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# 2.5. Ethnic groups

### (a) General overview of the ethnic composition of the country

There are about 500 ethnic groups in Sudan,339 including the Fur, Beja, Nuba, Ingessana, Uduk, Fallata, Masalit [also spelled out as Massalit], Dajo, Gimir, Tunjur, and Berti.340 Sudan's society is mostly Muslim, with a small Christian minority.341 Sudanese Arabs comprise about 70 % of the population.342 According to Al Jazeera, 'Darfur's tribal society is classified broadly into ‘non-Arab’ (sedentary) and ‘Arab’ (nomadic) tribes, both groupings are Black and Muslim and have lived in Darfur for centuries. The non-Arab tribes speak several languages, as well as Arabic'.343 For additional and background information on ethnic groups in Darfur, see section 2.4. of the EUAA Sudan report – Country Focus (April 2024).

Map_3_Map_of_ethnic_groups_in_Sudan_during_2012_2021

### Group name

### Area in square kilometers

Other Arab Groups

354 102

Beja

253 320

Shaygiyya, Ja'aliyyin and Danagla (Arab)

111 119

Fur

93 532

Nuba

82 259

Other Northern Groups

13 155

Zaghawa

10 293

Rashaida

5 813

Masalit

4 773

**Map 3. Map of ethnic groups in Sudan during 2012-2021**.344

### (b) Ethnic conflict related profiling and targeting

Sources indicated that the SAF's Military Intelligence target people, often based on their presumed or real ethnic identity, for allegedly supporting the RSF,345 including Arab tribes from Kordofan346 and tribes from West Darfur.347 OHCHR indicated that the RSF also carries out unlawful detentions of persons in Darfur based on ethnicity, particularly the Masalit348 and the Zaghawa.349 According to Ali Mahmoud Ali, Sudan researcher for ACLED, 'the RSF is fighting not just against the west of the country but the central and northern Arab tribes that traditionally control the government'.350 For background information on ethnic conflict related targeting, see section2.3 and 2.4. of the EUAA Sudan report – Country Focus (April 2024).

## ☐ Non-Arab/African in Darfur

Much of the violence in Darfur is attributed to the RSF and allied militias, and it is ethnically driven[351] as the RSF seeks to push non-Arabs out of certain areas.[352] Sources indicated that the Darfur region is 'on the brink' of a genocide.[353] BBC quoted the UN Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide as saying that ‘[w]e do have circumstances in which a genocide could be occurring or has occurred’ as 'many civilians were targeted based on their ethnicity'.[354] In January 2025 the US administration formally declared that the RSF, its leader and allied militias have committed genocide and crimes against humanity in Sudan.[355]

The USDOS indicated that the RSF has 'perpetrated genocide in the Darfur region' during the war, and imposed sanctions on Hemedti.[356] In December 2024, sources indicated that El Fasher, the last stronghold of the SAF, was about to fall to the RSF.[357] Sources indicated that the Zaghawa, one of North Darfur's largest tribes whose areas stretch into Libya and Chad, are particularly vulnerable.[358] Additionally, the Masalit are particularly targeted by the RSF, with some reports pointing to the 'erasing' of Masalit neighbourhoods 'from the map' after their displacement.[359]

According to the UN FFM for the Sudan, acts committed by the RSF against ethnic groups included 'killings, torture and other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as looting, pillage and destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population'.[360] Pillage, looting, and the destruction of property in Darfur affected the livelihoods, public facilities, and access to water and healthcare for non-Arab communities, particularly the Masalit.[361] Sources indicated that RSF militias also target prominent members of the Masalit community, including academics, lawyers, imams, human rights activists, due to their professions.[362] The UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights indicated in September 2024 that its office has documented 'multiple testimonies' of summary executions, forced displacement, and sexual violence committed against the Masalit in West Darfur, and that ethnically-motivated violence and harassment has been documented in Darfur and Al Jazirah.[363]

