

UNICEF HUMANITARIAN SNAPSHOT

Children under siege in North Darfur

The humanitarian crisis in Al Fasher,
Zamzam Camp, and Tawila

Darfur's humanitarian crisis

In the Darfur States – already scarred by decades of violence– the latest conflict has unleashed new waves of violence and pushed many communities into catastrophe. In North Darfur's capital Al Fasher and, its surrounding camps, children are enduring horrific violence, displacement and trauma on top of a worsening hunger crisis and spreading famine. International aid agencies are struggling to respond amid active fighting and access blockades, while continuing to urge all parties to stop the violence and allow critical lifesaving aid to reach those in need.



With the relentless fighting, countless children are caught up and growing up in the middle of this nightmare. While the night is already dark, it will get even darker if we are not able to reach them"

UNICEF Representative Sheldon Yett

Al Fasher and Zamzam: Escalating violence and child impacts

Since late 2024, Al Fasher, the capital of North Darfur, has been under a tightening siege and in early 2025, the fighting there escalated dramatically. Indiscriminate shelling and airstrikes have pummeled civilian areas, including the densely populated Zamzam camp. At least [110 grave violations against children](#) were verified in North Darfur in the first quarter of 2025 alone - a grim indicator of how deadly the conflict has become for the young.

The current wave of the crisis exploded in April 2025, which saw a major assault launched on Zamzam camp. Witnesses described hundreds of armed fighters pouring into the camp on 11 April, burning shelters as strikes hit. At least 300 civilians were killed, including more than 20 children, and around 400,000 people fled in search of safety. By 16 April, Zamzam, once home to at least half a million people, lay largely in ruins.



We were in the hospital when it was hit. The bombs were falling. The sick and their mothers were killed. We took our children and ran. All we thought about was our safety and our children's safety."

Hawa, a mother of three, recounting the terror of being inside a hospital during the attacks on Zamzam.

For children, these escalations have been devastating. Many were killed or injured in the crossfire, and countless others witnessed unspeakable violence. Children have been orphaned or separated from their parents amid the chaos. Those who survived face deep psychological distress, and ongoing deprivation, with no end in sight.

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Displacement and access:

A population trapped and uprooted

The fighting in North Darfur has uprooted an enormous number of people in a short time. Even before the April assault, conflict around Al Fasher had displaced over 60,000 people in six weeks as families fled sporadic shelling and insecurity. The attack on Zamzam camp then triggered one of the largest single displacements of this war: roughly 350,000 people fled towards Al Fasher town and westward to Tawila in mid-April. Many walked up to 60-70 km on foot across arid scrubland in scorching temperatures.



The war has ruined our lives... We can no longer live like other people. We walked on a road with no safety... no food, no water... we just wanted to survive"

Awatif, 13-year-old, a child displaced from Al Fasher to Tawila

In mid-June, there was another surge in conflict in Al Fasher, after a year-long siege. The escalation mirrored the offensive on the Zamzam camp in April, leading to reports of hundreds of civilian deaths, widespread sexual violence, and a humanitarian catastrophe.

Large numbers of people remain trapped by the fighting and not able to leave for safety in Al Fasher. They have nowhere safe to go – caught between frontlines and cut off from assistance. Many neighbourhoods have been without running water or electricity for weeks. Food supplies are dwindling – markets in Al Fasher have only sporadic produce, and prices have skyrocketed, putting basic staples out of reach. Medicine and fuel stocks are nearly exhausted, crippling health services. Communication blackouts compound the crisis: phone networks have largely shut down, severing family links and hindering aid coordination.

Humanitarian access to Al Fasher and Zamzam has been choked off by the fighting. All major roads are blocked by armed groups. The vital Tawila–Zamzam road, once a supply lifeline, is now impassable amid the collapse of security. Armed fighters have attacked relief convoys and looted aid, while also targeting rural villages, making delivery of aid and commercial goods nearly impossible.

UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations warn that unless access is immediately granted, children will continue to suffer and die needlessly.

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Impact on children:

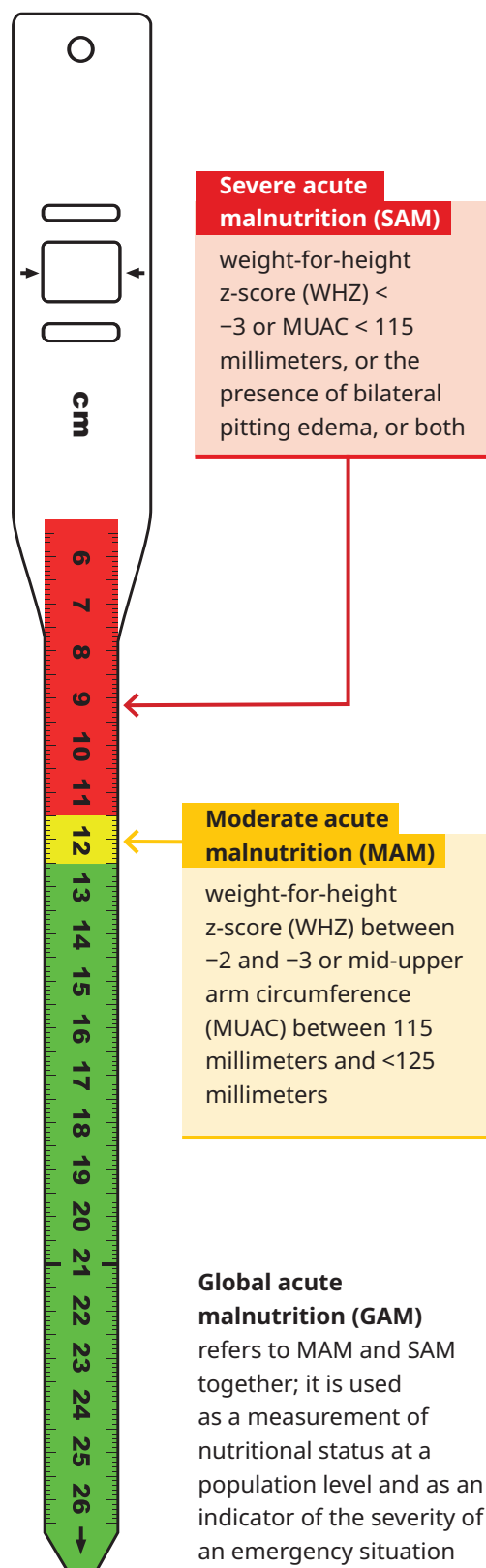
Malnutrition is rife among families cut off from aid, especially those displaced. In North Darfur, over 457,000 children are projected to be acutely malnourished in 2025, including nearly 32 per cent suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) – the deadliest form of child hunger.

According to the latest data from UNICEF, between January and May 2025, more than 40,000 children in North Darfur were admitted for treatment for SAM – double the number admitted during the same period in 2024 and equivalent to an average of nearly 270 children every day. Across all five Darfur states, admissions have increased by more than 45 per cent. The most recent nutrition surveys conducted in April-May 2025 across Darfur revealed Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates significantly exceeding the WHO's emergency threshold of 15 per cent. In Yasin locality, the GAM rate reached a staggering 28 per cent, dangerously close to 30 per cent, one of the three IPC-defined famine thresholds.

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the UN-backed global food analysis body, confirmed famine in Zamzam camp in 2024 with several other localities at risk. With the camp decimated, and health services disrupted, the nutrition crisis is only growing. Stocks of lifesaving therapeutic food (RUTF) for treating malnourished children have run out. UNICEF managed to deliver a batch of supplies to Al Fasher early this year but attempts to send more have been thwarted by insecurity.

