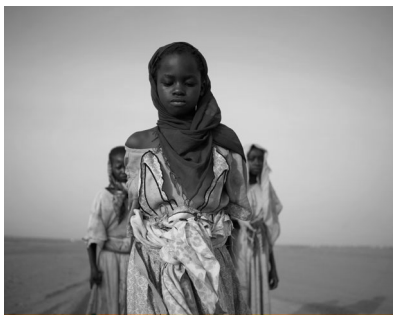


UNICEF CHILD ALERT | April 2026

# Darfur: 20 years on, children under threat

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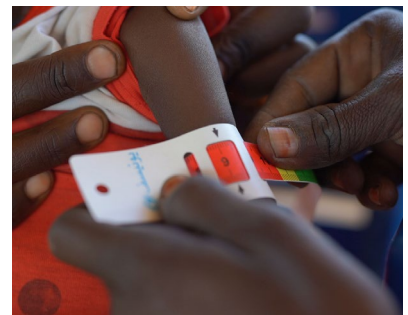
*Two decades after global alarm over Darfur, children are again facing violence, displacement, hunger and loss of protection.*



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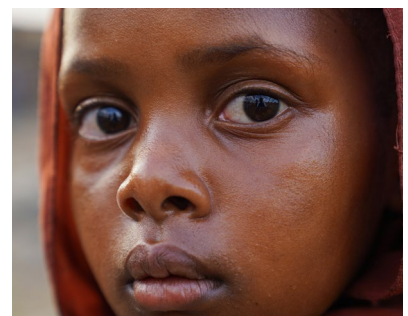
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# Two decades of crisis for children in Darfur

Two decades ago, the situation in Darfur drew global outrage as conflict devastated whole communities and upended children's lives. Today, children in Darfur are again facing violence, displacement and extreme deprivation, but with far less international attention. In late 2005, UNICEF's first Child Alert warned that Darfur's children faced a dangerously uncertain future: homes torched, classrooms shut and childhoods reduced to a fight for survival. Around 1.85 million people were displaced in Darfur, including hundreds of thousands of children living in camps with tenuous protection, patchy healthcare and interrupted schooling.

*"No place is safe, however, and even if children in camps escape further attack, they live in dependence and, too often, in fear."*

UNICEF's Child Alert: 2005

Yet in 2005, international attention to Darfur was far greater, and humanitarian action was scaled under intense global scrutiny. The "Save Darfur" movement galvanized global awareness and helped raise the alarm on the scale of the crisis, demanding action, even if these fell short of the immense and growing needs of children and families affected.

Today, nearly two decades on, the gap is even more stark: despite even greater needs attention, funding and action are insufficient. Children in Sudan cannot afford

DARFUR, 2005

## 1.85 million

people displaced in Darfur, hundreds of thousands of them children

DARFUR, 2025

## 5 million+

children facing extreme deprivation across the five Darfur states

another moment in which the world looks away or responds too late. Urgent, sustained attention must be matched with meaningful action to protect lives and meet needs at scale.

Twenty years on, Darfur's children are again trapped in catastrophic conflict that re-ignited in 2023 and has engulfed the region. Today, about 33.7 million people in Sudan - over half of them children - need humanitarian assistance. An estimated 15 million people, including about 5 million children, across the country have been uprooted.

The impact on children is tragically familiar. In 2005 - and again today - girls and boys have seen their schools destroyed, their communities attacked, and their rights

flagrantly violated. Many have witnessed killing, lost parents, and struggled to survive in camps or while constantly on the move.

*"Twenty years ago, people still had hope. Today, a generation of children knows nothing but war."*

UNICEF Child Protection specialist, North Darfur

Yet the current crisis brings new challenges. Displacement and hunger are unfolding on a larger scale, and humanitarian access is tighter. Active conflict and deliberate blockades have left some communities completely cut off. At the same time, humanitarian actors - including the United Nations - are increasingly constrained from being present and reaching those most in need.

*"There is no protective environment for children - none. Law and order have disappeared."*

UNICEF Child Protection specialist,  
North Darfur

The year 2005 showed how decisive, coordinated action can help protect children. The parallels between 2005 and 2026 underscore persistent violence and

worsening needs - and reinforce UNICEF's call: the world cannot allow history to repeat without stronger action. Darfur's children survived one conflict only to face another.

