



Until we are all equal

Holding on through Conflict

An analysis of key aspects of sponsored children's lives before and during the current conflict in Sudan

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An analysis of key aspects of sponsored children's lives before and during the current conflict in Sudan

1. Summary

Sudan's conflict has changed sponsored children's lives in different and unexpected ways. Based on long-term data from over 80 sponsorship communities in the states of Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan, this analysis shows a complex situation: resilience in the face of war in some places, decline in others, and clear regional differences. Formal education attendance has mostly remained stable, and in some areas even improved, despite the ongoing conflict. While there is no evidence of causality linked to Plan's ongoing sponsorship work in the areas, it would be fair to argue that the long term presence of Plan, ongoing engagement with sponsored children and education projects among other things has contributed to this. However, beneath this seeming stability, unsurprisingly warning signs remain that progress remains fragile and susceptible to decline. In Kassala, child health outcomes have worsened, and access to safe water sources has decreased sharply since the start of the conflict compared to a similar period before the onset of war. Importantly, marriage as a reason for school dropout has notably risen among adolescent girls – a staggering 1.6 times increase than before the war. In contrast, North Kordofan shows improvements in health and water access. However, these results should be interpreted cautiously as the sample of participants interviewed during the war was smaller. At the same time, the total number of children with disabilities has increased across all regions, indicating either greater vulnerability or better identification of disabilities during the crisis.

Together, these findings present a story not of uniform decline, but of divergence: areas affected by the same national conflict are experiencing very different development outcomes for sponsored children. The patterns highlighted raise important questions about protection, household coping strategies, gender impacts, and the long-term effects of ongoing instability. The following analysis starts to address these questions but should be supplemented with more in-depth investigation.

2. Plan International's work in Sudan

Plan International Sudan has been working in Sudan for more than 40 years and currently maintains an operational presence in three states - Kassala, White Nile (Guli) and North Kordofan. In addition to this there are special operations in the North Darfur region. This footprint has been augmented by partner led emergency responses in East and West Darfur, South Kordofan and the Red Sea. Plan International is known nationally as one of the leading child rights organisations and its long-term commitment to communities has helped it gain the trust and confidence of both communities and the Sudanese authorities alike.

- Guli is located in the Western part of central Sudan, which has been hit hard by the ongoing conflict. Since April 2023, fighting in Darfur has forced over 3 million people to flee their homes. Some states, like West and Central Darfur, have seen especially high levels of violence and population shifts¹.
- Kassala State in eastern Sudan shares borders with Eritrea and Ethiopia and has long supported large refugee populations. The state is home to over 100,000 Eritrean refugees living in camps like Shagarab and in nearby communities. Since the onset of war in 2023, Kassala has also welcomed tens of thousands of internally displaced people escaping violence in Khartoum and other conflict-affected areas².
- North Kordofan is situated in central Sudan. It has faced insecurity and disruptions tied to the conflict, largely because of its key position on transport routes that connect Khartoum to Darfur. The state is home to hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people. Many were forced to leave during past conflicts, while others have been displaced by the ongoing war³.

Plan International delivers a range of both humanitarian and development programmes and projects in Sudan targeted at sponsored children and their communities and well as non-sponsored children. These projects align to the Sudan Country Strategy programme objectives which include a focus on early childhood development; freedom from violence; completion of formal and non-formal education; and delivering humanitarian responses to children and their communities amongst others. In the period that this analysis covers Plan Sudan delivered over 80 projects in the areas in which it operates. To give a sense of what these projects look like in practice, some of these delivered in the three states since 2020 include:

