

The Impact of War on Education in Sudan:

The Reality of IDPs and Refugees, Challenges, and Opportunities for Recovery

A thematic research report on the impact of war on education before and after 15th of April 2023

Research prepared by:

Yasir Mohamed Ali

Researcher & Senior Education Consultant



**Crisis
Coordination
Unit Sudan**

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Executive Summary

Since fighting broke out in Sudan in April 2023, the country has been living through one of the largest displacement and education crises anywhere in the world. The war has torn through educational services in the affected regions — schools have closed, buildings have been destroyed, students and teachers have scattered, and learning has stalled for millions. UNICEF puts the number of school-aged children now out of school at over 16.5 million, which makes Sudan’s education emergency one of the most severe on record. Millions of these children have either been displaced within the country or pushed across its borders, and in both cases getting to school has become one of the hardest parts of daily life.

This paper looks at what the conflict has done to education in Sudan, paying particular attention to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. It starts by looking at where the education system stood before the war, then works through the direct and indirect damage the conflict has caused, the specific obstacles displaced and refugee children run into, and what humanitarian and government actors have managed to do about it so far.

What emerges is a system that was already carrying serious structural weaknesses before the war made everything worse. Schools have been damaged, occupied, or shut down outright; teachers have fled along with everyone else; exams and certification have been thrown into disarray; and the psychological toll on students keeps climbing. Displaced and refugee children carry an extra weight on top of all this — poverty, language barriers, missing documents, risks tied to gender, child labor, and a scarcity of inclusive services that could otherwise help them catch up.

Even so, humanitarian organizations, government bodies, and local civil society groups haven’t stood still. They’ve set up temporary learning spaces, accelerated learning programs, psychosocial support, and digital learning options. But money is short, security is precarious, and these operational limits keep the response smaller than the need actually calls for.

The paper’s conclusion is straightforward: rebuilding Sudan’s education sector will take immediate humanitarian relief, medium-term reconstruction, and long-term reform aimed at a system that can actually withstand shocks and serve everyone fairly. It closes with strategic

recommendations for national authorities, development partners, donors, and humanitarian organizations.

Table 1. Sudan’s education crisis at a glance¹

Indicator	Figure	Source (as cited in this paper)
School-aged children out of school	16.5 million+	UNICEF
Children displaced	5 million+	UNICEF
People internally displaced	10 million+	UNICEF
People displaced in total (internally and across borders), 2025–2026	~13 million	AP News
School-aged children who have missed close to 500 days of formal schooling	8 million+ (about half of Sudan’s children)	Reuters; Save the Children
Children reached through formal and non-formal learning initiatives, 2024	2.3 million+	UNICEF
Children reached with education, child protection and psychosocial support, by end-2025	~3.5 million	UNICEF
Sudanese refugee children and youth enrolled in school in Chad, 2025–2026	218,000+	UNHCR

Note: displacement and out-of-school totals are estimates that vary between agencies and reporting dates; see the relevant sections for context.

¹ Figures as reported in the text of this paper. Attributed there to UNICEF (see UNICEF, 2025, 2026, *Sudan Humanitarian Situation Reports*, in the References), Associated Press (2026, July 6), Reuters and Save the Children (2026), and UNHCR (2026), *Chad School Enrollment Dashboard 2025–2026*. The Reuters report cited in the text does not appear in the References list.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The war that began on 15 April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has left almost no part of Sudanese life untouched, and education has been hit especially hard. Schools and universities across several states have been destroyed, occupied by armed groups, or simply shut for months or years at a time, cutting off millions of children and young people from learning.

The displacement this war has caused is now among the largest in the world. Millions of Sudanese have been forced from their homes, with many crossing into Egypt, Chad, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, or the Central African Republic. Children make up a large share of this displaced population, and they are the ones most likely to fall out of the education system entirely. UNICEF has described Sudan as the largest child displacement crisis on the planet right now, with more than five million children displaced.

Education tends to get treated as secondary in emergencies, but it shouldn't be. It's a basic human right, and in a crisis it does more than teach — it protects children, gives them psychological stability, holds communities together, and lays groundwork for whatever recovery comes next. War, unfortunately, is exactly the condition that makes safe, quality education hardest to deliver.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This paper sets out to examine how the Sudan conflict has affected education, with particular attention to what IDPs and refugees have experienced. It looks at what's blocking access and continuity, reviews what's being done in response, and points to where recovery and reform efforts should focus.

1.3 Research Questions

- How has the conflict affected Sudan's education system?
- What has displacement and forced migration meant for access to education?
- What are the biggest challenges facing displaced and refugee children and youth?
- What interventions are currently being used to support education?
- What should guide educational recovery and reconstruction going forward?

2. Methodology

This is a qualitative desk review, built on a combination of literature review, policy analysis, and secondary data.

Sources of Information. The paper draws on reports from UNICEF, UNESCO, UNHCR, OCHA, and the World Bank, alongside government documents and policy papers, Education Cluster assessments, humanitarian needs assessments, academic research, and situation reports with displacement statistics.

Analytical Framework. The analysis moves through five areas: pre-conflict educational conditions, the direct and indirect effects of the conflict, the specific experiences of IDPs and refugees, humanitarian and policy responses, and finally the opportunities available for recovery and reform.

Limitations. The conflict is still ongoing, which means reliable data is hard to come by in some regions. Population movement and insecurity keep interfering with data collection and verification.

Section One

Introduction and Context

3. Overview of the Conflict in Sudan

The roots of this conflict go back to escalating tensions following the 2021 military takeover and disputes over security sector reform. What started as a standoff between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces spread quickly into a nationwide war, touching major cities and rural communities alike.

Civilian casualties have been extensive, infrastructure has been destroyed, and public services have broken down across much of the country. Education has not been spared. Schools and universities have been damaged, taken over by armed actors, or converted into shelters for the displaced. Even the administrative side of education — the systems that keep schools running and coordinated — has been disrupted, leaving authorities with less capacity to deliver services. Recent humanitarian reporting continues to note damage to civilian infrastructure, schools included, from ongoing violence.

3.1 Scale and Trends of Displacement

Sudan's displacement crisis is now one of the largest in the world. Millions of people have left their homes since April 2023, and the strain this puts on host communities and public services is enormous.

Internal displacement has surged in Darfur, Kordofan, Khartoum, Al Jazirah, and other affected regions, with families crowding into camps, collective shelters, informal settlements, and overburdened urban neighborhoods. UNICEF estimates more than ten million people internally displaced, with millions more crossing international borders in search of safety.

