



## **Sudanese Community Profile**



Sudan



South Sudan

**May 2010**

**Updated June 2013**

**Updated June 2015**

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## Country Background

Unless otherwise stated a reference to Sudan will include both North and South.

### Location

The Republic of Sudan is Africa's third largest country after the succession of South Sudan and is part of the group of countries known as the 'Horn of Africa'. It borders 9 countries (Egypt, Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Eritrea).

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. The capital of Sudan is Khartoum.

South Sudan became an independent state on 9 July 2011, following a referendum that passed with 98.83% of the vote. It is a United Nations



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member state, a member state of the African Union, and a member state of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. In July 2012, South Sudan signed the Geneva Conventions.

## Population

The last official census recording the population of Sudan included the populations of Eastern, Western and Northern Sudan in 2008 and recorded over 30 million citizens, which puts present estimates of the population of Sudan post-secession at 40 million. This is a significant increase over the past two decades as the 1983 census put the total population of Sudan, including present-day South Sudan, at 21.6 million. The population of metropolitan Khartoum (including Khartoum, Omdurman, and Khartoum North) is growing rapidly and was recorded to be 6 to 7 million.

Despite being a refugee-generating country, Sudan also hosts a refugee population. According to the *World Refugee Survey 2008*, published by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 310,500 refugees and asylum seekers lived in Sudan in 2007. The majority of this population came from Eritrea (240,400 persons), Chad (45,000), Ethiopia (49,300) and the Central African Republic (2,500). The Sudanese government UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 2007 forcibly deported at least 1,500 refugees and asylum seekers during the year. Sudan is a party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

A large proportion of Sudan's (North and South) population is young with the the medium age in 2006 being 18.9 years. Infant mortality in 2006 was 61 per 1000 births and life expectancy was 58.9 years.

The "Fifth Population and Housing Census of Sudan", of Sudan as a whole, was conducted in April 2008. However, the census results of Southern Sudan were rejected by Southern Sudanese officials on reported grounds that "the central bureau of statistics in Khartoum refused to share the national Sudan raw census data with the southern Sudan centre for census, statistics and evaluation." The census counted the Southern Sudan population at 8.26 million

## History

Internal conflict and civil war has plagued Sudan since its independence from joint British-Egyptian administration in 1956. The causes of the divisions are complex but are generally rooted in the political dominance of northerners and the non-Muslims and

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southerners who seek autonomy, a say in the control of resources and an end to their marginalisation.

The most recent conflict in Sudan erupted in Darfur in 2003, in Sudan's west.

In response to a rebel uprising, which demanded proportional political representation and equitable access to the country's significant economic resources, the Government of Sudan launched a violent campaign against the people of Darfur.

Government armed Janjaweed militias, supported by the Sudanese Air force, carried out violent attacks in villages throughout the region. The villages of Darfur, predominantly inhabited by native African tribes, were bombed and burnt to the ground, their inhabitants raped and murdered. Survivors were forcibly displaced to make shift camps within Darfur, neighbouring Chad and elsewhere.

Darfur has been labeled widely and consistently as the site of the world's worst humanitarian disaster since it was described as such by United Nations (UN) officials in 2004. Various reports estimate that since the outbreak of violence in 2003 between two and four hundred thousand people have died as a result of fighting and conflict induced malnutrition and disease. Three million have been displaced and four million people remain entirely dependent on limited humanitarian assistance.

On 9 January 2005, the Nairobi Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed between the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the Government of Sudan, with the objective of ending the Second Sudanese Civil War. The agreement granted Southern Sudan autonomy for six years, to be followed by a referendum about independence. The United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) was established under the UN Security Council Resolution 1590 to support implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. According to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the region of Abyei must hold its own referendum, and decide whether to go with the south, or remain with Sudan. The referendum on Abyei is yet to be rescheduled.

A referendum on independence for Southern Sudan was held from 9 to 15 January 2011. Former US President Jimmy Carter, among a number of foreign dignitaries, acted as an observer.

