



600 DAYS OF WAR IN SUDAN
INTERSOS EXPERIENCE AND
RECOMMENDATIONS



Policy and Programming Note for the '600 days of War in Sudan' - v.2
Nairobi, Kenya - December 3-4, 2024

This Policy and Programming Note was prepared for the '600 Days of War in Sudan' organised by the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC), the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) that took place on December 3-4, 2024, in Nairobi, Kenya. With the following note, INTERSOS objective is to highlight the current challenges impacting both displaced populations and humanitarian organisations emanating from the Sudan conflict in both Sudan and its neighbouring countries, as well as delivering a key set of recommendations and programmatic priorities, with a particular focus on the need to strengthen the regional response to mixed migration.

Introduction

The situation in Sudan is becoming increasingly challenging with each passing day. Since the conflict started in April 2023, the number of those in need of assistance has increased exponentially, going from 15.8 million people before the start of the war to 25 million today. Currently, over 11.2 million people have been forcibly displaced since April 2023, including 8.1 million internally displaced people (IDPs), while a staggering 3.1 million people have fled into neighbouring countries looking for protection and sanctuary.

INTERSOS worked in Sudan for 12 years, from 2004 to 2015. In 2024, in response to the escalating needs following the outbreak of conflict, the organization reactivated operations in the country focusing on the sectors of Health, Nutrition and WASH in West Darfur, Central Darfur, River Nile, and Kassala States.

Simultaneously, leveraging its ongoing regional presence and operations, **INTERSOS** has also been responding to refugees fleeing Sudan into neighbouring states, namely Chad, South Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Libya. Additionally, **INTERSOS** has also provided assistance to Sudanese through its programs in Italy and Greece. Since the onset of the conflict, **INTERSOS** has been providing vital humanitarian aid and protection to those fleeing the violence in Sudan, including both Sudanese nationals and third-country nationals who were residing in Sudan prior to the conflict.

The assistance provided in neighbouring countries can be summarized as follows:

- In **Chad**, **INTERSOS** teams have been providing emergency shelters and protection assistance, including safe spaces for women and children, Gender-based violence assistance and support with family reunification along the Eastern border - in Zabout, Kerfi and Daguessa refugee camps.
- In the Vakanga prefecture of the **Central African Republic**, **INTERSOS** is focusing on delivering assistance to children facing protection risks, including family separation, child abuse, sexual and gender-based violence and recruitment by armed groups.
- In **Libya**, across the 3 regions (East, West and South), **INTERSOS** has been supporting the Sudanese refugees and migrants, as well as refugees and asylum seekers from other nationalities with protection services such as integrated case management, mental health and psychosocial support and legal assistance, in addition to non-formal education services, and distributing non-food items. **INTERSOS'** services are mostly centre-based, but outreach activities have increased in the latter half of 2024.
- Until October 2024, in **South Sudan** **INTERSOS** provided essential services in transit camps including case management for children, arrival kits for women and girls, psychosocial services, material assistance, family tracing and reunification for unaccompanied minors, in addition to distribution of non-food items, shelter assistance and cash provision.
- In **Greece**, **INTERSOS** teams have been providing food to refugees and asylum seekers - including Sudanese nationals - and protection for unaccompanied and separated minors. In addition, through a series of activities, primarily housing support and employability programs, **INTERSOS** aims to support their integration into Greek society, increasing their prospect for autonomy and self-reliance.



- In Italy, **INTERSOS** has been supporting the Sudanese refugees alongside migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers of other nationalities with protection services, including information dissemination, awareness campaigns, case management, mental health and psychosocial support, and legal assistance. These efforts are complemented by tailored healthcare services delivered through a combination of mobile and static approaches.

In June 2024, **INTERSOS** published a policy paper titled '**Sudan's Exodus**' focusing on its regional humanitarian response in countries bordering Sudan sharing testimonies of some of those that have been assisted, highlighting their needs, and showcasing the challenges of humanitarian organisations in addressing them while directing recommendations to different stakeholders. Sudan's Exodus is accessible by clicking [here](#).

