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2.7. Children

(a) General overview

Both the SAF and the RSF are accused of violating children's rights, including through killing, maiming,[468] and sexual abuse.[469] Children have been killed in airstrikes and shelling on residential areas, central markets and schools, including in Khartoum, East Nile, North Darfur and Nyala, as well as in crossfires and through execution.[470] On 5 June 2024, for example, the RSF and allied militias attacked the village of Wad al-Noura, Al Jazirah state, with artillery shells, machine guns, and assault rifles, killing 100 people, including over 35 children.[471] On 1 July 2024, Sudan Tribune reported that eight people, including children, were killed and 18 injured after the RSF launched a drone strike against a mosque in El Fasher.[472] In September 2024, during clashes between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North-al-Hilu (SPLM-N-al-Hilu) and the SAF in Sennar City, artillery shells used by the SAF reportedly killed dozens of people, including children.[473]

Most victims of sexual violence are women and girls, however, there are cases of men and boys who are victims of sexual abuse, though many of these cases are not reported due to cultural norms or the lack of support services available to them.[474] Human Rights Watch reported that most services for victims of sexual violence are only available for women and girls, and that male victims have 'fewer channels' to seek help.[475] Most reported cases of sexual violence against men and boys took place in detention during or prior to their interrogation, and included forced nudity, beatings on genitals, rape threats, and reportedly, rape and gang-rape, in most cases by RSF members.[476] The UN FFM report indicated that there are reports of boys under the age of 18 who, after being detained by both the SAF and the RSF, were imprisoned with male detainees in Khartoum and Darfur.[477] For additional information on conflict related sexual violence, see section 2.6 Women and girls.

IOM indicated that 6.2 million children in Sudan are in need of child protection services.[478]

☐ (b) Child soldiers

For background information, see Section 2.6. of the EUAA Sudan report – Country Focus (April 2024).

Sudan acceded the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict in 2005, is party to the International Labour Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and has domestic legislation prohibiting the recruitment of children under the age of 18.[479] However, Sudanese criminal legislation does not provide sanctions for the use of children in hostilities by armed groups.[480] The UN FFM report indicated that children have been recruited and used in hostilities, as well as killed, injured, abducted, forcibly displaced, detained alongside adults, tortured, subjected to sexual violence, and denied access to healthcare and education.[481]

According to a joint investigation by the Sudan Human Rights Hub (SHRH), a civil society organisation that promotes the protection of human rights in the country, and Ayin Network, based on testimonies from victims, lawyers, activists, and witnesses, as well as their own monitoring, the scale of child recruitment in the current conflict is 'massive and widespread' and takes place throughout the country.[482]

Sources indicated that children are recruited by armed groups, including the SAF, the RSF, and their allied militias,[483] the SPLM-N-al-Hilu, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North-Malik Agar (SPLM-N-Agar), the Sudan Alliance,[484] and SAF supporters, including Islamist groups, the Muslim Brotherhood, the National Congress Party, the Sudan Liberation Movement – Mustafa Tambour (SLM-Tambour), the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), and Sudan Liberation Movement – Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM).[485] The SAF has reportedly been establishing alliances with armed militias in Northern Darfur, Khartoum, and Al Jazirah such as the SLM-MM and the JEM, which are accused of using child soldiers.[486]

Child soldiers in Sudan are known as jana jaish and there are no statistics about their numbers.[487] According to Sudanese military intelligence officers, the number of child recruits in the RSF is estimated between 8 000 and 10 000.[488] Sudan Tribune reported that, according to local organisation National Committee for War Crimes and Violations, the RSF has recruited around 6 000 children.[489] Sources indicated that the use of child soldiers is not hidden by armed groups, and on the contrary, they appear in social media networks with uniforms and weapons.[490]

The UN FFM report indicated that factors that contributed to the recruitment of children included their desire to seek revenge, as a protection move to defend their communities and livelihoods, and as a tribal custom.[491] Recruitment also takes place through coercion, threats, and kidnapping.[492] According to a local source interviewed by SHRH and Ayin Network in West Darfur, the recruitment of children is also done through friends who encourage and tempt them to join the RSF with promises of

wealth, luxury, and safety.493 The SAF launched a 'mobilization campaign' in December 2023 to bolster its ranks with 'volunteers', who are also called mustanfareen, many of whom are minors.494 Sources reported that the RSF is invoking Faza'a to recruit men and boys.495 The UN FFM report indicated that 'the use of children by Arab militias is deeply entrenched in the Sudanese 'Faza'a' (الفزع) tradition which consists of the spontaneous mobilisation of armed men to defend the community against a perceived threat, particularly prevalent in Darfur and Kordofan'. 496 The UN FFM report indicated that girls under 18 years of age and women are also recruited by the SAF and are sent to training camps in River Nile and Port Sudan.497 For additional information, see section 2.2 Conscripts, draft evaders, forced recruitment to armed groups.

