

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION FOR SUDANESE REFUGEES IN CHAD: EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND LAND ACCESS

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Research carried out by SIPRI in Chad in 2024 and 2026 examined how armed conflict and displacement impact refugee women and girls. It sought to assess the extent to which the humanitarian response in Chad was meeting the needs and expectations of Sudanese refugee women and girls and their communities.¹

The research in April and May 2024 was conducted in collaboration with SIPRI's Chadian partner BUCOFORE in four refugee camps in eastern Chad. Researchers collected the experiences of displaced Sudanese women and girls, Chadian returnees and host communities via perception surveys, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions.

In January and February 2026, SIPRI and BUCOFORE convened two seminars with humanitarian actors in Abéché and N'Djamena, Chad, with support from the Forum of International Non-governmental Organizations in Chad (FONGIT) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), to reflect collectively on the research findings. The seminars were designed to strengthen the link between research, practice and accountability to affected populations.

This SIPRI Fact Sheet expands on three of the key findings in the research by incorporating insights from the seminars. The research and subsequent engagement with humanitarian actors, donors and policymakers identified education, employment and access to land as particularly relevant. Focusing on these areas, the fact sheet aims to guide donor decision making and to support targeted, effective interventions that minimize harm and foster positive impact.

KEY FACTS

- Limited access to education during conflict and displacement reinforces existing inequalities and has long-term consequences for refugees
- The establishment of scholarship programmes with regional and international universities, including digital learning centres, would increase access to higher education
- Land access is central to social cohesion: 23 per cent of the surveyed host community believe that land disputes are a key driver of conflict with the refugees. The lack of clarity around land access and land use has been documented as a source of tension

¹ For the full findings of the research see: Bourhrous, A. et al., *Through Their Eyes: Experiences of Displaced Sudanese Women and Girls in Eastern Chad* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Mar. 2025); and Riquier, M. and Nandoumabe, P., 'The impact of conflict and displacement on Sudanese refugee women in eastern Chad', Policy brief, XCEPT, June 2025. See also Baudais, V. et al., 'Humanitarian funding gaps in Chad: Implications for vulnerable populations', Fact sheet, Aug. 2026.