Voting on the referendum began on January 9, 2011. On 12 January, after three days of voting, representatives of the SPLA/M announced that, according to their estimates, the 60 percent turnout threshold required for the referendum's validity (corresponding to around 2.3 million voters) had been reached. Official confirmation came later the same

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day, when the referendum commission released a statement announcing that turnout would "exceed" the required 60 percent threshold. Jimmy Carter expressed his belief on 13 January that the referendum would likely meet international standards for both the conduct of the vote and freedom of voters. The United Nations reported that preliminary results would be expected by February 2, 2011, with final results expected within the following two weeks.

According to preliminary counts reviewed by the Associated Press, consisting of 30,000 ballots in 10 polling stations, the sample had a 95% turnout with 96% in favor of secession, 3% in favor of unity and the rest invalid. Mohamed Ibrahim Khalil, chairman of the referendum commission, said 83 percent of eligible voters in the south and 53 percent in the north had voted

## Ethnicity, language and religion

### **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'alin 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.

### **Language**

There are 142 recorded languages in Sudan, 134 of which are living languages and eight of which are extinct. Arabic is the official and most widely spoken language. English was the lingua franca of southern Sudan and has been the language of instruction in all secondary schools and University of Khartoum.

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.

### **Religion**

In Sudan approximately 65 percent of people follow the official state religion of Islam and most are Sunni Muslims. Another 25 per cent follow traditional indigenous beliefs, while Christians make up the remainder.

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## Family Values

Because 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 also challenge gender norms. A greater sense of freedom in Australia may also cause inter-generational or gender conflicts within families and communities.

### **Family**

The family unit is an integral part of Sudanese society and community life. Western notions of nuclear family do not exist in Sudan as Sudanese customs and traditions are intrinsically linked to extended family. The family includes grandparents, mothers, fathers, children, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews and nieces<sup>1</sup>.

The complexity and importance of extended family ties mean that many Sudanese in Australia will feel obligated to propose entry, or send money back to support relatives who seem quite distant by Australian definitions.

### **Relationships and marriage**

In Sudan the legal age for marriage is 18 although in rural areas it is not uncommon for girls to be requested by a suitor at an earlier age. The suitor pays part of the dowry until the girl can legally marry. The age at which people marry varies according to region and tribe.

Marriage in Sudan establishes an alliance between two families which makes divorce for women very difficult as she usually has to gain support from her family. Divorce is not common in Sudanese culture and is regarded as divisive to communities. Elderly members of the family will normally try to resolve marital disputes before divorce or separation is considered.

Sudanese values are generally conservative with regard to public displays of affection. Courting is usually secretive and public displays of affects.

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## **Role of men and women**

In Sudan men are expected to be the breadwinners, the head of the household and to provide for and protect their immediate family as well as extended family. In rural areas where livestock is the main source of wealth, men are expected to head and attend the cattle and will not usually assist the woman with household duties.

Women in rural areas are primarily responsible for caring for the family and maintaining the household. In areas of conflict and in refugee camps, many women become the family breadwinner as many men have either been killed fled so they are not killed or have joined opposition armed forces.

In urban areas the roles of women and men have started to change. Both men and women may work and so the men may assist with domestic duties previously assigned to the woman.

## **Children and childcare**

Children are a shared responsibility within Sudanese communities. Extended family members, particularly grandparents and uncles, may play a prominent role in the childcare and disciplining process. It is common for people to take in their nieces and nephews and bring them up with their own children. This is important to note because the Sudanese interpretation of what constitutes a family differs greatly from Western notions.

The community is seen as the 'broader' family and as such gives anyone the right to challenge a child's misbehaviour. For example, in Dinka community everybody, not only parents and relatives, is responsible for disciplining children.

Caning, smacking and skin pinching (practised by women only) are acceptable and regarded as part of the child-rearing process.

## **The elderly**

In Sudan elderly people are highly respected and regarded as custodians of the community. They are a source of family oral history and reconcile conflicting parties, bless marriages, and lead their communities. They are considered to be the backbone of the family and wider community. There are no special services for the elderly in Sudan. The wider community take care of their elderly until death.