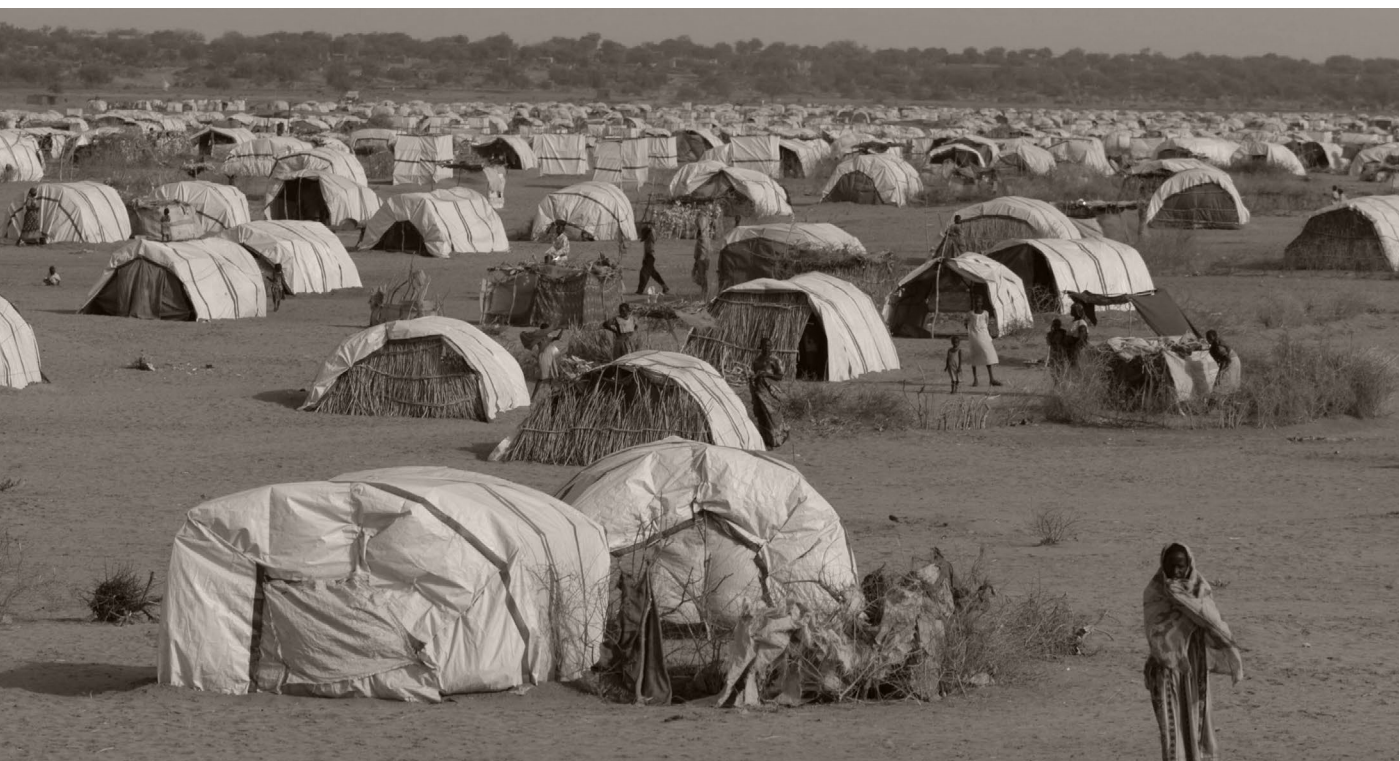
Many of Darfur's children from 2005 are now adults and parents, yet they are once again being failed without the safety, stability or support needed to protect their own children. This is how crises endure across generations, when children grow up in conflict, only to raise their own children in it. Their situation is a test of whether the international community will act more decisively, not only to protect children, but to break a cycle that has already stolen too many childhoods.

“

*I was a child in Darfur in 2005. Today, I am a father, and I am raising my own children in another war. What I lived through as a child is now repeating itself in their lives - and that is the hardest thing to accept,"*

Ayoub, a frontline worker and father of two, who grew up as a child during the war in Darfur

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# 2

## Children under fire and cut off

For more than 18 months, Al Fasher - the capital of North Darfur - was encircled by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and allied fighters, cutting the city off from supplies and aid. Continued fighting kept children in constant danger, with schools and hospitals repeatedly hit and learning disrupted for a prolonged period. Families avoided gathering out of fear of strikes.



