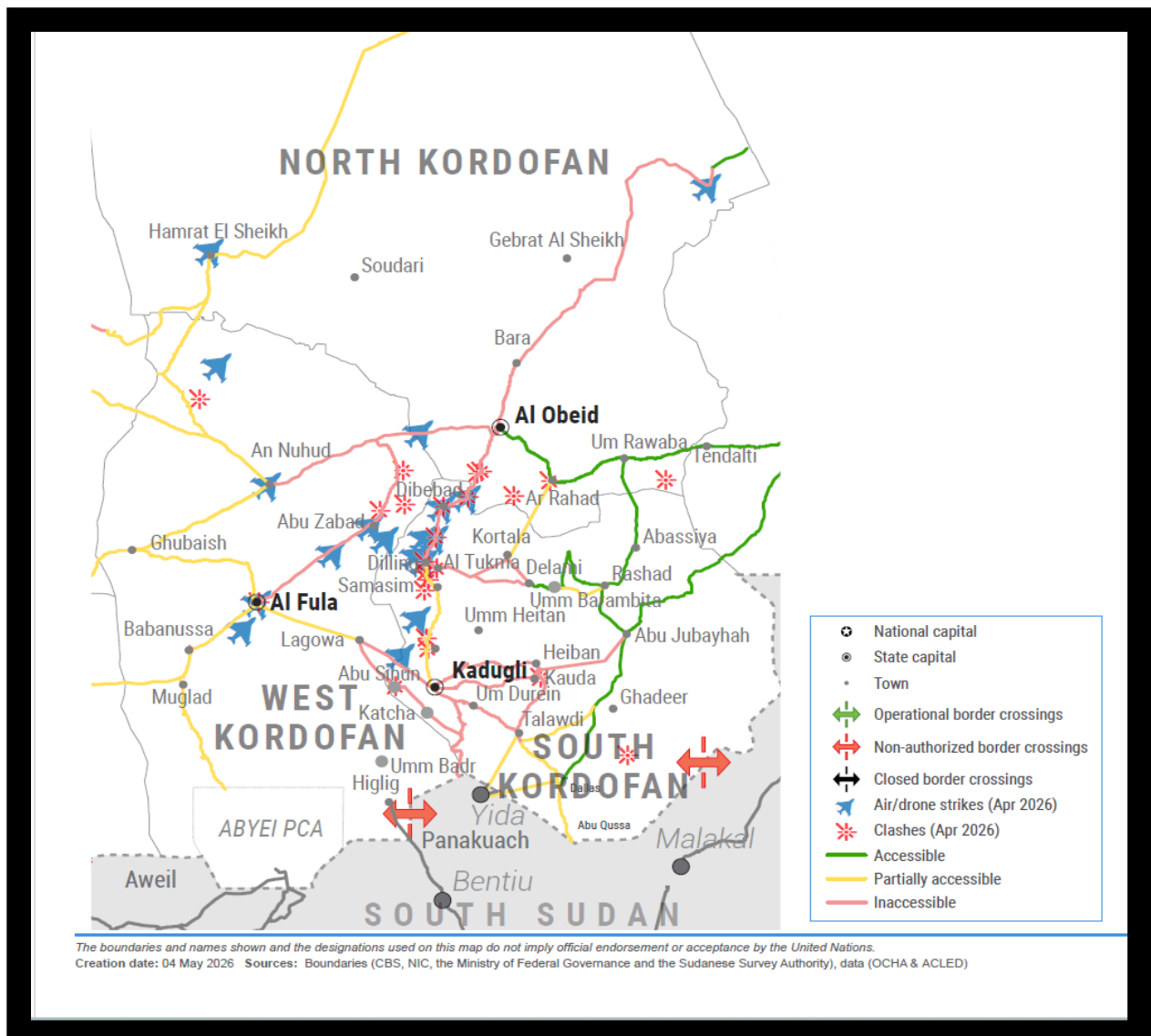


Protection cluster note- North Kordofan, Sudan

Date: 8 May 2026

Geographic focus: El Obeid and surrounding areas-North Kordofan

This note aims to draw urgent attention to escalating protection risks facing civilians in El Obeid and surrounding areas, and to reinforce collective advocacy for the protection of civilians and humanitarian access.





1. Situation overview

The Greater Kordofan region is experiencing sustained instability marked by shifting frontlines, fragmented territorial control, and disruption of key supply routes. North Kordofan, and in particular El Obeid, has increasingly become a strategic focal point due to its role as a logistical and administrative hub linking central Sudan, Darfur, and southern Kordofan.

