

SUDANESE

COMMUNITY PROFILE

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This booklet has been compiled by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to help state and territory governments, service providers and other key settlement stakeholders to settle new entrants under Australia's Humanitarian Programme.

Accurate information about the pre-arrival experiences of refugees, including environmental conditions in camps, can be difficult to obtain and verify. While every effort has been made to ensure this document is factually correct, it may contain some inaccuracies.

Refugee experiences can vary considerably between individuals. Readers should note that this document is intended to provide a general background of the possible experiences of arrivals under the Humanitarian Programme. Information presented here may not always be applicable to individuals within the community in Australia or to new arrivals.

Where possible, more detailed information on specific groups of arrivals will be provided to service providers as an adjunct to this and other community profiles.

Policies in relation to Australia's Humanitarian Programme change over time. For current information visit the department's website at www.immi.gov.au.

The information provided in this document does not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or its employees.

Introduction

The Republic of Sudan is Africa's largest country and is located in the northeast of the continent. Since independence from joint British-Egyptian administration in 1956 it has been ravaged by drought, famine and war. Sudan has seen regular turnover of governments but most have been military regimes controlled by Muslim, Arab northern Sudanese favouring Islamic-oriented policies. Disputes with largely non-Muslim, black African southern Sudanese over access to power and resources have resulted in two extended periods of civil war.

Sudan's first civil war began shortly after independence and continued until 1972. Eleven years of relative calm ended in 1983 when fighting broke out again. The estimated toll from the second war and associated famine included almost two million deaths and more than four million displaced people.

In January 2005 both sides signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which ended the fighting and granted the southern part of the country autonomy for six years. Under the terms of the CPA, a referendum on the south's political future is scheduled to be held in 2011.

Drought, famine, war damage and limited infrastructure in the south have hindered the return of the estimated 500 000 Sudanese refugees who fled to neighbouring countries. Australia has assisted in resettling some of the worst affected people from the region.

The CPA did not end internal conflict in Sudan. In 2003 fighting broke out in Darfur, in the country's west. To date this conflict has resulted in more than 200 000 deaths and the displacement of nearly two million people. The United Nations is providing humanitarian aid to people in the region.

Community in Australia

According to figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Sudanese community is currently one of the fastest growing groups in Australia. During the past 10 years the number of arrivals born in Sudan has increased by an average of 34 per cent each year.

The primary reason for the rapid growth in the Sudanese community is the large number of Humanitarian Programme entrants that the Australian Government has accepted from Sudan and nearby countries in recent years. In the 2002-03 financial year, Sudan became the Humanitarian Programme's top source country and has since provided more than 33 per cent of programme arrivals.

The department's Settlement Database (SDB) statistics show that since the 1996-97 financial year more than 20 000 settlers born in Sudan have made Australia their new home. In addition to settlers born in Sudan, SDB figures indicate that a significant number of settlers born in Egypt or Kenya are ethnically Sudanese, the majority of them being children born of Sudanese parents in refugee camps in surrounding countries. These entrants, not shown in the graph below, number in excess of 2200.

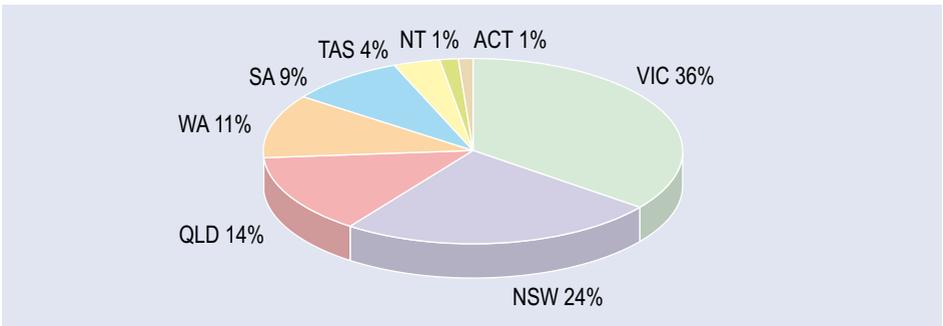
Figure 1: Number of Sudan-born arrivals (1996-2006)



Sudan-born migrants to Australia before 2001 included a number of skilled migrants. Since 2001, the large increase in the Sudan-born population in Australia has principally occurred through the Humanitarian Programme, with more than 98 per cent of Sudan-born arrivals entering Australia as part of this programme. These settlers can be further broken down into Refugee and Special Humanitarian Programme (SHP) components. SHP entrants are proposed by an Australian citizen, permanent resident or eligible New Zealand citizen, or an organisation based in Australia, whereas Refugee entrants are granted visas solely on humanitarian criteria, and may not have any pre-existing social or family links in Australia. Refugee category entrants tend to require more government funded settlement services than SHP entrants, who can generally rely on some level of support from their proposers. In the past five financial years, SHP entrants have comprised 74 per cent of all Sudanese humanitarian entrants.