Sources indicated that local leaders play a significant role in child recruitment to seek protection for their communities or in exchange for money for communal or personal use.498 The UN FFM report indicated that '[t]ribal military leaders or 'Agid' receive instructions from mid-level administrators or 'Omdas' who respond to tribal leaders 'Amirs' orders to provide them with a specific number of combatants from a specific tribe. 'Agid' would then request each family of the clan to assign a number of their sons, including the ones below 18'.499

In addition to being used in combat, recruited children are also used by armed groups in operating checkpoints, transporting ammunition, conduct of rudimentary reconnaissance and surveillance activities, and performing labour in military camps. 500 The RSF reportedly use children as human shields,501 bodyguards, informers, combatants, to conduct security patrols, man checkpoints, carry out searches, monitor arrestees, pillage, commit arson, commit acts of torture in detention centres, and record scenes of crimes and post them on social media.502

According to SHRH and Ayin Network, child recruitment into the RSF dates before April 2023, whereas for the SAF it became more prevalent after the onset of the current conflict.503 Child recruitment takes place mostly in Darfur and the Eastern and Northern states of the country (Northern State, River Nile, Kassala, Gedaref, Sennar, and West Kordofan).504 The UN FFM report indicated that, according to local sources, minors have been identified in the ranks of the RSF and its allied militias in El Geneina, Ardamata (West Darfur) and other localities along the border with Chad, Zalingei, Nyala, Wad Madani, Khartoum, and El Fasher.505

According to a local source interviewed by SHRH in March 2024, SAF 'volunteers', many of whom are between 15 and 16 years of age, are paid around 1 000 USD and are given a gun.506 According to testimonies received by SHRH and Ayin Network, Mayors of the RSF are paid between 200 000 and 300 000 Sudanese pounds (between 317 and 475 EUR) per recruited child.507 Another local source indicated that they are also recruited as spies and paid about 10 USD for a recognisance mission.508

The USDOS report on human trafficking stated that the government 'did not report investigating or prosecuting any officials for the recruitment or use of child soldiers' and the government ceased efforts to verify that the SAF was not recruiting children.[509]

☐ (c) Labour exploitation

The 2010 Children's Act indicates that the minimum working age is 14 years old, although 'persons under that age can work in pastoral and agricultural activities'.[510] The 2024 USDOS report on trafficking in persons for Sudan indicated that '[a]lthough information on the worst forms of child labor was difficult to obtain due to the conflict, observers report child labor remains prevalent in Sudan. Criminal groups exploit Sudanese women and girls – particularly IDPs or those from rural areas – in domestic work and in sex trafficking'.[511] The USDOS report also indicated that, according to local observers, child labour is 'prevalent' in Sudan.[512] Save the Children similarly indicated that the conflict has forced many children into child labour.[513]

Additional information could not be found among the sources consulted by EUAA within the time constraints of this report.

☐ (d) Trafficking in human beings

The 2014 Anti-Human Trafficking Law criminalises sex and labour trafficking with a penalty between three- and ten-years' imprisonment for offenses involving adult male victims, and between five- and 20-years' imprisonment for offenses involving adult female and child victims.[514]

The US Department of State indicated that anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts declined after the onset of hostilities on 15 April 2023, and that the government has not reported 'any trafficking investigations, prosecutions, or convictions' since then.[515] Law enforcement was 'inadequate or entirely absent' from some areas.[516] There is no law dedicated exclusively to human smuggling, which makes it difficult to separate from human trafficking and prosecute.[517] According to the USDOS report on human trafficking, 'corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes remained significant concerns'.[518] For further information, see section 1.3 Rule of law and administration

of justice.

The USDOS report provided the following profile of trafficked children:

'Traffickers exploit children experiencing homelessness in Khartoum – including Sudanese and unaccompanied migrant children from West and Central Africa – in forced labor for begging, market vending, and in sex trafficking. Business owners, informal mining operators, community members, and farmers exploit children working in brick-making factories, gold mining, collecting medical waste, street vending, and agriculture; victims endure threats, physical and sexual abuse, and hazardous working conditions with limited access to education or health services'.519

For additional information, see section 2.6(d) Trafficking in human beings.

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