

# SUDAN

## Political transition strained by COVID-19



### KEY FACTS

Population: **43.8 million**

**13.4 million** people in need of humanitarian aid (30% of population)

**9.6 million** facing crisis or worse levels of food insecurity (IPC 3+)

**2.6 million** people internally displaced

**1.1 million** refugees hosted

**163rd** (of 195 countries) for capability to prevent and mitigate epidemics

**157th** (of 167 countries) for women's equality

**174th** (of 181 countries) for resilience to climate change

**3/5** for severity of access constraints

**52%** of funding received for 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan

Above: Recently arrived Ethiopian refugees are registered at Um Raquba in eastern Sudan.

### PROBABILITY

**8** HUMAN THREAT

**5** NATURAL THREAT

### IMPACT

**7** CONSTRAINTS ON COUNTRY RESPONSE

**8** EXISTING PRESSURES ON POPULATION

**Sudan is entering 2021 navigating a fragile political transition and major economic challenges that are hampering the country's recovery after decades of conflict and under-development.**

2021 will test the ability of Sudan's young transitional government – the first new leadership in the country in three decades – to address the concerns of opposition groups and the needs of the population, including a recent fragile peace deal with some of the armed groups active in Darfur and Blue Nile/South Kordofan. The transition is further complicated by the need to overcome decades of large-scale conflict and under-development and the likelihood that refugees, and possibly instability, will flow into the country from Ethiopia. The government's ability to effectively adopt critical political and economic reforms will be further strained by a set of complex humanitarian crises, including the highest level of people in need in a decade, some of the worst climate-related disasters in decades, an economic crisis deepened by COVID-19, the highest levels of food insecurity in a decade and millions of people still displaced in the country.

"The political developments of 2019 were a watershed moment for the people of Sudan. Despite political changes, any new government faces enormous challenges including a collapsed economy, heavily underdeveloped social services, multiple disease outbreaks, large swaths of hard-to-reach areas and a history of tension between different groups. There is a mix of optimism and concern in the air and the next year will be incredibly important for charting a new path for Sudan."

- Ari Berkowitz  
Emergency Program Coordinator, IRC  
Emergencies and Humanitarian Action Unit



## HUMANITARIAN RISKS IN 2021

- ▶ **COVID-19 will put further pressure on the fragile political transition process and hamper Khartoum's ability to address the deepening economic crisis, which is driving record levels of food insecurity.** Sudan has been ruled by a transitional government since August 2019, when a power-sharing agreement was reached. COVID-19 is exacerbating the country's economic crisis, further complicating the transition and driving up humanitarian needs. Inflation rates reached 212% in September 2020, compared to 57% at the start of the year ([OCHA](#)). The price of the local food basket increased by 200% in 2020 ([OCHA](#)) in a country where 90% of families already spent most of their income on food before the pandemic ([OCHA](#)). As a result, Sudan is seeing record levels of food insecurity ([WFP](#)). The U.S. announced in October 2020 that it intends to remove Sudan from its State Sponsors of Terrorism list, which would open the door to greater financial investments and debt relief after 27 years of sitting on this list ([State Department](#)).
- ▶ **The absence of key armed groups from a peace deal signed in late 2020 suggests conflict may recur in parts of the country.** The government signed a peace agreement in September 2020 with several armed groups. The deal is an important step forward in ending conflict in Darfur and the southern regions of South Kordofan and the Blue Nile and could lead to improved humanitarian access to these areas. However, some key armed groups are not yet party to the deal and so there is a risk conflict could resume. The worsening economic crisis may also limit the government's ability to fully implement the deal.
- ▶ **Refugees and possibly instability are likely to flow into the country from Ethiopia.** The conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region is escalating rapidly and has already driven tens of thousands of people to seek refuge in Sudan, not least because Tigray's other borders - with Eritrea and internal borders with the rest of Ethiopia - are closed. Over 43,000 Ethiopian refugees have already entered Sudan since tensions and violence escalated in early November 2020 in Tigray and these numbers are likely to grow significantly in 2021 ([UNHCR](#)). Such an influx would result in a roughly 30% increase in the total number of refugees in Sudan and would likely be hosted in remote eastern areas, putting even greater strain on the existing humanitarian response in the country.
- ▶ **Climate-related disasters are worsening and driving greater needs in a country with limited coping capacity and high vulnerability.** Sudan has very high exposure to natural hazards, which can spark major disease outbreaks given the country's weak health, water and sanitation infrastructure. Sudan ranks in the top ten countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change ([ND-GAIN](#)), increasing the risk of natural shocks. In 2020, the country experienced the worst flooding in over three decades, which affected over 875,000 people and contributed to more than 10 million people being at risk of water-borne diseases and 4.5 million people at risk of vector-borne diseases ([OCHA](#)). Moreover, desert locust swarms have destroyed crops and farmland during 2020 and will remain a threat in 2021 as well.

### THE IRC IN SUDAN

The IRC began moving forward with the re-launch of humanitarian programs in Sudan in 2019, marking its first return to the country since its departure in 2009 amid mass NGO expulsions. The IRC had spent 28 years in Sudan providing healthcare, water, sanitation, education, livelihoods and women's health and protection services. IRC has used unrestricted, emergency and COVID-19 response funds to facilitate the opening of the country office. Current programming includes direct and partner implementation in health and WASH. Going forward the team will focus on building up the program portfolio to address needs as they unfold. Learn more about the IRC's work at [Rescue.org](#).