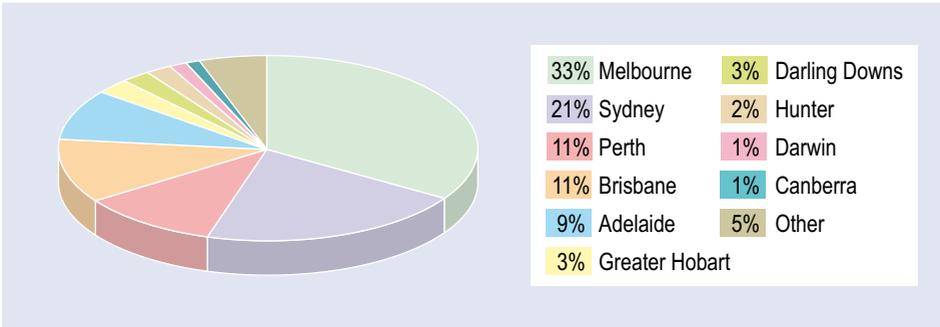
The 2001 census indicated that a large community of Sudan-born arrivals had settled in Victoria and subsequent settlement figures from the department's SDB clearly show the establishment of significant Sudanese communities in Victoria and New South Wales and, to a lesser extent, Queensland (figure 2).

Figure 2: Sudan-born settlement by state (2001-06)



SDB settlement figures over the past five financial years show that the majority of Sudanese arrivals (90 per cent) initially settled in one of the state or territory capital cities (figure 3). Only 10 per cent of Sudan-born arrivals have settled in areas outside the state and territory capitals and many of these cities, such as Toowoomba, already have an established Sudanese community.

Figure 3: Sudan-born settlement by statistical divisions (2001-06)

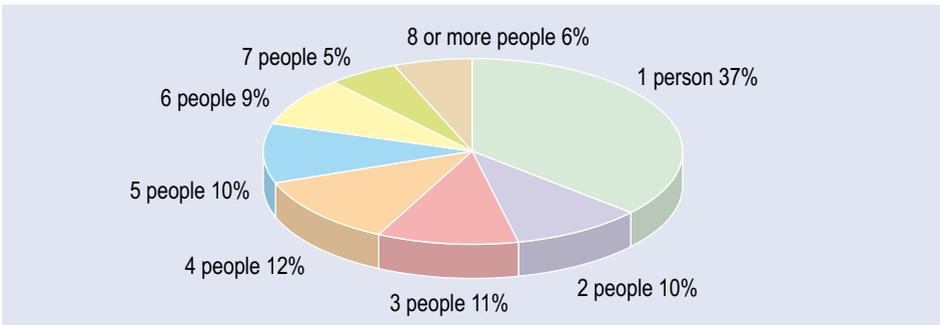


Humanitarian entrants with social links – family, friends or proposers in Australia – are assisted to settle close to them. Over the past five years, most Sudan-born arrivals entered Australia under the SHP and were therefore settled near their proposers.

Over the past five financial years, 83 per cent of Sudanese settlers identified with one of various Christian denominations, 12 per cent were Muslims and five per cent identified with another religion, no religion or did not state a religious belief.

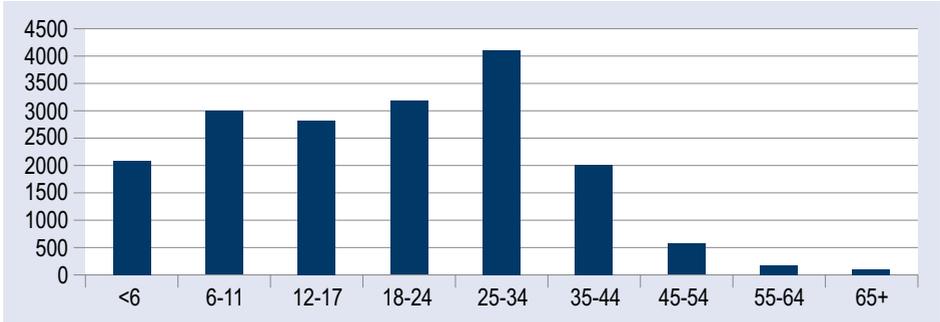
More than 50 per cent of Sudanese arrivals were part of a family unit of three or more people and 20 per cent were part of a family unit of six or more people (figure 4). Although 37 per cent of Sudan-born settlers arrived as single people, they may be part of a larger family unit.

Figure 4: Family size of Sudan-born entrants (2001-06)



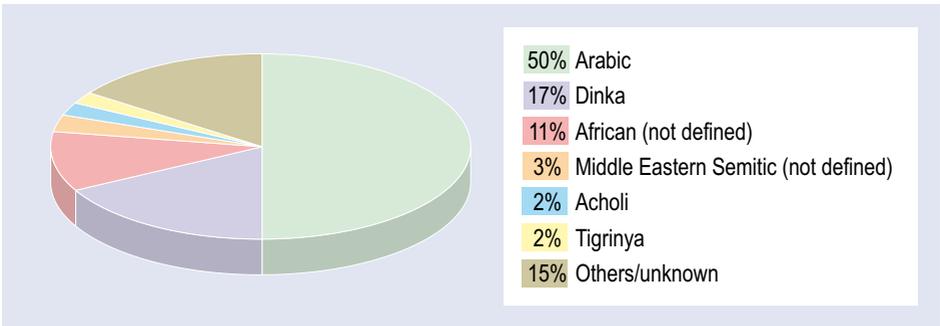
The age profile of Sudanese settlers in Australia during the past five financial years is comparable with the Sudanese population generally, with 62 per cent of all Sudanese settlers aged 24 years old or younger on arrival (figure 5). Many of these are younger than 18 years of age and are likely to access Australian education facilities. Males outnumbered females in all age groups except 55-64 and 65 years of age and older. In total, 55 per cent of Sudanese settlers in Australia were male and 45 per cent female.