While El Obeid remains under the control of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), the city is under growing pressure from surrounding areas where the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) presence is reported, notably in Bara and across parts of the northern and western corridors. The situation remains fragile and civilians face increasing challenges in their movements.

In recent weeks, El Obeid has faced a renewed pattern of hostilities characterized by drone strikes and attacks heavily affecting populated areas. These developments signal a shift toward sustained remote warfare affecting urban populations, increasing the exposure of civilians to harm even in areas not directly experiencing ground combat.

Access to El Obeid is highly constrained. The Southern axis towards Dilling remains an active theater of hostilities, while Northern and western routes are largely inaccessible due to RSF presence and insecurity. The eastern route towards White Nile State represents a vital supply corridor. However, it remains fragile and at risk of disruption. This has resulted in conditions of partial isolation, marked by increasing pressure on markets, inflation, overstretched services, and significant constraints on humanitarian access.

As of March 2026, International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) reported approximately 231,211 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North Kordofan¹. The displacement situation remains highly fluid, with increasing arrivals from surrounding localities, particularly toward El Obeid. Within the Kordofan region, displacement is largely concentrated in North Kordofan, with around 30,605 IDPs recorded, mainly in Sheikan (16,715) and Ar Rahad (9,280). However, by April 2026, a rapid needs assessment conducted by humanitarian actors in collaboration with the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) estimated approximately 100,548 IDPs in Sheikan alone.

These variations reflect the use of multiple data sources and methodologies, which present challenges in reconciling figures and establishing a consistent understanding of displacement trends.

In El Obeid, the civilian population includes both host communities and a rising number of displaced people from nearby areas, as well as from South and West Kordofan and the Darfur states. Movement patterns continue to shift, with some households relocating within the city to safer areas, while others attempt to move eastward despite significant risks and constraints. However, movement options for civilians are increasingly constrained by insecurity, active hostilities, and the high cost of transportation. These restrictions are shaping displacement patterns, limiting access to services and livelihoods, and increasing protection risks for civilians both within and outside El Obeid.

¹ [DTM Sudan Displacement Dashboard | Displacement Tracking Matrix](#)



The situation is further compounded by economic hardship, limited service availability, and growing protection concerns particularly in overcrowded and substandard sites hosting people newly displaced.

With the approaching rainy season, there is a high likelihood of further deterioration in access conditions, increased isolation, disruption of supply routes and additional barriers to humanitarian response.

2. Protection risks

The protection environment in El Obeid is increasingly complex, with civilians exposed to overlapping and compounding risks driven by insecurity, access constraints, and the erosion of essential services.

- Movement restrictions, displacement and associated protection risks

Population movement is highly constrained due to insecurity along all major routes, the presence of armed actors, and the high cost of transportation. Civilians attempting to leave El Obeid face significant risks along corridors, particularly toward Bara (North), Darfur routes (West), and Dilling (South), where insecurity and active hostilities persist.

As a result, many civilians remain effectively trapped within the city, while others relocate internally to areas perceived as relatively safer. Ongoing insecurity and fear of attacks are driving displacement both within and out of El Obeid, while limited safe movement options continue to expose civilians to heightened Protection risks. Displacement within El Obeid is placing additional pressure on host communities with services that are already strained.

Women, men, boys, and girls face differentiated risks during movement. Men and boys are at heightened risk of arbitrary, detention, and targeting based on perceived affiliation with parties to the conflict. Women and girls face increased risks of harassment, intimidation, and sexual violence at checkpoints and along movement routes with reports of rape and sexual assault of women and girls, especially those fleeing and encountering parties to the conflict en route. Reports indicate that crossing between areas under different control can expose civilians to risks, including looting, extortion, drone attacks, and abuse.

Women-led organizations report that insecurity along routes, combined with economic constraints, is forcing many families to remain in unsafe conditions within the city, increasing their exposure to other protection risks.

Families increasingly report fear for the safety of boys during movement, including risks of recruitment and association with armed groups. Economic hardship and movement restrictions are also contributing to harmful coping mechanisms and increasing pressure on already vulnerable households.

The proximity of military objectives to civilian areas further increases risks and undermines the civilian character of affected neighborhoods. Between January and April 2026, OHCHR documented at least 13 drone-related incidents with civilian casualties in North Kordofan. Available information indicates at least 94 civilians killed. Actual numbers are likely much higher. Many attacks occurred against civilian objects, including at least three markets and one school and 100 injured.



