

Analysis of humanitarian access in the Darfur and Kordofan regions

INTRODUCTION

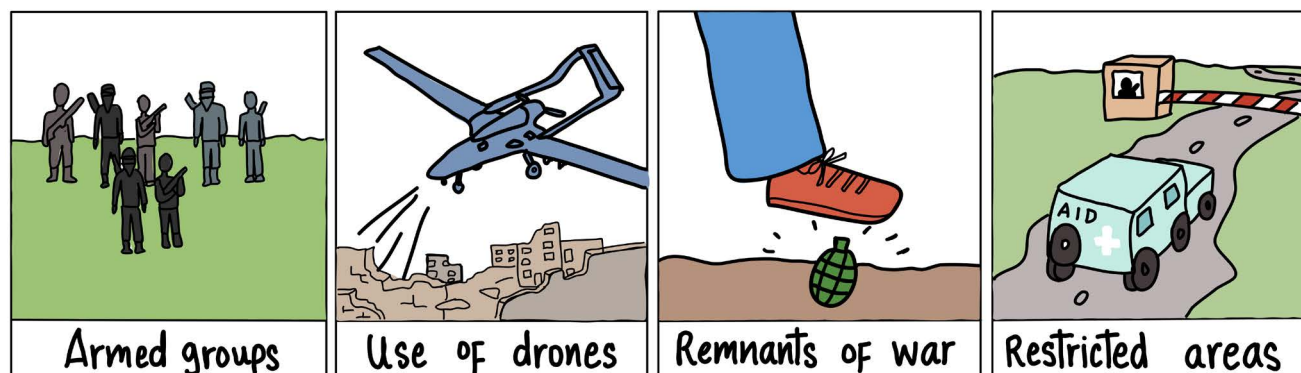
Humanitarian access constraints have been a pervasive and persistent structural occurrence in Sudan's continuing crisis, even as the conflict enters its third year (UNHCR 17/02/2026; OCHA 09/09/2025). A combination of shifting conflict lines, a deeply fragmented political landscape, physical and environmental challenges, and institutional barriers have resulted in constrained humanitarian access, with humanitarian organisations in the Darfur and Kordofan regions reporting significant bureaucratic and administrative impediments (BAIs) and insecurity constricting their operations (OCHA 16/03/2026; UNHCR 16/02/2026).

Escalating conflict and the intensive use of aerial drone warfare have created significant security challenges for humanitarian personnel and assets, as the indiscriminate drone targeting of civilians is increasing insecurity for humanitarian convoys, damaging infrastructure, and creating unpredictable front lines (Sudan INGO 17/02/2026; MSF 19/02/2026). While humanitarian needs in frontline areas of the Darfur and Kordofan regions remain persistently elevated, continued attacks on humanitarian operations have slowed efforts to scale up aid interventions in these areas, as operations are suspended and movements reduced.

The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and allied armed groups also continue to impose parallel directives, such as registration requirements and coordination restrictions, that complicate aid coordination policies through BAIs, constraining humanitarian assistance. This is alongside neighbouring countries' shifting policies around the cross-border delivery of aid into Sudan. Chad, for example, has ordered the closure of its shared border with Sudan, including the Adré and Tine crossing points, creating an additional layer of bureaucracy, coordination, and logistical constraint on humanitarian and commercial supply chains at the border (Sudan Tribune 22/02/2026; AJ 23/02/2026). Political instability in South Sudan and Ethiopia has also perpetuated growing insecurity and tensions, threatening humanitarian operations, especially the use of border routes and logistical corridors in Sudan.

Rising regional tensions in the Middle East threaten to create shipping disruptions and global fuel shortages, which are likely to drive humanitarian access constraints in Sudan (Sudan Tribune 11/03/2026; AP 09/03/2026). Logistical constraints arising from fuel shortages are likely to impact the scale and volume of humanitarian operations, such as convoy movements, and cold-chain storage for critical commodities including medicine. An increase in logistical constraints is likely to result in surging operational costs for humanitarian organisations, disrupting the flow of assistance.

Figure 1: Current access constraints



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim

This report, which is an update on the access analysis snapshot developed by the ACAPS Sudan Hub in 2025 (ACAPS 10/04/2025), aims to inform the humanitarian community and decision makers interested in the Sudanese context of recent humanitarian access developments, emerging trends, and anticipatory access risks in the Darfur and Kordofan regions. This report also serves as a foundational report for a series of analyses exploring the intersection of thematic developments – e.g. health and protection – with humanitarian access.