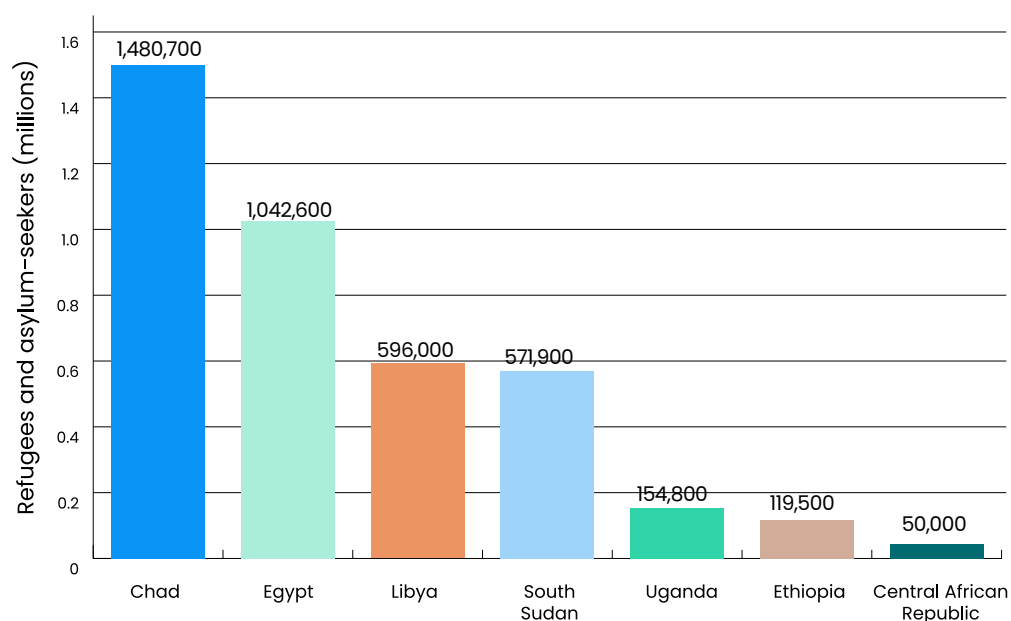
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Figure 1. Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers by country of asylum, 2026 planning figures²



Note: these are projected 2026 population planning figures, not registered counts. Libya is included in UNHCR's regional plan although it is not among the host countries listed above.

3.3 Importance of Education in Emergencies

Education isn't a luxury that waits until a crisis passes — in humanitarian emergencies, it functions as a life-saving intervention. It protects children from violence, exploitation, and harmful practices; it offers psychosocial support and a sense of normalcy; it helps hold communities together; it builds skills that matter for future livelihoods; and it lays a foundation for long-term recovery and peace.

For displaced and refugee children in particular, keeping access to education open is what stands between them and becoming part of a "lost generation" — a phrase that captures just how much is at stake when schooling disappears for years at a time.

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2026). *Sudan Regional Refugee Response Plan 2026 – At a Glance*. Geneva: UNHCR. Retrieved from <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/121141>. This source is not in the References list and should be added.

3.4 Legal and Policy Frameworks

The right to education is written into several international legal instruments: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Table 2. International legal and policy instruments guaranteeing the right to education³

Instrument	Adopted	Body	Provision relevant to education
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	1948	UN General Assembly	Article 26: right to education; free and compulsory elementary education
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights	1966	UN General Assembly	Articles 13–14: right to education; progressive introduction of free education at all levels
Convention on the Rights of the Child	1989	UN General Assembly	Articles 28–29: right to education and the aims of education
African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child	1990	Organisation of African Unity (now African Union)	Article 11: right to education, including for displaced children
INEE Minimum Standards for Education	2004 (latest edition 2024)	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies	Global framework guiding education response in emergencies (non-binding)

Sudan is a party to a number of these frameworks and, on paper, has obligations to keep education accessible even in emergencies. Humanitarian organizations operate under their own global benchmarks too, most notably the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards, which guide how education responses are designed in crisis settings.

None of this changes the scale of the problem on the ground: the current conflict presents challenges to fulfilling educational rights that are simply unprecedented for millions of Sudanese children and youth.

³ Instruments as cited in Section 6. Article references are taken from the instrument texts: United Nations (1948), art. 26; United Nations (1966), *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, arts. 13–14; United Nations (1989), arts. 28–29; African Union (1990), art. 11; INEE (2024). The ICESCR is not in the References list and should be added if the table is retained.

Section Two

Overview of Sudan's Education Sector Before the Conflict

4. Overview of Sudan's Education Sector Before the Conflict

4.1 Introduction

Before the war broke out in April 2023, Sudan's education sector had gone through cycles of expansion and reform, but it never fully shook off some deep structural problems. Access had improved over the prior two decades, but that progress was uneven — it depended heavily on where a child lived, their gender, and their family's economic situation. Underfunding, teacher shortages, weak infrastructure, and regional gaps kept holding the system back.

Understanding where things stood before the war matters, because it's the baseline against which the scale of the damage — and the priorities for rebuilding — have to be measured.

4.2 Structure of the Education System

Sudan's formal system was organized into pre-primary education, eight years of basic education, and three years of secondary education. Higher education included universities, colleges, technical institutes, and vocational centers, run mainly through the Federal Ministry of Education working alongside state-level authorities. Public schools made up most of the system, though private schools had been growing in importance in urban areas.

Table 3. Structure of Sudan’s formal education system before the conflict⁴

Level	Structure	Notes
Pre-primary	Precedes basic education	—
Basic education	Eight years	Core compulsory cycle; many schools could not offer the full cycle (Section 2.7)
Secondary education	Three years	Exit exams determine access to higher education and employment (Section 3.6)
Higher education	Universities, colleges, technical institutes, vocational centres	—
Governance	Federal Ministry of Education with state-level authorities	Public schools predominate; private schools growing in urban areas

The system had been reformed several times with the goal of widening access and improving outcomes, but implementation problems and resource constraints kept undercutting the quality and consistency of what was actually delivered (World Bank).

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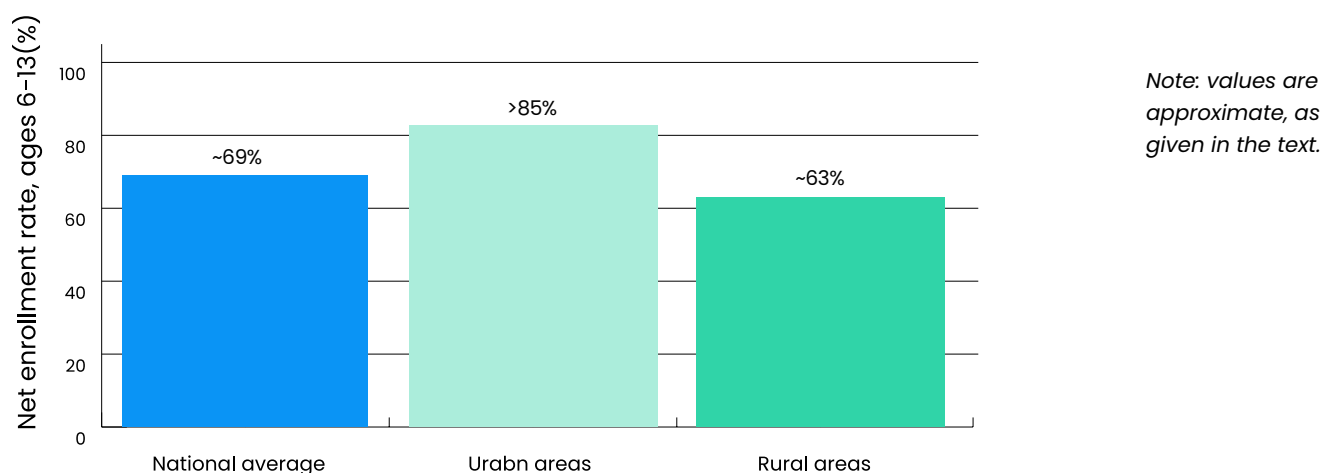
4.3 Enrollment and Participation

Enrollment had genuinely improved before the war — access to primary education expanded meaningfully through the 2000s and 2010s, helped along by government initiatives and international development programs.