- *Access to Quality Education through Digital Learning*: delivered in partnership with UNICEF and the Federal and State Ministries of Education, the project is designed for out-of-school children who have never attended school, dropped out or those who cannot be mainstreamed into the normal education system without catching up the lessons that they lost. Digital learning is also targeting children enrolled in schools to improve learning outcomes. Aligned to the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2018-2022) the project supported the implementation of basic education priorities such as the realisation of increased access to education for out-of-school children and improving the quality of education.
- *Enhancing Girls and Boys Education, Youth and Women Capacities Building in Kassala*: developed to assist and support vulnerable children particularly girls to complete a formal or non-formal education; improve livelihoods and create economic opportunities for adolescent youth; and promote child protection, combat early marriage and FGM and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls.
- *Strengthening Child Rights and Girls' Empowerment*: which has focused on raising awareness of child rights and combatting violations of those rights; establishing early childhood centres; working with the communities on community-based child protection mechanisms and enhancing economic stability through village saving associations.
- *Providing life-saving protection to conflict-affected children in sponsorship communities*: providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable children, especially girls, in sponsorship communities affected by conflict and natural crises in Kassala, White Nile, and North Kordofan states. It included providing high-quality early care services, free, quick, adequate WASH services, gender-responsive training

¹ ACAPS. (2024). *Sudan: Conflict, displacement and humanitarian needs*.

² International Crisis Group. (2023). *Sudan's War and the Spread of Violence Beyond Khartoum*.

³ The UN and the crisis in Sudan (2024). <https://unric.org/en/the-un-and-the-crisis-in-sudan-jan-jun-2024>

opportunities, employment, and life skills, improving food availability, integrating gender-sensitive and market-oriented education, and addressing sexual violence and HIV prevention and care.

3. Sampling and analytical approach

The data used in this analysis comes from Plan International's sponsorship data and relates specifically to sponsored children in Sudan between 2020 and 2025. Every sponsored child is interviewed at enrolment and then followed up annually, creating repeated observations of their development outcomes over time⁴. To assess changes associated with the conflict, this report compares aggregated data for sponsored children interviewed in two time periods: the three years before the onset of the war (2020, 2021 and 2022) and the three years after (2023, 2024 and 2025). Percentages are calculated relative to the total number of children interviewed within each category and time period. This approach allows for consistent comparison across years while accounting for fluctuations in sample size. Therefore, the results reflect differences in the composition and reported outcomes of the sponsored child population interviewed in each period.

Within Sudan, the data analysed here primarily covers sponsorship areas in Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan. Sponsorship operations are fully active in Kassala and Guli. In North Kordofan, operations are partially active, with activities suspended in 5 out of 15 sponsorship communities since 2023 due to security constraints. Overall, the dataset covers 83 out of 88 sponsorship communities in Sudan.

For most indicators analysed in this report (health, disability, sanitation), the sample includes all sponsored children aged 0–18 years who were interviewed during the relevant three-year periods. The analysis of formal education attendance focuses on children aged 6–18 years, recognising that children aged 0–5 years may not yet be expected to attend formal schooling. For marriage as a reason for not attending formal education, the analysis is restricted to girls aged 11–18 years, as this is the age group for which marriage reporting is relevant.

The results highlight trends within the sponsored child population in Sudan rather than national estimates or an individual level, longitudinal analysis, offering a consistent snapshot of how war conditions are affecting sponsored children.

4. Findings

4.1 Education before and after the onset of war

Across the three regions of Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan combined, a total of 56,798 children were interviewed in the three years before the war, including 38,910 girls and 17,888 boys. Among them, 54,391 children (95.8%) were recorded as attending formal education, including 37,198 girls and 17,193 boys. A total of 2,376 children (4.2%) were recorded as not attending formal education, including 1,689 girls and 687 boys, while 31 children (0.05%) did not provide a response.

During the three years after the onset of the war, the total number of children interviewed increased to 68,113 children, including 47,251 girls and 20,862 boys. Among them, 66,204 children (97.2%) were recorded as attending formal education, including 45,835 girls and

⁴ These interviews are securely stored in a centralised database and coded to ensure the anonymity of children and their families.

20,369 boys. A total of 1,878 children (2.8%) were recorded as not attending formal education, including 1,415 girls and 463 boys, while 3 children (0.004%) did not provide a response.

These results indicate that formal education participation remained very high across the three regions and increased slightly during the war period. The share of children recorded as not attending formal education declined from 4.2% before the war to 2.8% during the conflict period, while the proportion attending formal schooling rose from 95.8% to 97.2%. Non-response rates remained extremely low in both periods.