Figure 5: Age on arrival of Sudan-born entrants (2001-06)



The majority of Sudan-born entrants (79 per cent) described their English proficiency as 'nil' or 'poor'. The main languages spoken were Arabic and Dinka (figure 6). The large number of Sudanese entrants whose main language has been recorded as 'African (not defined)', 'Middle Eastern Semitic languages' or 'others/unknown' reflects the fact that SDB language codes do not exist for many smaller or newer ethnic groups not already represented in Australia.

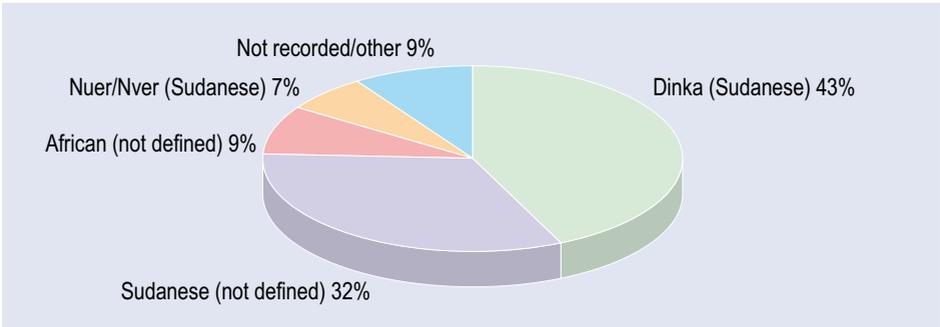
Figure 6: Main languages of Sudan-born entrants (2001-06)



The department's SDB records show that since 2001, the ethnicity of many Sudan-born settlers has been undefined (50 per cent were identified as 'Sudanese – not defined', 'African – not defined' or 'not recorded/other'). This is due to the department not having individual statistical codes for many of Sudan's ethnicities or due to settlers themselves being unfamiliar with English terminology for their own ethnic groups (eg. Dinka and Nuer are historically constructed terms arising from names used by Arabs and the British, and are not generally used by the ethnic groups themselves). New ethnicity codes have since been developed to assist in more accurately recording many of the smaller ethnic groups.

Those whose ethnicity was defined have come from some of the largest ethnic groups in southern Sudan, the Dinka and Nuer (figure 7), many of whom sought sanctuary in neighbouring countries during the second civil war.

Figure 7: Stated ethnicities of Sudan-born entrants (2001-06)



Pre-arrival experiences

The Sudanese refugees who have arrived in Australia under the Humanitarian Programme to date are victims of the second civil war between the north and the south (see Post-independence history and politics section). Many entrants have been living in refugee camps in surrounding countries such as the Kakuma and Dadaab camps in Kenya and camps around Gambella in Ethiopia and in northern Uganda. A significant number of Australia's humanitarian intake from Sudan are from the north of the country and have arrived in Australia via Cairo.

Some 30 000 southern Sudanese have been repatriated from neighbouring countries with the assistance of the UN since the end of the civil war in 2005, but the challenges facing the refugees and those assisting them to return are immense. Infrastructure in the south, already suffering from years of neglect, took a battering during the 21 years of civil war and the region cannot cope with the immediate return of all its refugees and internally displaced people. The situation is further complicated by the presence of land mines in much of the region, and by continued violence in border areas and near Darfur, often involving forces from other nations such as Chad and Uganda.

Australia has assisted in resettling some of the Sudanese who cannot be repatriated. While they are a diverse people with a wide range of experiences, many have spent a long period of time in refugee camps immediately before coming to Australia. The following section describes Kakuma camp in Kenya. Settlers who have spent time in other camps are likely to have experienced similar conditions.



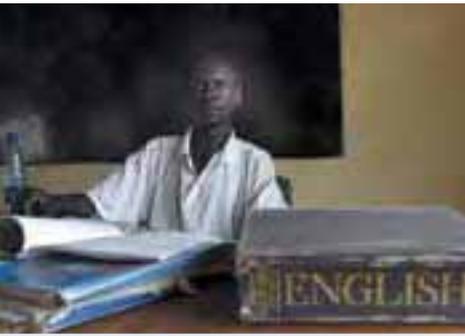
Southern Sudanese women await repatriation
WFP/Simon Crittle

Kakuma camp

Kakuma refugee camp was established in 1992 to receive a large group of Sudanese children known as the 'lost boys'. It is located in northern Kenya, approximately 100 kilometres from the Sudanese border. The camp's population varies but it is generally home to more than 80 000 people, the majority of them Sudanese. The 25 square kilometre camp lies in an arid region with barely enough resources to provide subsistence for the local population. Water is scarce

and camp residents are dependent upon the distribution of food aid. Much of the accommodation is mud brick huts built by the residents themselves.