World Bank and UNESCO data put the net enrollment rate for children aged 6–13 at around 69 percent nationally, with gross enrollment above 73 percent. But that average hides a real urban–rural split: over 85 percent in urban areas versus roughly 63 percent in rural communities (World Bank).

⁴ Section 2.2 of this paper; the system description is attributed there to the World Bank (see World Bank, 2020, in the References).

Figure 2. Pre-conflict net enrollment rate for children aged 6–13, national, urban and rural⁵

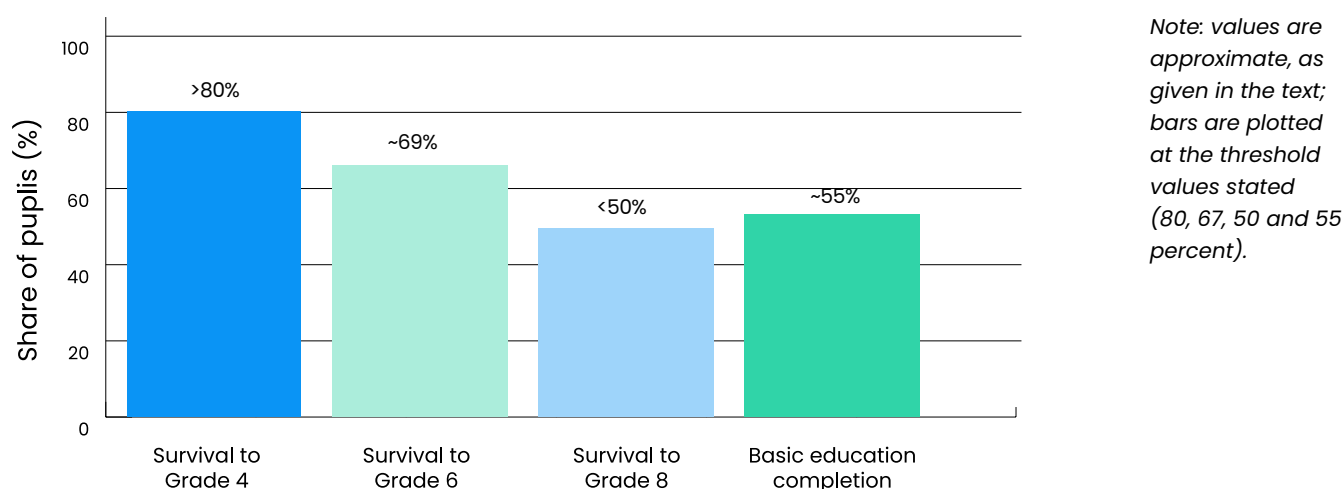


Getting kids into school was one thing; keeping them there was another. Retention was a persistent weak point — many children started school but never made it through the full basic education cycle, and completion rates dropped sharply as students moved into higher grades (World Bank).

4.4 Learning Outcomes and Completion Rates

The numbers tell a story of progress that thinned out the further along students got. Grade 4 survival rates were above 80 percent, but that fell to around 67 percent by Grade 6, and below 50 percent by Grade 8. Basic education completion sat at roughly 55 percent nationally (World Bank).

Figure 3. Pre-conflict survival rates by grade and basic education completion⁶



⁵ World Bank and UNESCO data as cited in Section 2.3 of this paper; see World Bank (2020) and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2024) in the References.

⁶ World Bank data as cited in Section 2.4 of this paper; see World Bank (2020) in the References.

In other words, plenty of children walked through a school door at some point, but a large share of them left before finishing. Poverty, child labor, early marriage, household displacement, poor facilities, and a lack of qualified teachers all played a role, and dropout was worst among poor, rural, and conflict-affected communities — often because families had no choice but to prioritize immediate income over schooling (World Bank).

4.5 Regional and Social Inequalities

Sudan's education system carried real inequalities well before the war. Urban children generally had better access to schools, teachers, materials, and infrastructure than children in rural or remote areas, and states with histories of prior conflict — Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile — lagged behind more stable regions in both enrollment and outcomes.

Gender gaps persisted too, especially in rural communities, where early marriage, cultural expectations, household duties, and safety concerns kept many girls out of school even as overall enrollment for girls improved. Children with disabilities faced their own set of barriers — weak inclusive education policy, few specialized services, and school buildings that simply weren't built with accessibility in mind — leaving many of them shut out of formal education altogether.

4.6 Teachers and Human Resources

Teachers are the backbone of any education system, and Sudan's was short on them, particularly in rural and underserved regions. Many schools ran with too few teachers for too many students, which meant overcrowded classrooms and stretched-thin instruction. Training opportunities were limited, and professional development programs rarely had the funding to do much.

Low pay and difficult working conditions made things worse. Economic instability and inflation ate into teachers' incomes, pushing some to look for other work entirely. All of this weakened the quality of education well before the conflict ever started.

4.7 Educational Infrastructure

Infrastructure quality varied a great deal across the country. Urban schools generally had decent facilities, but many rural and marginalized schools lacked permanent classrooms, electricity, safe drinking water, working sanitation, libraries, laboratories, and any real access to technology. World Bank assessments found that a significant number of students were attending schools in temporary or unfinished buildings, and many schools couldn't offer the complete basic education

cycle — meaning students had to travel long distances just to keep studying. Conditions like these fed directly into absenteeism and dropout, hitting girls especially hard (World Bank).

4.8 Education Financing and Governance

Money was always tight. Public spending on education fell short of what was needed to keep up with demand, maintain infrastructure, and improve quality, and the sector leaned heavily on international development partners, humanitarian organizations, and donor-funded projects to fill the gap. That shortfall showed up everywhere — in teacher recruitment, school construction, textbooks, and learning materials.

Governance added its own layer of friction. Decentralized administration sometimes meant resources and implementation capacity varied wildly from one state to another, and weak monitoring systems made it harder to plan and manage the system effectively.

4.9 Existing Vulnerabilities Before the Conflict

Sudan's education system had made real gains, but it went into 2023 carrying a long list of vulnerabilities: large numbers of out-of-school children, weak completion and retention, regional and gender inequalities, poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, underfunding, and very little in the way of emergency preparedness.