Healthcare has also been struck by a terrible blow. Al Fasher's Al Saudi Hospital – the only remaining referral hospital – has come under repeated attacks. Many clinics in town have closed due to lack of supplies or insecurity. Within Zamzam camp, the sole clinic providing care was shuttered after aid workers were killed there during the April assault.

Basic health services are stretched to the breaking point. Routine immunizations, maternal health care, and treatment for illnesses have largely stopped. Clean water is scarce, and with latrines destroyed and water systems collapsed, the threat of waterborne diseases looms in overcrowded displacement sites. The cholera outbreak currently reported across four affected Darfur states and polio outbreak confirmed in Central and West Darfur could spread further across Sudan and across its borders, without a sustained vaccination response.



Many children have seen family members killed or injured or have been victims themselves of physical or sexual violence. Reports of gender-based violence have risen in the chaos. Child protection networks are strained – social workers and community volunteers who once ran child-friendly spaces or tracing services for separated children have themselves been displaced or attacked. Psychosocial support is urgently needed to help children cope with nightmares, anxiety, and grief.

Schools in and around Al Fasher have been closed for months due to the conflict, and many school buildings have been damaged or occupied. In Tawila and other towns hosting the displaced, classrooms are crowded with families. This means tens of thousands of children are without learning and the stability and psychosocial benefits that schools can provide during crises.

Tawila:

A refuge for displaced families and the response for children

Tawila, a small town about 60 km west of Al Fasher, has been transformed by a massive influx of desperate people. On 12-13 April, as the attacks on Zamzam peaked, over 10,000 people arrived in Tawila within 48 hours. Families arrived on foot, children crying from hunger and thirst, some badly wounded. The population in Tawila has now swollen to an estimated 500,000 people.



We need everything. Our children need food, clothes, and blankets...- we wash old sacks we sleep on. We don't even have plastic to cover ourselves. We need food and warmth - just something in our stomachs and something to sleep under,"

Hawa, a mother who fled to Tawila with her children.

Humanitarian responders are working to assist displaced children and their families in Tawila, but resources are stretched thin. Thousands of families are currently camped in the open or overcrowded public buildings in Tawila, exposed to the harsh sun by day and dropping temperatures at night.

Water and sanitation are major concerns: Tawila's few boreholes, wells and toilets were never meant to serve a population of this size. Makeshift defecation areas raise the risk of disease. Aid groups are working to truck in water and construct emergency latrines as quickly as possible, but they face logistical hurdles. Meanwhile, children and families line up for hours to fill jerrycans at the existing water points.

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Funding constraints and access challenges compound crisis

The humanitarian response in North Darfur faces critical challenges due to severe funding shortfalls and significant restrictions on humanitarian access. Currently, 70 per cent of UNICEF's appeal for Sudan remains unfunded. Reductions in funding translate into missed treatments, closed clinics, and preventable child deaths.

Humanitarian workers on the ground are doing everything they can to save lives – from treating the wounded and malnourished, to drilling wells and distributing food – but the violence continues to drive new needs faster than they can be met. UNICEF, along with OCHA, WFP, WHO and others have all appealed for safe, unimpeded access to reach children in need.

As Al Fasher remains under siege, and Tawila's makeshift camps keep swelling with new arrivals, the next few weeks will be critical. Without sufficient aid and a halt in hostilities, the lives of hundreds of thousands of children hang in the balance. UNICEF, alongside global humanitarian leaders, is calling on the international community to intensify diplomatic efforts for peace. We cannot allow the horrors inflicted on Darfur 20 years ago to be repeated.

In the meantime, the message from the ground is clear: the children of Al Fasher, Zamzam, and Tawila cannot wait. They need protection and aid now – food to eat, water to drink, medicine, safety and hope for the future – and they need the strikes to cease so they can reclaim their childhoods from the chaos of war.

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Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

For further information, please contact

Eva Hinds | UNICEF Sudan
ehinds@unicef.org

Tess Ingram | UNICEF Amman
tingram@unicef.org

Joe English | UNICEF New York
jenglish@unicef.org

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