the Jebel Amer gold mine, which stretches for around 10km under the sandy hills of North Darfur. Gold became more indispensable when South Sudan separated from the rest of the country and Sudan lost access to large sections of oil reserves (ACLEDD 12/10/2020; Enough Project 05/2013).

## Ethnic identities

Violent clashes between communities in West Darfur have persisted since 2019 (OCHA 25/09/2022). Most of the conflict is between the Arab Rizeigat tribe and the non-Arab Masalit, who compete over dwindling land and water resources (Al Jazeera 27/04/2023). Beida, El Geneina, and Kereneik localities are some of the most affected, as they have witnessed repeated violence cycles since 2019. One reason for this cyclical violence was the May 2019 withdrawal from the state of UNAMID, which was there as a part of the peacekeeping mission's planned drawdown from Sudan (UN Sudan 06/2021).

Since 2021, the conflict in El Geneina and the Masteri area of Beida locality has become increasingly racialised, with attacks based on skin colour (UN Sudan 06/2021). For centuries, the term 'Arabs' has mostly referred to those who speak Arabic, as opposed to a local language, or those who lead nomadic, non-agricultural existences. With time, Arabs became government allies, and African groups considered themselves opposition. People are also making a skin colour distinction, and blackness is associated with servitude. This racialisation stems from the association of blackness with slavery, particularly in West Africa. That type of rhetoric between communities has become increasingly hostile, and the social fabric has steadily dissolved (NYT 03/10/2004; UN Sudan 06/2021). Between January–April 2021, El Geneina town became the site of large-scale intercommunal violence, primarily between the Arab and Masalit African communities. The killing of two Arab men triggered this violence, which escalated in April after the killing of two Masalit men (OCHA 05/04/2021; UN Sudan 06/2021). According to the protection cluster, the violence in 2021 resulted in the deaths of over 392 individuals and the injuring of 434 civilians. IOM reported that intercommunal violence killed 497 people and injured 508 in El Geneina between January–April 2022 (Global Protection Cluster 05/2022). The response from authorities to intercommunal violence typically involves deploying a significant number of forces, such as the SAF, the RSF, and the Central Reserve Police (ACLEDD 29/10/2021; Global Protection Cluster 05/2022).



## PRE-CRISIS LIVING CONDITIONS

### Poverty

In 2014–2015, 64.1% of West Darfur's population lived in poverty, well above the national global poverty prevalence of 36.1% (AfDB 06/2018). Sudan has the highest poverty rate in North Africa. According to projections, around 32% of Sudan's population lived below the national poverty line in 2022 (Statista 28/04/2023).

### Livelihoods

Historically, Masalit and African communities in West Darfur have primarily relied on agropastoralism, but insecurity, displacement, and climate hazards have caused people to diversify their livelihoods. A 2021 Food Security Monitoring System study showed that 36% of people in West Darfur relied on non-agricultural wage labour as their primary income source, followed by small businesses (19%), crops (11%), and agricultural wage labour (10%) (WFP 02/05/2021). Droughts and conflict have caused the loss of livelihoods, leading young herders with economic incentives to engage in illicit and violent activities (Climate Diplomacy accessed 27/06/2023). Pastoral Arab communities have also faced livelihood pressures, undertaking new activities such as gold mining, vehicle transport between markets, and migration (Tufts University 28/01/2019). Pastoral communities depend on seasons, and many tribes are nomadic and move according to resource access. The competition for scarce resources has triggered cases of pastoralism-related violence. An example of this was seen following the southward expansion of the Sahara desert when drought and the migration of camel pastoralists increased competition over land and indigeneity (Climate Diplomacy accessed 27/06/2023; African Arguments 25/06/2007).

### Health

The state's main healthcare facility is El Geneina Teaching Hospital. The under-five mortality rate for West Darfur is 110 out of 1,000 live births – significantly above the national average of 68 out of every 1,000 live births (OCHA 25/09/2022). As at 2020, West Darfur's infant mortality rate was 71% – significantly higher than Khartoum's 45% or Central Darfur's 44%. This rate is directly associated with inequality, chronic malnutrition, low birth weight, home birth, early motherhood, access to water, and other reasons (Boutayeb et al. 19/03/2020).