Table 4. Pre-conflict vulnerabilities in Sudan's education system⁷

Vulnerability	How it manifested before April 2023	Section
Large numbers of out-of-school children	Net enrollment around 69 percent; access depended on location, gender and household income	2.3
Weak retention and completion	Survival fell from above 80 percent at Grade 4 to below 50 percent at Grade 8; completion around 55 percent	2.4
Regional inequality	Urban enrollment above 85 percent versus roughly 63 percent rural; Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile lagged behind	2.3, 2.5
Gender gaps	Early marriage, cultural expectations, household duties and safety concerns kept girls out, especially in rural areas	2.5

⁷ Sections 2.3–2.9 of this paper; figures are attributed there to the World Bank (see World Bank, 2020, in the References).

Exclusion of children with disabilities	Weak inclusive education policy, few specialised services, inaccessible school buildings	2.5
Teacher shortages	Overcrowded classrooms, limited training, low pay eroded by inflation	2.6
Poor infrastructure	Rural schools lacking permanent classrooms, electricity, water, sanitation and technology; incomplete cycles forcing long journeys	2.7
Underfunding and weak governance	Public spending below need; heavy reliance on donors; uneven state-level capacity; weak monitoring	2.8
No emergency preparedness	Almost no shock absorption built into the system	2.9

These weaknesses meant the system had almost no shock absorption built in. So when the war hit in April 2023, it hit a sector that was already stretched thin — and the result was extensive learning loss and educational exclusion on a massive scale.

4.10 Conclusion

Before the war, Sudan's education sector had genuine gains to point to in enrollment and access, but the structural problems underneath never really went away. Disparities across regions and populations persisted, and financing gaps and weak infrastructure kept a ceiling on quality and completion.

The war arrived on top of all this existing fragility. It didn't just disrupt education — it deepened inequalities and structural weaknesses that were already there. Understanding this pre-conflict picture is essential for grasping the full scope of the crisis and for designing a recovery that actually addresses root causes.

The next section turns to Section Three: Impact of the Conflict on the Education Sector — the core analytical chapter of the paper, covering school closures, infrastructure destruction, teacher displacement, exam disruptions, and learning loss since April 2023.

Section Three

Impact of the Conflict on the Education Sector

5. Impact of the Conflict on the Education Sector

5.1 Introduction

The war that began in April 2023 has been devastating for Sudan's education sector. Millions of children and young people have had their learning disrupted, educational infrastructure has been damaged, students and teachers have been displaced, and the systems that govern and deliver education have been undermined. What started as a political and military standoff turned quickly into one of the largest education emergencies anywhere in the world.

The damage goes well beyond schools simply being closed. Destroyed facilities, interrupted exams, lost teaching staff, and mass displacement have combined to create long-term risk for an entire generation of learners. This section works through the direct and indirect impacts of the conflict on Sudan's education sector.

5.2 Closure of Schools and Universities

One of the earliest and most visible effects of the war was the mass closure of schools and universities across the affected states. Institutions in Khartoum, Darfur, Al Jazirah, Kordofan, and elsewhere suspended operations as fighting spread and buildings were damaged.

Many schools stayed closed for long stretches, and some simply couldn't reopen because both teachers and students had already fled. The disruption cut across every level — pre-primary, basic education, secondary schools, vocational centers, and universities alike.

The longer this interruption drags on, the more learning is lost, and the more likely it becomes that vulnerable students never return at all. Children who've spent months or years outside a classroom face a much harder road back, both in re-enrolling and in catching up academically.

Higher education took its own hit. Universities suspended classes, pushed back exams, and struggled just to keep basic administration running. Many students had no option but to pause their studies entirely or relocate to safer areas to find some way of continuing.

5.3 Damage and Destruction of Educational Infrastructure

Educational buildings across Sudan have suffered extensive damage — schools, universities, administrative offices, laboratories, libraries, and training centers hit by shelling, air strikes, looting, or outright occupation by armed groups.

Facilities in conflict hotspots have taken the worst of it, with entire school compounds rendered unusable in some communities. Damage to water systems, sanitation, electricity, and communications has further crippled whatever institutions managed to survive.

The costs here run deeper than just rebuilding walls. Communities also have to replace learning materials, furniture, lab equipment, and technology — and in many cases, the investment needed to rebuild simply outstrips what local authorities can afford. Inequality gets worse in the process too, since schools in already marginalized regions tend to suffer the most damage while receiving the least support for recovery.

5.4 Occupation of Schools by Displaced Populations and Armed Actors

The displacement crisis has changed how school buildings get used. Many have become temporary shelters for IDPs, and others have reportedly been taken over by armed groups for military purposes.

Using schools as shelter reflects real and urgent humanitarian need — but it also keeps education out of reach and delays reopening. Even where the physical damage is minimal, classes can't resume until alternative shelter is found and the building is rehabilitated.

In many places, classrooms have effectively become living spaces, and furniture, materials, and sanitation facilities have been damaged as a result. The longer a school stays occupied, the more expensive and complicated it becomes to restore it for education. There's also a protection dimension here — schools are supposed to remain safe civilian spaces during conflict, and their occupation undermines that principle directly.

5.5 Loss and Displacement of Teachers and Education Personnel

Teachers have been swept up in the same displacement as everyone else. Thousands have fled their communities, some injured, many having lost homes, livelihoods, and the professional networks they once relied on.

This has created serious staffing shortages, both in conflict zones and in the host communities absorbing displaced learners. Areas that suddenly see a spike in enrollment from displaced families often don't have enough teachers to match, which means overcrowded classrooms and weaker instruction across the board.

Economic pressure has compounded the problem. Delayed salaries, inflation, and collapsing local economies have all chipped away at teacher retention — some have left the profession to support their families, while others simply can't get back to their original schools because of ongoing insecurity.

Losing experienced teachers is a threat not just to education right now, but to how quickly the system can recover once the fighting stops. Rebuilding that workforce will take real investment in recruitment, training, professional development, and basic teacher welfare.

5.6 Disruption of Examinations and Certification Processes

National exams, certification, and academic progression have all been thrown off track. Students have faced delays sitting for key exams, and many now face real uncertainty about whether their certifications will be recognized or whether they can move on to the next level of education.

Secondary school exams — which determine access to higher education and jobs — have been hit particularly hard, as displacement, insecurity, and administrative breakdown have made it difficult to plan and run them consistently.

University students have run into similar problems with exams, thesis work, lab research, and graduation itself. Delays in certification add yet another obstacle for students trying to find work, apply for scholarships, or continue their education elsewhere.

All of this chips away at confidence in the education system and leaves students facing more uncertainty about what comes next academically and professionally.

5.7 Learning Loss and Interrupted Academic Progression

Arguably the biggest consequence of the war is the sheer scale of learning loss. Millions of children have had their formal education interrupted for extended periods, losing ground on foundational literacy, numeracy, and life skills.

Evidence from other conflicts shows the same pattern: extended school closures tend to produce real, measurable drops in learning outcomes, and younger children are hit hardest because early-grade disruptions undercut the foundation everything else depends on.