Sexual assault of women and girls is commonplace in Darfur,[364] with the UN FFM for the Sudan indicating that it is perpetrated on a 'large scale' during attacks of the RSF in cities and IDP camps in Darfur.[365] Masalit women who are human rights defenders, journalists, and lawyers are specifically targeted by the RSF, including through gang-

rape and other forms of sexual violence.366 The UN FFM for the Sudan provided the example of two Masalit rape victims in West Darfur who indicated that Janjaweed perpetrators said during the rape that ''this year, all girls must be pregnant by the Janjaweed'.'367 The Masalit are referred to by the RSF as 'slaves'368 and the use of racist slurs against non-Arabs is 'widespread'.369

Operation Broken Silence, a non-for-profit organisation that provides humanitarian aid to communities in need, similarly indicated that '[a] sizable portion of the RSF fighting force adheres to an extremely racist, Arab-supremacist ideology, which states that Darfur's historic African tribal groups must be cleansed from the region and all other Sudanese Arabs are inferior'.370

Incidents of ethnic-based targeting, as reported by sources during the reference period, included:

- On 1 December 2024, Sudan Tribune reported that the RSF bombarded the Zamzam camp in North Darfur, killing and injuring several and forcing 'thousands' to flee. The governor of Darfur region and the El Fasher RC attributed the attack as based on ethnic and racial grounds.371
- Between 2 and 12 October 2024, the RSF attacked Zaghawa communities in Kutum in what is considered a 'pattern of systematic ethnic targeting', killing 50 people, displacing around 1 000 households from Bir Mezza, Disa, and surrounding villages, and 3 400 households from various villages around Kutum, and destroying about 14 communities.372
- IOM reported that on 1 September 2024, an armed Arab nomadic group launched an attack on local farmers in Beli village, Sharg Aj Jabal locality, South Darfur, displacing 27 households.373

### ☐ Nuba in South Kordofan

The Nuba mountains is an area in South Kordofan, bordering South Sudan, and controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N).374 This area enjoys relative security, but with a difficult humanitarian situation with between 700 000 and 900 000 IDPs arriving since April 2023.375 Once in the Nuba mountains, IDPs face problems with food and shelter.376 For more information, see section 2.3 of the Sudan: Security situation report.

The SPLM-N has remained neutral in the current war between the SAF and the RSF.377 However, according to Small Arms Survey, the ethnicisation and tribalisation of the

current conflict reopened divisions between groups due to the mobilisation along ethnic lines, which has been particularly exploited by the RSF in its recruitment of Hawazma, Kenana, and Misseriya in South Kordofan, by invoking 'Arab, pan-Sahelian tropes that appealed to members of the Al Attawa tribal umbrella'.378 The same source indicated that these tropes include a 'strong racial element and the capture of land in South Kordofan for Arab economic use is a core principle'.379

The Dutch COI report indicated that '[i]n Dilling and the surrounding areas, violence took on an ethnic dimension. This area was home to both Nuba and Arabs. The SPLM-N/Al Hilu and Dilling's SAF garrison consisted mainly of Nuba. In contrast, the RSF could rely on support mainly from the Hawazma, an Arab population group'.380 The same source quoted two confidential sources as indicating that 'cooperation between the SAF and SPLM-N/Al Hilu in Dilling and surroundings was not the result of an order from higher up but was an informal and spontaneous casual coalition of Nuba relatives serving in both forces'.381

Incidents of armed actions in Nuba, as reported by sources during the reference period, included:

- On 9 June 2024, the SAF clashed with the RSF in Babanusa, West Kordofan, to regain control of some of the neighbourhoods.382
- On 8 April 2024, Radio Dabanga reported the attack on Qurdud Nyama, South Kordofan, by the RSF, leading to the death of over 100 people.383
- The International Service for Human Rights (ISHR), a Switzerland-based non-for-profit international organisation that promotes the protection of human rights, indicated that between 9 and 12 February 2024, the RSF launched an attack on the villages of Habila and surrounding areas near Dilling City, South Kordofan, in retaliation for their perceived support of the SAF.384 Over 76 people from the Nuba ethnic group were killed, at least 16 women and girls were kidnapped, 'dozens' of men and boys were missing, over 40 000 people were displaced, and at least five villages were destroyed and burned.385

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