While there is no direct evidence to attribute these results to Plan International’s work, its prolonged presence, education programming, and regular interaction with sponsored children may all play a part, alongside other contextual factors, in supporting children to continue attending school.

These overall patterns, however, may mask important regional differences, which become clearer when examining the results for Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan separately.

4.2 Education before and during the war per region

Guli

The data from Guli show high levels of formal education both before and after the onset of the war. In the three pre-war years, a total of 19,056 girls and 9,434 boys were recorded in the dataset. Of these, 96.7% of girls (18,429) and 96.5% of boys (9,107) were recorded as being in formal education (Figure 1).

During the three years of war, the total sample includes 22,037 girls and 11,478 boys. Within this group, 99.7% of girls (21,975) and 99.7% of boys (11,441) were recorded as being in formal education.

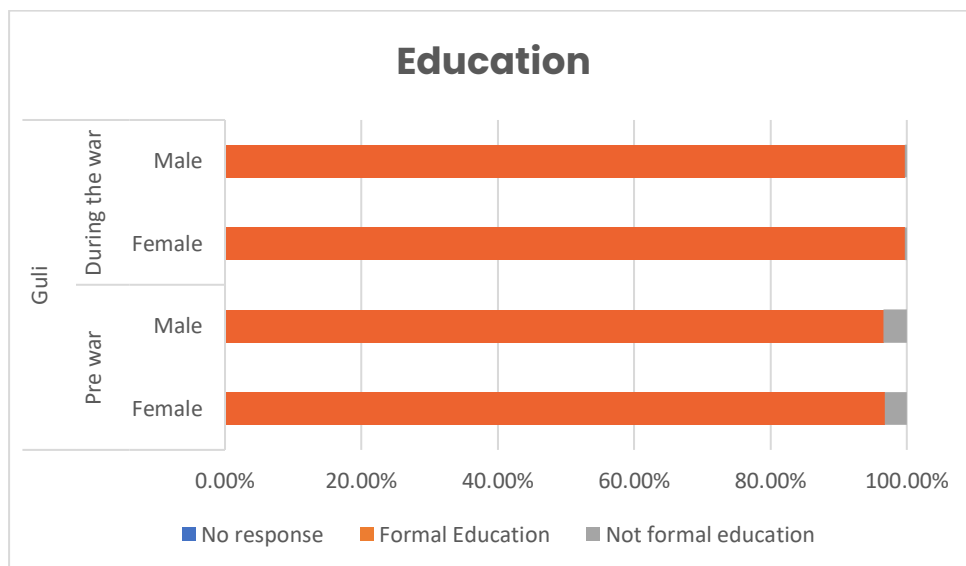


Figure 1: Formal education attendance by gender before and during the war in Guli

This represents a modest increase — approximately 1.03 times higher than pre-war levels — while the share of children recorded as not in formal education declined from around 3.3–3.4% pre-war (624 girls and 325 boys) to 0.3% during the war period (62 girls and 37 boys). The results suggest that, within the sponsored child population in Guli, formal school participation

remained very high and was sustained — and even slightly strengthened — during the conflict period.

North Kordofan

In North Kordofan, formal education levels were high before the war and increased further during the war period (Figure 2). Pre-war, 95.81% of girls (5,101) and 95.85% of boys (2,727) were recorded in formal education. During the war, this rose to 98.33% of girls (4,606) and 98.10% of boys (2,301). At the same time, the share of children not in formal education declined from roughly 4% pre-war to below 2% during the war for both genders.

