

Joint Protection / Site Management Clusters Alert

Blue Nile State, Sudan

Escalating protection risks amid new displacement, unsafe site conditions, and approaching rainy season

Date: 25 April 2026 | Location: Ed Damazine and Ar Rusayris localities

This joint Protection and SNFI–Site Management Clusters alert is issued to urgently highlight the worsening protection situation in Blue Nile State and to spur immediate, coordinated action to protect civilians and prevent further deterioration. It follows a joint mission to Ed Damazine and Ar Rusayris localities and is published amid renewed fighting reported on 25 April in areas south of Damazine, including Sali and Keili village. The intensification of hostilities is increasing displacement risks and compounding existing protection threats, at a critical time as the onset of the rainy season threatens to further expose IDPs, returnees, and host communities to harm.

Situation Overview

Following the capture of key locations in Blue Nile State and intensified fighting near the Ethiopian border, civilians have been displaced from Kurmuk, Geisan, and Baw toward Ed Damazine, Ar Rusayris, and surrounding gathering sites, adding to ongoing population movement. As of early April 2026, DTM reports that over 28,000 individuals (5,609HHs) were displaced since mid-January, contributing to a total caseload of more than 350,000 IDPs, alongside approximately 187,000 returnees. Most new arrivals are concentrated in informal sites around Ed Damazine and Ar Rusayris, exacerbating pressure on already overstretched basic services and host communities with limited resources and coping capacities.

Displacement journeys have been particularly severe, with civilians reportedly walking for up to four days to reach safer areas, facing hazardous conditions, attacks along transit routes, and reported deaths during movement. These movements are taking place amid ongoing insecurity, humanitarian access constraints, pre-existing vulnerabilities, and anticipated seasonal flooding, compelling civilians to pass through insecure and underserved areas and increasing their exposure to violence, exploitation, abuse, and secondary displacement.

Key Protection Risks

1. Unsafe site conditions are driving protection risks, including negative coping mechanisms.

Across multiple sites, overcrowding, lack of privacy, weak shelter, poor sanitation, and absence of lighting are directly increasing risks of GBV, child protection violations, public health threats, and general insecurity, especially at night. In many locations, structured site management is absent or insufficient, limiting referrals, accountability mechanisms, information-sharing, and visibility of high-risk households.

- **Al Karama 3** is the most critical site identified. It is flood-prone, has inadequate shelter, non-functional sanitation, major fire and environmental hazards, and no dedicated site management presence. Conditions are expected to deteriorate sharply with the rains. Relocation discussions with authorities are ongoing and remain urgent. IDPs are being consulted, and a go-and-see visit is being considered. Any relocation should be protection-driven and technically informed, implemented in phases, and only proceed where minimum multisector services are in place, including water, sanitation, health, protection, and access, not shelter alone.
- **Al Mukhtar School** is severely overcrowded and unsuitable for prolonged displacement, with unsafe cooking arrangements, inadequate sanitation, and heightened risks linked to the continued use of an educational facility.
- **Al Karama 9** faces severe protection and public health risks linked to grossly inadequate sanitation, flood exposure, lack of lighting, and a reported **Hepatitis E** outbreak, with serious implications for women and children.

2. Heightened GBV risks

Women and girls consistently report pervasive fear, restricted movement, and serious safety concerns, particularly when accessing latrines, bathing areas, water points, and during firewood collection. Poor lighting, lack of privacy, overcrowding, and weak complaint and referral mechanisms significantly compound risks and contribute to underreporting. Dignity kit coverage remains critically

insufficient, and bathing facilities are widely inadequate. Pregnant and lactating women face acute and potentially life-threatening risks where health services are absent, delayed, unaffordable, or physically inaccessible.

In returnee settings, women also report exploitative and unsafe labour conditions, including agricultural and mining work involving long hours, overcrowded transport, and limited safeguards. Across several sites, women, girls, and boys face heightened protection risks related to open defecation and insecure livelihoods, particularly where lack of documentation forces them into unsafe environments, increasing vulnerability to abuse, exploitation, and other protection violations.

