

CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

Since 25 October 2025, conflict between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in the Greater Kordofan region of Sudan has sparked widespread displacement. After RSF's October 2025 takeover of Al Fasher, North Darfur, from SAF, the Kordofan states have emerged as the new front lines as RSF and allied groups look to expand their areas of control (AJ 28/11/2025). By 15 January 2026, the clashes had displaced an estimated 88,000 people (IOM 27/01/2026; NRC 02/02/2026; Radio Tamazuj 29/01/2026). During this period, 63 conflict events were reported in Kordofan region, including 46 in South Kordofan, 18 in North Kordofan, and one in West Kordofan (IOM 27/01/2026). The concentration of intense conflict in South Kordofan rather than North Kordofan likely explains the secondary displacement into North Kordofan and onward movement to other states, including the repeated displacement of IDPs.

Prior to the escalation of the conflict in October, North Kordofan hosted an estimated 222,000 IDPs across 652 localities, an indication that the state was already grappling with stretched hosting capacity (IOM 16/10/2025). Between 25 October 2025 and 15 January 2026, North Kordofan recorded an influx of more than 22,000 newly displaced people, while South Kordofan registered nearly 11,000 (IOM 27/01/2026 and 16/10/2025).

The clashes in Kordofan region follow intense ground battles and aerial bombardments, including shelling and the use of drone warfare, heightening protection risks and concerns for civilians, such as indiscriminate harm and child casualties (UNHCR 23/01/2026; UN 22/12/2025).

Displacement patterns in the Kordofan states show that IDPs are highly dispersed, with IDPs seeking refuge across 526 sites within 69 localities across 13 states outside North and South Kordofan. North Kordofan emerged as the primary destination, hosting 25% of the total displaced population, concentrated largely in Sheikan and Ar Rahad districts (IOM 27/01/2026).

The needs of displaced people in Kordofan region – which include food assistance, shelter, cash support, WASH services, healthcare, nutrition, psychosocial support, and protection – are chronic as a result of protracted displacement and service collapse. (UNHCR 23/01/2026; UNICEF 25/01/2026; Radio Tamazuj 29/01/2026).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

Fighting between SAF and RSF in North Kordofan is likely to escalate further in the coming months because of SAF's renewed push to block RSF's territorial advancement eastwards to Khartoum. Both armed groups battle for key control of the strategic Al Obeid city and key export routes to Khartoum and White Nile (ST 18/01/2026). RSF has partially surrounded Al Obeid from the city's north, south, and west sides, intensifying artillery and drone strikes against SAF positions and limiting civilian access to essential commodities (ST 31/01/2026; Sudan War Monitor 30/12/2025). Such indiscriminate attacks are likely to affect civilians. Should the conflict in North Kordofan continue at the current pace, Al Obeid may experience complete besiegement similar to Al Fasher in Darfur, with RSF encircling civilians and SAF combatants within the city (CIR 04/02/2026; AJ 31/10/2025). If siege-like conditions persist, humanitarian needs will rise as trapped civilians face movement restrictions and limited access to essential commodities, such as food. Road blockades affecting commercial and humanitarian movements have driven severe food insecurity (FEWS NET 05/02/2026). Between 15 April 2023 and 22 February 2025, Al Obeid was under full RSF siege, with access denial patterns by warring parties impeding access to humanitarian assistance, heightening needs (Sudan War Monitor 24/02/2025; BBC 24/02/2025; ST 23/02/2025).

Both SAF and RSF are vying for control of the Bara–Um Durman road, a key commercial link from Khartoum to North Kordofan, restricting its use by civilians as well as for commercial and humanitarian movements (ST 18/01/2026; Insights 14/10/2025). The contestation of this strategic route could disrupt supply chains, humanitarian convoys, and the movement of civilians, who face targeting by attacks from the warring parties. In the long term, the limited movement of essential commodities could further worsen starvation conditions in Kadugli and Dilling by disrupting market functionalities in active conflict sites, resulting in the localised inflation of the prices of goods (FEWS NET 05/02/2026; MC 16/12/2025). This pattern of logistics strangulation mirrors documented outcomes in Al Fasher and Kadugli, where the deliberate obstruction of key trade arteries by warring parties was a key driver of the declaration of Famine (IPC Phase 5) conditions (IPC accessed 30/01/2026).

Perceptions of affiliation with either warring party put displaced individuals at heightened risk of targeting from both SAF and RSF in checkpoints or informal sites in new areas of displacement, creating widespread protection risks (OHCHR 27/10/2025; HRW 10/12/2024). In previous contested areas, such as Aj Jazirah, both RSF and SAF targeted young adult men returning to the state for misperceived affiliation with the opposing group or ethnic profiling.