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The siege was described as one of the most severe humanitarian crises of the Sudan conflict. Around 260,000 civilians, including an estimated 130,000 children, were trapped as food dwindled, safe water ran out and health services targeted and collapsed. Daily life for families became a battle against hunger, disease, and relentless violence. With piped systems down and boreholes damaged or contaminated, safe water had been scarce, forcing families to draw from

unsafe sources. Access to many medicines was non-existent or severely limited, leaving routine childhood illnesses untreated and injuries too often fatal.

Despite grave risks, families escaped whenever fighting lulled. Following a series of deadly assaults on displacement camps and civilian neighborhoods, Al Fasher was seized in late October 2025, ending the encirclement but not the suffering. Large numbers of people walked or travelled across arid terrain toward Tawila, roughly 60 kilometers away, while others fled toward Melit, Kutum, the Jebel Marra area and border towns near Tina. Some crossed into eastern Chad, while others travelled north to Al Dabba and other locations in Northern State. Tawila's displaced population more than doubled as exhausted mothers, separated children and elderly survivors arrived with little more than the clothes they wore.

UNICEF and other aid agencies reported people arriving in horrifying conditions, with many children malnourished, dehydrated and in severe distress. Many children also arrived separated from their families, having been exposed to traumatic events, including exposure to sexual violence. Those unable or unwilling to leave faced a severe threat of grave rights violations, with reports of abduction, killing and maiming and sexual violence. There were also reports of humanitarian workers being arrested, detained or killed, and deepening scarcity of necessities.

*“Children tell me they watched their fathers and siblings killed in front of them - and then ran.”*

UNICEF Child Protection specialist, North Darfur

Tawila continues to shelter a large community of internally displaced. UNICEF and partners are providing emergency assistance: trucking clean water; screening and treating children for acute malnutrition; running mobile health and vaccination services; and providing psychosocial support and child-friendly spaces to help children begin to recover. However, aid agencies warn that services in Tawila, Melit and other receiving areas are dangerously overstretched as new arrivals continue. The needs are vast and rising. Basic services are overstretched, shelters are improvised, and water and sanitation systems require urgent reinforcement to prevent disease outbreaks. Additional supplies - therapeutic food, essential medicines, vaccines, chlorine and fuel - are critical to sustain life-saving operations.

*“Every day, more children arrive in Tawila from Al Fasher, wounded and malnourished, with not enough to help them all.”*

Tewoldeberhan Daniel, UNICEF Sudan Chief of Nutrition

Al Fasher reflects the wider crisis across Darfur and Sudan in general, where shifting frontlines and continued displacement have left children bearing the heaviest burden of violence, deprivation and displacement. Without sustained access, protection of civilians and a significant surge in funding, more children will suffer preventable hunger, illness and trauma - whether forced to flee or remain trapped in conflict-affected areas.

“

*We left Al Fasher in a very difficult condition... I have young children and no money.”*

Na'eema, a mother displaced by the violence in North Darfur



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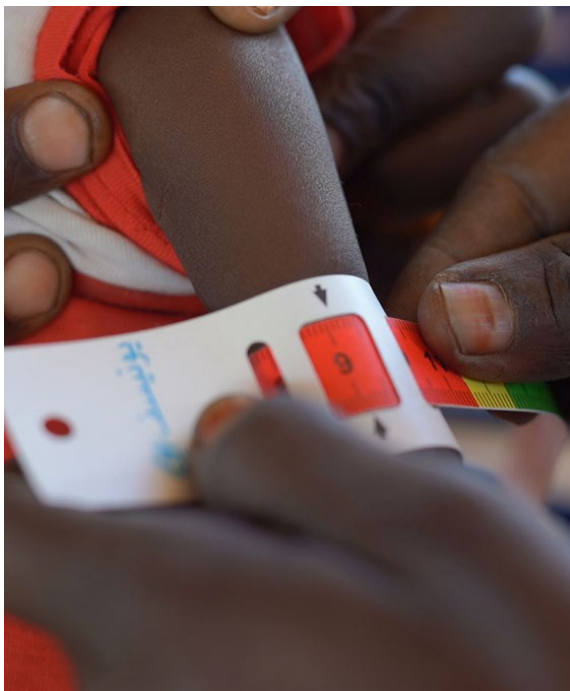
# 3

## Hunger and health: when the body becomes the battleground

Across Darfur, a full-blown humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding - acute hunger, soaring malnutrition, collapsed health services, and unsafe water and sanitation. Conflict has shattered livelihoods and food systems, pushing communities toward famine. Tens of thousands of children living in displacement sites scattered across the Darfur states are teetering on the brink.

