

# Experiences of refugees and migrants fleeing Sudan to Juba as a result of the 2023 conflict

On April 15th, 2023, conflict erupted in Sudan between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), internally displacing more than 6 million and forcing almost 1.5 million to flee to neighbouring countries, namely Chad (500,000), South Sudan (500,000) and Egypt (400,000).<sup>1</sup> Among those forced to flee are Sudanese (more than 1 million) and refugees and migrants from other countries who were hosted, settled in or transiting Sudan (430,000).<sup>2</sup> Sudan was a major refugee and migrant-hosting country prior to the start of the conflict, with over 1.1 million refugees and asylum seekers (over 680,000 of whom were South Sudanese),<sup>3</sup> and an estimated 1.2 million migrants.<sup>4</sup> This snapshot examines the experiences of South Sudanese, Sudanese, and other nationalities who fled to Juba, South Sudan, focusing on their movements in response to the conflict, the main challenges and protection abuses encountered while trying to find safety as well as their future movement intentions. It complements another MMC snapshot on the conflict-affected movements of refugees and migrants to Eastern Sudan.<sup>5</sup>

## Key findings

- Most respondents interviewed in Juba had been in Khartoum (84%) when the conflict broke out and stopped in Renk (50%) to look for aid on their way to Juba.
- Active conflict/fighting (93%) and access to transportation/increased transport costs (58%) were the main obstacles in leaving where they were when the conflict broke out.
- South Sudanese had less access to information on safe locations in Sudan (43%) compared to Sudanese (70%) and respondents of other nationalities (86%). Women also reported less access (49%) compared to men (64%).

- Protection incidents are high: since the start of the conflict, most respondents witnessed death (74%), experienced or witnessed physical violence (62%) and robbery (54%). Kidnapping (27%) and trafficking (15%) were also reported.
- In Juba, access to cash (56%), housing (55%) and healthcare (46%) are the primary challenges cited by respondents. Access to housing is the primary challenge for non-South Sudanese respondents (64%).
- The majority of respondents intend to stay in Juba for the coming three months (73%). However, among nationalities other than Sudanese and South Sudanese, many plan to move to another country (12/63), most commonly Uganda (4/12) or Europe (4/12), or return to their country of origin (18/63).

## Data and profiles

This snapshot draws upon 412 surveys collected from August - October 2023, 4-6 months after the outbreak of conflict in Sudan. All respondents were in Sudan when the conflict started and fled to Juba, South Sudan, where they were interviewed. 50% of respondents are men and 50% are women. 13% of respondents are youth (18-24 years of age), 45% are aged between 25-34 and 43% are 35 or older. The majority of respondents are from South Sudan (59%; n=241), while others are from Sudan (26%; n=108) and other countries<sup>6</sup> (15%; n=63).

1 UNHCR (2024). [Sudan Situation – Operational Data Portal. Accessed in January 2024](#)

2 UNHCR (2024). [Sudan Situation - UNHCR External Update #44 - 17 January 2024](#)

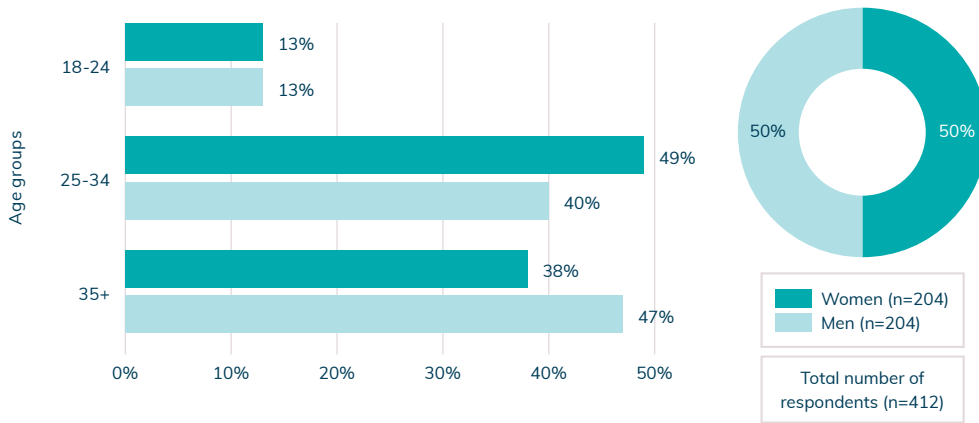
3 UNHCR (2024). [Sudan – Operational Data Portal. Accessed in January 2024](#)