A similar pattern is likely to materialise in the Kordofan states as the conflict continues (ST 26/02/2025). The warring parties are also likely to continue recruiting both adults and children as the conflict intensifies (UNHRC 04/12/2025). This trend not only sustains violence and further instability in Kordofan region but also creates significant protection risks for victims.

CRISIS IMPACTS

Displacement and shelter

Displacement from Kordofan region since October 2025 has largely taken place in urban centres such as Sheikan and Al Obeid, where available shelter options are limited and increasingly overstretched in terms of limited access to services (IOM 27/01/2026). Since the conflict in Sudan began in April 2023, Kordofan region has experienced both sporadic and prolonged violence, exposing people to multiple displacements internally and onwards to other states, eroding their capacity to cope with further shocks. Most displaced households find shelter with host families thanks to strong communal ties or in informal and temporary arrangements, including gathering sites, schools, and improvised shelters (IOM 27/01/2026; CIR 04/02/2026). Sheltering in informal camps and public buildings, such as schools, restricts the provision of services such as education, plus overcrowding creates poor sanitation conditions and increases the spread of diseases. Displacement into areas where services have collapsed, and where host populations are grappling with challenges such as overcrowding, erodes available material resources – and potentially hosting willingness – worsening humanitarian needs (IOM 27/01/2025; UNICEF 25/01/2026).

Protection

Indiscriminate attacks in North and South Kordofan have hit civilian homes, schools, hospitals, and other civilian infrastructure or targeted civilians on the move (UN 22/12/2025). Between 25 October and 16 December 2025, 104 civilians perished from various drone strikes across Kordofan region, including on two hospitals and a kindergarten (OHCHR 16/12/2025). Actual figures are potentially higher and have likely increased with the intensification of the conflict in January, with the discrepancy likely a result of deteriorating access and reporting constraints (OHCHR 16/12/2025; Protection Cluster 30/09/2025). Displaced individuals face risks of opportunistic criminality, abductions and forced disappearances, shooting violence, and indiscriminate aerial attacks along their routes of travel, all of which disrupt active displacement pathways for IDPs (Darfur24 09/02/2026). Targeted violence on IDPs linked to perceived affiliation with the opposing party, both in and out of displacement sites, creates protection challenges for IDPs. The warring parties' widespread use of explosives, such as

shells and mortars, also impedes the safe movement of civilians, including those forcibly displaced by the conflict. Gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, is a concern for displaced populations, with reports of the rape and sexual assault of women and girls, especially during flight (GPC 10/12/2025). The rapid onset of displacement has led to a rise in family separations, including unaccompanied and separated children, who face specific child protection risks, such as forced recruitment and child labour in the absence of their primary caregivers (UNICEF 03/12/2025; UN 04/12/2025; MEE 01/12/2025).

Health and nutrition

Intensified conflict and displacement in North and South Kordofan have caused supply disruptions and physical damage from direct attacks, leaving health facilities overwhelmed, while mental health needs rise as families grapple with trauma and uncertainty (UNICEF 25/01/2026; Insecurity Insight 09/02/2026; MEM 09/02/2026). Widespread malnutrition risks and shortages of essential medicines caused by prevailing access constraints aggravate the situation. Since January 2026, North Kordofan has registered suspected cholera cases driven by restricted access to WASH services, delayed diagnoses, and treatment risks, all of which accelerate transmission (UNICEF 22/01/2026).

Lack of sustained access to clean, safe water for displaced individuals, coupled with poor sanitation, has worsened cholera outbreaks in the Kordofan states.

Food security and livelihoods

Both North and South Kordofan states face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food insecurity levels, with Dilling and Kadugli localities expected to experience famine by early 2026, driven by insecurity and access constraints (FEWS NET 05/02/2026; IFPRI 13/11/2025; APA 07/01/2026). The IPC projects that between January–May 2026, the population in Sheikan district is likely to experience IPC 5 conditions, an indication of long-term starvation and acute malnutrition in overcrowded displacement sites. IPC declared that famine conditions will persist in Dilling and Kadugli localities in South Kordofan, despite recent SAF successes in breaking the sieges, owing to prolonged access constraints and market disruptions (FEWS NET 05/02/2026).