Even before this war, Sudan had one of the world's highest child malnutrition rates. Now, Darfur is worse.

**Famine conditions were confirmed in Al Fasher in November 2025.**



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In February 2026, Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates surpassed alarmingly high levels, particularly among children, reaching 52.9 per cent in Um Baru and 34 per cent in Kernoi. Experts continue to warn that additional areas could tip into famine if fighting persists, endangering hundreds of thousands of severely malnourished children. Clinics that still function are overwhelmed with emaciated children, many arriving too weak to survive.

*"Death isn't only from bullets now - it is from hunger too."*

UNICEF Nutrition specialist, North Darfur

Hunger, disease and displacement are putting millions of children at risk. Across Sudan, an estimated 4.2 million cases of acute malnutrition are expected in 2026 among children ages 6-59 months and pregnant and breastfeeding women, including more than 825,000 cases of severe acute malnutrition among children under 5, many in Darfur.

*"Health services are falling short. Children with serious injuries aren't getting care; some have amputations and permanent disabilities."*

UNICEF Child Protection specialist, North Darfur

Health system collapse compounds hunger. Dozens of facilities have been damaged,

looted or closed; in North Darfur alone, 35 health facilities have been attacked since 2023, including the main maternal hospital

in Al Fasher. Health workers have fled, and medicines are scarce. Routine immunization has been disrupted, fueling measles and malaria outbreaks. On 3 March 2026, the Federal Ministry of Health in Sudan officially declared the end of the cholera outbreak after 20 months. Nearly 15,340 suspected cases and over 530 deaths were reported in Darfur. Yet, cholera and other waterborne diseases remain a serious threat wherever children lack access to safe clean water, good sanitation and basic healthcare. Children weakened by hunger are highly vulnerable; when malnourished children contract cholera or measles, mortality risk soars.

“

*I watched a one-month-old baby whose mother was killed in an attack die from malnutrition because we had only a small amount of therapeutic milk left. I saw children die inside hospitals. I saw women in pain when we could not offer even a single painkiller,”*

Ayoub, frontline worker, Al Fasher

Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems are failing under the weight of protracted conflict. In the displacement sites in Tawila, many families still do not have enough water to meet basic daily needs. More than half of people receive less than the minimum amount of water needed to survive, with most families getting just eight to nine litres per person per day, barely enough for drinking and cooking, and almost nothing for washing.

“

*The drone strikes started intensively at night and then continued throughout the day. The terrifying sounds were unbearable; we took only what we could fit in small plastic bags. We had only one bottle of water and no food,”*

Yagoub, father of two displaced by violence in North Darfur

Aid agencies are trucking water, running mobile clinics and delivering therapeutic foods. Without a rapid scale-up -safe, unfettered and sustained access and an end to the fighting - more children will slip into critical malnutrition and illness. Unimpeded humanitarian access is a matter of life or death for Darfur's youngest and most vulnerable.

*“We used to move freely to reach communities. After 2023, everything changed: access collapsed, families were displaced again, and the social fabric tore.”*

UNICEF Child Protection specialist, North Darfur

“

*A child's health does not only depend on medical services; it's about many other things. There is no prevention without peace. There is no health without peace because violence disrupts everything in a child's life,”*

Dr. Mouwaia, health frontline worker, North Darfur

# 4

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## Education and protection: lost futures and rising risks



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Conflict in Darfur has devastated education and child protection services, placing an entire generation at risk. Even before this war, Sudan faced an education crisis: roughly 7 million children were out of school or not accessing quality learning. Since April 2023, formal education in large parts of Darfur has essentially ceased, especially in North and West Darfur. Of the estimated 3.9 million school aged children in Darfur, 3.3 million are out of school.

