

DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT IN TIME OF CRISIS

Spotlight on Sudan

In the 2020 EUDiF case study, [Diaspora engagement in time of crisis](#), Sudan was one of six countries analysed by research partner [Shabaka](#). At the time, Shabaka looked into how the Sudanese diaspora mobilised to help the country during the Covid-19 pandemic and major flooding. Tragically, as the country was slowly recovering, in 2023 a new crisis materialised, one which sent ripples around the world and, particularly, through the diaspora which regrouped and redoubled its efforts to support Sudan. As the crisis continues to unfold, Shabaka turns the spotlight on the herculean efforts of the diaspora in the UK, and one particular organisation supporting the struggling healthcare sector.

On 15 April 2023, fighting broke out in Sudan’s capital, Khartoum, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). This conflict has created an intense humanitarian crisis in a country already experiencing a protracted humanitarian crisis. The situation is dire, with hundreds of lives lost, over 6000 injured, and nearly 1.9 million people displaced, both internally and across neighbouring countries. The escalating violence has resulted in damage and destruction of civilian infrastructure and markets, limiting access to vital services and increasing the urgent humanitarian needs of approximately 24.7 million people, half of Sudan's population. ¹

The Sudanese diaspora is coordinating closely with local communities and civil society organisations in Sudan on crisis response and supporting via advocacy, community organising and humanitarian assistance.

Advocacy

One way the Sudanese diaspora is supporting Sudanese people is through advocacy, both for people in Sudan and for the diaspora. In the UK, [petitions](#) were created to urge the UK government to provide people fleeing Sudan with the same visa support Ukrainians were given while fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The Sudanese diaspora is also urging the UK government to evacuate people in Sudan with British passports, along with the families of Sudanese people living in the UK.

“Better Health for Africa ([BH4A](#))” posted a letter of solidarity with Sudan, encouraging the UK government and NHS bodies to “consider supporting Sudanese Healthcare Workers who want to volunteer to support healthcare services to do so in the coming months as part of deployment efforts as UK’s social responsibility.” They also urged partners and friends in Africa to support their ongoing relief efforts.

Support was also extended by other diaspora populations, as seen from an [open letter](#) signed by 16 organisations from different diasporas encouraging the UK government and NHS bodies to:

- Stand in solidarity with the civilians in Sudan and those stranded in the borders to ensure their safety and wellbeing
- Support diplomatic efforts for ceasefire and to ensure safe passage and corridors to and from Khartoum to access health and basic needs
- facilitate medical deployment to the borders to avoid a humanitarian crisis in collaboration with British partners on the ground
- Provide wellness services to Sudanese health workers in NHS in such critical times

¹ <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/sudan/>

Community organising

Activities by the diaspora since the conflict started have been varied, ranging from ad-hoc interventions or initiatives led by newly-created informal organisations, to activities led by established organisations such as the Sudan Doctors' Union. The mix of actors – diaspora and supporters – is reflected in the diversity of activities:

- The [Sudanese Revolutionary Movement](#) UK called for global protests in cities such as Cardiff, Ottawa, Sacramento, and London, among others.
- The African and Caribbean Leadership Consortium in Belfast, Northern Ireland convened an [urgent meeting](#) to discuss how the community can stand in solidarity with the Sudanese diaspora. A [solidarity march](#) was held in London including stops at the UK Home Office, and Egyptian and Saudi embassies.
-
- [Croydon Refugee & New Communities Forum](#), part of Croydon Voluntary Action, held a hybrid meeting to discuss how they can support Sudanese members of their community, especially unaccompanied minors fleeing the war, and how they can encourage the UK government to support people in Sudan.
- People also are using local councils for both organising their response and advocacy. For example, individuals are lobbying their MPs to raise the issue of evacuation and the urgent need for a ceasefire.
- Community events allow the Sudanese diaspora to share information about the crisis with people in their local communities. This spreads awareness, which helps advocacy efforts.

Diaspora humanitarian assistance

The global Sudanese diaspora have created several initiatives to provide humanitarian assistance to people who are trying to flee Sudan and for those who have chosen to remain in Khartoum. Many of these activities rely on the internet to organise assistance.

- [Sudan Safe Passages](#) seeks to raise funds to support humanitarian efforts in Sudan. This includes distributing food and water, providing medical support, and organising displacement arrangements for families in conflict zones that need to leave their homes.
- [Sudan Crisis Program](#), created by a Sudanese American diasporan to coordinate and facilitate efforts of verified knowledge sharing, resource mobilisation, volunteerism, and fundraising to support those affected by the crisis in Sudan. The Sudan Crisis Program consists of a group of global leaders, experts, academics, policy makers, activists, and volunteers that are put into global task force teams based on certain areas related to the crisis. This includes legal support, shelter, transport, technology, and medical assistance.
- [Keep Eyes on Sudan](#). Based on one of the more popular hashtags from even before the current crisis, #KeepEyesOnSudan, the Keep Eyes on Sudan website was created by Sudanese diasporans to post daily updates, campaigns, petitions, and initiatives responding to the crisis. The website also has information for people in Sudan on where they can find humanitarian assistance.