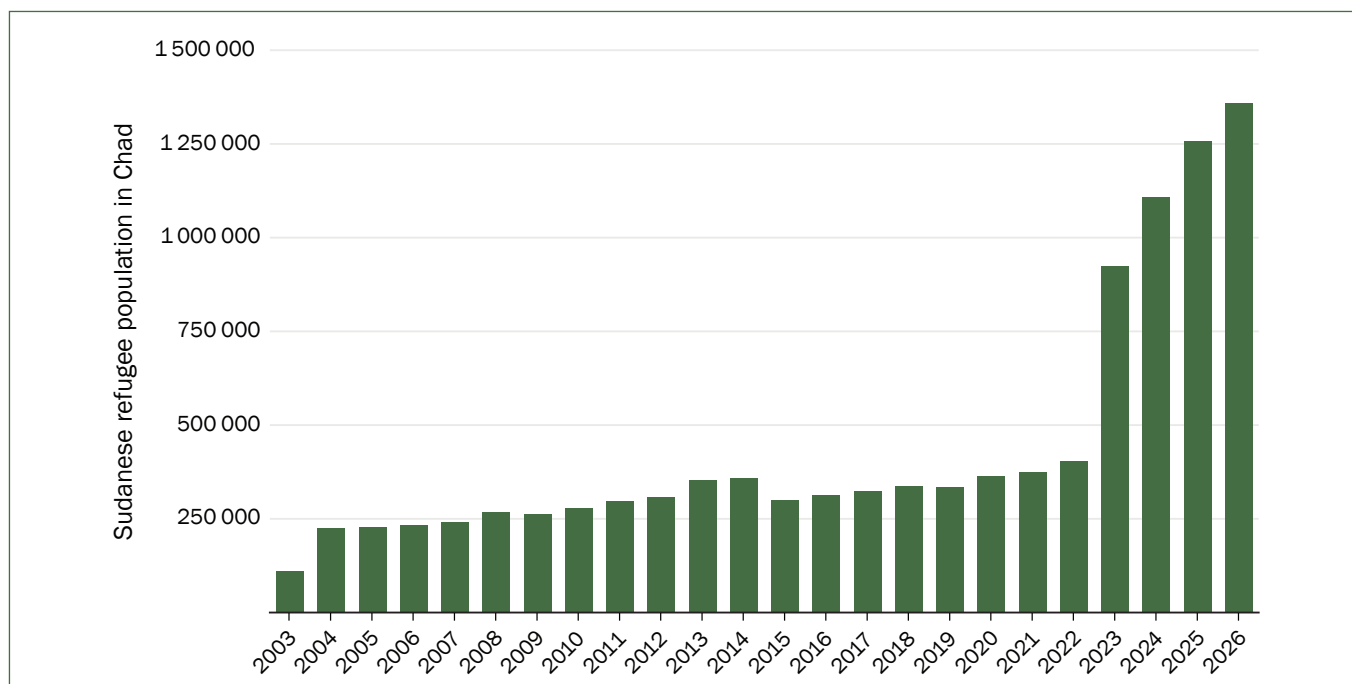


Figure 1. The Sudanese refugee population in Chad, 2003–26

Source: Data for 2003–25 is from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Humanitarian Data Exchange, Population data for Chad (TCD) (dataset), accessed 26 May 2026; and data for 2026 is from UNHCR, Operational Data Portal, Chad, accessed 26 May 2026.

CONTEXT

The armed conflict that resumed in Sudan in April 2023 has triggered the largest humanitarian and displacement crisis in the world, with over 11 million people forcibly displaced as of June 2026.² Over four million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, primarily Chad, Egypt and South Sudan. In the wake of the 2003 Darfur conflict, approximately 400 000 Sudanese refugees crossed the border into Chad. Since April 2023, this number has increased by more than 900 000 new refugees (see figure 1).

Women and children make up more than 80 per cent of the new arrivals in Chad. This poses specific challenges for humanitarian organizations, including in the provision of maternal and child healthcare, education, psychosocial support, safeguarding against sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), and preventing sexual exploitation and child labour.

BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION

The research found that in the Chad–Sudan border region, refugee women and girl face considerable threats to their safety, and existing protection measures are inadequate. While women report feeling relatively safer after arriving in Chad, they still face a range of threats and risks.

Furthermore, in a context of multidimensional poverty and resource scarcity in eastern Chad, the prospects for the socioeconomic integration of Sudanese refugee women are constrained by limited access to education,

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Operational Data Portal, accessed 29 June 2026.



economic opportunities and land for productive use and settlement. This reinforces their vulnerability and reliance on humanitarian assistance.

Incorporating insights from the seminars, the following sections discuss three key findings from the research and their implications: limited access to education diminishes prospects for refugees, limited access to economic opportunities exposes Sudanese refugee women to protection risks and limits inclusion; and issues around land access are likely to contribute to tensions between communities.

Limited access to education diminishes prospects for refugees

'I was in sixth grade, but I don't go to school here. There's no school here . . . None of us go to school here, whereas we all went to school in Sudan. We are very bored. We are just here all day. There is nothing to do here. We can't even go outside because we are scared.'³

In Chad, where approximately 3 million children do not attend school, the arrival of refugees puts additional pressure on an already fragile education system. As of June 2025, only 39 per cent of Sudanese refugee children in Chad were enrolled in school because of the lack of functioning schools, teachers and resources to cover salaries. National and local authorities rely on humanitarian organizations to provide education services.⁴

For those in school, limited funding results in overcrowded classrooms in the refugee camps. In eastern Chad, almost 40 000 additional classrooms would be required to align refugee enrolment rates with those of the local population. Budget cuts are exacerbating a shortage of textbooks and school kits, which reduces the quality of learning and increases the risk of pupils dropping out. School enrolment and attendance are also constrained by the restricted availability of food, latrines and safe drinking water in the camps.

Limited access to education during conflict and displacement reinforces existing inequalities and has long-term consequences for refugees. Access to education for all refugees, regardless of the duration of their displacement, is limited, but more recently arrived refugees face additional barriers because they are accommodated in extensions to the refugee camps and have longer to travel to school.

Furthermore, vulnerable children experience the greatest impact of limited educational services. Barriers to education expose children who are forcibly displaced by violence, especially girls, to protection risks and exclusion. Ultimately, this may contribute to prolonged aid dependency.