Because of the violence, farmers in the Kordofan states, especially frontline states, are unable to access their fields or markets, significantly increasing the risk of famine and food insecurity in the region (OCHA 16/12/2025). The violence has likely disrupted the November sowing season, leaving agricultural families with reduced yields and diminished food stocks during the March harvest (FAO 16/10/2023). Sudan typically experiences its annual lean season between April–June; the extensive disruptions to agricultural activities and subsequent failed harvests will significantly worsen food security and coping capacities.

People fleeing the conflict arrive in informal camps hungry, with some likely malnourished from loss of stock and flight without assets. Children exposed to the conflict face an elevated risk of malnutrition. On 25 January, UNICEF reported that 140 children in Sheikan and Al Rahad localities were admitted for severe acute malnutrition; these cases are likely undercounted, though they indicate that children, particularly those in displacement sites, face worsening humanitarian conditions (UNICEF 25/01/2026). The influx has affected responders' ability to provide food effectively, with some forced to divert aid from other camps that already had insufficient rations to deliver to the newly displaced across Sudan (TNA 30/01/2025).

Education

In South Kordofan, conflict has disrupted learning, with most schools in Kadugli closed after displacement and insecurity led teachers to flee the area. The few students still attending classes have been merged into a limited number of functioning classrooms, with overcrowding further compromising learning conditions (UNICEF 25/01/2026). The threat of violence also continues to disrupt learning as the warring parties expand their attacks on civilian infrastructure and education sites (SUWRA 11/12/2025). On 4 December 2025, a drone attack targeting a kindergarten in Ghadeer locality in South Kordofan killed more than ten children ages of 5–7 (UNICEF 05/12/2025). As well as the minimal resumption of education, constant violence disrupts learning as warring factions target learning facilities, and the displacement often removes children's education access.

Access to information and services

Both deliberate and incidental damage to communication infrastructure has caused intermittent, widespread communication disruptions, cutting off civilians and humanitarian organisations from internet and phone networks in parts of Sudan, including North and South Kordofan (ECT 04/02/2026). These communications disruptions have resulted in extreme difficulties in verifying civilian casualties and displacement figures, creating systemic information gaps. In the Kordofan states, telecommunications infrastructure is very limited as a result of conflict-induced degradation, and insecurity has left both urban and rural areas without reliable mobile or internet services (ECT 08/01/2026). This limits information access, hinders humanitarian monitoring, delays response planning, and leaves affected communities isolated from critical assistance. Civilians in Al Obeid, North Kordofan, face similar conditions as a partial RSF siege persists in the city.

Humanitarian access constraints

The insecure situation and continued active conflict in North and South Kordofan, particularly in frontline areas, hinder humanitarian access, as demonstrated in the denial of permits for humanitarian workers and the targeting of aid facilities and workers (UN RC/HC Sudan 06/02/2026; ACF 15/12/2025). While insecurity is the biggest driver of access limitations in the frontline areas of Kordofan, countrywide access challenges, such as authorities in control of contested territories imposing stringent procedures and delays in travel permit issuance, further limit humanitarian intervention in the Kordofan states. On 28 October 2025, five volunteers of the Sudanese Red Crescent Society perished in Bara city, North Kordofan, while on official food distribution in the area (ICRC 29/10/2025; ST 28/10/2025; IFRC 28/10/2025). In previous instances, armed groups have targeted clearly marked humanitarian vehicles and compounds in Al Andaraba area in North Kordofan (CFJ 17/09/2025). These security events highlight the precarious security situation under which humanitarian workers operate in Sudan. It is not clear to what extent existing local networks, such as mutual aid groups, fill the operational gap in the absence of a robust humanitarian access framework. Information on risks and challenges confronting grassroots responders is scarce and unavailable.

There have been reports of siege-like conditions in South Kordofan, particularly around Kadugli and Dilling, where food and medical supplies are severely limited and populations are effectively cut off (FEWS NET 05/02/2026; UNICEF 18/11/2025). On 26 January, SAF opened a route to Dilling town, allowing for the future scale-up of humanitarian assistance to Dilling (AP 26/01/2026). It remains unclear whether humanitarian responders have been able to deliver supplies through the newly opened route.

CRISIS DRIVERS

Conflict escalation in Kordofan region

Conflict and insecurity remain high in the Kordofan states, particularly in Al Obeid in North Kordofan and Kadugli and Dilling in South Kordofan, as RSF, SAF, and Abdelaziz Adam Al Hilu's Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N/AI Hilu) fight for control over territory (FEWS NET 05/09/2025; Chatham House 21/11/2025). Since December 2025, air and drone strikes in South Kordofan, the main stronghold of the SPLM-N/AI Hilu faction, have risen, while fighting for control in North Kordofan has escalated (ACLED 26/01/2026). This escalation has been driven not only by recent military gains but also by Kordofan's strategic assets, notably key logistics and oil infrastructure for possible future revenue extraction, as well as the presence of perceived RSF-aligned networks (The National 19/11/2025; AJ 28/11/2025). Since the beginning of 2026, SAF has recaptured at least a dozen locations in South and North Kordofan, including Dilling and Kadugli localities (ACLED 26/01/2026).