Methodology

This report uses the ACAPS access methodology, which examines humanitarian access constraints using three core pillars: people in need's access to humanitarian assistance; humanitarian organisations' access to people in need; and physical, environmental, and security constraints. The analysis here relies heavily on secondary data from over 100 verifiable sources, exploring the potential materialisation of access constraints in Sudan through proxy access indicators such as regional tensions, global market disturbances with the potential to result in disruptive security dynamics, and logistical bottlenecks. The analysis specifically incorporates a signals analysis lens, identifying emerging, marginal, or atypical trends and events that serve as lead indicators of significant systemic shifts within the operational environment.

KEY ACCESS DEVELOPMENTS (NATIONAL OUTLOOK)

Disruption of communications infrastructure and networks

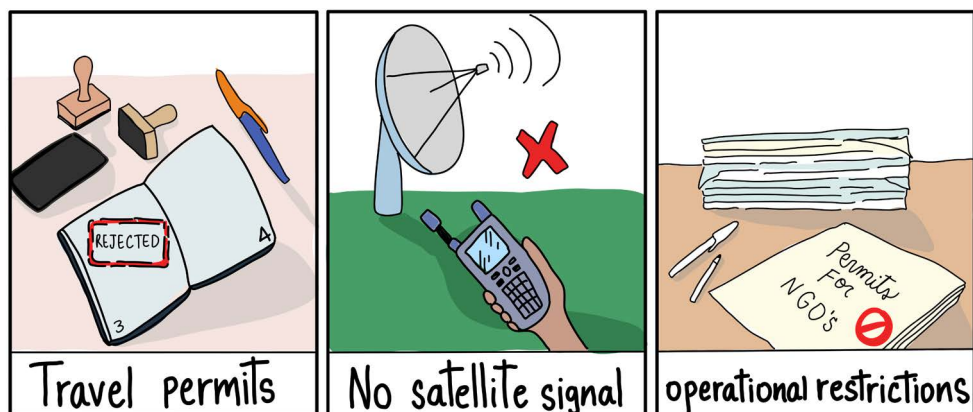
On 1 February 2026, Sudan's Telecommunication and Post Regulatory Authority (TPRA) began revoking UN and other humanitarian organisational licenses for the use of Thuraya satellite phones (Emergency Telecommunications Cluster 10/02/2026; Logistics Cluster 11/02/2026). For humanitarian organisations, Thuraya satellite phones provided a workaround for existing communications constraints, ensuring an efficient communications modality that guaranteed staff safety and the coordination of movements through convoy tracking (Emergency Telecommunications Cluster 02/03/2026). The TPRA's withdrawal of Thuraya authorisation without a sustainable alternative has created significant communications and logistical barriers for aid organisations, as they are unable to coordinate movements and have reduced security monitoring, creating delays in response operations and hamstringing humanitarian access. Sudan is already facing widespread network disruptions because parties to the conflict are deliberately destroying communications infrastructure or shutting down communications networks (Emergency Telecommunications Cluster 04/02/2026; Sudan Tribune 02/03/2026; LSE 31/03/2025). In frontline areas, such as the Darfur and Kordofan regions, where communications infrastructure has been extensively damaged and destroyed, aid organisations grapple with reduced monitoring and reporting capacity and diminished opportunities for coordination with community responders (Sudan Tribune 02/03/2026; LSE 31/03/2025).

Escalation of violence and insecurity

Both the SAF and RSF have intensified their use of drones for reconnaissance and military offensives, resulting in indiscriminate attacks on civilians, including humanitarian personnel, and infrastructure (Sudan INGO 17/02/2026; MSF 19/02/2026). The warring parties' persistent use of drones entrenches the war's asymmetry, creating unpredictable front lines and eroding opportunities for sustained humanitarian negotiations for operational pauses and safe humanitarian corridors, as spontaneous attacks intensify. This means that humanitarian sites and operations away from active front lines remain constantly at risk of either systematic or opportunistic drone attacks, disrupting the flow of humanitarian assistance. In the Kordofan

region, persistent attacks on clearly marked humanitarian facilities and workers makes the targeting of humanitarian responders appear systematic (MSF 19/02/2026; ICRC 29/10/2025). Such attacks undermine humanitarian operations, despite rising humanitarian needs resulting from continued violence, displacement, and access restrictions.

