

TQO Gender-Based Violence in Sudan

Gender-based violence (GBV) in Sudan has escalated dramatically amid the ongoing conflict that began in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). GBV includes physical, sexual, and psychological harm inflicted because of gender, and in conflict settings it often takes the form of rape, sexual assault, abduction, forced marriage, and exploitation. Women and girls are disproportionately affected, though men and boys have also been victims. GBV in Sudan not only violates human rights but also undermines community stability, health, and recovery.

Since the outbreak of violence, an estimated 12 million people — about one quarter of Sudan's population — are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, including rape, sexual exploitation, and forced marriage. Service providers have reported that the number of survivors seeking GBV support surged by 288% from December 2023 to December 2024, highlighting both the scale of the problem and the increased demand for assistance.

Accurate data remains limited due to insecurity, stigma, and reporting challenges, but multiple agencies have documented alarming figures. According to UN-linked sources, 221 cases of rape involving children were recorded in 2024, including victims as young as one-year-old, with girls comprising the majority of survivors. National authorities and humanitarian actors have also received reports of dozens of conflict-related sexual violence incidents across Khartoum, Darfur, and other regions. In some displacement settings, medical teams treated hundreds of GBV survivors over short periods, reflecting intense localized spikes in sexual violence.

Gender-based violence in Sudan is deeply tied to the conflict dynamics. Armed groups — most notably the RSF — have been repeatedly implicated in mass rape, gang rape, abductions, and other forms of sexual violence, often during raids on villages, checkpoints, or along displacement routes. These tactics are used to terrorize populations, force displacement, and exert control over territories. Survivors frequently face long-term health complications, psychological trauma, unwanted pregnancies, and social stigmatization, while many lack access to essential medical care, legal support, and psychosocial assistance.

The drivers of GBV in Sudan are complex. The breakdown of law and order has eroded protections, while displacement, poverty, and loss of livelihoods have increased vulnerability. Social norms that marginalize women and girls further exacerbate the risks they face. The conflict has also strained health systems, with many facilities damaged or closed, reducing survivors' access to emergency care and post-rape treatment.

The human impact extends beyond physical injury. Survivors may suffer long-term psychological harm such as post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety. GBV also disrupts education and social participation, especially for girls who are often removed from school for safety reasons. At a broader level, pervasive GBV undermines social cohesion and hampers prospects for recovery and peace.

International response has included condemnation from UN agencies and calls for urgent action to protect civilians. Humanitarian organizations are providing sexual and reproductive health services, GBV case management, safe spaces, psychosocial support, and dignity kits, though critical funding gaps limit the reach and sustainability of these efforts. Key global frameworks, such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda, call for protection of women and girls in conflict, accountability for violations, and the meaningful participation of women in peace processes.

United Nations involvement has been central to addressing gender-based violence in Sudan, despite significant challenges. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) leads efforts on gender-based violence prevention and response, providing sexual and reproductive health services, dignity kits, safe spaces, and psychosocial support. In 2024–2025, UNFPA reached over 250,000 people with GBV-

related services and supported more than 70 women- and girl-friendly safe spaces across Sudan. The UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) has documented hundreds of cases of conflict-related sexual violence since the war began, warning that these figures likely represent only a fraction of the true scale due to underreporting. In addition, the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has repeatedly condemned the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in Sudan and has called for accountability, civilian protection, and humanitarian access. However, UN agencies continue to face major obstacles, including insecurity, limited access, and severe funding shortfalls, which restrict the reach of life-saving services.

Addressing GBV in Sudan requires coordinated, sustained action. Priority steps include improving civilian protection mechanisms, expanding access to survivor-centred medical and psychosocial services, ensuring accountability for perpetrators, and integrating GBV prevention into humanitarian and peacebuilding plans. Supporting women's roles in community leadership and peace negotiations is essential for long-term change and resilience.

TQO Political Instability and Terrorism in the Sahel Region

Political instability and terrorism in the Sahel region represent one of the most serious threats to peace, development, and human security in the world today. The Sahel is a semi-arid region stretching across over 6,000 kilometres of Africa. The political region of the Sahel, as defined by the United Nations Strategy (UNISS), covers 10 countries Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria. Over the past decade, the region has experienced a sharp rise in extremist violence alongside repeated political crises, weakening state authority and worsening humanitarian conditions. This briefing paper outlines the scale of the crisis, its causes and impacts, and the role of the United Nations in responding.

The Sahel has become the global epicentre of terrorism. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the region accounted for approximately 43% of all terrorism-related deaths worldwide in 2024, the highest proportion of any region. Armed extremist groups linked to Al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State, including Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), operate across borders, carrying out attacks on civilians, military forces, schools, and humanitarian workers. Countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have experienced thousands of deaths annually as a result of terrorist violence, while communities live under constant threat of attack.

Political instability has significantly contributed to the growth of terrorism in the Sahel. Since 2020, the region has seen a series of military coups, including in Mali (2020 and 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023). These unconstitutional changes of government have weakened democratic institutions, disrupted regional cooperation, and reduced trust between governments and civilians. In many cases, weak governance, corruption, and the inability of states to provide basic security and services have allowed extremist groups to exploit grievances and recruit young people.

The humanitarian impact of political instability and terrorism in the Sahel is severe. As of 2025, over 6 million people are internally displaced across the region due to violence and insecurity. More than 30 million people require humanitarian assistance, including food, healthcare, and protection. Terrorist attacks have forced the closure of thousands of schools, leaving millions of children without access to education and increasing the risk of long-term instability. Climate change has further intensified the crisis, as drought, desertification, and competition over scarce land and water resources fuel local conflicts and displacement.

The United Nations has played a key role in addressing instability and terrorism in the Sahel. The UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) works to support political dialogue, early warning systems, and regional cooperation. The UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) previously supported civilian protection and stabilisation efforts before its withdrawal in 2023. UN agencies such as UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, and OCHA continue to provide humanitarian assistance, support displaced populations, and promote development and resilience. However, insecurity, political tensions, and funding gaps have limited the effectiveness of international responses.

The causes of terrorism in the Sahel are complex and interconnected. Poverty, youth unemployment, lack of education, political exclusion, and environmental stress all contribute to instability. Many extremist groups exploit these conditions by offering money, protection, or a sense of belonging to marginalized individuals. A purely military approach has proven insufficient to address these underlying issues.

In conclusion, political instability and terrorism in the Sahel pose a serious threat to regional and international peace and security. The situation requires a comprehensive response that combines security efforts with political stability, humanitarian assistance, and long-term development.

Strengthening governance, supporting democratic transitions, addressing climate and economic challenges, and investing in youth and education are essential to reducing terrorism and promoting lasting stability in the Sahel region.