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## Education and Employment

### **Education**

People are very aware of the importance of education. The civil war and constant displacement of people have created a situation where many people have had little or no chance of education. According to the United Nations Human Development Report (HDR) adult illiteracy levels in Sudan in 2007 were 39.1%.

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. Many will have limited English skills and will require interpreting services and English instruction.

### **Occupations**

The dominant source of employment in Sudan is subsistence farming. In urban areas there are two main streams of employment; people employed in the public sector (for example, local government authorities, police, and armed forces) and people employed in the private sector (for example, private companies, small businesses and shops).

## The Sudanese in Australia

In 2011 the ABS reported that there were 19,369 people born in Sudan living in Australia. This suggested that there are approximately 25,000 Sudanese born people currently living in Australia.

## Pre-arrival experiences

Recently arrived Sudanese refugees are victims of the second civil war between the north and the south. Many entrants have been living in refugee camps in surrounding countries such as the Kakuma and Dadaab camps in Kenya, camps around Gambella in



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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 since the end of the civil war in 2005 but they face immense challenges. Infrastructure already suffering years of neglect took a battering during the 21 years of civil war and the southern region cannot cope with the immediate return of all its refugees and internally displaced persons. The presence of land mines in much of the region is a further complication, as well as continued violence in border areas and near Darfur.

## The Sudanese Community in Shepparton

### *Population*

The Sudanese community in Shepparton began to establish from mid-2006 through secondary migration. Shepparton offered seasonal work in agriculture, which many took up while others felt that city life was too busy and came to Shepparton in search for a quieter place to live.

In July 2007 there were estimated to be 15 Sudanese families (80 to 90 people) living in the Shepparton area. By March 2008 this estimate had grown to 38 families, comprising of 38 women, 37 men, 194 children and 20 eighteen years+ young people, totalling 284 individuals.

In May 2010 the number of Sudanese living in Shepparton was estimated to be approximately 700.

In June 2013 the Sudanese community in Shepparton comprises 130 families totalling approximately 1000 people. The community has issues with transience as people move backwards and forwards between Melbourne, Sydney and Shepparton. It is estimated that two thirds of the total Sudanese community in Shepparton originate from South Sudan

There was no significant growth in the community during last two years and there were approximately 1,050 Sudanese and South Sudanese people living in Shepparton in 2015.

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### *Languages*

In Shepparton the main languages spoken by the Sudanese are English, Dinka and Arabic.

### *Education*

Most of the Sudanese adults in Shepparton have completed their primary education and some have attended high school. Some adults however may have not had any schooling.

### *Employment*

Members of the Sudanese community in Shepparton have a variety of work experience. For those who lived in camps, the majority were unable to continue their former employment and worked as peasant farmers.

It is highly likely that entrants 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. Those who do have formal qualifications may find they are not recognised in Australia.

Some of the jobs undertaken by the Sudanese in Shepparton include dairy farming, community services, nursing, teaching, laundry and seasonal work.

### *Health*

The Sudanese people of Shepparton are generally in very good health. Some Sudanese may be unfamiliar with a formal health system, western-style medicine and being treated by a doctor of the opposite gender.

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## **Contacts**

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## **Issues**

### **Community Leadership**

Given the educational background and language skills of many Sudanese; finding people with the skills and training to adopt leadership positions is a challenge and places great pressures on the leadership groups. This creates a vacuum and results in limited community activities and potential disengagement. The community identifies the need for a meeting space to support the community and to some extent African House is meeting this need.

As the community evolves it is considered important that the leadership groups remain consultative, inclusive to support the community to be independent and autonomous

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## Community Connectedness

The community has experienced great change in both the settlement processes and through the Southern Sudan independence. There are perceived tensions between the North and South groups influenced by events in Sudan and the community identifies the need for events and activities to bring the community together.

## Intergenerational Change

The rapid changes occurring as a result of settlement and exposure to a new culture places added pressure on parents and young people. Parents are already under stress dealing with settlement and view with great suspicion the activities and values of their children believing the changes are significantly impacting on the traditional respect those parents expect.

The community is concerned that some young people may have a poor relationship with police and are struggling in school due to the inability of parents to assist with home work and assignments.