Figure 2. Current bureaucratic access constraints



REGIONAL ACCESS (THE DARFUR AND KORDOFAN REGIONS)

Darfur region

The Darfur region continues to face significant humanitarian access barriers as a result of the continued threat of insecurity and administrative directives from warring parties amid high humanitarian needs. The Darfur region has a complex administrative architecture, as it has a parallel administration to the internationally recognised Government, creating barriers to humanitarian access (ICG 02/09/2025). Often, aid organisations in contested areas are confronted with operational dilemmas resulting from the conflicting directives of competing authorities aiming to entrench their political legitimacy, resulting in conflicting registration requirements, coordination mandates, or delayed movement approvals. On 28 January 2026, the SAF-led Sudanese Government issued directives to humanitarian organisations, warning them against cooperating with the RSF's Sudan Agency for Relief and

Humanitarian Operations (SARHO) (Sudan Tribune 29/01/2026). The Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) authorities responsible for aid coordination announced that organisations that did not adhere to this policy would be opening themselves to legal action and punitive consequences, including suspension (Sudan Tribune 29/01/2026). Since January, no organisation operating in the Darfur and Kordofan regions has reported being castigated by HAC authorities. The policy will no doubt increase BAIs, however, and disrupt access negotiations in territories held by parallel authorities, such as SARHO, threatening the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

In AI Fasher, North Darfur, RSF restrictions – including the denial of permits and use of siege tactics – have hindered aid organisations' access, despite high needs and organisations' readiness to respond (MSF 28/01/2026; HRR 31/10/2025). By 29 January 2026, an estimated 127,000 people had been displaced from AI Fasher by escalating conflict, with most settling in Tawila, where humanitarian access is comparatively better (IOM 29/01/2026). While the number of civilians displaced from AI Fasher is high, some people remain trapped, particularly women and older people with mobility constraints (MSF 28/01/2026). This residual population's ability to access or receive humanitarian assistance is impeded by the RSF's active blocking of aid organisations from accessing or operating in AI Fasher (MSF 28/01/2026). Humanitarian needs in AI Fasher cannot be mapped because broad access restrictions also hinder needs assessment and verification processes, obscuring planned interventions and response modalities (Yale HRL 10/03/2026). On 5 February 2026, new IPC projections reported the expansion of Famine (IPC Phase 5) levels of food insecurity to North Darfur's Um Baru and Kernoï localities as a result of insecurity and barriers to humanitarian access (IPC 05/02/2026; FEWS NET accessed 02/03/2026). The acute food insecurity projected in these areas is largely driven by persistent humanitarian access challenges, disrupted agricultural cycles, and widespread insecurity and conflict.

The RSF's continued use of siege tactics and civilian entrapment in the Darfur region, as in other frontline areas, while denying aid organisations entry into high-need areas that require timely intervention entrenches systematic and structural barriers to humanitarian access (Yale HRL 10/03/2026). In October 2025, the RSF captured AI Fasher from the SAF and its allied forces following a prolonged siege. Prior to the RSF takeover, the siege of AI Fasher had led to a significant deterioration of humanitarian conditions, resulting in IPC 5 conditions for populations trapped in the city (OHCHR 13/02/2026; IPC 28/11/2025). Conflict escalated in AI Fasher, with intensified attacks

resulting in mass displacement and attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. The UN estimates that around 6,000 civilians were killed in the RSF takeover of Al Fasher (UN 13/02/2026; Yale HRL 19/02/2026; HRW 24/02/2026).

Kordofan region

Since October 2025, the Kordofan region has emerged as the new flashpoint of the conflict, as the warring parties vie for territorial control, resulting in severe access restrictions (IOM 10/02/2026; UNHCR 16/02/2026). Aid organisations have reported systemic barriers to access imposed by authorities across multiple areas of control, such as denial of travel permits, interference in aid programming, and the continued targeting of humanitarian personnel (ODI 24/11/2025; OCHA 09/09/2025). Continued clashes, collapsing civilian infrastructure and services, and access restrictions limiting humanitarian assistance from getting to populations in need mean that humanitarian needs continue to rise as the crisis deepens (NRC 02/02/2026; UNICEF 25/01/2026).