Humanitarian aid organisations work in partnership with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to provide educational, medical and other services for the camp. However, limited resources mean both the quantity and quality of services provided are poor. Malnutrition is widespread due to deficiencies in the supply and quality of food. The inadequacy of medical treatment and supplies has left many residents suffering from disease. Primary schooling is available but the quality of education is poor and apart from some vocational training further education opportunities are limited.



School, Kakuma camp WFP/Francesco Brolfi

There is frequent violence in the camp. Regular clashes occur among residents, many of them armed, and between camp residents and the local population with whom residents compete for scarce resources. Sexual assault is common.

Like other refugees, many Kakuma residents have spent years living in camps. They have had limited opportunity to grow crops, work, or otherwise provide for themselves. They have lived in fear of violence from other camp residents and from raiders preying upon them

both inside and outside the camps. Children may have been born in the camps and be unfamiliar with any other lifestyle. The stresses of camp life will have added to the trauma many refugees experienced in fleeing from their country of birth.

Victims of the Darfur conflict have been accommodated in camps in Chad, as well as in internal displacement camps throughout Darfur. In addition to enduring conditions similar to those in other camps, residents have faced repeated attacks by the Janjaweed militia (see 'Darfur conflict' in Post-independence history and politics section).

Settlement considerations

Sudanese entrants may face considerable challenges in adapting to life in Australia. They need time to adapt to a new location, language and cultural framework. Their everyday life skills may have been extensively eroded by their experiences in refugee camps.

Work and education

It is highly likely that entrants from Sudan will require assistance to gain training, work experience and employment. Some may have work experience in agriculture and service industries. Some men may have worked in refugee camps or nearby townships, as drivers for the UN or in restaurants. Some women may have sold tea and food in the camps. However, many camp residents are unskilled, especially long term residents. Those who do have formal qualifications may find that their qualifications are not recognised in Australia.

Some children may be unfamiliar with formal schooling as a result of living in camps where there is little or no structure to day-to-day living. Moving into a highly structured environment such as a classroom may require assistance. Many parents will be unfamiliar with the Australian schooling system and will require encouragement to engage with schools and teachers. Illiteracy is common, particularly among women from rural areas. Those who are literate may not be familiar with the Roman alphabet as Arabic has been increasingly used in schools. Most Sudanese entrants have limited English language skills and will require interpreting services and English instruction.

Health

Health care in Sudan and in camps in neighbouring countries where Sudanese have sought refuge is usually very limited. Common medical conditions affecting Sudanese refugees include tuberculosis, HIV, poor eyesight, diabetes, malnutrition and high blood pressure. All humanitarian entrants will have undergone a medical examination for the purpose of their application for an Australian visa. Most entrants from Africa also undergo pre-departure medical screening. These entrants are given copies of medical documentation detailing the tests and any treatment or vaccinations administered at this screening. Some Sudanese may be unfamiliar with a formal health system, western-style medicine and being treated by a doctor of the opposite gender.

Culture and family

Traditional Sudanese age and gender roles may be significantly different from those in Australia and settlement challenges such as unemployment, differing rates of English acquisition between family members and understanding Australian laws may cause some family friction. Western-style dress may challenge traditional gender norms. A greater sense of freedom in Australia may also cause inter-generational or gender conflicts within families and communities.

For some Sudanese, religion is a very important part of life and finding a denomination, religious community and place of worship may assist in the settlement process.

Some Sudanese families are large and suitable accommodation may be difficult to find for these families. Sudanese from rural areas and refugee camps may have had no experience of a modern urban lifestyle. Settlers may not be familiar with living in western-style housing and may need assistance with using appliances and utilities (electricity, telephone, and internet), income support systems and accessing public services.



Sudanese flag

Sudan country background

Location

Sudan is located in the northeast of Africa. It is the continent's largest country at 2 505 813 square kilometres, making it slightly smaller than Western Australia. Sudan has a coastline of 853 kilometres along the Red Sea and shares borders with Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly known as Zaire), the Central African Republic, Chad, Libya and Egypt. The capital, Khartoum, is located near the centre of the country at the confluence of the White Nile and the Blue Nile. From Khartoum the Nile river flows northwards through Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea.



Topography and climate

Sudan can be divided into three geographical regions. The northern part of the country consists primarily of desert and semi-desert. Central Sudan, a region which supports much of the country's agriculture, consists of plains broken up by occasional hills. Southern Sudan contains vast swamps and flood plains and in the hills and mountains near the border with Uganda, patches of rain forest.

Sudan is entirely within the tropics. Temperatures are warm to hot throughout the year in the south, with average monthly maximums between 31°C and 38°C, while minimums remain above 20°C year round. Khartoum's maximums range from 32°C to 42°C with minimums dropping to 15°C in January.

Rainfall in Sudan varies with latitude, reducing with distance north from the equator. The rainy season in the south can be as long as eight or nine months (April to December) and can produce more than 1000 millimetres of rain.

Further north in Khartoum, the rainy season is only three months long (July to September, with about 160 millimetres) and this drops to one month on the edge of the northern deserts.

The wet season is not reliable and in some years may not arrive at all in central and northern Sudan. Many Sudanese have been affected by the resulting droughts.