AGGRAVATING FACTORS

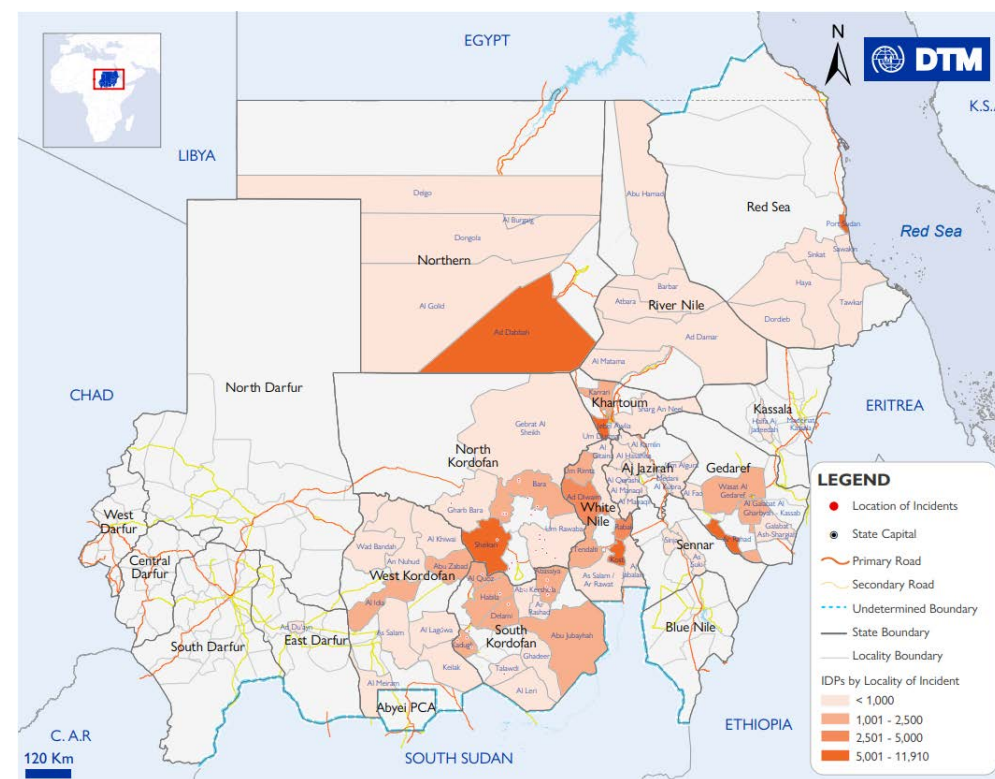
Climate-related issues

Seasonal flooding recurring between June–September, coupled with drought conditions in the Greater Kordofan region, aggravates displacement through the cyclical destruction of shelters, damage to crops, and the depletion of already scarce water sources (OCHA 08/01/2026). Climatic shocks in Greater Kordofan drive new displacement while worsening conditions for displaced populations, further eroding livelihoods such as rain-fed agriculture and pastoralism, deepening food insecurity, and undermining coping strategies. Simultaneously, the risk of local conflict arising from increased competition for limited water points and grazing land worsens existing tensions between pastoralist and farming communities, complicating an already volatile security and humanitarian situation (GDO accessed 30/01/2026; UN 01/07/2025; Adam et al. 16/12/2025; OCHA 08/01/2026).

Displacement from South Sudan

Despite conflict in Sudan, the Greater Kordofan region continues to receive South Sudanese refugees and Sudanese returnees fleeing political instability and rising hostilities between non-state armed groups in South Sudan. This stems from existing trade routes as well as historical political and familial networks between South Kordofan and north South Sudan, making the region the preferred destination for displaced individuals in the two countries. The Greater Kordofan region hosts over 114,000 refugees and asylum seekers sustained since last year, adding strain and likely creating competition for services and resources between IDPs, host communities, and existing refugees (UNHCR 15/06/2025; UNHCR accessed 30/01/2026).

Map 1. Localities of IDPs displaced from and within Kordofan region between 25 October 2025 and 15 January 2026



Source: IOM (27/01/2026)