Several factors are compounding the learning loss — fewer qualified teachers, scarce learning materials, limited access to digital learning, psychological distress, and pressure at home from economic hardship. The longer children stay out of school, the greater the risk of dropout, child labor, early marriage, and recruitment into armed groups. Taken together, these risks point toward the possibility of a genuinely “lost generation” of learners whose academic paths have been permanently derailed.

5.8 Increased Risk of School Dropout

Dropout risk has climbed sharply across every age group. Economic hardship has forced many families to put immediate survival ahead of schooling, and children are increasingly expected to contribute income through informal work, farm labor, street vending, or domestic tasks.

Girls face a particularly steep set of risks — greater household responsibilities, displacement-related insecurity, and early marriage all push them out of school faster than boys. In many communities under strain, education simply isn’t the priority it once was when families are struggling just to get by.

The longer children stay out of school, the harder re-enrollment becomes. As kids get older, they tend to drift further from formal education, especially once other ways of earning a living present themselves. Without targeted intervention, the war risks undoing decades of progress on enrollment and completion.

5.9 Impact on Educational Governance and Administration

The institutions responsible for running the education sector have themselves been disrupted. Government offices, education directorates, and administrative systems have all been affected by displacement, insecurity, and resource shortages.

Planning, monitoring, budgeting, and supervision have all become harder to carry out, and coordination between national, state, and local education authorities has grown more difficult in conflict-affected areas. Data collection has suffered too, which makes it harder to get an accurate picture of enrollment, attendance, infrastructure damage, and overall needs — and that, in turn, complicates efforts to coordinate a response and allocate resources well.

Weak administrative capacity is likely to keep affecting recovery even once active fighting winds down.

5.10 Impact on Higher Education and Research

Sudan's universities have taken a serious hit. Institutions have suspended programs, relocated operations, or improvised emergency arrangements just to keep some form of teaching and assessment going.

Research has been hit just as hard — labs closed, academic staff displaced, equipment lost, funding dried up. Many researchers can no longer reach the facilities, archives, or field sites their work depends on.

This matters beyond the university gates. Higher education is where Sudan trains the professionals it needs — teachers, health workers, engineers, administrators — and a prolonged disruption here risks weakening the country's human capital base and slowing recovery well into the future.

5.10.1 Case Study: The University of Khartoum

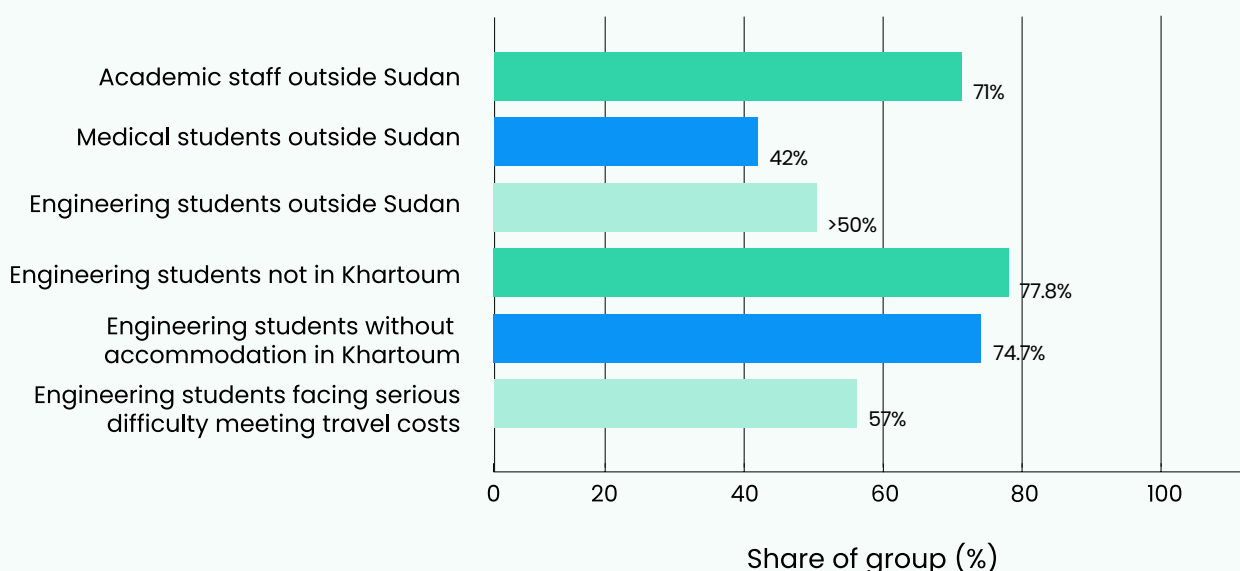
The University of Khartoum, Sudan's oldest university, offers a concrete illustration of what the preceding sub-section describes in general terms. A report issued by the University of Khartoum Academic Staff Union describes the institution as facing an existential crisis, with damage running through its staff, its students, its physical and digital infrastructure, and its ability to keep teaching at all. Because the figures below come from a single institutional source, they should be read as the university's own account rather than as independently verified data, but they are consistent with the broader pattern this paper documents.⁸

The most striking finding concerns the academic workforce. Seventy-one percent of academic staff remain outside Sudan, leaving only 29 percent in the country. Return rates differ sharply between faculties, from 20 percent to 68 percent. The reasons staff give for not returning are the same pressures identified in Section 3.5 for the teaching profession as a whole: loss of housing, family obligations, the cost of relocating, and, for

⁸ University of Khartoum Academic Staff Union. (n.d.). Report on the impact of the war on the University of Khartoum [title and date to be confirmed by the author]. Khartoum: University of Khartoum. All figures in this sub-section are drawn from this report; the report has not been independently verified, and its methodology and survey dates are not stated in the summary available to the authors.

some, the fact that they have now built stable lives and careers abroad. Students are dispersed in the same way. Forty-two percent of medical students are outside Sudan; among engineering students the figure is above 50 percent, and 77.8 percent are not currently in Khartoum at all.

Figure 4. University of Khartoum: staff and students outside Sudan or away from Khartoum⁹



Dispersal is only part of the student picture. Even students who have stayed enrolled report that the quality of what they can learn has fallen. More than 75 percent of medical students report significant gaps in their clinical skills, and over 90 percent are worried about practical and clinical training, the part of a medical degree that cannot be delivered remotely. Engineering students face a more basic obstacle: 74.7 percent have no accommodation in Khartoum, and 57 percent say they would struggle to cover the cost of travelling there. Table 5 brings these findings together.

⁹ University of Khartoum Academic Staff Union (n.d.), as summarised in this sub-section. Engineering figures refer to the Faculty of Engineering survey; the report does not state sample sizes.