Attacks on schools have been documented. Most schools today are closed or are being used as shelters. Teachers have fled or gone unpaid; exams are cancelled; families fear gathering due to shelling. Adolescents out of school face heightened risks of recruitment and exploitation. Parents say they would rather keep their children home and safe. Restoring safe learning, including temporary spaces, is urgent.

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# 1,300+

children have been killed or maimed in Al Fasher alone since April 2024,

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Grave violations against children have escalated sharply, with Darfur at the epicenter. Since the onset of the war, the United Nations has verified more than 5,700 grave violations against children across Sudan, affecting at least 5,100 children, over 4,300 of whom have been killed or maimed. Verification challenges mean the real toll is likely far higher.

Nowhere has the impact been more acute than in Al Fasher. Since April 2024, more than 1,500 grave violations against children have been verified in Al Fasher alone, including the killing or maiming of over 1,300 children

(according to UN reporting for the relevant period), rape and other forms sexual violence against children, alongside abductions and recruitment and use - figures that almost certainly underrepresent the true scale of abuse due to severe access constraints.

Behind the numbers are children who have witnessed parents killed, suffered shrapnel or burns, or become separated amid flight. Girls face acute risks of rape and other gender-based violence (GBV), with devastating physical and psychological impacts. Mental health services are scarce.

*"Many children are being recruited by armed groups. Their stories are painful. Among the most painful are sexual-violence cases. especially against girls."*

UNICEF Child Protection specialist, North Darfur



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# 5

## Across borders: Seeking safety beyond Darfur

Darfur's crisis is also driving displacement across borders, with the largest refugee movements into eastern Chad. Since April 2023, waves of Sudanese - especially from West Darfur - have crossed the border. By the end of 2025, Chad was hosting approximately 897,000 Sudanese refugees and nearly 367,760 Chadian returnees displaced by the war in Sudan. Children made up around 62 per cent of Sudanese refugees and 68 per cent of returnees - clear evidence that this conflict is falling heaviest on the young.

Most enter via Adre, At Tina and Koufroun in Ouaddai and Sila - already among Chad's poorest regions and home to 400,000 earlier Darfuri refugees. Services were already limited and the influx has overwhelmed water, food and health systems. Families first gather at informal sites of plastic-and-stick shelters under searing Sahel heat. Many children arrive exhausted, dehydrated and malnourished after days of travel.

Nearly everyone carries distressing stories. Families fled intense fighting in Al Fasher, Geneina and other hot spots, often at the last moment. Children witnessed killings and sexual violence, then endured the shock of flight and separation.

Authorities and agencies move new arrivals to transit centres and camps inland. UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP and partners are screening for malnutrition; providing ready-to-use therapeutic food and high-energy biscuits;

running measles vaccinations; deploying mobile health; and establishing Child-Friendly Spaces for play, psychosocial care and monitoring of distress. Education lifelines are emerging: nearly 5,000 Sudanese refugee students in Chad sat Grade 12 exams in mid-2025.

Host communities show notable generosity, but strain is severe. Camps remain basic - tarpaulins, trucked water, too few latrines - with flooding risks in the rains. Underfunding hampers scale-up across WASH, nutrition, health and education.

For Darfur children in Chad, active fighting may be behind them, but hardship remains: food insecurity, rudimentary shelter and open-ended exile. Sustained support - food, WASH, education, psychosocial care, and bolstered host services - is essential. These children cannot be forgotten.



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# 6

## Voices across time: The persistent echo of fear

In 2005, a UNICEF staff member described Darfur's children as "a generation living in fear." In 2026, the phrase remains tragically relevant. It is also a reminder that efforts to protect children have not kept pace with the scale and persistence of conflict.