- Explosive ordnance (EO) contamination

Ongoing hostilities, including the use of explosive weapons, are likely increasing EO contamination, particularly in areas surrounding El Obeid, El Rahad, and along key road corridors. This poses ongoing risks to civilians, restricts safe movement and hinders the delivery of aid, particularly in areas affected by recent attacks. The use of explosive weapons in and around populated areas raises serious concerns regarding the protection of civilians. Civilians in El Obeid are increasingly exposed to direct harm from hostilities, particularly through drone strikes impacting populated areas, and the subsequent response which exacerbates the explosive ordnance threat from anti-aircraft munitions. These attacks have affected residential neighborhoods and civilian gatherings, resulting in casualties and psychological distress among the population.

The unpredictability of attacks, including their occurrence without warning, significantly limits civilians' ability to take protective measures.

- Forced displacement and unsafe shelter conditions

Displaced families are sheltering in overcrowded conditions including with host communities and in informal arrangements, often with limited access to basic services and protection safeguards.

Overcrowding, lack of privacy, and inadequate shelter conditions increase risks of GBV, exploitation, and health-related concerns, particularly for women, girls, and children.

Nearly half (47%) of IDPs recently displaced across Kordofan reportedly stayed with host families (IOM DTM). The remainder were split between gathering sites (16%), rented accommodation (12%), camps (11%), schools or other public buildings (10%), and improvised or critical shelter (4%) (IOM DTM).

For women IDPs and women from host families, staying with other families may increase care burdens and reduce privacy when several families share confined space, leading to additional domestic violence and GBV risks.

Families in crowded areas such as camps and public buildings also face protection concerns due to lack of locks and lights, including in shared WASH facilities, which can increase GBV risks.

One of the main issues reported is the lack of separate facilities for women and men (mentioned by 35% of surveyed households in North Kordofan) and lack of privacy, including missing walls, doors or locks in WASH facilities (mentioned by 21% in North Kordofan).

22% in North Kordofan and 18% mention the complete absence of facilities. The absence or lack of WASH facilities often forces women to walk long distances to relieve themselves, increasing protection risks and potential assault en route. 31% of household surveyed in North Kordofan, also reported that water points



are too far, which creates similar protection issues for women and girls who are often responsible for collecting water.²

An estimated eight displacement sites are currently identified in El Obeid (Sheikan locality), hosting approximately 20,612 individuals. The largest sites include Al Mina Al Bari and Tagat.

Shelter conditions across these sites are largely makeshift and fall below minimum standards, raising significant protection concerns. Sites located outside the city perimeter, such as Alban Jadeed, receive limited humanitarian assistance, leaving vulnerable populations with unmet critical needs.

Ongoing hostilities in North Kordofan and surrounding regions continue to drive displacement toward El Obeid, placing additional strain on already limited resources and response capacity. This has heightened the need for life-saving shelter and essential non-food items (NFIs) to support the safety, dignity, and protection of newly displaced populations. For example, on 3 May alone, Tagat site reportedly received approximately 950 new arrivals.

Limited shelter capacity and overstretched host community absorption mechanisms are forcing many displaced individuals to resort to unsafe shelter options, including abandoned buildings such as factories and hangars in the El Obeid Industrial Area. These locations expose populations to elevated risks, including unexploded ordnance (UXO) and other protection threats. SNFI and Site Management partners are working to verify population figures in these locations to provide a coordinated response.

However, the operational capacity of SNFI and Site Management actors remains significantly constrained relative to the scale of needs. Limited site management presence is contributing to gaps in coordination, service mapping, and communication with affected communities, undermining the ability to identify vulnerabilities, address protection risks, and ensure community engagement in the humanitarian response.

- Collapse and disruption of essential services

Access to essential services in El Obeid is increasingly strained, heightening protection risks.

In March 2026, 91% of surveyed households in North Kordofan said they had not received any form of humanitarian assistance in the past three months. Among those who did receive aid, the majority reported it was insufficient to meet priority needs (87% in North Kordofan)³

Health facilities are under significant pressure due to supply shortages, limited staffing, uncertainty in service delivery, and the ongoing impact of insecurity on health operations. Restricted civilian movement and insecurity continue to hinder access to healthcare, increasing the risk of untreated injuries and preventable morbidity.