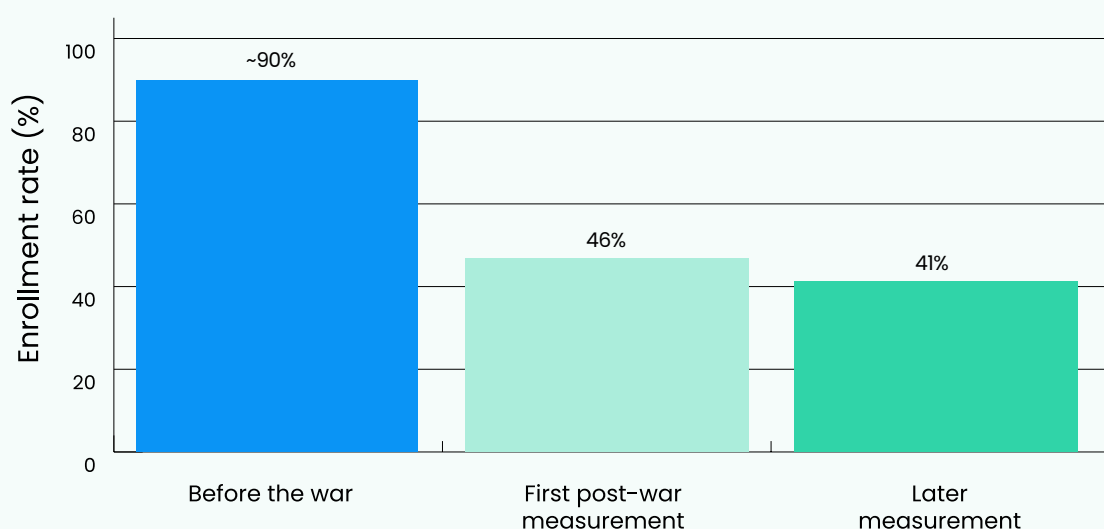
Table 5. University of Khartoum: student situation by faculty¹⁰

Faculty	Finding	Share of students
Medicine	Outside Sudan	42%
	Report significant gaps in clinical skills	>75%
	Concerned about practical and clinical training	>90%
Engineering	Outside Sudan	>50%
	Not currently located in Khartoum	77.8%
	Without accommodation in Khartoum	74.7%
	Facing serious difficulty covering travel expenses	57%
All faculties	Could be prevented from sitting examinations if external centres close	>80%

The external examination centres the university set up during the war have become the hinge on which continuity turns. The report estimates that closing them would prevent more than 80 percent of students from sitting examinations, and recommends keeping them open for at least a full academic year. Enrollment is already slipping. In the Faculty of Pharmacy, enrollment fell from roughly 90 percent before the war to 46 percent, and then to 41 percent. The report draws a pointed conclusion from this: unless conditions change, the university risks becoming accessible mainly to students who can afford post-war living costs in Khartoum, rather than remaining a national institution that admits on academic merit. That would reverse exactly the kind of equity gains described in Section 2.3.

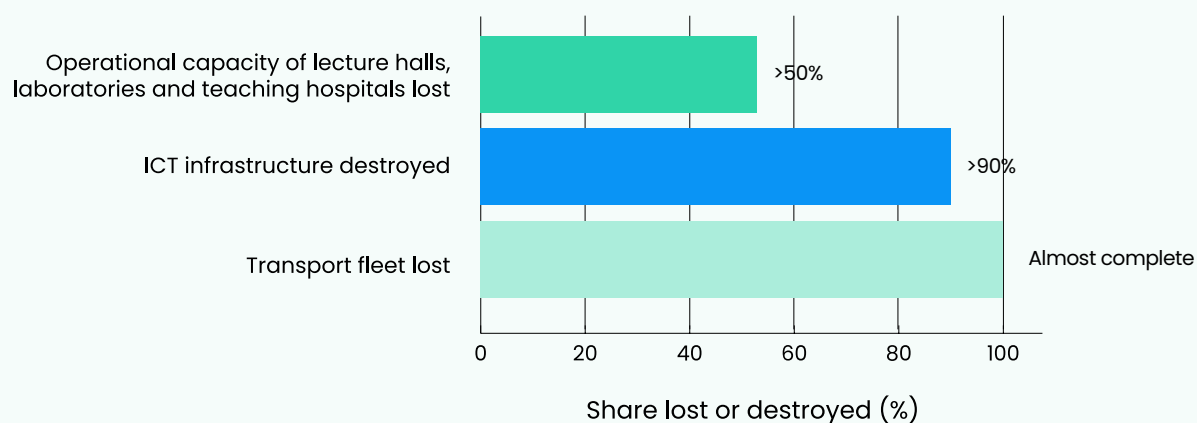
¹⁰ University of Khartoum Academic Staff Union (n.d.). The medicine and engineering figures come from separate faculty surveys and are not directly comparable.

Table 5. University of Khartoum: student situation by faculty¹¹



The physical losses are on the scale described in Section 3.3, and the digital losses go further. More than half of the operational capacity of lecture halls, laboratories, and teaching hospitals has been lost, staff housing and classrooms have been extensively damaged, and the university's transport fleet is almost entirely gone. More than 90 percent of its information and communications technology infrastructure has been destroyed, including the official website, student registration, certification and records systems, the learning management system, human resources systems, and the servers and databases that held academic records. The loss of records is the part with the longest tail: it bears directly on the certification problems discussed in Section 3.6, because a university that cannot reliably retrieve its own transcripts cannot easily prove what its graduates have earned.

Figure 6. University of Khartoum: reported infrastructure losses¹²



¹¹ University of Khartoum Academic Staff Union (n.d.). The report gives the pre-war figure as approximate and does not date the two wartime measurements; they are shown here in the order reported.

¹² University of Khartoum Academic Staff Union (n.d.). "Almost complete" loss of the transport fleet is plotted at 100 percent for display; the report gives no precise figure.

Set against all of this, the university has kept working. It has run six examination cycles since the war began and graduated roughly 8,000 students, with teaching and assessment continuing through a combination of internal and external examination centres. That record matters for the argument of this paper: it shows that institutional continuity under war conditions is possible when there is a workable mechanism for reaching dispersed students, and it is why the report's recommendations centre on protecting and extending that mechanism rather than waiting for a full return to campus.

The report's proposals fall into three groups, summarised in Table 6. For the transitional period it recommends blended learning combining face-to-face and online delivery for a full academic year, reopening the external examination centres, and expanding distance learning for students and staff who remain abroad. For the academic workforce it proposes a return framework with three participation models (full return, hybrid participation, and full remote participation), backed by housing assistance, relocation grants, financial incentives, and improved salaries and services. For reconstruction it calls for a national fund to rebuild the university, a high-level reconstruction committee, and rehabilitation of both physical and digital infrastructure, alongside support for the gradual return of staff and students.

Table 6. University of Khartoum: recommendations proposed in the Academic Staff Union report¹³

Area	Recommendation	What it responds to
Transitional teaching	Blended (face-to-face and online) learning for a full academic year	Dispersal of staff and students; loss of teaching space
	Reopen and maintain external examination centres	>80% of students unable to sit examinations if centres close
	Expand distance learning for students and staff abroad	71% of staff and large shares of students outside Sudan
Faculty return	Three participation models: full return, hybrid, full remote	Return rates of 20–68% across faculties
	Housing assistance, relocation grants, financial incentives, improved salaries and services	Loss of housing, relocation costs, stable positions abroad

¹³ University of Khartoum Academic Staff Union (n.d.). The third column is this paper's reading of which finding each recommendation addresses, not a categorisation made in the report itself.