4 EU (2020). [First steps taken to protect migrant domestic workers in the Sudan](#)

5 MMC (2023). [Movements, challenges and abuses of refugees and migrants in Eastern Sudan during the first months of the 2023 conflict](#)

6 Eritrea (n=16), Ethiopia (n=16), Chad (n=6), Uganda (n=6), Somalia (n=5), Democratic Republic of the Congo (n=3), Kenya (n=3) and other (n=4).

**Figure 1. Sample gender and age distribution**



## Half the respondents stopped in Renk before reaching Juba, mostly to look for assistance.

The majority of respondents (84%) were in Khartoum when the conflict started. Others were in Al Jazirah (3%), Blue Nile (2%), North Kordofan (2%) or other locations (9%). Two-thirds (66%) of respondents stopped in at least one location along their way to Juba. Half of the respondents stopped in Renk (50%), which is the main arrival point into South Sudan, before continuing their journey to Juba. In Renk (n=208), most reported stopping to look for assistance (82%).

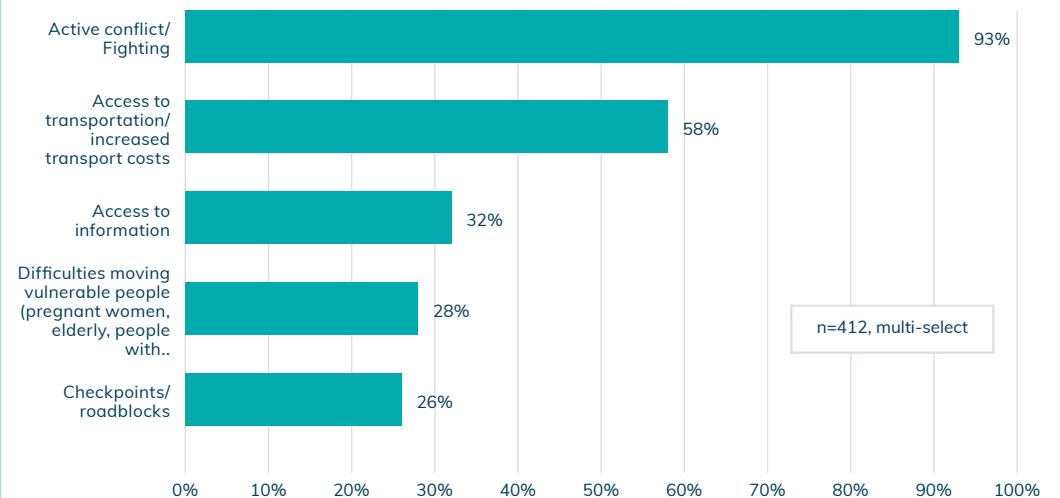
Arrivals in Renk rose steeply when the conflict broke out, straining already limited services.<sup>7</sup> Further, with the start of the rainy season, the conditions in Renk and other transit points along the border deteriorated significantly, as options for onward travel became constrained, forcing many to remain stranded.<sup>8</sup> A quarter (n=103) of respondents indicated that they needed assistance in Renk but did not receive it, namely shelter (80%), food (56%) and medical assistance (51%). Hence, the data reveals Renk as a place where people stopped to look for assistance and as a place where assistance needs were unmet. Many respondents also indicated stopping in Kosti (30%; n=124), located in Sudan before reaching the border, to look for assistance (88%) and because it was a safe location (55%).