Population

In 2006, Sudan's population was estimated to be 41 million. Of the 6-7 million people living in the greater Khartoum area, two million were internally displaced people from the civil war in the south. Infant mortality was 61 per 1000 live births and life expectancy at birth was 57.7 years of age for males and 60.2 years of age for females.

The population growth rate is high at 2.55 per cent per annum. A large proportion of Sudan's population is young, with the median age being 18.3 years compared to 36.9 years in Australia (figures 8, 9 and 10). This suggests that Sudan's high population growth rate is likely to continue.

Ethnicity

Sudan is a country of considerable ethnic diversity. Although the Sudanese are often categorised into two major groups - Arab and black African – this disguises ethnic and tribal subdivisions numbering in the hundreds. Arab groups include the Kababish, Ja'alain and Baggara, while some of the larger African groups include the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, and Azande. In many cases these ethnic divisions are further split into sub-groups or tribes. However, concepts of ethnicity are flexible, often being based upon cultural affiliations rather than ethnic characteristics, and 'Arabs' and 'Africans' may be physically indistinguishable from each other. Ethnic identities have frequently been subject to manipulation for political purposes.

Arab groups predominate in the north of the country while Africans are more prevalent in the south. It is estimated that Africans form approximately 50 per cent of Sudan's population, Arab tribes comprise 40 per cent, Beja (a semi-nomadic group considered distinct from both Arabs and Africans) six per cent and others four per cent.

Figure 8: Sudanese and Australian demographic comparisons

	Population growth (%)	Life expectancy (years)	Infant mortality (per 1000)	Median age (years)
Sudan	2.55	58.9	61.05	18.3
Australia	0.85	80.5	4.63	36.9

Figure 9: Sudan age distribution (2006)

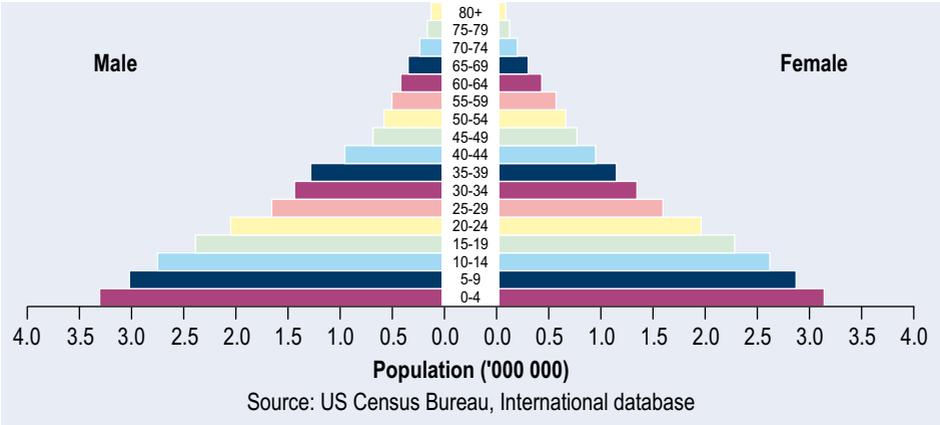
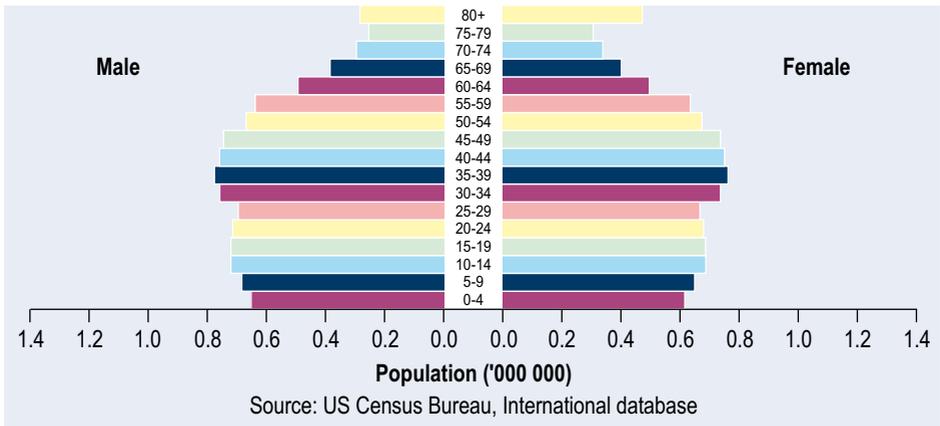


Figure 10: Australia age distribution (2006)



Language

Arabic is the most widely spoken language in Sudan. It is the country's official language and has emerged as the most used lingua franca, enabling communication between people from different native language groups. English was the lingua franca of southern Sudan and had been the language of instruction in all secondary schools and the University of Khartoum, but its status came under threat following the Sudanese Government's 1990 policy of using Arabic as the language of instruction in all schools.

In addition to Arabic and English, as many as 400 other languages and dialects may be spoken in Sudan. Many Sudanese are bilingual or multilingual, speaking their native language, one of the lingua francas and sometimes another language.

Juba (or Pidgin) Arabic is a form of the language developed and used mainly in the south. It may not be intelligible to speakers of other forms of Arabic.