Reconstruction	National fund for rebuilding the university; high-level reconstruction committee	Scale of losses beyond institutional resources
	Rehabilitate physical and digital infrastructure; recover records and systems	>50% of operational capacity and >90% of ICT infrastructure lost
	Support gradual return of staff and students	Declining enrollment; risk of access by ability to pay

Two lessons follow for the sector as a whole, and both are inferences from this single case rather than findings the report itself states. First, the damage to higher education is not mainly a matter of buildings. The workforce and the records are harder to replace than the lecture halls, and any recovery plan that budgets for reconstruction without budgeting for staff return and data recovery will rebuild an empty campus. Second, the mechanisms improvised during the war (external examination centres, remote teaching, hybrid staffing) are not stopgaps to be dismantled at the first opportunity. They are the reason the university still exists as a functioning institution, and they point toward a more resilient model than the one the war destroyed.

3.11 Conclusion

The war has done extraordinary damage to Sudan's education sector. Schools and universities have been shut down, destroyed, or occupied; teachers and students have scattered; exams have been derailed; and learning losses have piled up at every level.

Research has been hit just as hard — labs closed, academic staff displaced, equipment lost, funding dried up. Many researchers can no longer reach the facilities, archives, or field sites their work depends on.

Table 7. Summary of conflict impacts on Sudan’s education sector since April 2023¹⁴

Impact domain	Nature of the impact	Most affected	Section
School and university closures	Mass suspension of operations across all levels; some institutions unable to reopen after teachers and students fled	All learners; Khartoum, Darfur, Al Jazirah, Kordofan	3.2
Infrastructure damage	Shelling, air strikes, looting and occupation; loss of water, sanitation, power and equipment	Conflict hotspots; already-marginalised regions	3.3
Occupation of schools	Buildings used as IDP shelters or by armed actors; reopening delayed, rehabilitation costs rising	Host and displacement areas	3.4
Teacher displacement	Thousands of teachers displaced; delayed salaries and inflation driving attrition	Conflict zones and host communities absorbing new learners	3.5
Exams and certification	National and secondary exams delayed; uncertainty over recognition and progression	Secondary and university students	3.6
Learning loss	Extended interruption to foundational literacy, numeracy and life skills	Younger children; the poorest households	3.7
Dropout risk	Economic hardship pushing children into work; early marriage; recruitment risk	Girls; older children; poor and rural families	3.8
Governance and administration	Disrupted planning, budgeting, supervision and data collection	State and local education authorities	3.9
Higher education and research	Programmes suspended or relocated; laboratories closed, staff displaced, funding lost	Universities; Sudan’s future professional workforce	3.10

None of this is a temporary interruption. It’s a threat to educational attainment, social cohesion, economic recovery, and the country’s long-term development. Without urgent action to restore learning and protect educational institutions, the consequences for Sudan’s children and youth could last for decades.

The next section turns to how these challenges have specifically played out for internally displaced persons (IDPs) – among the most vulnerable groups within the current education crisis.

¹⁴ Sections 3.2–3.10 of this paper.

6. Recent Statistics, Data and Academic Analysis (2025–2026)

6.1 Current Scale of the Education Crisis

Sudan’s education emergency has grown into one of the largest in the world. Roughly 16.5 million school-aged children are currently out of school — the vast majority of the country’s school-age population. Despite substantial humanitarian effort, ongoing conflict, displacement, and insecurity have kept access to education severely constrained (UNICEF).

This crisis is inseparable from Sudan’s displacement emergency. By 2025–2026, the war had displaced around 13 million people, millions of them children, and this scale of movement has overwhelmed education services in host communities and displacement sites alike (AP News).

Recent reporting suggests more than eight million school-aged children — roughly half of Sudan’s child population — have missed close to 500 days of formal schooling since the war began. In some of the hardest-hit regions, only a small fraction of schools remain functioning at all (Reuters).

Table 8. Displacement and out-of-school indicators, 2025–2026¹⁵

Dimension	Indicator	Figure	Source
Displacement	People displaced in total, 2025–2026	~13 million	AP News
	People internally displaced	10 million+	UNICEF
	Children displaced	5 million+	UNICEF
Education access	School-aged children out of school	16.5 million+	UNICEF
	School-aged children who have missed close to 500 days of schooling	8 million+ (about half of all children)	Reuters; Save the Children
	Schools still operating in the hardest-hit areas (parts of North Darfur; West and South Darfur; West Kordofan)	Only a small share	Reuters

6.2 School Closures and Infrastructure Damage

Schools have been closed, destroyed, occupied, or made inaccessible by insecurity across huge stretches of the country. Darfur and Kordofan have been especially hard hit — in parts of North Darfur, only a small share of schools remain operational, with many others destroyed or repurposed, and similar patterns are reported across West Darfur, South Darfur, and West Kordofan (Reuters).

Schools being used as shelter for displaced families is now a defining feature of this crisis. It meets a genuine emergency need, but it also delays reopening and drives up rehabilitation costs — a pattern that echoes what’s been seen in humanitarian emergencies elsewhere in the world.

6.3 Learning Loss and Human Capital Implications

The prolonged interruption to schooling is creating learning losses that could shape Sudan’s human capital for a long time to come.

Research on educational disruption elsewhere consistently shows that extended school closures produce real declines in learning outcomes, hitting vulnerable students, girls, and disadvantaged populations hardest — and these losses tend to compound over time without remedial support (arXiv).

Applied to Sudan, this suggests that children who’ve missed one to two academic years are likely facing serious gaps in literacy, numeracy, and basic learning skills. Younger children are especially at risk, since early-grade disruption affects cognitive development and shapes everything that comes after academically.

From a broader economic angle, this kind of disruption tends to translate into lower future labor productivity, reduced earnings, and slower growth — international evidence consistently links conflict-driven learning loss to weaker educational attainment and a less-skilled workforce decades down the line.

¹⁵ Figures as reported in the Current Scale of the Education Crisis and School Closures and Infrastructure Damage sections of this paper. Attributed there to Associated Press (2026, July 6), UNICEF (2025, 2026, *Sudan Humanitarian Situation Reports*), Save the Children (2026), and Reuters. The Reuters report does not appear in the References list.

6.4 Education Access Among Internally Displaced Children

Displaced children run into a distinct set of barriers: lost school records, interrupted enrollment, no transportation, overcrowded classrooms, shortages of teachers and materials, and deepening poverty at home.

Many displaced families are focused on food, shelter, and healthcare first, which naturally reduces how consistently children can attend school — and that economic pressure often pushes families toward child labor, early marriage, or permanent dropout.

Host communities absorbing large numbers of displaced families are struggling too. Infrastructure that was already stretched before the war has little room left to accommodate a sudden influx of new students.