7 UNHCR (2023). [Sudan violence forces South Sudanese refugees to return to country they fled](#)  
 8 Refugees International (2023). [Return to a Displaced Nation: The Sudan Crisis and South Sudan's Returnees](#)

## Fighting, access to transportation and increased fuel costs were the main obstacles in seeking safety

Respondents faced multiple challenges in terms of seeking safety when the conflict broke out. Close to all cited that active conflict/fighting (93%) was a challenge when trying to leave where they were when the conflict broke out, while many also cited access to transportation/increased transport costs (58%), access to information (32%), difficulties moving vulnerable people (pregnant women, elderly, people with disability, children, among others) (28%) and checkpoints/roadblocks (26%). In terms of transportation and fuel, these findings confirm widely reported accounts of skyrocketing prices obstructing flight.<sup>9</sup> There were no observable differences in challenges among women and men and among nationality groups, apart from South Sudanese respondents more often citing access to information as a challenge (37%) than Sudanese (27%) or other nationalities (22%).

**Figure 2. What were the main challenges in leaving the location you were in when the conflict started?**



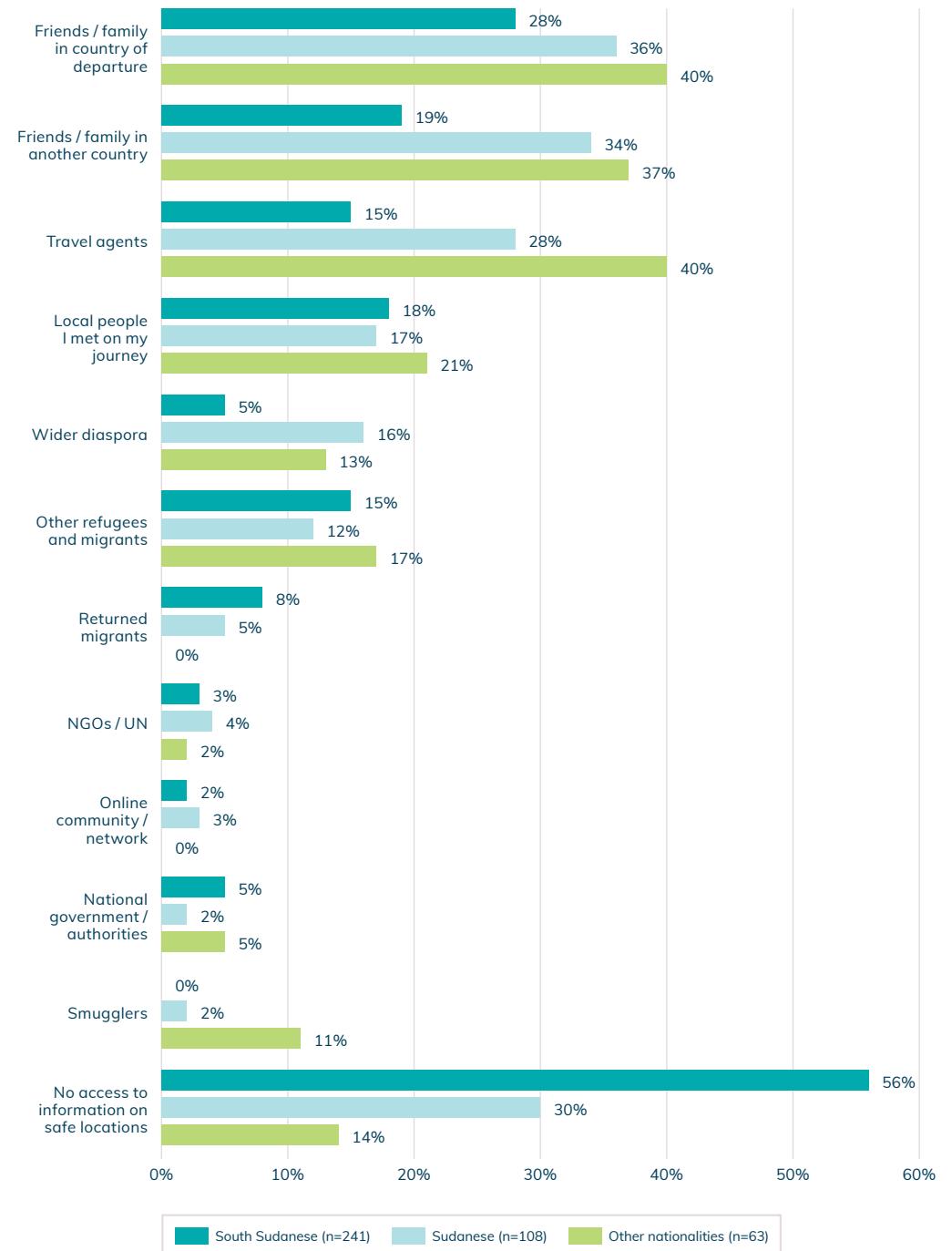
9 IOM (2023). [Sudan: Escalating Conflict Situation Update](#)