As recent as 24 January 2026, access constraints marginally improved when the SAF broke a two-year siege by the RSF and Sudan People's Liberation Movement North –Al Hilu (SPLMN-AH) on Dilling and Kadugli localities in South Kordofan, allowing minimal humanitarian scale up. This development coincided with worsening food insecurity and acute malnutrition in Dilling and Kadugli, categorised as IPC 5 (FEWS NET 05/02/2026; STC 02/03/2026; OCHA 19/02/2026). Despite persistent access challenges as a result of insecurity and BAIs, the removal of the physical blockade of formerly besieged areas allowed both humanitarian assistance and commercial supplies to reach the population in need (Sudan Tribune 04/03/2026; Xinhua 27/01/2026). Previous instances of RSF sieges broken by the SAF, such as in Aj Jazirah, show that remaining explosive remnants of war mean that humanitarian access is not automatically guaranteed (DRC 11/04/2025; OCHA 23/01/2025). Unexploded ordnance significantly undermines the scaling up of aid operations through delays of convoy movements, especially in the case of Dilling and Kadugli, where surge assistance is critical (Radio Dabanga 12/02/2026; The New Arab 22/02/2026). Similarly, civilians previously trapped in Dilling and Kadugli experience exposure to explosive remnants of war during displacement cycles or in transit to humanitarian sites, effectively undermining dispensation of assistance (DONARE 05/03/2026). As aid scales up in Dilling and Kadugli, broad attacks on critical supply routes hamper humanitarian convoys,

potentially resulting in humanitarian organisations seeking alternative routes, creating delays and exorbitant operational costs (DONARE 05/03/2026; WFP 18/02/2026). Aid organisations are increasingly co-opting community responders for last-mile aid delivery as a strategy for localisation, capacity building, and skills transfer. Community responders are exposed to a plethora of security access constraints and risks, however, because of their perceived reduced scrutiny by authorities and familiarity with the topography of places with physical access constraints. Regardless, given security volatility and shifting authorities in contested areas, access challenges faced by both humanitarian and commercial suppliers persist, but to varying degrees, with greater implications in humanitarian delivery timelines and a rise in operational costs.

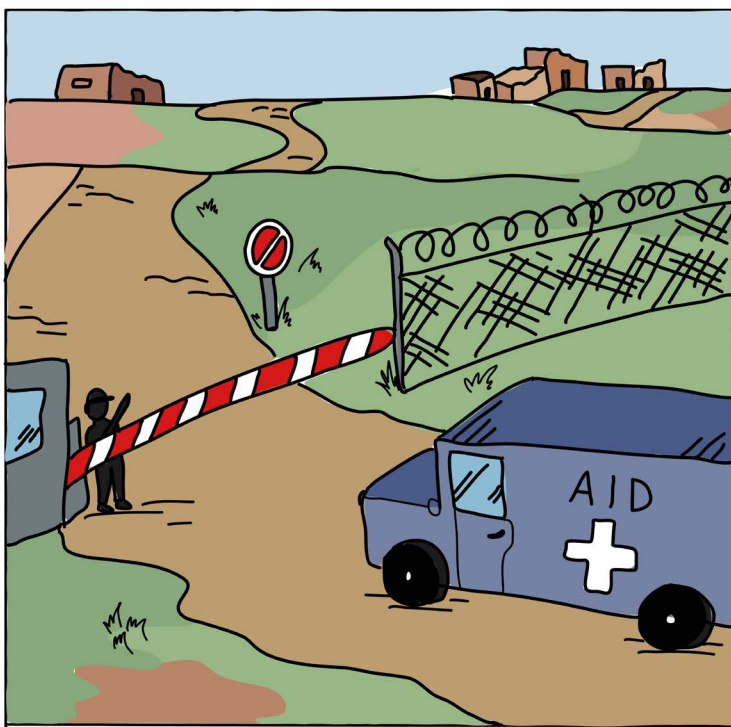
By 5 February 2026, Al Obeid in North Kordofan was under a partial RSF-imposed siege, which effectively restricted humanitarian access by blockading the city (FEWS NET 05/02/2026). Growing SAF–RSF conflict in Al Obeid and the persistent presence of BAIs continue to pose significant access challenges (AJ 07/02/2026). Al Obeid serves as a key commercial and humanitarian transport corridor linking Khartoum with the Kordofan–Darfur axis through the Al Inqaz Al Qarbi highway, which goes via areas under the control of various armed groups (Sudan Independent 06/03/2026). The SAF Government in Port Sudan favours crossline aid delivery from Port Sudan as opposed to cross-border deliveries in the Darfur and Kordofan regions, where the RSF holds significant control (TNH 11/04/2025). As such, the RSF siege on Al Obeid serves two purposes: the expansion of RSF territorial control of the strategic city and control of key routes and supply networks from the Kordofan region into the Darfur region by undermining the SAF's capacity to strengthen beyond Khartoum (ICG 09/02/2026; Sudan Independent 12/10/2025). As the two parties continue to contest control of Al Obeid and North Kordofan, the resulting widespread violence and limited access to essential services such as food and medicine mean that humanitarian needs are on the increase.

