



Chad-Sudan border, Returnees settled in Lycée d'Adre. Credit : IOM Chad 2023

ADVOCACY NOTE

VITAL SERVICES MUST CONTINUE IN 2024 FOR RETURNEES IN EASTERN CHAD

December 2023

Summary

Uprooted by the ongoing conflict in Sudan, Chadian returnees remain in acute need of life-saving assistance yet are often overlooked in the humanitarian response in the east of Chad.

Despite the ask of 30,000,000 USD to support over 93,000 registered returnees displaced from Sudan since April 2023, funds mobilized fell short of what is required to provide vital humanitarian assistance to returnees, many of whom are pregnant, breastfeeding or under the age of 18.

With no sign of the conflict in Sudan abating, IOM expects the number of returnees to reach 150,000 by the end of March 2024.¹

The gap in funding is having a direct impact on the vital needs of Chadian returnees and vulnerable host communities with funding urgently required to ensure life-saving support and services continue in 2024.

This document has been developed to be complimentary to the Regional Refugee Response and Resilience Plan (RRRP) as well as the 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for Chad, with the aim of informing and mobilizing funding to support Chadian returnees throughout 2024.



Chad-Sudan border, woman climbing in a car to be resettled in returnees site of Tongori. Credit : IOM Chad 2023

¹IOM, "[IOM Chad: Sudan Crisis Response, Situation Update No.26](#)," December 29, 2023.

Key Messages

- Chadian returnees' particular legal and social status produce distinct vulnerabilities. As Chadian nationals, returnees are not eligible for international legal protection extended to refugees. And yet, prolonged residence in Sudan signifies that many lack community and social ties in Chad through which to meet their basic needs post-displacement.
- Mass displacement into the east of Chad, including by returnees, has placed significant strain on services and resources as host provinces (Ouaddaï, Sila, and Wadi Fira) had low socio-economic resilience prior to the start of the crisis.
- Humanitarian actors are currently partnering with the government to provide shelter, WASH, health, education, and protection assistance to respond to the displacement crisis and reinforce the services available in host provinces. However, the bulk of humanitarian funding for the returnee response finished in December 2023. Given ongoing fighting in Sudan which makes return impossible while pushing new returnees into Chad, the continuation of emergency, life-saving services in 2024 is imperative.
- Without sustained funding to support the returnee response, humanitarian agencies face having to scale back operations in 2024. The potential reduction in assistance heightens the precarity of populations already in vulnerable situations and risks engendering inter-community conflict over scarce resources.

Who is a Returnee?

Chadian returnees are Chadian nationals who were living in western regions of Sudan prior to the outbreak of violence in April 2023. Many had well established lives and livelihoods in Sudan, some running small businesses or engaging in subsistence farming. The outbreak of violence in Darfur left households with little choice but to pack what they could carry and flee over the border into Chad. Despite being Chadian citizens, many of these returnees no longer have family ties or connections to towns and villages in Chad (to learn more about what Chadian returnees have been through please visit [here](#)).² Moreover, returnees as Chadian citizens do not qualify for international protection provided to refugees, although they have been displaced by the same violence as Sudanese nationals. This puts returnees into positions of extreme vulnerability, especially when the following demographics are considered:

 **67%** registered returnees are children under 18

 **1,730** registered returnees are pregnant women

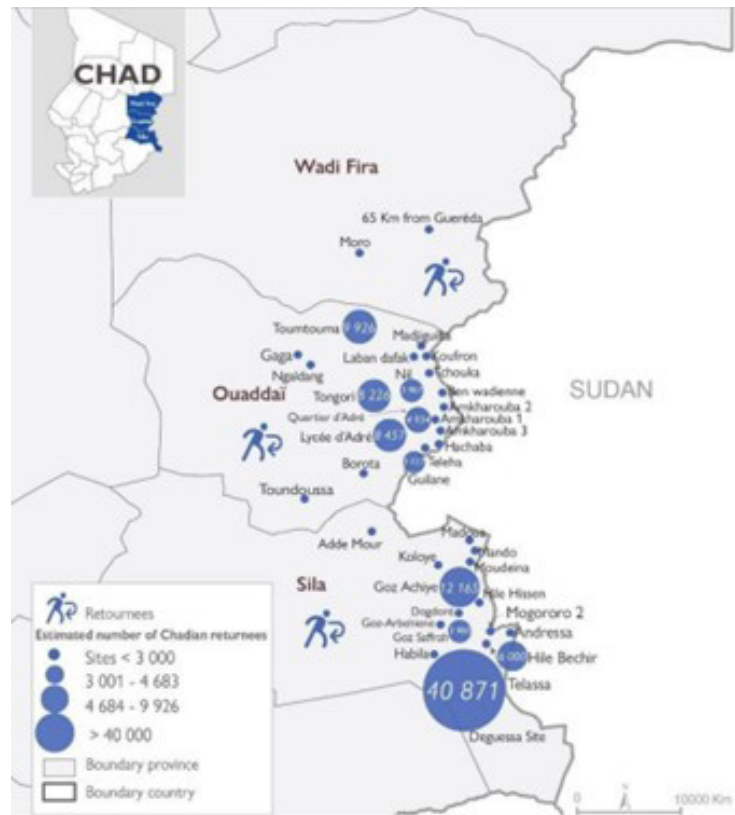
 **5,260** registered returnees are breastfeeding

² François-Xavier Ada, "[A Path to New Beginnings for Chadians Returning from Sudan](#)," IOM, October 24, 2023,

Context

Since April, Chad has received over 550,000 new arrivals across Ouaddaï, Sila, and Wadi Fira provinces in the east of the country, adding to the over 400,000 largely aid-dependent Sudanese refugees displaced into eastern Chad since 2004. Amongst those uprooted by the recent conflict in Sudan, IOM and partners have registered over 93,000 Chadian returnees.³

Returnees in Chad face limited options; while continued violence in Sudan makes return impossible, flimsy social ties and community connections related to extended settlement in Sudan render integration more difficult.



Although border communities in the provinces of Ouaddaï, Sila, and Wadi Fira have welcomed the returnee population, the influx in arrivals has placed significant pressure on resources. Prior to the conflict in Sudan, services (education, health, and protection) in these provinces were sparse, and the increase in arrivals has created competition between host communities and new arrivals.

The situation is made worse by limited humanitarian aid, supply challenges, and hikes in food and fuel costs due of the conflict in Sudan. The government as part of its integrated response to reduce pressure on border communities has designated two sites, Tongori and Degussa, for the returnee population. While humanitarian actors are actively providing lifesaving, emergency assistance to returnees, much of the funding for these interventions finished at the end of December 2023. With no obvious end to the conflict in Sudan, IOM predicts that the number of returnees in eastern Chad will reach 150,000 by the end of March 2024,⁴ making continued funding for multi-sectoral assistance to returnees and host communities imperative.

³ IOM, "[IOM Chad: Sudan Crisis Response, Situation Update No.26](#)," December 29, 2023

⁴ IOM, "[IOM Chad: Sudan Crisis Response, Situation Update No.26](#)," December 29, 2023

Aggravating Factors

Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH):

A lack of WASH facilities in host provinces has meant that many people have lived without adequate access to sanitation services or clean drinking water since crossing the border with Chad. In the border villages, where refugees and returnees first arrived (and remain in smaller numbers), WASH activities are extremely limited. Similarly, within returnee sites access to water is scarce, fomenting tensions with the host community and pushing some to collect water from unsafe sources such as wadis. These practices lead to higher risks of typhoid, diarrhea, and cholera, with many deaths registered across the displaced population related to waterborne diseases.⁵ Open defecation is also widespread, and the lack of disposal systems is contributing to serious health conditions. Furthermore, for women, children, and people with limited mobility, the absence of adequate WASH facilities produces protection risks. Expanding WASH services for returnees and host communities is hereby vital to address related health and protection concerns.

Access to Education:

67% of the registered returnees are under the age of eighteen placing pressure on an educational system already strained by a lack of infrastructure and an insufficient number of teachers. In sites where there is access to schools, prohibitive fees associated with school inscription, equipment, and uniforms remain barriers for both host and returnee communities. In addition, the absence of catch-up education programs, urgently needed for returnee children to be on track within the Chadian curriculum, impedes children from enrolling in schools. These obstacles coalesce to render the continuation of returnees' education uncertain. To address these challenges and support children's right to education amongst host and returnee communities, adequate resources must be available to ensure that education services continue.