Family

Traditionally, kinship ties are close in Sudan and involve extended families. Marriages are often arranged and involve payment from the groom's family to the bride's, in cash or property – usually in head of cattle in the south. This may be returned if the marriage breaks down, a custom which in practice acts as a disincentive to divorce. Polygyny, a form of polygamy where a husband may have more than one wife, occurs more often in the north of the country than in the south, and is now less common than in the past.



Sudanese women, west Darfur
WFP/Antonia Paradela

Many Sudanese families are significantly larger than the Australian norm. The complexity and importance of extended family ties mean that many Sudanese in Australia will feel obligated to propose for entry, or send money back to support relatives who seem quite distant by Australian definitions.

Gender

Gender roles in Sudan tend to be traditional in rural areas with men participating in public life while women are responsible for the home and often manage crops. Usually a man will be the 'head' of the house and women are considered somewhat subordinate, although

this varies across tribes and locations. In southern Sudan, women may have more freedom within the family and society than in the north.

Female circumcision, or female genital mutilation (FGM), has been performed on as many as 90 per cent of women in the north of Sudan, but the practice is not prevalent in the south. Recent reports suggest that, while still common, the incidence of FGM is declining. The Sudanese Government discourages the practice.

Some tribes in southern Sudan still perform gender rituals at certain ages, which typically involve cutting the skin of the forehead or face in linear or circular patterns. Traditionally, the Dinka people also remove some teeth.

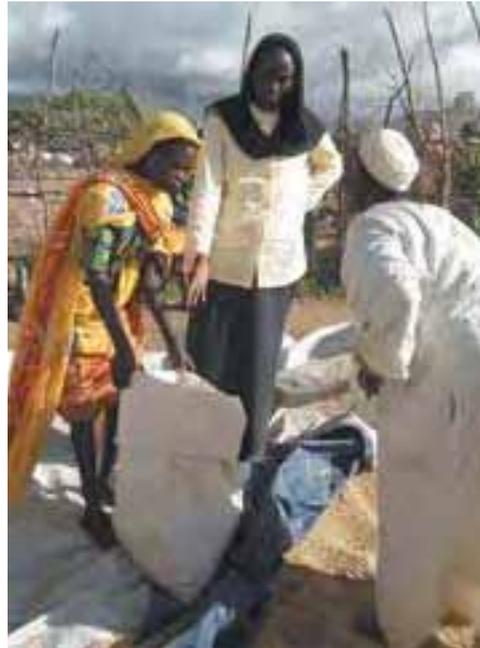
Religion

Approximately 65 per cent of Sudanese follow the official state religion of Islam and most are Sunni. Another 25 per cent follow traditional indigenous beliefs, while Christians make up the remainder. Muslims predominate in the north and Christians and animists in the south.

Along with ethnicity, religion is seen by many in the south as a divisive influence. They claim that southern African Christians and others are politically, economically and culturally dominated and discriminated against by northern Arab Muslims. Southerners have been particularly concerned by the imposition in September 1983 of Sharia law and the extent to which it applied or will apply to non-Muslims. This issue was a major factor in the second civil war.

Dress

In the north and other Muslim regions, many women cover their heads, in accordance with Islamic custom. Women wear the toab, a length of material wrapped around the body similar in style to a loose robe. Many Sudanese men wear western-style clothing. Others wear the traditional jalabiya, a wide ankle-length gown, with the shaal or shawl. In the south, both men and women may wear the kitenge as a sarong.



Sudanese dress
WFP/Antonia Paradela



Mince, onion and tomato stew on asida
Marktanner.com



Meat and spinach stew on kiswa
Marktanner.com

Food

Food in Sudan tends to be fairly simple, seasoned with salt, pepper or lemon. Staples include asida, a porridge made from millet or sorghum, and a flat bread called kiswa. Lamb and chicken are eaten, often in stews, which may also contain tomatoes, onions, potatoes, eggplant or okra. Beans and lentils are also often used and salads may accompany the meal. Dried or smoked fish is commonly eaten in the south. In traditional areas meals may be communal, with diners using kiswa to dip into or scoop from a bowl or bowls of food shared by all.

Coffee is a popular beverage. To make Sudanese guhwah coffee, the beans are fried and then ground with cloves and spices. Hot water is passed through the grounds, the brew is strained through a grass sieve, then served from a pot called a jebena. Tea is also popular and is often flavoured with cloves, cinnamon or mint.

Health

The standard of health care in Sudan is not high. According to the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Report 2006*, Sudan had 22 physicians for every 100 000 people, compared to Australia where there were 247. Doctors and hospitals are mostly in urban areas and in the north and there is a shortage of medicines. However, immunisation rates are rising, and it was estimated that 60 per cent

of children were immunised against most childhood diseases by the end of the 1990s. Malnutrition is common in Sudan as a result of famine caused by drought and war. People have insufficient access to safe drinking water.

Education

Literacy rates in Sudan for those aged over 15 have risen from 45.8 per cent in 1990 to 60.9 per cent in 2004. Males have a higher rate of literacy (71.1 per cent) than females (51.8 per cent).