Although access to education for refugees is a fundamental right and a right protected by Chadian legislation, there are currently few opportunities for Sudanese refugees to pursue their studies. The research shows that limited access to education is a major concern for Sudanese refugees in Chad. Many of the young women interviewed expressed the wish to study to improve their lives, in Chad, Sudan or abroad.

In the long term, further budget cuts would undermine the education system in eastern Chad, which is already under strain, slow down infrastructure development, limit the recruitment of teachers and reduce the quality of learning. Furthermore, the United States's allocation to the United

³ Focus group discussion with young Sudanese refugees, Farchana camp extension, 24 Apr. 2024.

⁴ Development Action Platform, 'Education in Chad', [n.d.], accessed 25 June 2026.



Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has deprioritized education to focus on emergency response.⁵ This risks causing a significant increase in the number of both out-of-school refugee and Chadian children, with lasting consequences for the country's stability and development. While several initiatives, such as Education Cannot Wait and scholarship programmes with universities and embassies, have scaled up in eastern Chad, the efforts remain underfunded and have been hit particularly hard by recent cuts in aid.⁶

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts to strengthen the education system and improve access to education. Multisectorial responses must be broadened to address barriers to education by integrating school meals, safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation services into schools. These interventions could contribute to creating safe educational environments for both Sudanese refugee and local children that can improve school enrolment and attendance. Expanding existing financial and academic support is also essential, including through scholarships that cover school fees, accommodation and transportation costs. The establishment of scholarship programmes with regional and international universities, including digital learning centres, would increase access to higher education. At the same time, increased investment in the Chadian education sector is essential, requiring financial partners to provide funding and support for the Chadian government to invest in the education sector.

Limited access to economic opportunities exposes Sudanese refugee women to protection risks and limits inclusion

'In Sudan, I was a teacher. I have been teaching for 20 years but since arriving here I have not been able to get a job. At home, I never had to fetch water. Nor did I go to collect wood. I had drinking water at home and I cooked with gas. Now I go to the market and do whatever needs to be done to get some money. I help people here and there. I also wash clothes in people's homes to get some money. You see, most of the people who are here in Iridimi camp come from the big cities in Sudan. They are not used to working in the fields and other chores involving water and searching for wood. This is what makes things harder for us.'⁷

The socioeconomic profile of Sudanese refugees crossing the border into eastern Chad has evolved; recent refugee populations originate from both urban and rural areas, are more diverse and less socially integrated than earlier waves, which makes economic integration more challenging.

Skilled and qualified Sudanese refugees struggle to access the labour market in Chad because they are often not literate in French, and the diplomas they hold are not recognized in Chad. This means that many who wish to pursue their previous line of work, such as teaching or nursing, are unable to do so. A significant number of women find themselves constrained to informal jobs like doing laundry or making bricks, which deepens their

⁵ Working seminar, hybrid, Abéché, 28 Jan. 2026; Working seminar, N'Djamena, 11 Feb. 2026; and Cassam-Chenaï, F., Nandoumabe, P. and Riquier, M., 'Study of the effects of the reduction in US aid on the response to the war in Sudan and its consequences in Chad', Internal report, French Development Agency, 2026.

⁶ Education Cannot Wait, 'ECW provides additional US\$2 million to Sudanese refugees in Chad', Press release, 17 Oct. 2025; and Consultation with humanitarian actors in eastern Chad, Jan. and Feb. 2026.

⁷ Recently displaced Sudanese refugee, Iridimi, interview with the research team, 2 May 2024.



economic vulnerability and increases their exposure to exploitation and protection risks. Meanwhile, Chad is facing a shortage of qualified personnel, including within refugee camps.

Humanitarian and development actors and national authorities have launched programmes to tackle the complex challenges of integrating refugees into the job market and boosting economic integration. These programmes aim to transition refugees from dependence to self-reliance by developing livelihood sectors. For example, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Chadian non-governmental organization APLFT (Association pour la Promotion des Libertés Fondamentales au Tchad) carry out skills screenings at refugee camps. Meanwhile interagency collaboration between the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNHCR aims to empower refugee women, particularly by launching programmes to improve access to education, training and economic opportunities.⁸

Despite efforts—in particular, UNHCR's programmes in professional learning centres—significant structural barriers remain.