CROSS-BORDER DRIVERS

Chad's closure of its eastern border with Sudan

On 22 February, the Government of Chad announced the closure of several border crossings with Sudan, including those at Adré and Tine, which have been key entry points for aid into the Darfur region and Sudan more broadly (Sudan Tribune 22/02/2026; AJ 23/02/2026). These closures follow recent RSF and SAF security incursions into Chad, creating further instability in the border regions. Humanitarian access through Chadian borders is fraught with multiple access constraints, such as BAIs resulting from the parallel HAC and SARHO authorities contesting aid coordination, and physical access limitations as a result of poor road networks (Sudan Tribune 29/01/2026; OCHA 06/03/2025).

Figure 3. Closure of borders



Chad's conditional border closures ostensibly make humanitarian access policy negotiations tripartite, including the Government of Chad, SARHO, and the HAC, creating additional authorisations, coordination challenges, and delays to convoy approvals. Even though the previous arrangement was fragile and volatile, the existing cross-border coordination framework was largely predictable and sustainable. The current circumstances threaten to disrupt the continuity of humanitarian operations, potentially resulting in new permit requirements or oversight mechanisms. Insecurity leading to border closures adds a new layer of humanitarian access constraints to the cross-border delivery of aid by blocking the movement of people and disrupting humanitarian and commercial supply chains (IRC 25/02/2026). Beyond access restrictions, border closures erode Chad's existing goodwill frameworks that allow the country to be used as a primary humanitarian base into Darfur, further depriving populations in needs of humanitarian assistance.

Emerging conflict on the Sudan/Ethiopia/South Sudan border

Escalating conflict in Sudan's Blue Nile state – marked by drone attacks on civilian targets – signals either the geographic expansion of hostilities or the intensification of existing conflict dynamics (Sudan Tribune 03/02/2026; ACLED 26/01/2026; MEE 26/01/2026). Blue Nile borders both Ethiopia and South Sudan, along humanitarian and commercial supply routes; both of these countries are experiencing political instability that risks armed group spillover, cross-border insecurity, and restrictions on humanitarian movement. Aside from BAIs, insecurity in Sudan and neighbouring countries is another major barrier to humanitarian access, especially with the proliferation of drones (UN 06/02/2026; OCHA 06/02/2026). Prior to recent escalations, Blue Nile state was already experiencing constrained humanitarian access as a result of insecurity (HART 07/04/2025; OCHA/UN RC/HC Sudan 06/02/2025). Widespread insecurity coupled with the degradation of civilian facilities is diminishing the state's already limited humanitarian capacity, constraining aid organisations' operational presence, staff movements, and delivery of assistance.

Figure 4. New frontlines



ANTICIPATORY ACCESS ANALYSIS AND SIGNALS OF RELEVANCE

Climate hazards

Physical and geographic access constraints resulting from seasonal rains

In the Darfur and Kordofan regions, the rainy season creates a myriad of access barriers, including inaccessible roads, convoy delays, and disruptions to supply routes, limiting the logistics of humanitarian operations (UN News 01/07/2025; WFP 11/04/2025). The convergence of climate-related hazards (such as heavy rains and floods), poor existing infrastructure, and systemic access challenges in the Darfur and Kordofan regions amplifies existing BAIs, creating a difficult access environment for aid responders (OCHA 24/07/2025).