West Darfur has had high infant mortality figures for years. In 2014, the under-five mortality rate was 91%, and neonatal mortality was 39%. For several years, children have lacked access

to various food and vitamins, making their health more vulnerable and exposing them to disease. Poor nutritional conditions since 2014 have affected children's immune systems, and caused below-average growth (MICS 2014 a).

### Diseases

The state reported dengue fever cases in 2022, and the rainy season due in the coming months will likely increase the number of cases. A dengue fever outbreak started in Sudan on 28 June 2022 and spread to 82 localities across 12 states. Out of 6,501 suspected cases across the country, only 1% of the cases (61) were in West Darfur as at the end of February 2023 (OCHA 29/03/2023). In December 2022, a case of polio was confirmed in West Darfur. During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Sudan reported its first few poliovirus cases (UNICEF 17/09/2022). Monkeypox was detected in 2022 (UNICEF 29/12/2022). The possibility of an outbreak puts young children at risk, and there is a high need for immunisation. As at 2022, over 60,000 children under five were not vaccinated against preventable diseases (UNICEF 2022).

### WASH

In 2022, over 450,000 people (around 24% of the state's population) in West Darfur did not have access to sanitation, and 37% lacked access to safe water. Across Sudan, over 72% of the population has access to basic sanitation, with a 33.3% prevalence of open defecation practices, which is especially concerning for women and girls (UNICEF 2022; OCHA 07/11/2022). Camp water pumps are often damaged, causing scarcity of drinking water for camp residents and in different state localities over several years (Dabanga Sudan 2016 and 2012). At least 26% of people across Sudan reported that it takes more than 50 minutes to fetch water, exposing them to security risks, especially for women and girls. Over 46% of schools across the country reported that children do not have access to drinking water, and 71% of schools do not have sanitation facilities (OCHA 07/11/2022).

Sudan's 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey shows that West Darfur is below the national average of access to WASH facilities in most indicators. There is limited information from the following years, but some reports indicate limited access to water and sanitation, particularly for IDPs. Flooding and water contamination worsen this, as do dry seasons without access to water. As at 2022, the situation in some places was critical, such as in Kulbus locality, where up to 97% of IDPs did not have access to sanitation facilities (OCHA 20/06/2022).





## WASH in Sudan, 2014

INDICATORS	WEST DARFUR	NATIONAL	URBAN	RURAL
Use of improved drinking water sources (%)	67.5	68	78.3	63.5
Water treatment (%)	1.6	4.1	3.7	4.2
Use of improved sanitation (%)	10.4	32.9	57	22.1
A place for handwashing (%)	30.5	25.8	34	21.8
Availability of soap or other cleansing agent (%)	55.3	55.4	67.9	50.1

Source: MICS (2014 b)

### Protection

The primary concern in West Darfur centres around protecting vulnerable communities. Statistics reveal a 126% increase in violence in April 2022 compared to the same month the previous year, with civilians bearing the brunt of interethnic clashes. Landmines and unexploded ordnances further compound this trend, as they pose an imminent danger to the population. In May 2022, four children suffered severe injuries when an unexploded ordnance detonated in Kereneik, West Darfur (OCHA 09/05/2022; Dabanga Sudan 05/2022; ACLED 28/04/2022). In 2021 and 2022, IDPs consistently identified the absence of safety and security as their foremost protection challenge, particularly in gathering sites and previously inhabited areas, such as camps and villages. The precarious proximity of certain IDP sites and gathering points to unsafe roads significantly increases the risk to the population, especially children. El Geneina alone houses 97 informal gathering places for IDPs, where individuals seek physical security and humanitarian aid (UN Sudan 06/2021). Limited security forces to provide physical protection around the sites and prevailing distrust towards the government security forces within IDP communities worsens these protection challenges (Global Protection Cluster 05/2022). The absence of an impartial and representative security force or coordination between the Governor and the military adds another layer of insecurity and instability to the state's volatile situation (Protection Cluster 10/02/2022; Sudan Tribune 16/04/2021). There is a lack of trust in the few authorities present in the state, as there have been connections between the Government and armed groups that have attacked communities in West Darfur, such as the Janjaweed militia.