Addressing these barriers requires coordinated action from national authorities, humanitarian actors and donors.⁹ This includes establishing mechanisms, in particular through relevant professional bodies, to formally recognize Sudanese professional qualifications in Chad. Recognizing qualifications in fields such as medicine and law could help address critical skills shortages in Chad while enabling Sudanese refugees to access dignified employment and provide opportunities for socioeconomic development. It also includes investment in French language education to improve refugees' access to employment in Chad, alongside the establishment and funding of digital learning centres to enable Sudanese refugees to continue their studies online, thereby expanding pathways to higher education.

Issues around land access are likely to contribute to tensions between communities

The Chadian government has allocated land in eastern Chad to refugees, and local Chadians provide access to land for agriculture, in coordination with the authorities. Nevertheless, for women, many of whom take on the role of breadwinner and caregiver, access to land is a critical barrier to self-reliance and being able to support and feed their families.

In April 2026, over 40 people lost their lives in intercommunal violence over access to a water point in Wadi Fira, Chad. This illustrates the risk of tensions around natural resource availability and competition over water and land escalating in a context marked by climate change, demographic pressure, limited state presence and a proliferation of weapons.¹⁰ Basic services and infrastructure in eastern Chad are minimal, meanwhile multidimen-

⁸ Consultations with humanitarian actors in Chad, Jan. and Feb. 2026.

⁹ Working seminars, Abéché and N'Djamena, Jan. and Feb. 2026.

¹⁰ Sow, F., 'Tchad : 42 morts dans un affrontement intercommunautaire dans l'Est' [Chad: 42 dead in inter-communal clash in the east], *Afric Telegraph*, 27 Apr. 2026; and France 24, 'Un affrontement intercommunautaire fait au moins 42 morts dans l'est du Tchad' [Inter-communal clashes leave at least 42 dead in eastern Chad], 24 Apr. 2026.



sional poverty scores are high.¹¹ Land productivity is low in the provinces of eastern Chad, which are marked by climate-induced stress and the pressure on natural resources has increased over time.

Despite Chadian government efforts to raise awareness among local host communities of the importance of access to land for refugees, the research noted a sense of fatigue at the absence of durable solutions in the face of protracted displacement. Land access is central to social cohesion: 23 per cent of the surveyed host community believe that land disputes are a key driver of conflict with the refugees. The lack of clarity around land access and land use has been documented as a source of tension.¹²

Against this backdrop, stakeholders are launching initiatives aimed at strengthening land governance. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) is supporting the Chadian government's land reform by reviewing land policy and the national Land and State Property Code (*code domanial*), launching pilot projects to modernize the land registry and contributing to the design of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism designed to support the implementation of the national policy. These efforts are steps towards greater clarity and coordinated action between humanitarian and development actors and the authorities. Furthermore, in 2023 the Chadian government launched "Haguina"—an initiative run in partnership with the FAO, UNHCR and World Food Programme (WFP)—which allocates land to refugees to provide economic opportunities and improve agricultural production.¹³ These initiatives are inscribed in the humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus approach, which seeks to align emergency response, development assistance and peacebuilding initiatives in fragile contexts.

Building on these ongoing efforts requires continued coordination among national authorities, humanitarian and development actors, donors and local communities. This includes strengthening land governance frameworks that balance hosting refugees with the protection of community land rights. In parallel, investments in agricultural production and livestock farming can strengthen food security, improve nutrition and expand livelihood opportunities for the host community and refugees. This could contribute to reducing long-term dependence on humanitarian assistance. National institutions, with operational support from humanitarian and development actors and financing from donors, play a key role in strengthening inclusive and conflict-sensitive land governance systems while investing in infrastructure that improves land productivity to reduce aid dependency. Accompanying these measures with efforts to raise community awareness of equitable access to land can contribute to reducing tensions over land access and use.

¹¹ World Bank, 'Chad—Special chapter: Hosting refugees in an inclusive manner', Economic Update, Apr. 2024.

¹² Laville, C. et al., 'Accès à la terre et résilience des femmes réfugiées soudanaises au Tchad: Enjeux systémiques et perceptions locales' [Access to land and resilience of Sudanese refugee women in Chad: Systemic issues and local perceptions], Technical report, Sep. 2025.

¹³ Wilton, P., 'From aid to autonomy: How refugee and host communities are building food security in Chad', World Food Programme, 23 Apr. 2026.



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