



Rebuilding Sudan from the Devastation of War

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The ousting of the militias, the so-called Rapid Support Forces (RSF), from the central part of Sudan and with it the capital city of Khartoum at the beginning of 2025 has made it possible to start rebuilding destroyed infrastructure. More than 2 million residents have already returned to their homes. Supporting this process is in the EU's interest as it leads to the restoration of stability, including controlling migration, in its close neighbourhood.

The civil war in Sudan, ongoing since April 2023 in which RSF militias are fighting government forces, has been accompanied by significant infrastructure destruction and the world's largest refugee crisis: some 13 million people left their homes, becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs) or fleeing abroad. Most of them planned to return when the situation allowed. The impact of the [2024-2025 offensive](#) in which Sudanese government forces succeeded in driving the RSF out of the agricultural provinces of Sennar and Gezira, and later from the capital's Khartoum-Omdurman-Khartoum North (Bahri) metropolitan area, was groundbreaking in this respect. As a result, almost all areas east of the White Nile and adjacent areas came under state control outside the zone of active fighting and without the risk of militias returning to terrorise the population. This opened up opportunities for much of the country to begin reconstruction and for the return of refugees, including IDPs. Although the war continues and [is intensifying in the western parts of the country](#) (especially the Kordofan and Darfur regions), its central part with Khartoum, is rapidly returning to normal life.

Return of Refugees. The first IDPs began to return to central Sudanese localities (Sinja, Wad Madani) in the very first weeks after RSF's departure at the end of 2024. On a larger scale, returns began this spring to exceed 1 million in May and 2 million by the end of July, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). While initially the main destination was rural areas (about half of all returns are to Gezira), where it is relatively easier to rebuild a household, July saw a surge in returns to the Khartoum metropolitan area, from which a total of about 3.6 million people had left since the start of the war. Around 500,000 of them returned in July alone, a number that could quadruple by the end of the year. However, the problem there is unstable access to

water, which causes disease outbreaks such as cholera. To facilitate activities to support returns, in September this year, the IOM, despite a reduction in its activities following U.S. aid cuts, opened an office in Khartoum.

According to IOM, by the end of July, 77% of returnees (1,550,000) had returned from other parts of Sudan and 455,000 from abroad (most from Egypt and South Sudan, 41% and 32%, respectively; fewer from Libya and the Gulf States). The vast majority declared that they were motivated by the improved security situation. Virtually no refugees are returning from Chad, where more than 500,000 refugees from the Masalit community, which was attacked by the RSF in the [2023 ethnic cleansing](#), had taken refuge. Returns to areas under RSF control are sporadic (according to IOM, no more than 4,000 in West Darfur) and are unlikely to involve permanent settlement.

Infrastructure. The occupation by the RSF and their subsequent withdrawal was accompanied by large-scale looting. Transformers, hospital equipment, copper wiring for houses, among other things, were dismantled and taken away. After being pushed out of central Sudan, the group continued to attack civilian critical infrastructure with drones. For example, in April this year, they targeted the power plant on the Nile dam in Merowe, which produces electricity for the northern part of Sudan, and in May the power plants in Omdurman. According to the UN, the reconstruction of Khartoum's basic infrastructure will cost around \$350 million, and it will take many years to fully repair the damage. The authorities' priority is first to restore access to electricity by repairing power plants and transmission stations and rebuilding damaged pumps to ensure access to water.

In Khartoum province alone, 60 water and power installations were damaged or destroyed. They are being repaired and

gradually restored to service. In July and August, supplies to some hospitals (in Bahri, where they were reduced to 60% of operations, and in Khartoum, which was down to 45%) and pumping stations were stabilised, and by the end of September the network is expected to be restored within the agglomeration. Government institutions are gradually returning to the capital, but will initially occupy temporary premises on the outskirts of the city. The former government quarter, completely destroyed, is to be redesigned. Slums are also being removed. The runway at Khartoum International Airport—immobilised and destroyed in the first days of the war—has already been repaired. Preparations are underway to restore scheduled passenger traffic from October. The airport has begun flights carrying out spraying to combat disease-carrying mosquitoes. Classes have started at Khartoum University. Infrastructure reconstruction is also underway, for example, in El Obeid, the capital of North Kordofan, which was under siege until recently and where the main pumping station was repaired in September, restoring the operation of the water supply network.