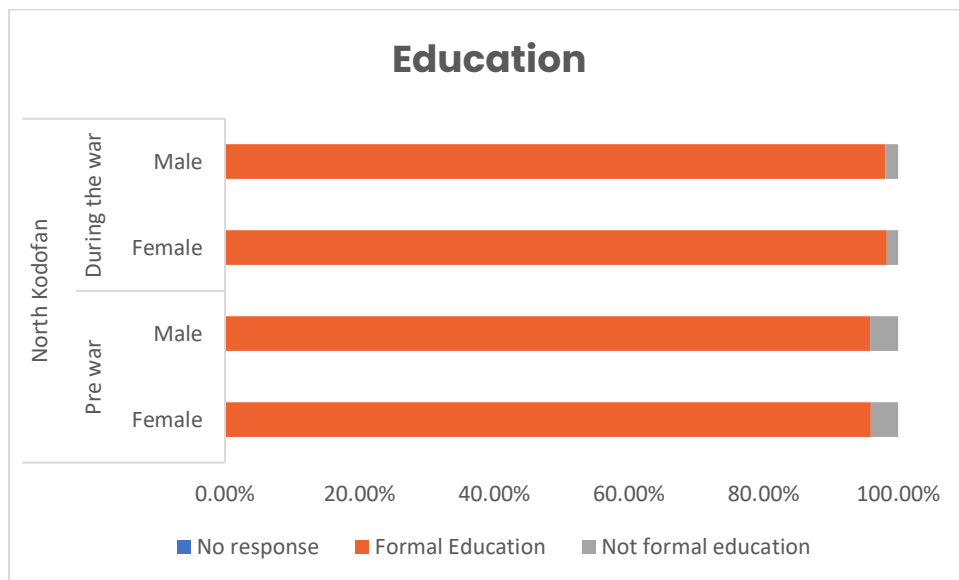


Figure 2: Formal education attendance by gender before and during the war in North Kordofan

These results suggest that, within the sponsored child population in North Kordofan, formal school participation remained high and improved slightly during the conflict period.

Kassala

In Kassala, formal school participation remained high both before and during the war, although a slight deterioration is visible after the onset of the conflict (Figure 3). In the three pre-war years, a total of 14,530 girls and 5,609 boys were recorded in the dataset. Of these, 94.07% of girls (13,668) and 95.54% of boys (5,359) were recorded as being in formal education, while 5.83% of girls (847) and 4.35% of boys (244) were recorded as not attending formal education.

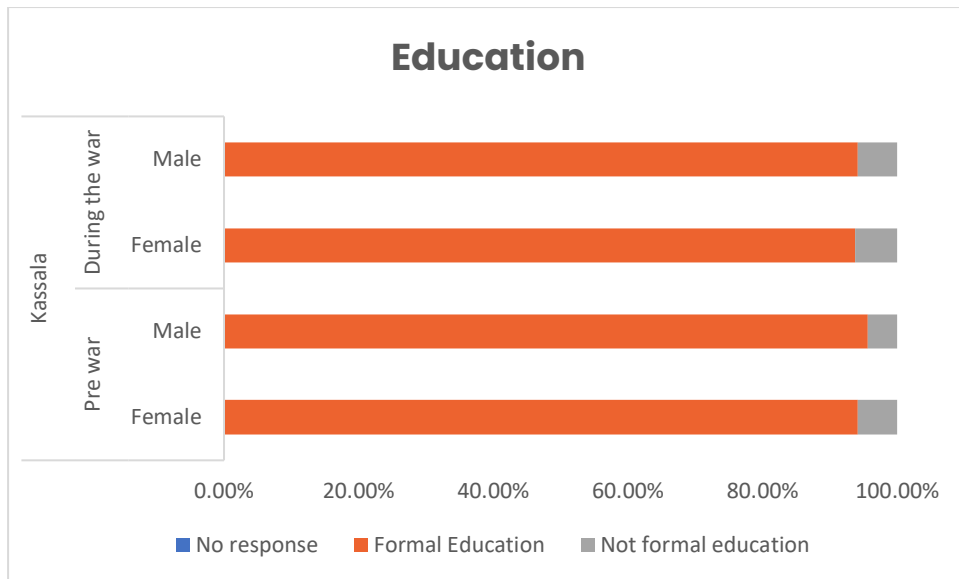


Figure 3: Formal education attendance by gender before and during the war in Kassala

During the three war years, the total sample increased to 20,530 girls and 7,039 boys. Within this group, 93.78% of girls (19,254) and 94.15% of boys (6,627) were recorded as being in formal education. At the same time, the share recorded as not attending formal education increased to 6.21% of girls (1,275) and 5.84% of boys (411).