## Sexual and gender-based violence

There is little information on SGBV, but there have been reports of rape and other types of sexual violence in West Darfur and other states in 2022, 2014, and 2004. SGBV is used as a weapon of war to humiliate, punish, control, inflict fear, and displace women and their communities (UNFPA 07/05/2022; Dabanga Sudan 06/06/2022 and 25/05/2014; Amnesty International 18/07/2004). These assaults are likely to continue, but there is a lack of up-to-date information, partially because fear of further violence and retaliation leads to underreporting. In 2019 there were reports of extortion, abduction, violence, and sexual abuse in West Darfur (OCHA 08/01/2020).

## Forced recruitment

The state has a high risk of forced recruitment and child labour (Global Protection Cluster 05/2022). There is evidence that all armed groups in the conflict in Darfur have recruited children; boys are forced to fight, and girls take care of meals (Trani and Cannings 08/2013). Children also experience other serious impacts from the war, including injuries, maiming, killing, and attacks on schools, with direct physical and psychological effects. In 2022, the protection cluster identified at least 150 children in West Darfur showing unusual behaviour, including stress, trauma, imitating and acting like armed combatants, carrying toy sticks, pointing them as guns, and drawing pictures of guns (Global Protection Cluster 05/2022).

### Education

As at 2022, the number of school-aged children out of school in West Darfur stood at approximately 85,000 (UNICEF 2022). Local sources state that 58% of children in West Darfur were out of school as at October 2022 (Alhurra 06/10/2022). Since 2021, conflict and interethnic clashes have been affecting education, with at least 55 schools affected in 2021. In February 2021 alone, intercommunal conflict between Masalit and Arab tribes resulted in the damage or destruction of 20 schools. These incidents worsened an already critical state of education following COVID-19. Consequently, an estimated 58,000 additional children are at risk of being left behind, unable to return to school (Education Cluster 04/03/2021). Educational needs across the country are likely to remain high throughout 2023, particularly in September and October, when annual floods directly affect schools and schoolchildren at the start of the new academic year (OCHA 07/11/2022). The conflicts, coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic and annual floods, have further deteriorated the region's already critical state of education.

## PRE-CRISIS HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS AND CAPACITIES

### Existing displacement and refugees

Protracted and regular displacement characterises the lives of many people in West Darfur. Some people flee for safety during the fighting and often return, but conflict in 2019 and flooding in 2020 and 2022 have caused increased displacement in West Darfur. In 2022, there was a government and UNHCR plan to assist returnees wanting to leave El Geneina and return to their places of origin, but when conflict broke out in 2023, people again sought refuge in the cities or Chad (IOM 29/06/2023; UNHCR 16/10/2022; REACH 15/03/2022). As at March 2023, West Darfur hosted about 491,000 IDPs, 285,000 of whom needed assistance. Some of these IDPs had lived in camps for over ten years (OCHA 29/03/2023). In 2022, IDPs made up 12% of West Darfur's population. The main cause of displacement has been the increased conflict, mostly in El Geneina, Jebel Moon, and Kereneik localities, and this has led to the primary and secondary displacement of an estimated 250,000 people across the state (UNICEF 2022; OCHA 25/09/2022).

In February 2021, 60% of IDPs were children (Education Cluster 04/03/2021). Since 2019, insecurity has limited the possibility of sustainable return for IDPs and of durable solutions to the protracted displacement situation. Attacks have particularly targeted non-Arab communities around El Geneina. Between 1 June and 20 July 2019 alone, there were reports of over 20 attacks against communities (OCHA 08/01/2020). During the conflict in 2022, many IDPs lost their documentation, and some children were born in IDP settlements or gathering points. Because of this, many children lack birth certificates or are unregistered, and the population (particularly of children) could be higher than reported (Global Protection Cluster 05/2022).