## South Sudanese had less access to information on safe locations compared to other nationalities, as did women compared to men

57% of all respondents reported having access to information about safe locations when the conflict broke out. Such access, however, varied by nationality with fewer South Sudanese (43%) as compared to Sudanese (70%) and other nationalities<sup>10</sup> (86%; 54/63) having access to information on safe locations. Access to information on safe locations was also higher among men (64%) compared to women (49%).

Among respondents who did have access to information on safe locations, friends/family in Sudan were the most common source of such information among all nationality groups. Many, especially non-South Sudanese, also received information from friends/family in other countries. Almost one-fifth (18%; 75/412) of all nationality groups cited receiving information from locals met on their journeys. Of note, nationals of other countries also indicated travel agents<sup>11</sup> (40%; 25/63) and smugglers (11%; 7/63) as sources of information on safe locations. This might suggest that nationals of other countries had pre-existing relationships with these actors because they facilitated their initial journeys to Sudan. These data show that protection actors should consider how different information sources could be better leveraged to disseminate information about assistance and safety to individuals of different nationalities.

Figure 3. What were your sources of information on safe locations?



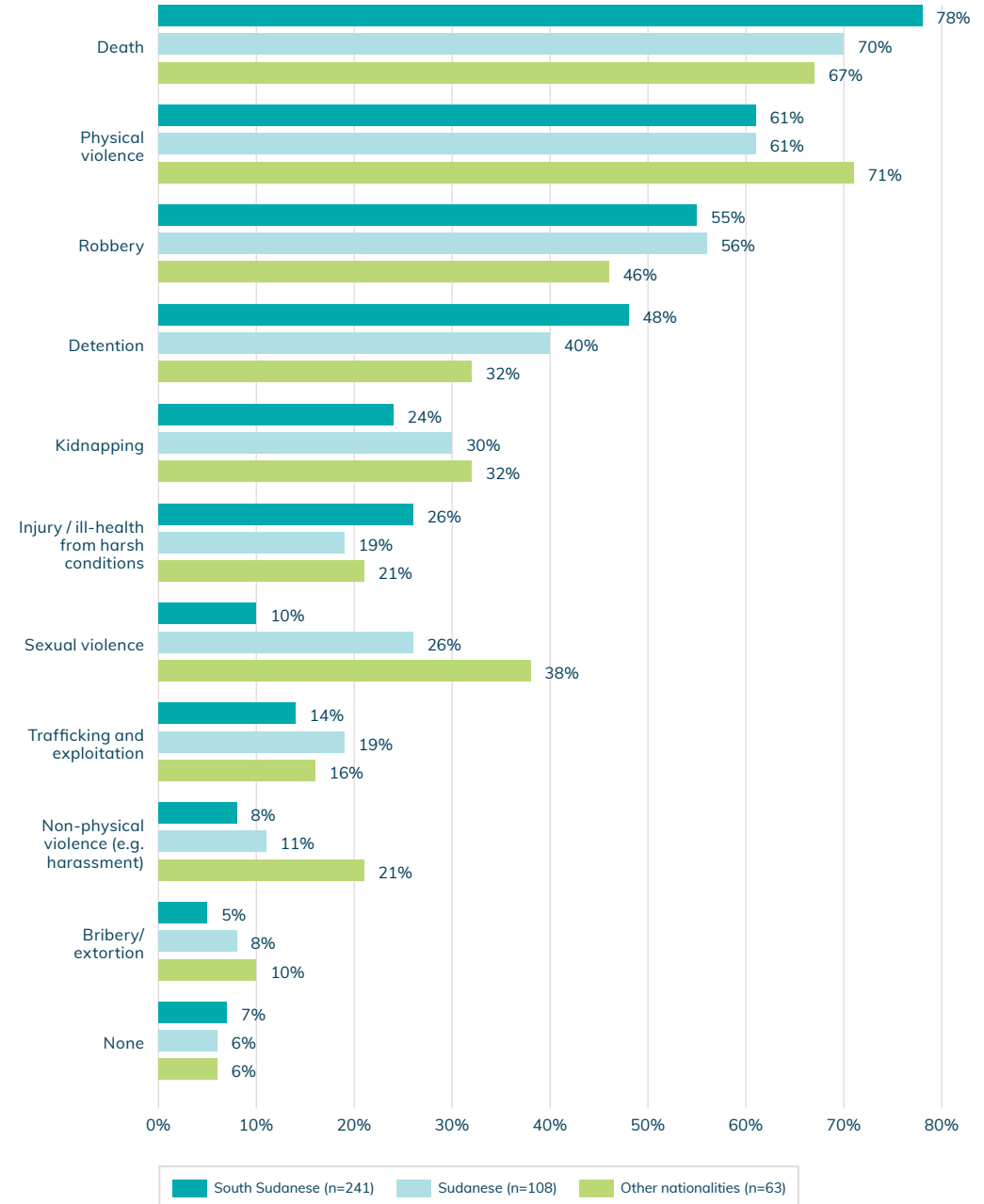
<sup>10</sup> All or close to all of Eritreans (15/16), Ethiopians (14/16), Somalis (5/5), Ugandans (5/6), Central Africans (3/3), and Kenyans (3/3).