Some of the main challenges facing the displaced population in Sudan and in neighbouring countries

Sudanese refugees crossing into neighbouring countries are often in a state of deep poverty, having left their homeland with only the most essential possessions they were able to take with them. Their journey often exacerbates existing hardships, creating a dire need for comprehensive humanitarian assistance. Below are some of the key challenges faced by the displaced populations in both Sudan and its neighbouring countries that **INTERSOS** has witnessed:

- **Resource scarcity and high prices:** Limited resources in host countries, already strained by pre-existing poverty and challenges, are further burdened by the large-scale influx of refugees, including refugees in Sudan from neighbouring countries who had to flee back from Sudan into their countries of origin or other neighbouring countries. This scarcity leads to high commodity prices, price inflation, currency depreciation, unfavourable exchange rates and the loss of livelihoods and income, resulting in low purchasing power and high competition over available commodities, resources and services, fueling intercommunal tensions.
- **Social tensions:** The current conflict has exacerbated pre-existing ethnic tensions in Sudan, leading to targeted violence, particularly against groups like the Masalit tribe in Darfur. On the other hand, the influx of refugees and returnees into neighbouring countries has strained resources and created tensions between displaced populations and host communities, adding a regional dimension to the crisis. Overcrowded refugee settlements often become hotspots for social tension, where competition for limited resources, shelter, and income opportunities intensifies, further exacerbated by ethnic, cultural, and language differences.
- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to GBV in Sudan, including sexual assault, rape, forced/early marriage, and sexual exploitation. This is exacerbated by the breakdown of social structures, limited access to justice and support services, and the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. In most countries hosting Sudanese refugees, there is a lack of GBV service provision, and on some occasions, the survivors themselves are at heightened risk of arrest and deportation. Additionally, due to the poor conditions, the high level of vulnerability and the condition of marginalization, refugees and asylum seekers are further exposed to the risk of

sexual exploitation and abuse in the country of arrival.

- **Lack of access to legal documentation:** In Sudan and other neighbouring countries, many refugees and returnees have lost or lack essential documents, including identification papers and birth certificates. This limits their ability to access basic services (e.g., education and health), seek legal protection, exercise their rights, and drastically limit freedom of movement, increasing their exposure to risks.
- **Child protection risks:** Children are at heightened risk of separation from their families, exploitation, abuse, and recruitment by armed forces and groups. The disruption of education systems, the lack of access to education due to lack of documentation or administrative barriers, and limited access to child protection services further compound their vulnerability and present long-term negative consequences and risks for the development and well-being of children. Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) constitute a significant portion of child protection cases identified, however, there is a chronic lack of alternative care arrangements, and there is a need for alternatives to detention.
- **Navigating national laws and regulations surrounding housing, land and property (HLP) rights in Sudan:** the conflicting coexistence of statutory and customary legal systems, leads to confusion, insecurity, and disputes. For instance, in Darfur and other regions where customary land tenure practices are deeply entrenched this issue is particularly heightened. Additionally, secondary occupation of land by Sudanese IDPs in the place of origin has been, and most likely will continue to be, one of the most widely reported housing, land and property (HLP) rights concerns, posing a significant barrier to return.

Challenges for humanitarian actors

INTERSOS, like many other INGOs, faces a complex array of challenges in ensuring adequate humanitarian assistance and protection of Sudanese and third-country nationals fleeing the conflict. In Sudan, these mainly are:

- **Limited humanitarian access:** Obstacles to humanitarian access, including insecurity, bureaucratic and administrative hurdles, and restrictions imposed by multiple parties to the conflict in the region, hamper the delivery of aid and essential services to those in need.
 - **Visa and access to the country:** Obtaining visas for international staff is a protracted and cumbersome process, often resulting in significant delays. The acceptance rate for visa applications remains low, limiting the presence of humanitarian personnel on the ground.
 - **Cross-line movements:** Securing permits for cross-line movements-necessary to deliver aid across frontlines-is highly challenging. In addition to administrative delays, the lack of security guarantees and high safety risks for staff and convoys further complicate operations, often leaving entire communities without critical assistance.
 - **Cross-border movements:** Until recently, cross-border humanitarian movements were prohibited. While the recent decision to keep the Adré border crossing between Chad and Sudan open for an additional three months is a positive development, this remains the sole available crossing point for aid, making it insufficient to sustain all those in need.