Children begin eight years of compulsory schooling at the age of six. Eight years of primary school are followed by three years of secondary school. However, statistics from 2004 indicate that only 60 per cent of eligible children were enrolled in primary school (64 per cent of boys and 56 per cent of girls) while 33 per cent were enrolled in secondary school (34 per cent of boys and 32 per cent of girls). The percentage of children enrolled in school varies by location. In 2004, an estimated 78 per cent of children were enrolled in Khartoum state whereas only 26 per cent were enrolled in South Darfur state.

Before 1990, schooling at the secondary level was conducted either in English or Arabic. From 1990, according to government policy, the language of instruction at all levels was to be Arabic. This policy was deeply unpopular in the south and other parts of Sudan as it was seen as part of a process of Arabicisation and Islamicisation designed to entrench Arab dominance over other peoples. Protocols signed by the Sudan Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and subsequently incorporated into the CPA of January 2005 stated that 'the use of either language at any level of government or education shall not be discriminated against'.

Instructional materials including textbooks, blackboards and notebooks are often in short supply. In addition, the south of the country has been under-represented in terms of schools per head of population.

Economy

Sudan was ranked 141 out of 177 nations in the United Nations Development Programme's *Human Development Index (2005)*, which measures factors such as GDP per capita, life expectancy and education. In its *2006 Work Plan for Sudan*, the UN sought more than USD 1.5 billion to meet humanitarian needs. In 2004, 40 per cent of Sudanese were estimated to be below the poverty line. Sudan has slowly been implementing International Monetary Fund macroeconomic reforms since 1997.



Sudanese children attend an open-air school
WFP/Simon Crittle

Sudan's natural resources include reserves of oil and natural gas, and small amounts of gold, iron ore, copper and other metals. Increasing oil exports combined with the cease fire in the civil war in 2004 have led to strong GDP growth. However, limited infrastructure and the scars of the civil war pose substantial challenges to future economic growth. Industries include motor vehicle assembly, cotton ginning, cement, edible oils and sugar refining. Agricultural products include cotton, peanuts, sorghum, millet, wheat, sesame seeds, gum Arabic, sugar cane, fruit and livestock. Most industry and agriculture for profit is based in the centre of the country. Agriculture in the south is mainly pastoral and is often at subsistence level. Eighty per cent of Sudan's workforce is in agriculture which supplies 39 per cent of GDP. Industry makes up 20 per cent and services 41 per cent.

Exports include oil and petroleum products, cotton, sesame, livestock, groundnuts, gum Arabic and sugar. Sudan's major trading partner is China, which accounted for more than 71 per cent of Sudan's exports in 2005 and provided nearly 21 per cent of Sudan's imports. Sudan imports foodstuffs, manufactured goods, refinery and transport equipment, medicines, chemicals and textiles.

The United States imposed economic sanctions on Sudan in 1997, claiming that Sudan was guilty of human rights violations and supporting terrorism. The sanctions remain in force.

History

Internal conflict has plagued Sudan since its independence in 1956. The causes of the divisions are complex but are generally rooted in the political dominance of northerners who have attempted to impose Islam and Arab culture and language against the wishes of non-Muslims and southerners, who seek autonomy, a say in the control of resources and an end to their marginalisation. Traces of the origins of Sudan's internal tensions can be found in its pre-independence history.

The northern part of the region now known as Sudan has a long history of contact with Egypt, its powerful northern neighbour. Egypt's influence and control at times spread far down the Nile valley into Sudan. Kingdoms based in northern Sudan and heavily influenced by Egypt became strong enough around the eighth century BC to conquer and rule Egypt itself. Ultimately their power declined and the region became host to a number of smaller, independent kingdoms. Christianity had arrived in the region by the sixth century AD, and Arabs introduced the Islamic faith shortly afterwards. Islam gradually replaced Christianity as the dominant religion as a result of continuing Arab migration and conversion.



In the early nineteenth century Egypt, by then part of the Ottoman Empire, invaded and conquered northern Sudan. Slave trading intensified under the new regime and thousands of Africans from southern Sudan were captured and sold, contributing to southern Sudanese hostility towards Arabs and Islam.

The British took control of Egypt in 1882, at the same time as a revolt led by an Islamic cleric began forcing the Egyptians out of Sudan. In 1896 the British, for reasons which included a desire to end the slave trade and fears of French and other European influence in the region, invaded Sudan in partnership with Egypt. By 1899 they had secured control of Sudan and began a period of colonial administration of the country known as the Anglo-Egyptian condominium. In practice, this period of joint Anglo-Egyptian sovereignty was one of de facto British rule.

Differences between the north and the less developed south were exacerbated under the British. The two halves were separately administered and the British believed south Sudan had more in common with their East African colonies than with north Sudan. In practice, British administration left the south politically and economically underdeveloped. British rule lasted until 1953, when a three year period of transitional self-rule led to Sudan's full independence on 1 January 1956.

Post-independence history and politics

Southern fears of northern domination were apparent even before independence and the imposition of Arabic as the language of administration, and southern under-representation in government, did nothing to allay them. Rebellions in the south escalated into a civil war which persisted through a succession of governments, many of which seized power through military coups. In 1969 Colonel Gaafar Muhammad Nimeiri came to power and in 1972 he signed an agreement giving the south some degree of autonomy. This resulted in an uneasy peace which lasted until 1983 when Nimeiri rescinded some of the concessions of the 1972 agreement, provoking a rebellion by southern soldiers. Later that year Nimeiri attempted to impose Sharia law on Muslims and non-Muslims alike. These actions, combined with disputes over ownership of resources and other longstanding grievances, contributed to the second civil war which was essentially a resumption of the first. In the south, the SPLM was formed and its military wing, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), became the main rebel faction under the leadership of Colonel John Garang.