² [Gender Alert: Escalation of hostilities in Kordofan - Sudan | ReliefWeb](#)

³ [DTM Sudan Focused Flash Alert: Kordofan Region \(Update 05\) | Publication Date: 11 March 2026 - Sudan | ReliefWeb](#)



In North Kordofan, 65% of displaced households reported that at least one family member experienced a health problem requiring medical care during the past three months. However, access to healthcare remains severely constrained. The main barriers reported were the high cost of treatment and the limited availability of essential services and medicines. Among households unable to access treatment, 60% cited the cost of treatment as the primary barrier, while 32% reported the absence of nearby functional health facilities, and 18% highlighted the lack of specific medicines or services⁴.

Protection actors report a serious rise in psychological distress and trauma-related cases. However, the availability of mental health and psychological support (MHPSS), including psychological first aid and specialized care remain insufficient to meet growing needs.

Water supply systems and market functionality continue to be affected by disruptions to supply routes, insecurity, and drone attacks, leading to shortages and reduced access to essential goods and reliance on negative coping mechanisms. Financial barriers are a critical constraint, and the absence of cash assistance limits the ability of the most vulnerable to afford transportation and access even those services that remain operational, exacerbating exclusion and deepening vulnerability.

Education services remain disrupted, with schools affected by closures and, in some cases, converted to shelter and being used for military purposes, increasing protection risks for children including exposure to exploitation and loss of protective environments.

Newly displaced groups face additional barriers due to limited access to timely and accurate information on available services, further restricting their ability to seek assistance and compounding protection risks.

Recent weeks have seen a concerning pattern of attacks affecting civilian and public infrastructure in El Obeid, raising serious concerns under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Reported drone strikes have impacted facilities essential to civilian life, including media infrastructure, education sites such as the University of Kordofan, and areas in proximity to health services. The reported strike on the state radio and television headquarters, which caused significant damage and disrupted broadcasting services, further illustrates the increasing use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

In addition, previous incidents have reportedly affected police and administrative facilities, contributing to the erosion of law enforcement capacity and weakening the rule of law.

While certain facilities may be considered military objectives depending on their use, the repeated impact of attacks in densely populated areas raises concerns regarding the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack.

The degradation of civilian and public infrastructure not only increases the risk of civilian casualties but also disrupts access to essential services, limits the population's access to information, and reduces the capacity of authorities to respond to security incidents, thereby exacerbating protection risks and contributing to a broader environment of insecurity and impunity.

⁴ [DTM Sudan Focused Flash Alert: Kordofan Region \(Update 05\) | Publication Date: 11 March 2026 - Sudan | ReliefWeb](#)



- Severe shortages and economic constraints

The disruption of supply routes, looting of markets, has contributed to shortages of food, fuel, and essential commodities. Prices of basic goods have increased, reducing purchasing power, particularly for vulnerable households.

Limited access to cash and reliance on informal or digital mechanisms further constrain households' ability to meet basic needs. These pressures are increasing the adoption of negative coping strategies, including reducing food consumption, selling assets, and engaging in high-risk livelihoods.

- Child Protection risks

A total of 663,334 internally displaced children have been identified across Sheikan, Al-Rahad, and Um Rawaba. This includes 1,296 children with disabilities, 204 unaccompanied children, 1,764 separated children, 2,000 street-connected children, and 169 children without parental care.

Approximately 20% of these children are living in IDP camps and gathering sites, while 80% reside within host communities.

The overall context remains highly unstable. Insecurity continues to restrict humanitarian access, displacement flows are increasing from all five Darfur states and both Kordofan regions, and living conditions are extremely poor and impacting on the most vulnerable leading to severe escalation of child protection risks.

Multiple locations are heavily contaminated with landmines and unexploded or unidentified explosive remnants, requiring urgent Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE) and specialized clearance.

Vulnerable children, particularly unaccompanied and separated children, require structured case management and safe referral pathways. GBV prevention and response services remain insufficient, including the need to activate Confidential Corners for child- and adolescent-sensitive support.

Mental health and psychosocial support is critically limited, highlighting the need to strengthen social worker capacity and rehabilitate the trauma center, with particular attention to children with disabilities.

Additional support is required for children in conflict with the law and for the significantly high number of children living in street situations, which further exposes them to heightened protection risks, including recruitment by armed groups. Child recruitment and association with armed groups remain major protection concerns across affected areas.