Although the changes in formal education attendance are not dramatic, they suggest a modest but measurable erosion in formal school participation during the war period in Kassala.

4.3 Marriage as a reason not to attend formal education before and during the war

Across the three regions of Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan combined, a total of 15,167 girls aged 11–18 were interviewed in the three years before the war. Among them, 62 girls reported marriage as the reason for not attending formal education, representing 0.41% of the girls interviewed during that period. During the three years after the onset of the war, the number of girls interviewed increased to 23,247. Within this larger sample, 153 girls reported marriage as the reason for not attending formal education, representing 0.66% of the girls interviewed (Figure 4).

% of girls not attending formal education due to marriage relative to the total number of girls interviewed

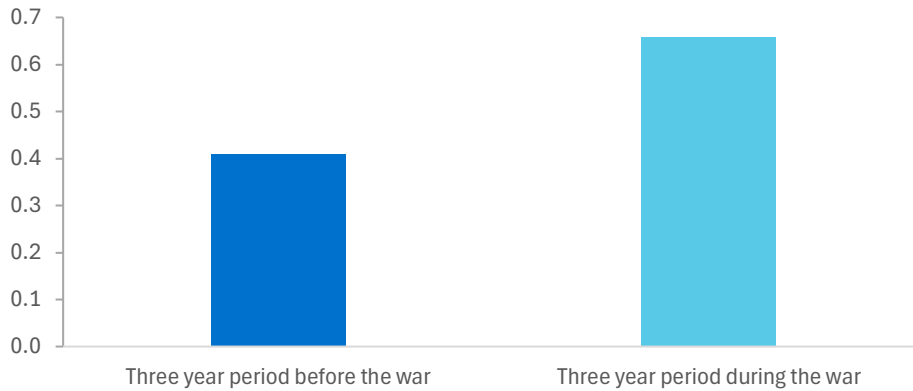


Figure 4: % of girls not attending formal education due to marriage relative to the total number of girls interviewed

Overall, both the absolute number and the proportion of girls citing marriage as a reason for school non-attendance increased during the conflict period, rising 1.6 times from 0.41% before the war to 0.66% during the war. This increase suggests that marriage-related school exclusion among adolescent girls became more frequent during the conflict period across the regions studied.

Marriage as a reason for school non-attendance: a closer look at girls out of school

When considering only girls who were recorded as not attending formal education, marriage represents a more substantial share of the reasons reported. In the three years before the war, 562 girls were recorded as not attending formal education, among whom 62 girls reported marriage as the reason, representing 11.03% of girls out of school. During the three years after the onset of the war, the total number of girls recorded as not attending formal education declined slightly to 483 girls. However, within this group, 153 girls reported marriage as the reason for not attending school, representing 31.68% of girls out of school (Figure 5).

% of girls not attending formal education due to marriage relative to total number of girls not attending formal education

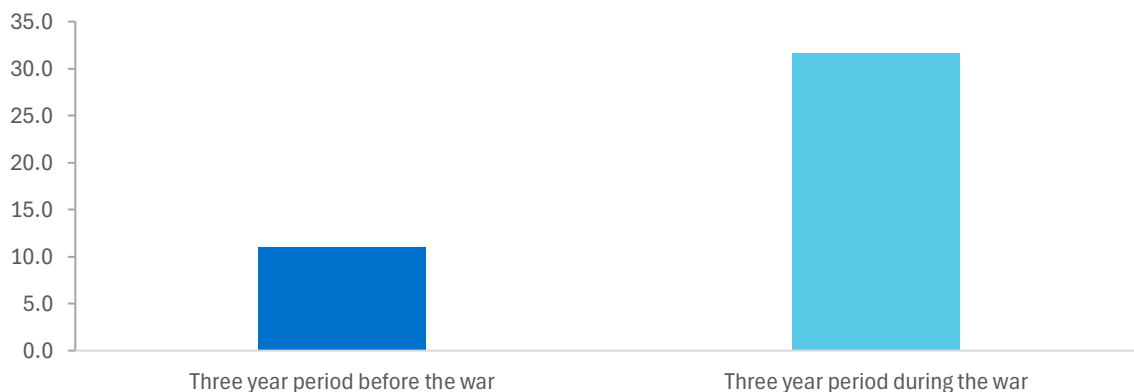


Figure 5: % of girls not attending formal education due to marriage relative to the total number of girls not attending formal education