6.5 Refugee Education Trends

Sudanese refugee children face a version of the same struggle in neighboring countries. Host governments and humanitarian agencies have made real efforts to bring refugee students into national education systems, but access remains inconsistent.

In Chad — one of the largest host countries for Sudanese refugees — more than 218,000 refugee children and youth were enrolled in school during the 2025–2026 academic year, a meaningful step forward even though enrollment still falls short of actual need (UNHCR). Funding is the biggest threat here. UNHCR has warned that cuts to humanitarian financing risk reversing the enrollment gains made so far, and in eastern Chad, funding shortfalls have already disrupted teacher pay and educational programming, putting thousands of refugee students at risk of losing access altogether (UNHCR).

6.6 Humanitarian Education Response

Despite everything working against them, humanitarian actors have kept implementing emergency education programs.

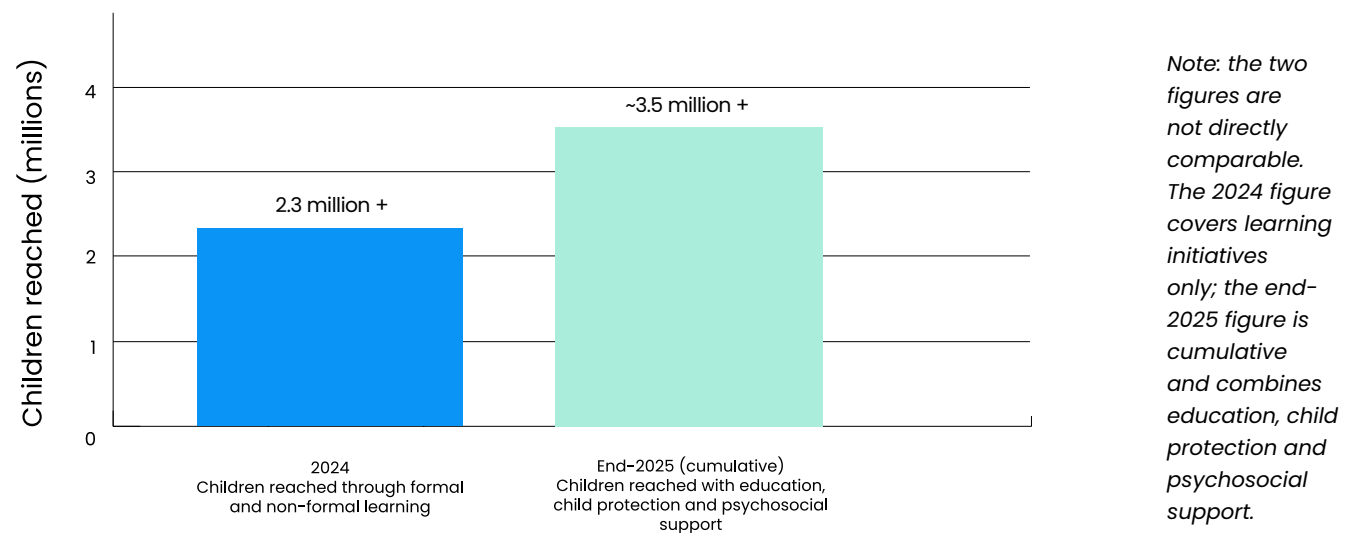
UNICEF reported reaching more than 2.3 million children through formal and non-formal learning initiatives in 2024 alone. By early 2025, over 175,000 children were learning through more than 1,260 safe learning spaces, and thousands of facilitators and educators had received training to support continued learning and psychosocial wellbeing (UNICEF).

By the end of 2025, UNICEF and its partners had delivered education, child protection, and psychosocial support to roughly 3.5 million children across Sudan — through school reopening initiatives, temporary learning spaces, learning materials, and psychosocial programs (UNICEF).

Table 9. Reach of UNICEF-supported education response in Sudan, 2024–2025¹⁶

Period	Indicator	Reach
2024	Children reached through formal and non-formal learning initiatives	2.3 million+
Early 2025	Children learning in safe learning spaces	175,000+
Early 2025	Safe learning spaces in operation	1,260+
Early 2025	Facilitators and educators trained	Thousands
End-2025 (cumulative)	Children reached with education, child protection and psychosocial support	~3.5 million

Figure 7. Children reached by UNICEF-supported programming, 2024 and end-2025¹⁷



¹⁶ UNICEF figures as cited in the Humanitarian Education Response section of this paper; see UNICEF (2025), *Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report: January 2025 and March 2025*, and UNICEF (2026), *Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report 2025 (Annual Report)*, in the References.

¹⁷ As for Table 9: UNICEF (2025, 2026), *Sudan Humanitarian Situation Reports*, as cited in this paper.

6.7 Analytical Assessment

Taken together, the evidence points to something bigger than a temporary disruption — Sudan is facing a systemic education emergency with consequences that could stretch across generations.

Three dynamics are driving this: ongoing conflict-related destruction and insecurity that continues to block access to schools; mass displacement that keeps creating barriers to enrollment, attendance, and retention; and funding shortfalls that limit how much humanitarian and government actors can actually do at the scale the crisis demands.

Table 10. Three dynamics driving Sudan’s education emergency¹⁸

Driver	How it operates	Effect on the education system	Evidence in this paper
Conflict-related destruction and insecurity	Fighting, shelling and occupation of school buildings; insecurity on routes to school	Blocks physical access; keeps schools closed or unusable; delays reopening	Sections 3.2–3.4; School Closures and Infrastructure Damage
Mass displacement	Families move repeatedly, often into overcrowded host areas; records and documents lost	Creates barriers to enrollment, attendance and retention; overloads host-community schools	Section 4; Sections 3.5 and 3.8; IDP and refugee sections
Funding shortfalls	Humanitarian financing falls short of the scale of need; cuts disrupt teacher pay and programming	Limits how much humanitarian and government actors can deliver; risks reversing gains	Refugee Education Trends; Humanitarian Education Response

Without serious investment in recovery — accelerated learning programs, teacher support, infrastructure rehabilitation, psychosocial services — Sudan risks a long, slow deterioration in educational outcomes and human capital. And education recovery can’t be pursued in isolation. It has to be woven into broader humanitarian, protection, and development strategies, because none of these interventions will hold if displacement, poverty, food insecurity, and child protection risks aren’t addressed alongside them.

¹⁸ Analytical Assessment section of this paper.

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Note: For a donor-grade submission, aim for 30–40 references, drawing further on UNICEF Sudan reports (2023–2026), UNHCR Sudan Regional Refugee Response reports, OCHA Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans, Education Cluster Sudan assessments, UNESCO and UIS datasets, World Bank education and human capital reports, and peer-reviewed journal articles on conflict, displacement, and education in emergencies. This will strengthen the paper’s academic credibility and policy relevance.



**Crisis
Coordination
Unit Sudan**

وحدة التنسيق السودان

sudanunit.com
info@sudanunit.com
shabaka.org
info@shabaka.org