Further changes of government through popular uprisings and coups failed to end the war. The aggressive promotion of Islam by the National Islamic Front,

which seized power in 1989 under the leadership of General Omar Hassan al-Bashir, intensified the conflict. During the 1990s, regionalism and support for the SPLA and other rebel groups grew in the east, west and south of the country, as both Muslim and non-Muslim populations reacted to a perceived escalation of the dominance of the Arabic centre.

An accord between the Sudanese Government and the SPLM in July 2002 led to the signing of the CPA in January 2005, bringing the fighting to an end. The CPA provided for the withdrawal of northern troops from southern Sudan, sharing of political power and revenue from oil fields in the south, the return and resettlement of refugees and internally displaced people, and the right for the south to determine its own political future after an interim six year period. However, southern Sudanese dissatisfaction lingered over points such as their exclusion from certain government portfolios and the absence of independent checks of oil revenues to ensure the south was getting its share.

It has been estimated that Sudan's second civil war cost 1.9 million lives and four million people were displaced. As many as 500 000 of these fled to neighbouring countries while an estimated two million ended up in the greater Khartoum area. For many, there has been limited opportunity or incentive to return following the end of the war. The south's capacity to reabsorb the refugees and internally displaced people is constrained by war damage and the lack of infrastructure. Many southerners who had fled to Khartoum returned to the south following the end of the war, but subsequently returned to Khartoum as they had nowhere to live and no means of support.

The National Islamic Front changed its name to the National Congress Party (NCP) in 1996 and has remained in power under President al-Bashir. Elections were held in 1996 and 2000 but were widely viewed as rigged, with the intention of rubber-stamping al-Bashir's legitimacy. Sudan was effectively an authoritarian state but after the signing of the CPA in January 2005 and the subsequent ratification of an interim constitution, power has been somewhat decentralised, with the NCP and SPLM forming the Government of National Unity under an arrangement which also calls for national elections before July 2009. SPLM/SPLA leader John Garang was appointed vice-president but died in a helicopter crash in July 2005, after which his deputy, Salva Kiir, became vice-president. Under the terms of the CPA, this makes Kiir president of the autonomous Government of Southern Sudan.

Darfur conflict

In 2003, as one conflict drew to a close, another erupted in Darfur, in Sudan's west. Although religion was not an issue in this conflict – all the antagonists were Muslims – the rebels' grievances were similar to those of the SPLA, and other groups elsewhere in Sudan's peripheral regions. They cited political marginalisation of Africans by Arabs, limited access to and control of resources, and anger at being left out of the negotiations which led to the CPA. The rebels have since been fighting not only government forces but also the pro-government militia known as the Janjaweed. The Sudanese Government has denied links to the Janjaweed, who have been accused of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The various rebel factions are comprised of Africans, while the Janjaweed are Arabs, although these ethnic distinctions are somewhat blurred and have been exaggerated and politicised. The two groups have been in sporadic, generally low-key, conflict for many years, primarily over access to land and resources. Friction was intensified by drought and famine in the early 1980s.

In 2004, the African Union (AU) began deploying troops to Darfur to monitor a ceasefire. The ceasefire was not widely observed and the AU peacekeeping force, although gradually increased to 7000, proved unable to prevent continuing violence over such a vast region. Meanwhile, international aid agencies set up camps throughout Darfur but the camps have not proved to be safe for either Darfurians or aid workers. Militia attacks have continued on people in and around the camps and vehicles belonging to the UN, AU and humanitarian aid agencies have been hijacked.



Reception area, Farchana camp, Chad
Courtesy Oxfam Australia

By 2006 an estimated 1.8 million people were internally displaced within Darfur, and 200 000 more had sought refuge in camps across the border in Chad. A peace deal signed in May 2006 by the government and one of the rebel factions did little to reduce the violence. Other rebel factions refused to sign the deal, and the one faction that did sign was reported to have subsequently attacked villages in Darfur with the support of government troops and the Janjaweed.

The AU mandate in Darfur was due to expire at the end of September 2006. A UN Security Council resolution of 1 September 2006 called for a force of 20 000 UN peacekeepers to replace the AU troops, but this was rejected by the Sudanese Government. The AU subsequently extended their mission twice, firstly until 31 December 2006, and then until 30 June 2007. As of February 2007 there were no signs of improved security in Darfur.

Sudan faces enormous challenges over the next few years. It remains to be seen whether both the north and the south have the commitment or ability to comply with the terms of the CPA, given that the agreement requires the south to resettle its people and the north to forgo considerable oil revenue if the south should secede. It is also possible that the signing of the CPA, or exclusion from it, will be a factor in encouraging disaffected people in other parts of the country to seek greater autonomy and concessions from Khartoum, as appears to be the case in Darfur where no peaceful resolution to the conflict is yet in sight.

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