- **Attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure, and humanitarian premises:** Although **INTERSOS** has not experienced direct attacks on its infrastructure since commencing operations in September 2024, the broader security environment is highly volatile. Reports of attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure, as well as hospitals, offices, and facilities of other humanitarian organisations are frequent. These attacks severely limit the ability of those in need to access aid and hinder humanitarian organisations from delivering assistance where it is most urgently required. As a result, service delivery is disrupted, and critical needs remain unmet, further intensifying the crisis.
- **Compliance with laws and national regulations:** Operating in multiple countries can be particularly challenging due to the differences in national laws and regulations, which can vary significantly between host nations. Meeting these legal and regulatory requirements often adds additional layers of complexity, including delays in registration processes, constraints on certain types of activities, and reporting obligations that may limit operational flexibility.
- **Lack of United Nations presence:** Operating in Sudan, **INTERSOS** witnesses the consequences of insufficient UN presence in Sudan and, in many parts of it, the total absence of the UN, particularly in the Darfur region. This has also meant more work for NGOs and less capacity for impact due to the increased challenges.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Sudanese displacement crisis requires a coordinated and comprehensive response from all actors. Addressing the challenges outlined in this policy and programming note and implementing evidence-based programming combined with robust advocacy that exposes and addresses the identified blind spots are crucial steps toward alleviating and mitigating the suffering of those affected by this crisis and promoting durable solutions. **INTERSOS** teams on the ground witness daily the severe hardships faced by refugees and returnees across all their areas of operation, including Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan, and Sudan.

The time to act is now. Those affected by the conflict in Sudan and those who have fled to neighbouring countries need to be able to access assistance without further ado. We call on all actors, including Member States, the UN, and other humanitarian actors, to step up their engagement and support all affected populations in both Sudan and neighbouring countries. With the situation rapidly evolving, swift and decisive action is essential to assist the most vulnerable, both within Sudan and in neighbouring countries. In light of the immense humanitarian needs, **INTERSOS** emphasizes the importance of implementing the following recommendations.

Recommendations to Donor and Member States:

- **Urgent funding is needed:** **INTERSOS** welcomes the partial fulfilment of the humanitarian pledges made during the Paris Conference for Sudan and neighbouring countries on 15 April 2024, and it acknowledges and appreciates the contributions made by many donors to support the humanitarian response in Sudan and neighbouring countries.

However, as of the 3rd of December, the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan for Sudan remains underfunded, with only 60.1% of the required funding secured, while the Sudan Emergency Regional Refugee Response Plan 2024 remains at a lower 45.6%. Donors must fully honour their pledges made at the Paris Conference on Sudan and prioritize longer-term funding commitments that support both emergency relief and resilience-building initiatives.

- **Multi-year funding models:** The current funding landscape prioritizes short-term emergency responses, which are inadequate to address the complex and protracted nature of displacement. There is a critical need for donors willing to support flexible multi-year projects that align with the dynamic nature and complex geographic patterns of migration.
- **Enhanced diplomatic efforts for an end to the conflict:** A lasting solution to the displacement crisis hinges on a political resolution to the conflict in Sudan. Member States must urgently scale up diplomatic efforts to facilitate dialogue between warring factions, promote a ceasefire, and support an inclusive peace process that addresses the root causes of the conflict.
- **Call to put pressure on parties to the conflict:** At the same time, recognising the current situation in the country, we call on all Member States to increase pressure on the parties to the conflict in Sudan to comply with international humanitarian law and denounce and call out IHL violations, respect human life, ensure protection of civilians, allow safe passage for those fleeing, and ensure humanitarian actors can safely reach affected populations with the assistance they need and vice versa.
- **Durable solutions:** While supporting neighbouring countries in assisting refugees and strengthening multilateral diplomatic efforts toward political solutions to the conflict, all relevant actors, including Member States, Donor countries, and international organisations, should enhance efforts to utilize the full spectrum of immediate and durable solutions for Sudanese refugees, including complementary pathways. At the same time, it is equally important to implement humanitarian assistance aimed at fostering self-reliance and preserving the dignity of displaced populations. These efforts are necessary to prevent further deterioration of the conditions for those displaced, both within Sudan and in neighbouring countries.