Agriculture and Industry. Established by the British in the early 20th century, the so-called Gezira Scheme, located between the White and Blue Nile, was historically the world's largest centrally managed agricultural establishment, operating with a complex network of canals. Under RSF occupation, 2024 was the first time in history that the production cycle at Gezira had broken down, due to dam closures, deliberate stock destruction, seizures, theft of agricultural equipment, and population displacement, among other things. Restoring stable agricultural production in the area is fundamental to Sudan's food security. In May, a planting campaign was conducted in home gardens for the ongoing needs of residents to facilitate the reception of returnees. In July, the authorities provided farmers with maize seed free of charge to sow their fields before the rainy season so as not to miss the next cycle of agricultural production.

In the heavily industrialised area of the Khartoum metropolitan area, the reconstruction and restoration of the functionality of industrial plants is underway, which is important for production, and employment. In March, the first plants of the Bahri industrial zone were put into operation, followed, for example, by the grain mills and the Sudanese-Malaysian steel plant. The Moawia Elberier conglomerate, with a number of food production plants, is also returning to work. Most in need of investment and work is the dilapidated refinery north of the capital, which was a mined RSF base for many months.

Reconstruction Support. Many initiatives are organised from the bottom up. At its core is the self-help movement that consolidated during the revolution against the rule of Omar Al-Bashir and often replaced state functions during the war, such as organising emergency repairs to power lines. The Youth Authority for Reconstruction and National Recovery, for example, led the restoration of lighting on Khartoum's most important road artery, and the Revolutionary Brigades led the launch of a football stadium. At the neighbourhood level, residents are organising campaigns to clear rubble, clean up public spaces, and make basic repairs to buildings. In smaller towns, residents, with the financial help of local entrepreneurs and the diaspora, are bringing in solar panels to power water pumps and street lighting for local needs.

With the limited presence of UN agencies or Western aid organisations and their dwindling funding, some Gulf states, notably Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have become leading foreign partners in Sudan's reconstruction. In March this year, a committee was formed under the auspices of the Saudi king to support reconstruction for six months in the critical areas of energy, health, water, and agriculture. The Saudi aid agency King Salman Relief Center, for example, is also active. The Egyptian Roads and Bridges Authority will help with the reconstruction of two junction bridges on the Nile in Khartoum. Chinese-supported projects are also noticeable, such as in the restoration of the obstetrics, gynaecology, and dentistry departments of Haj Al-Safi Hospital in Bahri.

In April the EU pledged €282 million to support mainly humanitarian needs in Sudan in 2025. A further €240 million has been pledged by 13 Member States, including Poland. The assistance is mainly for emergency health, food, water and sanitation, as well as education support for Sudanese refugees residing in Chad and for the host community. Also, a German delegation held discussions on a contribution to infrastructure reconstruction with the Sudanese finance minister in March.

Threats and Prospects. A threat to stability is the possible intensification of air attacks on civilian infrastructure in central Sudan. There is also the risk of a new offensive by the RSF, which in June, with logistical support from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the help of the Libyan militia Subul al-Salam, occupied the area where the borders of Sudan, Libya, and Egypt meet. From there, they announced their intention to launch an invasion of the Northern State (through which refugees from Egypt are returning) towards Omdurman. This can only be prevented by pressure from the Sudanese army on the RSF.

The ongoing reconstruction of war damage in much of Sudan, carried out without the significant involvement of international aid agencies, is primarily a demonstration of the social resilience and self-organisation capacity of the Sudanese and their diaspora. In the coming months, we can expect an acceleration of returns and an increase in the reconstruction needs of the central part of Sudan, and possibly (depending on the situation on the frontline) of more parts of the country. The EU should engage not only in humanitarian efforts but also in the long-term reconstruction of Sudan as a key condition for improving stability. Funds from the European Peace Facility (EPF) should be involved for this purpose, especially in the context of [the dismantling of USAID](#).

Return statistics in different parts of the country clearly indicate that for Sudanese, the primary criterion for assessing whether it is possible to return is the presence of RSF militias. Only areas where they are driven out will be where war refugees return and economic recovery progresses. In this context, the EU's policy of maintaining an equal distance from the parties to the conflict should be reviewed. The EU should pragmatically assess the situation and politically favour the goal of the sustainable elimination of the RSF as a means of stabilisation and to ward off the risk of worsening destruction and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis, including the migration crisis. To this end, it should be more forceful in demanding that the UAE withdraw its support for the group.