Access to Healthcare:

Access to healthcare is challenging for the returnee and host community linked to the limited availability of primary and secondary health services in Ouaddaï, Sila, and Wadi Fira. Before the conflict in Sudan, people crossed the border to access healthcare, an option that is no longer available. As many returnees lost their source of income through displacement, costs associated with certain health services also constitute a barrier. For returnees, displacement has produced immediate and longer-term health needs. Exposure to violence and trauma during returnees' flight from Sudan has resulted in physical injuries such as burns or open wounds and had a deleterious impact on mental health. In addition, diseases linked to poor sanitation such as diarrhea and respiratory infections are common.

⁵ MSF, "East Chad Refugee Response: No Excuse for failure: Urgent Scale to the emergency response required in eastern Chad," October 2023.

Also contributing to negative health outcomes, food insecurity and malnutrition were concerning in Ouaddaï, Sila, and Wadi Fira provinces prior to the conflict.⁶ Increased pressure on resources, increased prices, reduced trade, and host communities and returnee populations' sharing of food stocks are contributing to a serious nutrition situation amongst returnee and host populations. Accordingly, the expansion of healthcare, including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) and nutrition services – in line with national policies such as the provision of free healthcare for children under five and pregnant women – is integral for addressing immediate needs while strengthening the health infrastructure within these provinces.

Access to Protection:

Chadian returnees often lack civil documentation to confirm their Chadian nationality and legal status, engendering precarity. Added to this, protection risks for returnee populations with underlying vulnerabilities are being further exacerbated by the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the region and lack of basic services. Indicative of this trend, IOM's protection assessment identified child protection as a priority concern in returnee communities.⁷ In this context, adolescent girls and single mothers face distinct risks associated with their gender and age including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). There have been reports of domestic violence and aggressive behaviors perpetuated by both the returnee and host communities; amidst the fifty returnee protection cases documented in Sila by INTERSOS between the end of August and end of October 2023, 50% were cases of gender-based violence.⁸ Displacement has also resulted in the separation of children from their families. In the absence of care and protection by caregivers and families, separated and unaccompanied children are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The integration of life-saving child protection, MHPSS, and SGBV services across sectors is thus critical and must include safe and effective referral pathways for all sites including non-camp settings.

Access to Shelter:

Returnees have been welcomed in border communities. However, the large influx of returnees has resulted in overcrowding in sites of first arrival and produced precarious living conditions. Despite being Chadian nationals, the absence of community ties in Chad through which to meet their basic needs post-displacement means that many returnees are highly dependent on humanitarian assistance. The relocation of 2,311 returnee households (13,686 individuals) into transitional shelters within designated returnee resettlement sites has helped to address privacy and security concerns related to shelter.⁹ However, this number represents a fraction of the returnee population and with the ongoing arrival of new returnees, further shelter support is needed. The construction of additional shelters for the most vulnerable households and expansion of the infrastructure available in returnee sites are integral to uphold the right of returnees to dignified living conditions – steps towards the longer-term integration and achievement of durable solutions for returnees within their country nationality.

⁶ OCHA, "[Tchad: Note d'Analyse sur les résultats du Cadre Harmonisé et de l'enquête SMART 2022](#)," January 20, 2023.