3. Serious child protection concerns

Children in displaced and returnee households face severe protection risks, including psychosocial distress, family separation, lack of education access, and widespread child labour. Documentation barriers restrict movement, birth registration, and school enrolment, while the absence of child-friendly spaces leaves children without safe environments. Children are increasingly engaged in hazardous and physically demanding labour, including cotton picking, gold mining, and wheels carts pulling. Their visible absence during the mission visits confirms the prevalence of child labour. Education gaps further exacerbate these risks, as returnee children and adolescents face exclusion due to curriculum differences and the lack of accelerated or alternative learning programs, leaving them vulnerable to negative coping mechanisms such as early marriage.

4. Civil documentation gaps and exclusion

IDPs, and particularly returnees from South Sudan, face widespread loss of civil documentation, including national IDs and birth certificates. This severely limits access to assistance, health care, education, freedom of movement, and livelihoods. Birth registration, marriage registration, and school enrolment or equivalency certificates are often not possible without documentation, even when households can afford the fees.

5. Returnees in host communities face specific protection risks

Returnees hosted outside formal sites, including villages near Al Karama 5, report no assistance since arrival and remain dependent on relatives. Severe water shortages were identified as the most urgent need, with women walking up to 30 minutes and paying for each jerrycan. Food insecurity has worsened following the end of distributions in December 2025. Sanitation facilities are unsafe and nearly full. There are no women's or child-friendly spaces, no community-based protection structures, and limited awareness of reporting pathways for security incidents. Children's access to education is limited, and adolescent girls are engaged in cotton field labour to meet basic needs. Lack of civil documentation continues to restrict access to health care, schools, and SIM cards, heightening risks of child labour, reliance on harmful coping mechanisms and eviction.

6. Imminent rainy season threat

The approaching rainy season represents a critical protection tipping point. Several sites are located in flood-prone areas, sanitation infrastructure is weak or non-functional, and access roads may soon become impassable, increasing the risk of secondary displacement, disease outbreaks, and isolation of high-risk populations. The window for preventive action is rapidly closing.

Key Recommendations – Urgent Actions Required

1. To Parties to the Conflict

- Protect civilians without delay, including IDPs, returnees, women, children, elderly persons, and persons with disabilities, in line with International Humanitarian Law, and refrain from attacks on civilians, civilian infrastructure, and displacement routes.
- Ensure safe and unimpeded civilian movement and prevent violence, exploitation, abuse, including by strictly enforcing age-verification measures to end all forms of child recruitment during displacement and in host communities.

2. To Authorities in Blue Nile State

- Immediately prioritise high-risk sites, notably **Al Karama 3**, **Al Karama 9**, and **Al Mukhtar School**, through safe, voluntary, and protection-driven relocation and/or urgent risk mitigation, ensuring accessibility for persons with disabilities and elderly persons, and minimum multi-sector services ahead of the rainy season.
- Remove barriers to civil documentation for IDPs and returnees, including through fee waivers, mobile services, and simplified procedures, prioritising women, children, and returnees from South Sudan.

3. To Humanitarian Partners

Protection

- Increase protection presence in priority displacement sites and host communities and urgently scale up life-saving protection interventions including GBV and child protection services, safe spaces, referral pathways, strengthened community-based mechanisms and risk mitigation measures such as improved lighting and privacy.
- Strengthen civil documentation support, including legal aid, referrals, awareness, and advocacy to reduce financial and administrative barriers.

All sectors

- Rapidly improve site conditions ahead of the rains, prioritising WASH, drainage, shelter reinforcement, and access in flood-prone and overcrowded sites.
- Systematically mainstream protection, age, gender, and disability considerations across all sectoral responses.
- Extend multi-sector assistance to returnees in host communities outside formal sites, to reduce harmful coping mechanisms, exploitation, and child labour.

4. To Donors

- Use political, diplomatic, and financial leverage to strengthen civilian protection, and humanitarian, and to advance protection-driven site solutions, including safe relocation from high-risk sites.
- Provide timely, flexible, and protection-sensitive funding to enable integrated responses addressing escalating protection, WASH, health, Shelter and site risks ahead of the rainy season.

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