<sup>11</sup> Travel agents refer to individuals who facilitate (authorized) travel, and are distinct from smugglers because they do not facilitate irregular cross-border travel.

## Almost all respondents experienced or witnessed protection incidents during the outbreak of conflict, most commonly death, violence and robbery

Close to all respondents (93%) had experienced or witnessed abuses during the outbreak of conflict. Overall, the data suggest a high rate of multiple protection abuses: 74% had witnessed death, 62% had experienced or witnessed physical violence, and 54% had experienced or witnessed robbery. No major differences were observed between women and men respondents, which contrasts with media reporting on increases in sexual violence experienced by women since the outbreak of conflict. This could be linked to women respondents' underreporting of abuse or a rise in reporting by men. Differences were observed by nationality (Figure 4). Respondents of nationalities other than Sudanese and South Sudanese more commonly cited witnessing or experiencing physical violence (71%; 45/63), sexual violence (38%; 24/63) and harassment (21%; 13/63). The frequent mentions of kidnapping (27%) and trafficking and exploitation (15%) may suggest, as past research has indicated,<sup>12</sup> an increased incidence of trafficking and abductions in conflict settings. The high prevalence of protection incidents among respondents stresses the need for greater support for protection programming in hard-to-reach locations along the route and for protection actors to offer comprehensive protection services to those fleeing, including psychosocial support and sexual assault services.

Figure 4. Have you witnessed or experienced abuses since April 15th?