Recommendations for countries hosting refugees and returnees:

- **Allow unimpeded humanitarian access:** In both Sudan's neighbouring countries and Sudan itself, we call on all state actors and authorities to guarantee and ensure unimpeded and unobstructed access for humanitarian organisations to reach those in need and remove barriers that delay or prevent the delivery of essential aid. This requires upholding international humanitarian law and principles, ceasing attacks on humanitarian personnel and infrastructure, and removing bureaucratic and administrative impediments that hinder aid delivery.
- **Continue support for those displaced in neighbouring countries:** Recognising the great challenges that the Sudanese influx has created in many countries neighbouring Sudan, **INTERSOS** calls on these states to continue ensuring temporary protection and humanitarian assistance to the civilians fleeing the conflict. In line with this, we call on the same states to support the strengthening of public services, community actors and non-governmental organisations to enable an effective response to the influx of refugees, ensuring basic needs are met.
- **Ensure inclusion of refugees and promote cohesion with local communities:** **INTERSOS**, responding itself in support of refugees and host communities in many countries neighbouring Sudan, calls states to ensure access and inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers into public services and promote social cohesion initiatives aimed at fostering understanding and collaboration between refugees and host communities to mitigate tensions and promote peaceful coexistence.

Recommendations to the Humanitarian Community:

- **Bureaucratic and administrative impediments:** Bureaucratic and administrative obstacles, both within host countries and within the humanitarian system, delay the delivery of aid and hinder the effectiveness of interventions. To address these challenges, it is crucial to strengthen coordination and enhance the sharing of information among humanitarian actors. Streamlining processes, improving communications, and fostering closer collaboration will enable a more effective response and reduce delays in delivering assistance to those in need.
- **Navigating political instability and hostility towards NGOs:** The challenging political context in some countries, including hostility towards NGOs providing humanitarian assistance to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, requires careful navigation and strategic engagement to ensure the safety and security of staff while maintaining access to populations in need.
- **Support for local responders:** Local organisations and community-based initiatives have been at the forefront of the response to the Sudan crisis, showcasing remarkable solidarity, capability, and commitment to addressing needs at the grassroots level. These actors possess a deep understanding of local contexts and are uniquely positioned to deliver effective and timely assistance. Strengthening their capacity through targeted support, including funding, training, and partnership opportunities, is crucial for ensuring a more sustainable and impactful long-term humanitarian response.
- **Developing coherent regional policies:** Regional cooperation is crucial to developing harmonized policies on border management, refugee protection, and securing access to services for migrants and refugees.
- **Lack of project sustainability:** Existing project designs often fail to adapt to the changing needs of populations on the move and the evolving context of the crisis. A greater emphasis on building local capacities, fostering self-reliance, and promoting durable solutions is essential.
- **Strengthening mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and protection programming more broadly:** The invisible wounds of conflict and displacement can have long-lasting consequences on individuals, families, and communities. To improve the quality of programming, MHPSS and protection must be integrated into all aspects of humanitarian response and considered a core component of humanitarian assistance. It is essential to invest in building the capacity of local stakeholders in protection and mental health and ensure the integration of MHPSS and Protection components at prevention, response and environment-building levels.
- **Addressing the needs of host communities:** Interventions should be sensitive to the concerns and should consider the needs of host communities and ensure that support provided to refugees and returnees does not negatively impact existing resources and services, in particular, the most vulnerable population groups among the host communities. Moreover, in most host countries, the existing public services are not sufficiently developed and equipped or simply lack the capacity to deal with the increased demand following the influx of Sudanese refugees or returnees. Emergency response should, therefore, go hand in hand with investment in public/social sector capacity, including infrastructure and equipment, in addition to more traditional soft support such as training and capacity-building programs for national staff.





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