Mini-case study: Sudan's Doctors for Human Rights

[Sudan's Doctors for Human Rights \(SDHR\)](#) have always been strong advocates for human rights in Sudan. They work with people in Sudan and the Sudanese diaspora to form alliances to protect human rights in Sudan, stop violations, and challenge impunity. The idea to create Sudan's Doctors for Human Rights came from the association of the founder of [Physicians for Human Rights](#) based in the US. The launch meeting was held in October 2021, just days before the military coup in Sudan.



At Shabaka, we interviewed the founder of Sudan's Doctors for Human Rights, Dr Husam El-Mugamar, who was also the vice president of the [Sudan Doctors' Union – UK](#) during the 2018/19 Sudanese revolution, and a member of the [Preliminary Committee of Sudan Doctors' Union](#) in Sudan. Dr. El-Mugamar is also a consultant microbiologist and represents the Sudanese Diaspora in the Royal College of Pathologists in the UK.

Before the war, a peacetime memorandum of understanding was signed between the Royal College of Pathologists, Stack Medical Research Laboratory in Sudan, Soba University Hospital and the Ministry of Health in Sudan, which was going to be the beginning of a very ambitious project that included training and capacity building for Doctors in Sudan. The long-term vision was to tackle microbiology resistance which is a serious issue in Sudan and can lead to morbidity and mortality. "Every time we try to do something like this, something happens!" he said. "First it was the military coup and now the war!"

In response to the current crisis, they launched a campaign to stand firmly against the war in Sudan. Members are constantly advocating for human rights laws to be upheld and for safe passages to allow health workers to perform their duties. They are also engaging with various media outlets, including recently a [Japanese newspaper](#), to continue raising awareness about Sudan's human rights violations.

Dr El-Mugamar emphasised the need for an immediate ceasefire and for the regional and international powers to exert pressure on the fighting parties to stop the war and handover to a civilian led government. He also raised the issue of public health prevention and is worried about the rainy season which is imminent, and the diseases that are usually associated with it. The damage to public health is huge, given that the main research laboratory is occupied by one of the fighting factions. There is also a significant biological risk ([Aljazeera](#)). Without an operational lab, there are no means to prevent disease outbreaks, such as cholera and other infectious diseases, because the structure is no longer in place.

"Hospitals are running out of supplies and medicines, and ambulances are being attacked. They need to step in now to forcefully end this," he said. "We hope that we get back our civilian government as soon as possible." SDHR is urging the government in the UK and the international community to put pressure on the fighting parties to "uphold the commitment they made under international law, and to conform with the human rights laws."

SDHR has members in the diaspora and in most states in Sudan. However, the health care is deteriorating in some states due to the dire security situation, and there are currently almost no doctors and nurses in places like Elgeneina, Elfashir, and Nyala, where the fighting has erupted again. Many doctors have moved across borders to neighbouring countries for safety. "The main link we had with Sudan is our members, and now there are fewer of them. They are getting direct threats to their lives," explained Dr El-Mugamar. This means that organisations are now unable to obtain accurate information about the needs, which is essential for planning responses to the crisis.

Dr El-Mugamar said that fundraising is the most needed response due to the gap left by INGOs, and described the challenges they are facing as an organisation in sending funds and not being able to trust agencies that do it from abroad. Most of the time, SDHR has to rely on trusted members of the organisation to obtain information and to send money to their personal bank accounts. This has caused issues for individual members in the past, as some were detained by security agents and interrogated to answer who they were receiving money from. The main app that is used in Sudan for banking transactions, Bankak, is available intermittently due to the internet connection. Although "we are lucky that there is some internet connection at least where we can get updates on the urgent

needs and situation reports about what is happening on the ground,” Dr El-Mugamar said. When the internet connection is down, they rely on direct phone calls, and phone bills can skyrocket due to international call charges. SDHR has been a bridge between the various health institutes in Sudan and grassroots organisations to communicate needs when the internet is not working. Another challenge diaspora organisations face is trust from those in Sudan. SDHR has tried to overcome this by establishing a link with the [International Bar Association](#) to reassure doctors and other activists on the ground. SDHR also have lawyers among their members, as well as human rights activists.

In the face of immense challenges, SDHR has demonstrated unwavering dedication to advocating for human rights in Sudan. Working alongside individuals within Sudan and in the diaspora, the organisation has formed crucial alliances to address human rights violations, combat impunity, and protect the rights of the Sudanese people. In the face of adversity, Sudan's Doctors for Human Rights stands as a beacon of hope and resilience, working tirelessly to bring about positive change and ensure a brighter future for the people of Sudan.

Conclusion

The engagement of the Sudanese diaspora in addressing the unfolding crisis in Sudan underscores the power of diaspora communities to support their home countries during times of turmoil. Their collective efforts in advocacy, community organising, and humanitarian assistance have provided a lifeline for those affected by the conflict and have been essential in raising awareness and garnering support from host country governments, international organisations, and the wider international community. The importance of diaspora engagement in Sudan's crisis response and recovery cannot be overstated, as diaspora individuals, organisations and communities bring unique perspectives, networks, and resources to support communities in Sudan and advocating for positive change on the ground.

This publication was produced by Shabaka, with editorial support from the EU Global Diaspora Facility. EUDiF is funded by the European Union, implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

 | European Union
Global Diaspora Facility