Figure 5. Floods and environmental hazards



In the 2024 and 2025 rainy seasons, humanitarian organisations operating in the Darfur region relied heavily on the prepositioning of aid prior to the start of the rains to reduce operational delays and supply chain disruptions (WFP 11/04/2026; Govt. France 15/04/2024). In 2026, humanitarian access constraints could potentially worsen because of the restricted ability to preposition aid in Darfur as a result of diminished funding, Chadian border closures on top of existing BAIs, insecurity, and physical access constraints. Seasonal rains in Sudan start between June–September every year, sometimes earlier as a result of erratic rainfall patterns (OCHA accessed 24/02/2026; FEWS NET accessed 24/02/2026). Should upcoming climate-related access barriers coincide with the closure of Darfur-bound aid deliveries through Chadian borders, the humanitarian access environment will significantly worsen, heightening humanitarian needs.

Signals of change

In the context of humanitarian access constraints, signals anticipate emerging access conditions before they materialise. Signals act as an early warning system for evolving humanitarian access needs, creating opportunities for operational planning, advocacy, and anticipatory response measures.

Escalating conflict in the Middle East and Gulf countries

The escalation of conflict in the Middle East is likely to influence access conditions and conflict dynamics in Sudan as a result of disrupted patronage networks between Sudan's warring parties and the Gulf countries. On 28 February 2026, the US and Israel launched attacks on multiple targets in Iran, including on the official residence of Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Khamanei, killing him in the process (AJ 28/02/2026; NYT 28/02/2026). Iran retaliated by targeting US military assets in Gulf countries, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a key financial and military ally of the RSF (Atlantic Council 02/03/2026; CNN 02/03/2026). Iran's targeting of the UAE is likely to swing UAE defence priorities away from external support for its allies, including financial and military support (HRRC 16/07/2026; MEE 04/11/2025). In the long run, attacks on the UAE could downgrade RSF military capabilities and lead to an easing of humanitarian access limitations resulting from RSF-instigated aggression and attacks on civilian and humanitarian targets. On the other side, Iran's reported support for the SAF, providing the Mohajer-6 combat unmanned aerial vehicles

the SAF uses in its increasing aerial campaigns, could potentially reduce drone-related security incidences that act as barriers to humanitarian access (The New Arab 12/02/2026; AJ 03/02/2026)

Global surge in random access memory (RAM) component prices

The global surge in RAM component prices could potentially lead to a decline in drone production, likely influencing supplies to conflict parties. As technological advancements in artificial intelligence continue, RAM demands have increased, resulting in a sharp rise in computer hardware prices (CNBC 10/01/2026; BBC 02/01/2026). Should this pattern continue, RAM demand in electronics manufacturing, including for drones, is likely to exceed supplies, potentially constraining drone production. While it remains unclear how global technology supply chains will translate into local conflict dynamics, this trend could ease drone-related incidences and the pace of the conflict in Sudan, reducing humanitarian access restrictions.

Disruption of humanitarian operations as a result of fuel shortages

Humanitarian operations in Sudan risk being affected by the fuel shortages resulting from regional tensions in the Gulf/Middle East. Sudan is a net importer of fuel and other oil by-products, despite being a key oil exporter. Much of Sudan's oil exports, however, are refined in the Gulf region, creating external dependencies and vulnerabilities tied to regional energy disruptions (Sudan Tribune 12/03/2026; Logistics Cluster accessed 12/03/2026). Regional tensions in the Middle East resulting from confrontations in the Gulf region are disrupting fuel supply flows in Sudan, creating logistical constraints for aid organisations (Sudan Tribune 12/03/2026; AP 09/03/2026). While organisations such as the WFP hold fuel depots to support humanitarian operations, the scale and volume of humanitarian assistance needed is likely much higher than can be sustained by fuel reserves in the event of global fuel shortages (Sudan Tribune 04/03/2026; Logistics Cluster accessed 12/03/2026). Additional factors, such as inflationary pressures and weak micro- and macro-economic status, could destabilise humanitarian procurement and logistics capacities, resulting in increased transport costs and operational delays (Zero Carbon Analytics 03/2026). By 19 January 2026, Sudan's inflation was 60.8%, a drop from 74% in November 2025, but the global economic climate could reverse this trend and affect humanitarian operations (Sudan Tribune 20/01/2026 and 18/12/2025).