The lack of protected environment and safe spaces, such as schools, is contributing to increased protection risks, including child labor and child marriage among girls. Several actors and community members also reported a rise in child marriage cases. In addition, the deterioration of mental health particularly among girls is evident, as many clearly expressed that the absence of schooling is an additional source of anxiety about their future.

There is an urgent need to scale up Child Friendly Spaces in both IDP camps and host communities to provide safe and protective environments for children.



Strengthening coordination among Child Protection AoR partners, updating service mapping, and improving referral pathways are essential to ensuring timely and effective responses.

Overall, humanitarian access remains constrained, further heightening risks for children and limiting partners' ability to deliver life-saving protection services. Immediate and coordinated action is required to mitigate these risks and ensure the safety and well-being of affected children.

- Gender-based violence (GBV)

The situation in El Obeid remains critical, with a growing IDP population and host communities increasingly unable to meet basic needs. Protection actors reported rising cases of transactional sex and child marriage, as well as the presence of women and girls from displaced communities who experienced serious protection incidents in their areas of origin, during displacement, and in their current locations. Limited and overstretched services in El Obeid and surrounding areas are severely constraining access to life-saving support for women and girls.

Conditions in displacement sites, including overcrowding, inadequate shelter, and insufficient WASH facilities continue to heighten protection risks by reducing privacy and safety, particularly for women and girls, and increasing exposure to gender-based violence (GBV). Economic hardship and prolonged displacement are contributing to harmful coping mechanisms, including exploitation and transactional sex, while rising household stress is contributing to increased incidents of domestic violence.

Women-led organizations (WLOs), which are key providers of GBV services, face multiple operational challenges such as bureaucratic impediments that constrain their ability to respond. As a result, the availability of safe, timely, and quality GBV services remains critically limited despite growing needs.

The protection response in Kordofan remains critically under-reached and severely underfunded. To date, only 3,785 individuals have been reached out of a target of 210,550, representing just 1.7% coverage. This leaves more than 206,700 people without access to lifesaving gender-based violence and protection services.

At the activity level, core life-saving interventions are largely unavailable at scale. Case management and cash and voucher assistance (CVA) show near-zero coverage in multiple locations, while psychosocial support services remain almost entirely unmet (over 99.98%), reflecting immense and growing needs. Even dignity kits, the most widely delivered intervention, have reached only 5.5% of the targeted population.

Service delivery infrastructure remains critically insufficient. In North Kordofan, three mobile Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS) have been deployed in Sheikan with support from UNFPA and Plan International.

As per the new population statistics (including the DTM and HNRP 2026) the target is to establish 36 facilities. However, these services are presently available in just 6 localities across the Kordofan region, compared to 39 highly prioritized localities identified for intervention. This indicates a significant service delivery gap of approximately 85%, underscoring the urgent need for scaled-up investment and expansion of WGSS facilities to meet critical protection needs.

3. Recommendations

- All parties to the conflict are urgently called upon to cease attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure and to comply fully with their obligations under International Humanitarian Law such as principle of distinction and proportionality. Parties must avoid the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, refrain from locating military objectives within or near civilian areas and ensure the protection of civilians at all times.
- All parties must facilitate safe, voluntary, and informed movement of civilians, including by ensuring safe movement along key routes, preventing harassment, detention, and violence at checkpoints, and respecting the rights of civilians to move freely to areas of their choice with specific safeguards for populations most at risk.
- Urgent measures are needed to ensure sustained and safe humanitarian access to El Obeid, including through the eastern corridor, and to prevent further isolation of the city. All parties must allow and facilitate rapid, safe, and unimpeded humanitarian access.
- Donors are urged to increase flexible and timely funding to support the scale-up of life-saving protection interventions in El Obeid and surrounding areas, with a particular emphasis on support to local actors and women-led organizations. Priority should be given to GBV services, including women and girls' safe spaces as well as child protection, emergency shelter, and multi-sectoral assistance.
- Humanitarian actors should strengthen coordinated protection responses, including protection monitoring, referral systems, community-based protection mechanisms, as well as EO threat mitigation. Efforts should prioritize mobile and remote modalities where access is constrained and ensure the integration of protection risk mitigation across all sectors.
- Donors and humanitarian community are encouraged to continue advocating for alternatives to camp settings while simultaneously strengthening protection in existing sites as an interim measure. This includes improving conditions and supporting relocation from the highest-risk areas where feasible.