12 ICMC (2023). [Trafficking in Human Beings in Conflict or Post-Conflict Situations. A Reflection on Strategies](#)

## In Juba, access to cash, housing and healthcare are primary concerns

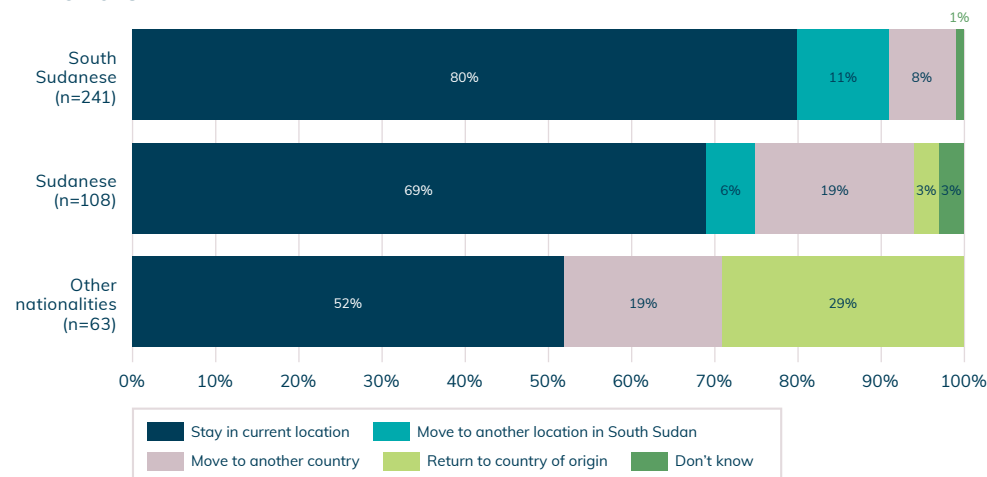
In Juba, access to cash (56%), housing (55%) and healthcare (46%) are the primary challenges cited by respondents. Among non-South Sudanese respondents, housing is the most frequently reported challenge faced in Juba (63% and 65%, respectively). Non-South Sudanese respondents also frequently cited access to food (49% of Sudanese and 44% of those of other nationalities) as a challenge. In contrast, South Sudanese most frequently outlined cash (60%) and healthcare (55%) as their top concerns in Juba. Women more frequently cited access to healthcare as a challenge compared to men (54% vs 38%). These data show the different protection needs among different nationalities who may have dissimilar networks, resources and challenges.

## While most intend to stay for the coming three months, many non-South Sudanese plan to move to another country or return to their country of origin

Movement intentions for the following three months varied within the sample. Among South Sudanese respondents, the large majority intended to stay in Juba (80%), while 11% intended to move to another location in South Sudan and 8% to another country. Most Sudanese respondents also planned to stay in Juba (69%), and 19% intended to move to another country. This could be linked to the fact that most respondents reported feeling safe in Juba – 96% of the overall sample. Among respondents of other nationalities, fewer - just over half - planned to remain in Juba (33/63) while 18 of 63 intended to return to their countries of origin and 12 of 63 to travel to other countries. Such third country nationals will have already been on longer journeys at the time the conflict broke out, and many intend to re-embark when possible. Respondents who reported intentions to move to another country (n=53) indicated Uganda (n=15), the United Arab Emirates (n=10), Kenya (n=7), Saudi Arabia (n=4) and other countries<sup>13</sup> (n=17) as intended destinations. When asked if they would consider returning to Sudan at a later stage, 94% of Sudanese did, as did 53% of South Sudanese and 54% of other nationals.

<sup>13</sup> Including the United Kingdom (n=3), the United States of America (n=3), Australia (n=2), Egypt (n=2), Sudan (n=2) and other countries (n=5).

Figure 5. What are your movement intentions within the next 3 months?



### 4Mi data collection

4Mi is the Mixed Migration Centre's flagship primary data collection system, an innovative approach that helps fill knowledge gaps, and inform policy and response regarding the nature of mixed migratory movements and the protection risks for refugees and migrants on the move. 4Mi field enumerators are currently collecting data through direct interviews with refugees and migrants in East and Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Note that the sampling approach means that the findings derived from the surveyed sample provide rich insights, but the figures cannot be used to make inferences about the total population. See more 4Mi analysis and details on methodology at:

[www.mixedmigration.org/4mi](http://www.mixedmigration.org/4mi)