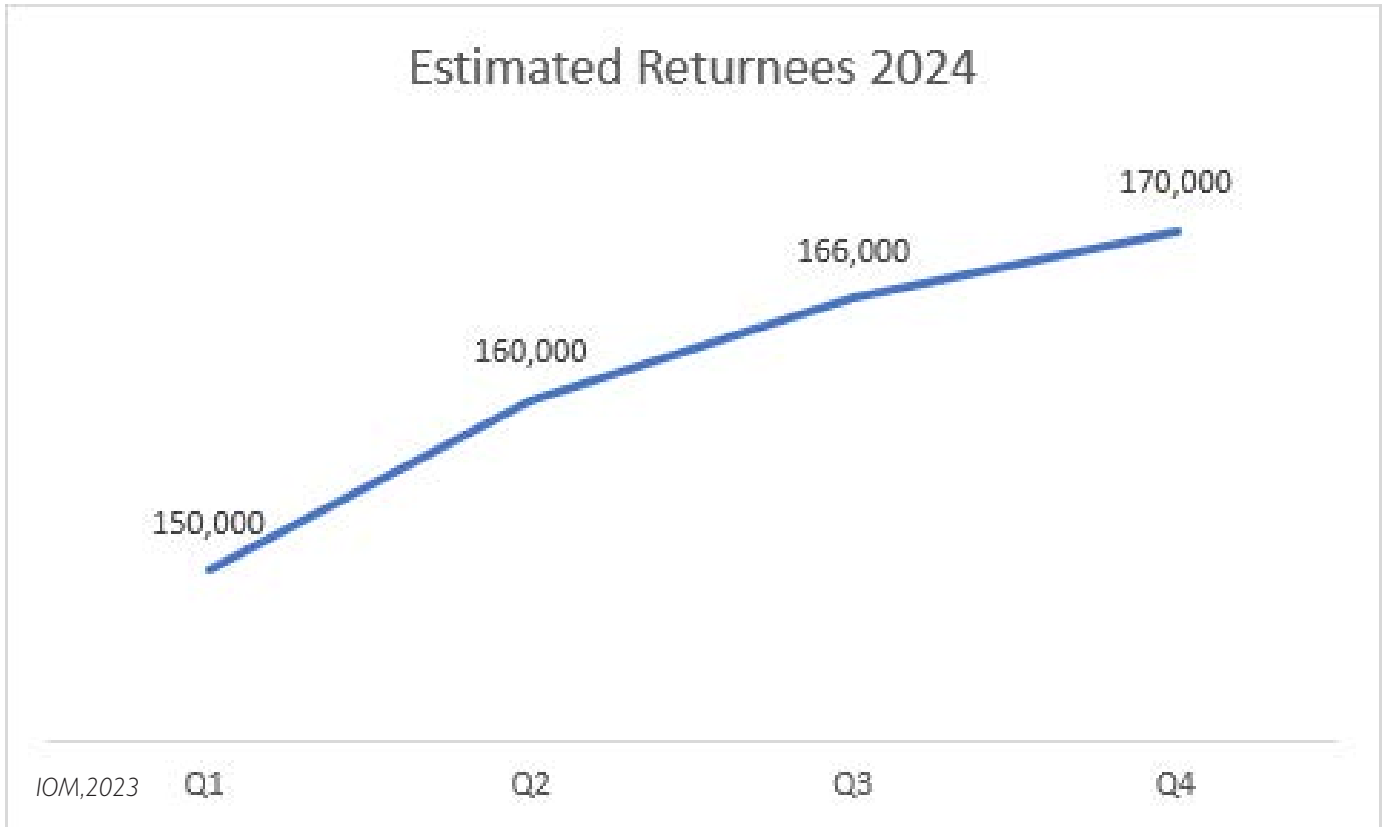
⁷ IOM, "Protection Monitoring Report: Assessment of Protection Situation and Needs in Returnee Hosting Areas & Sites in Sila," August, 2023.

⁸ INTERSOS, Protection Field Assessments Degoussa, August – October 2023.

⁹ IOM, "[IOM Chad: Sudan Crisis Response, Situation Update No.26](#)," December 29, 2023

Planning Figures

For 2024, IOM anticipates that 170,000 returnees will require multi-sectoral assistance across Ouaddaï, Sila, and Wadi Fira :



Recommendations

- Urge the **International Community** to continue to support the **Government of Chad to protect displaced populations and facilitate the reintegration of Chadian returnees into their country of nationality.**
- Call on **Donors to increase funding levels to meet the heightened needs in eastern Chad in 2024.** This funding must include the returnee population to enable a multi-sectoral, emergency response in returnee sites. Funding for sustainable, long-term programming is also needed to bolster social cohesion and community resilience within returnee and host communities.
- Call on the **International Community** (UN, NGOs, and civil society) to prioritize the delivery of **conflict-sensitive assistance for returnees, refugees, and host communities** that takes into consideration age, gender and disability needs and reflects the distinct concerns of the returnee community.