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“

*Children do not survive wars on courage alone; they survive when the world chooses to protect them.”*

Ayoub, frontline worker, North Darfur

“

*We looked at any older man as our father and any older woman as our mother. Life felt safe. Today it's the law of the jungle, where the strong devour the weak,”*

UNICEF Child Protection specialist, North Darfur



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“

*My message to the world: End the war by all means possible and bring back smiles to the children of Darfur.”* Tarig,

UNICEF staff member, Al Fasher, North Darfur



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“

*Life was never perfect, but we were safe, and the boys had hoped of becoming something. Now that's all gone,”*

Amna, a mother who fled violence with her six children

“

*When I tell my children how Sudan used to be, they don't believe me,”*

UNICEF Child Protection specialist, North Darfur



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“

*This is not the first time for us, I think I was in my 20's when we experienced the same horror in 2003. I just want my grandchildren to be happy; it pains me that they must go through what we went through,”*

Mona, mother of five living in a displacement site

“

*Everything that can possibly happen has already happened to us. I don't know what to say. We need help, peace and safety. All we want is to go home. We want our simple lives back,”*

Awatif, mother of nine, displaced two times and now living in a displacement site in North Darfur

# 7

## Staying and delivering: UNICEF's response and challenges



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Throughout 2025, UNICEF and partners worked across 18 states in Sudan, including Darfur, to sustain essential services and protect children, adapting programmes to a conflict environment where traditional delivery modalities are increasingly unsafe and unpredictable.

In WASH, 14.7 million people accessed safe water through a combination of system support, rehabilitation, water treatment and emergency service delivery.

In nutrition, UNICEF treated over 612,000 children with severe acute malnutrition across Sudan. Of these, 276,000 children were treated in high-risk areas including Darfur, while expanding outpatient sites and stabilization centres.

In health, UNICEF supported 1,400 health facilities and mobile clinics, enabling more than 4.5 million children and women to access primary health care services across the country. Emergency and outbreak response services reached around 6.5 million people, particularly in hard-to-reach and conflict-affected areas, including Darfur.

In education, UNICEF and partners reached 3.2 million children and adolescents with access to formal and non-formal education. This included the establishment of 1,431 Safe Learning Spaces, benefiting 454,900 children.

In child protection, 20,190 children benefited from family tracing, reunification and alternative care services, while 3.3 million children and caregivers received psychosocial support, and referral pathways for GBV survivors remained operational.

While these are record-breaking achievements in terms of number of people reached, they remain insufficient to meet overall needs. Each response depends on numerous operational decisions: negotiating access, repairing damaged systems with limited spare parts, choosing viable routes, and ensuring social workers can keep reaching children.

Aid missions in Darfur are all too often delayed or denied due to insecurity, administrative impediments and active fighting, limiting sustained presence. While UNICEF and partners continue to

find innovative and context-specific ways to remain present and deliver for children, working through local partners and flexible modalities - these approaches cannot replace consistent, large-scale access. Without it, the response cannot keep pace with growing needs.

Funding is another limiting factor. In 2025, UNICEF's Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) was only 49 per cent funded. In 2026, the HAC appeal for Sudan stands at US\$ 962.9 million, prioritising lifesaving, child-centred interventions across health, nutrition, WASH, education, child protection and humanitarian cash assistance, aiming to reach 7.9 million children. As of 24 March 2026, only US\$ 149.9 million had been mobilised, leaving the appeal just 16 per cent funded, constraining the scale and continuity of lifesaving services.



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# 8

## What must happen now: access, presence, protection and funding



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**As 2026 unfolds, decisions taken now will determine whether children in Darfur have safety and can access essential services - or continue living on rationed hope.**

What is needed is not abstract: predictable, sustained humanitarian access and presence across Darfur; the protection of civilians with children explicitly at the centre; and the political will to uphold these commitments. Corridors must open and remain open, and movement must be enabled rather than obstructed. Civilians and key civilian infrastructure, including schools, clinics and water systems, must be spared from attacks. Separated children must be traced and

reunited, survivors of GBV supported, and all grave violations against children must end.

This response also requires funding that matches the scale and urgency of the needs. Flexible, multi-year financing can keep nutrition, health, water, education and protection services running and prevent the collapse of already weakened systems. Fuel, vaccines and temporary learning spaces are not optional extras – they are lifelines. These commitments are achievable, and the difference they make is immediate: between a truck that arrives and one that turns back; a school that reopens and a child who never returns; and a childhood defined by hope or by fear.