Provision of activities for young people is seen as a high priority as is the promotion of Sudanese culture as a means of maintaining a sense of community and identity.

Sudanese people are particularly proud of their culture and are committed to preserving it and the history of their resettlement journey. A group was formed by some of the Sudanese men in Shepparton who were part of the “Lost Boys” of Sudan. This group was formed with the aim of raising awareness about the issues in Sudan amongst the mainstream Australian community. It was also formed to ensure the unity of the Lost Boys.

On occasion Family violence has occurred and come to the attention of Victoria Police and Child Protection although the level of incidence is well below the occurrence in the mainstream community which suggests an issue of under reporting.

When these issues occur Community Leaders are the first response and other authorities will become involved if the threat increases.

The community identifies contributing factors to family violence as:

- Culture shock from adapting to a new way of life.
- Differing systems from Sudan to Australia.
- Family frustration at the loss of culture, language and tradition as younger generation assimilates to Australian culture and systems.
- Loss of parental influence.
- Lack of knowledge about supports and assistance if family violence is an issue.

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All new arrival communities have expressed concern at their lack of knowledge or understanding of the Child Protection systems which they view as more favourable to their children and do not respect the rights of families. They are seeking more information on the capacity to discipline children and impose family curfews. There is concern that children who leave the family home bring shame to the family and community.

The Sudanese people are very giving with their time, particularly when it comes to informing and raising awareness about their culture and history. The community see that sharing their culture and generating understanding amongst the mainstream community, will help to facilitate the preservation of their culture and improve the quality of service delivery for people from CALD communities.

## **Understanding Australian Systems**

Education levels and language skills are seen as a barrier to Sudanese accessing appropriate services and understanding the Australian systems and laws such as criminal, civil and local government laws.

## **Youth Activities**

The males are generally socially active in the Sudanese community. Many are engaged in sport and/or involved with the Sudanese Youth Association.

In Shepparton, young Sudanese female are noticeably less active outside of the home. They are generally not engaged in any sports or in other activities outside of the home or school. It has been suggested this reflects the wishes of their parents whom do not believe that any culturally appropriate activities are available to young Sudanese girls in Shepparton

## **Language**

Although most Sudanese people have undertaken 510 hours of government funded English classes, English proficiency continues to be an issue even after completing these hours. A lack of English skills is a significant barrier for many of the Sudanese people to gain employment and access mainstream services. It also has a significant bearing on individuals to study and pass the Australian Citizenship Test.

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The community has identified a need for increased English language training linked to day to day activities and vocational training.

## **Housing**

Housing shortages is an issue faced by the mainstream public and the Sudanese people in Shepparton are not exempt from being affected by this issue. A lack of appropriate accommodation impacts significantly on the ability of new arrivals to move through the settlement process. As many families are large compared to Australian standards (up to 7 children) finding housing is particularly difficult. Ability to access public transport can be a factor in restricting the options available when searching for accommodation.

The challenge of applying for private rental without a rental history was described as a community problem as was the perception of discrimination and assumption by property managers that large families will cause damage to rental properties. Language was seen as a barrier to accessing rental properties and all communities are seeking further information on rights and responsibilities in the public and private rental systems.

## **Communication**

The best form of communication was through the leaders and holding information sessions. These sessions could include Australian culture, Family Law, violence, career pathways, health, computer literacy, Centrelink, Medicare, purchasing property, consumer rights, local government, civil and criminal law and specific training courses.

## **Education**

Parents indicate a concern that the school system does not adequately involve them in the school processes and that the schools could be more culturally appropriate and inclusive. Language is a huge barrier for parents as is literacy and parental education as they find it difficult to assist their children with studies and homework.

There is concern that young people are dropping out of school and becoming disengaged from their community.

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## References

Department of Immigration and Citizenship <http://www.immi.gov.au>

United Nations Human Development Report <http://hdr.undp.org/en/>

Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)

Darfur Australia Network <http://www.darfuraustralia.org/darfur/background>

Issues raised in community consultation in conjunction with GO TAFE, Victoria Police, Department of Justice & Regulation and Department Health and Human Services.