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2.2. Conscripts, draft evaders, forced recruitment to armed groups

Military service is both voluntary[250] or compulsory,[251] it is open for both men and women between the ages of 18 and 33, and lasts between 12 and 24 months.[252] The Dutch COI report indicated nevertheless that, based on confidential sources it consulted, '[i]n formal terms, the Sudan National Service Act 1992 still applies', but it is not actively applied or enforced either by the Transitional Sovereignty Council (TSC) or the SAF 'as the forced recruitment of conscripts would further damage the standing of the SAF'.[253] The same source indicated that before the fall of President Bashir, 'men of fighting age had to be able to prove that they had completed the compulsory military service before they could have a college degree authenticated, get a job in the public or private sector or travel abroad, [but that] this condition lapsed during the transition period' of Prime Minister Hamdok.[254] For additional information on the transitional period, see section 1.1 Historical background in this report, and section 1.1.1. of the EUAA Sudan report – Country Focus (April 2024).

Both the SAF and the RSF, however, are accused of engaging in forced recruitment of men and boys.[255] For information on child recruitment, see section 2.7(b) Child soldiers. In SAF-controlled areas, recruitment is carried out through mobilisation campaigns as part of an 'armed popular resistance to halt the RSF advance'.[256] These campaigns appeal to the notion of 'dignity'[253] and are also backed with allusions to RSF abuses committed in places they had taken over, which prompt prospective recruits to want to join the SAF and defend themselves, their property, and communities.[258]

Recruits come from all walks of life[259] and are referred to as mustanfareen, or 'the mobilised'.[260] According to a report by Africa Defense Forum (ADF),[261] the SAF uses social media to recruit volunteer fighters by directing them to the nearest SAF command or military unit to sign up.[262] The Dutch COI report indicated that some government officials face pressure to enlist in these mobilisation campaigns under the threat of losing their jobs or social benefits.[263] Ayin Network, a Sudanese media network, reported that, as a response to a mobilisation drive carried out by the RSF since October 2024, SAF-allied militias led parallel campaigns in the Chad-bordering areas of Ambaro, Karnoi, Abu Gamra, and Al-Tina, where they mobilised 'thousands' of fighters into their ranks motivated by the need to protect their villages from armed attacks launched by the RSF and its allied militias.[264] Without providing an exact date, the Dutch COI report provided the example of more than 40 Darfurian mineworkers in Northern and River Nile states who had to join the SAF and prove their loyalty because they were being seen as collaborators of the RSF.[265]

Map 2. Cities with highest number of recruitment camps.

Map 2. Cities with highest number of recruitment camps.[266]

In RSF-controlled areas, Sudan Tribune reported that the RSF relies 'heavily' on tribal affiliations for recruitment.[267] Sources reported that on 9 October 2024, Hemedti called for a 'general mobilisation' in Darfur and Kordofan to enlist 'one million' fighters, mainly along tribal lines, to deploy them to 'hotspots', including Khartoum and El Fasher.[268] Sudan Tribune indicated that the Misseriya (West Kordofan) and Ta'aysha (South Darfur) rallied alongside the RSF.[269] The same source indicated that the RSF is forcibly recruiting male IDPs in North Darfur to bolster its ranks amid 'mounting loses'.[270]
The RSF reportedly uses intimidation, torture, the public execution of those who refuse to join, or the withholding of food or medicines, as tactics to recruit men into their ranks.[271] In an interview with EUAA, A human rights analyst reported having knowledge of cases of RSF combatants going to villages in central Sudan and asking people to fight, or withholding food to force the recruitment of locals.[272] The same source also indicated that many people join the RSF mostly driven by profit, personal interests, food, or to settle old scores in their own communities.[273] Sources indicated that, as part of recruiting campaigns, the RSF frames its fight as 'fighting for democracy'[274] or as a 'sacred duty'.[275] Sources also reported that, as part of recruitment efforts, the RSF invokes Faza'a, 'an ancient' pre-Islamic Sudanese tradition that allows tribes to call on their members and allies for support against attacks by other tribes or to take revenge for killings.[276] CNN reported that between January and March 2024, about 700 men and 65 boys were forcibly recruited by the RSF in the state of Al Jazirah.[277] In one event in January 2024, the RSF attacked a village in Al Jazirah, rounded up the males, and executed six who refused to enlist, and in another event, on 27 February 2024, RSF combatants took over another village and looted the houses, set ablaze its supermarkets and food warehouses, and stole 30 vehicles after 20 residents refused to enlist.[278] The Dutch COI report indicated that, according to a local source, SAF veterans are required by the RSF to join their ranks to avoid being detained.[279]

Human Rights Watch reported that, following the defection to the SAF of Abu Agla Keikel, a commander of an RSF-aligned force in eastern Al Jazirah state, on 20 October 2024, the RSF launched attacks on at least 30 villages and towns, including Rufaa, Tamboul, Al-Sireha, and Azrag, resulting in the displacement of over 130 000 people.[280] ACLED indicated that Al-Sireha was particularly targeted, where between 50 and 500 men were killed, around 200 people were injured, and over 150 civilians were kidnapped, with victims of sexual violence committing suicide after the attack.[281]

A human rights analyst indicated that, even though information on desertion was not readily available, he became aware of cases of SAF and RSF combatants retreating into South Sudan during combats; once on the South Sudan side, authorities await guidance from Port Sudan on what to do with SAF soldiers, whereas for RSF combatants, 'it is unclear what happens to them'.[282] Additional information on the treatment of defectors, draft evaders, and forced recruitment within the reference period of this report could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

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