### Food security and nutrition

The latest IPC analysis for Sudan was from June 2022, when it was predicted that about 632,000 people (around 32% of West Darfur's population) would face acute food insecurity – Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels – from October 2022 to February 2023. This figure is a significant increase from the 22% estimated to face acute food insecurity between April–May 2021 (IPC 05/2021 and 21/06/2022). In 2022, West Darfur was the state with the highest level of food insecurity in Sudan (HRW 22/06/2022). According to a Food Security Monitoring System assessment in June 2022, an estimated 75% of households in West Darfur were food-insecure in the first quarter of 2022 – a 7% increase compared to the third quarter of 2021. As at 2022, 85% of IDPs in Foro Baranga, Habila, and Morni were food-insecure, and 12% were severely food-insecure. In the same period, 63% of IDPs in Ardamata, El Riad, and Kirinding were food-insecure, and 18% were severely food-insecure (WFP 21/08/2022). The state's main

reason for food insecurity was the eruption of localised conflicts, which triggered population displacement. Combined with the economy's deterioration, these conflicts led to higher-than-usual levels of acute food insecurity (IPC 05/2021). Food insecurity is likely to get worse as the crisis has caused food, water, and fuel prices to increase, and disruption to bank services prevents people from accessing cash (NYT 07/06/2023).

In September 2022, OCHA reported that the prevalence of global acute malnutrition among children under five in West Darfur was 19.1%, affecting approximately 80,042 children and above the national value of 16.3%. The prevalence of chronic malnutrition (including severe and moderate) among children under five was 35.2%, slightly below the national average of 38.2% (OCHA 25/09/2022). Over three million children in Sudan suffer from acute malnutrition, 50% of which is associated with repeated diarrhoea or worm infections related to poor WASH conditions. 611,000 children are severely malnourished (OCHA 07/11/2022; UNICEF 2022).

### Climate-related hazards

Sudan is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change, and in recent decades, it has experienced rising temperatures, unpredictable seasonal rains, and more frequent droughts (ND-GAIN accessed 02/06/2023; USAID 08/2016). The country is also facing several environmental challenges, including deforestation and land degradation, which compound the impact of climate hazards (UNEP 07/10/2020). Sudan's climate is predominantly dry. The rainy season usually starts in June and lasts until September, with the peak of rains and flooding observed between August–September (OCHA 08/12/2022). With most rainfall occurring within just a few months of the year, the uneven distribution poses a continuous risk of severe dry spells and prolonged droughts (EC-JRC 30/06/2019).

#### Drought

West Darfur, a semi-arid zone, faces a high risk of desertification (GoS/UNDP 03/2006; UNICEF 2022). Rising temperatures, decreased rainfall, increased rainfall variability, and drought are the main climate hazards in West Darfur, affecting the quality and productivity of crops and the health of livestock (GoS 07/2016; Young and Adam 2019). The most significant drought event in recent years occurred in 2015 and affected most of the country, including West Darfur (FEWSNET 17/12/2015).

#### Floods

The most severe flooding event recorded in 100 years occurred in 2020 and affected nearly 900,000 people across 18 states, with West Darfur being one of the most affected states. In August 2022, heavy rains and flash floods affected over 15,500 people in the state (OCHA 25/09/2022; Dabanga Sudan 02/09/2022).

## PRE-CRISIS RESPONSE CAPACITY

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As at 2022, 39 organisations (ten UN organisations, 16 INGOs, and 13 NGOs) were physically present and implementing activities in West Darfur. Most were in El Geneina and were dedicated to addressing health and food needs (OCHA 25/03/2022).

## PRE-CRISIS HUMANITARIAN ACCESS CONSTRAINTS

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Since 2021, aid response and information access in Darfur, particularly in West Darfur, have become increasingly limited because of the worsening intercommunal conflict. As a result, there are usually limited comprehensive assessments of the location, extent, and requirements of people in need. These significant gaps and insecurity levels prevent organisations from providing coordinated aid delivery to the population in need in El Geneina and the rest of the state (REACH 15/03/2022). During 2020–2021, humanitarian responders often had to evacuate their staff because of security concerns and could not monitor the situation or assist the conflict-affected population in El Geneina town or Beida, Jebel Moon, or Kereneik localities (Global Protection Cluster 05/2022).