## ALL PARTIES

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- ▶ **Open the roads:** issue written, time-bound guarantees for unimpeded passage of humanitarian personnel and supplies into and within Darfur and other conflict affected areas and maintain an effective notification system that is honoured in practice.
- ▶ **Remove bureaucratic roadblocks:** publish clear procedures and timelines for visas, movement permits and customs; stop ad hoc restrictions; recognise pre-cleared humanitarian cargo as priority and allow a sustained and effective presence on ground.
- ▶ **Shield civilians:** stop attacks on key civilian objects, including schools, hospitals, water and sanitation systems, and prohibit military use of schools.
- ▶ **Prevent and end grave violations against children:** cease killing and maiming, abductions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, recruitment and use, attacks on schools and hospitals, and denial of humanitarian access.
- ▶ **Engage with the UN** to develop and implement an action plan to end grave child rights violations.
- ▶ **Keep families together:** enable safe access for child protection caseworkers; facilitate tracing, reunification and documentation for unaccompanied and separated children; ensure confidential GBV services are available.
- ▶ **Safeguard essential services:** protect and repair water and sanitation networks, health facilities and learning spaces; allocate fuel and chlorine to keep water and sanitation systems running; stop occupation of schools.
- ▶ **Guarantee impartial aid:** allow needs-based targeting, independent assessments and third-party monitoring without interference or diversion.

## BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL PARTNERS

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- ▶ **Finance at speed and with flexibility:** front-load multi-year, unearmarked resources for nutrition, WASH, health, child protection and education to protect critical supplies and scaled delivery.
- ▶ **Back cross-border lifelines:** fund health and nutrition screening, vaccinations and child protection casework along flight corridors and in refugee-hosting areas.
- ▶ **Resource accountability:** sustain monitoring of grave violations and survivor-centred services, without politicisation.

## NEIGHBOURING STATES AND REGIONAL BODIES

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- ▶ **Keep borders open:** uphold non-refoulement and guarantee safe entry and freedom of movement for children and families fleeing Darfur.
- ▶ **Meet needs at the border:** enable measles and cholera vaccination, nutrition screening, WASH and child-friendly spaces at reception points; recognise civil documentation issued in displacement.
- ▶ **Coordinate regionally:** align cross-border health, WASH and protection operations; share surveillance data to prevent and contain outbreaks.

## MEMBER STATES INCLUDING AFRICAN UNION

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- ▶ **Secure and verify access:** use diplomatic leverage to obtain sustained access corridors and predictable operational pauses around civilian areas, and establish joint mechanisms to monitor compliance.
- ▶ **Centre children in talks:** embed concrete, trackable child-focused benchmarks in any cessation of hostilities or political process, including safe schooling, protected health facilities, and prohibition of recruitment and use.

## UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER CHILD PROTECTION ACTORS

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- ▶ **Strengthen evidence:** support impartial collection and publication of data on needs, access denials and violations, including IPC and MRM processes, with safeguards for sources.

## MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC

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- ▶ **Sustain attention on children:** report with verified facts and child-safe storytelling; keep Darfur visible in global conversations on conflict and famine risk.
- ▶ **Mobilise solidarity:** use consented stories and evidence-led visuals to power appeals; point supporters to reputable giving channels and the policy asks above.

## A line the world can choose to draw

The children of Darfur are living through one of the world's gravest protection and humanitarian crises. Two decades after the world first prompted a global alarm, girls and boys are once again trapped in violence, hunger and fear. A second generation of children is now paying the heavy price of repeated failure to prevent and resolve conflict. Yet amid burned villages and crowded camps in Darfur and Chad, children still show resilience. They dream of a day when bullets stop, classrooms reopen, friendships resume and nights pass without terror.

That day is possible - but only with urgent, sustained action. An entire generation is at stake. The fighting must end and a lasting peace in Sudan secured. It is the only durable solution.

Darfur's story is one of profound suffering, but it can become a story of hope regained. With safe, unimpeded humanitarian access, robust child protection, and peace, young people can recover from trauma, learn and grow, and someday lead their communities toward reconciliation and renewal. They have not given up, nor should we.

UNICEF and partners are staying and delivering for children. We call on the world to stay with us. Let 2026 be the year the international community acts with urgency to protect children in Darfur. Every child - whether in Nyala, Al Fasher or a refugee camp in Chad - has the right to safety and to dream. Their lives, and Darfur's future, depend on our resolve now.

“

*I want to be a doctor so  
I can help people in pain.”*

Hamid, 9-year-old

“

*I want the adults to stop  
this war.”*

Touba, 6-year-old, North Darfur



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# for every child,

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

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for every child