Overall, while the total number of girls not attending school decreased slightly during the conflict period, marriage accounted for a substantially larger share of the reasons for school non-attendance, rising 3 times from 11.03% to 31.68%. This indicates that marriage became a more prominent factor among the reasons reported for girls being out of formal education during the war period across the regions studied.

Considered together, these two levels of analyses indicate that marriage accounts for a growing share of the reasons reported by girls who are not attending formal education during the conflict period.

4.4 Marriage as a reason not to attend formal education before and during the war per region

Guli

Marriage does not appear to be a considerable driver of school exclusion. Out of 8,201 interviewed pre-war, 2 girls (0.02%) cited marriage being the reason for non-attendance. During the war period, among 12,228 girls interviewed, no girls (0%) reported marriage as the reason not to attend formal education.

North of Kordofan

In North Kordofan, marriage does not increase as a reason for school non-attendance during the war period. Pre-war, 11 out of 1,668 girls in total (0.66%) cited marriage as the reason for not attending formal education. During the war, 10 out of 2,106 girls (0.47%) reported the same. While the total number of girls increased, the proportion citing marriage declined slightly, indicating no evidence of a war-driven rise in marriage-related school exclusion in this region.

Kassala

In Kassala, child marriage plays a considerable more visible role in the reasoning provided for school non-attendance. Pre-war, out of 5,298 girls in total, 49 girls (0.92%) cited marriage as the reason. During the war period, out of 8,913 sponsored girls interviewed, 143 girls (1.60%) reported marriage as the reason not to be in formal education (Figure 6).

% girls not attending formal education due to marriage relative to the total number of girls interviewed

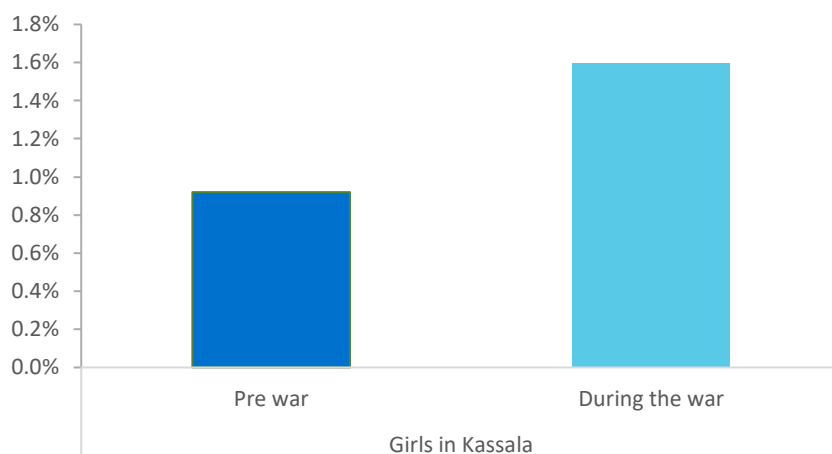


Figure 6: % of girls not attending formal education due to marriage relative to the total number of girls interviewed in Kassala

This represents both an increase in absolute numbers (from 49 to 143 girls) and a rise in proportion (from 0.92% to 1.60%) equivalent to 1.6 times higher, suggesting that marriage-related school exclusion has intensified during the conflict period in Kassala.

A closer look at girls out of school per region

In Kassala and North Kordofan, marriage represents a notable share of the reasons reported by girls who are out of school, although the scale of the problem differs between the two regions.

In North Kordofan, the number of girls recorded as not attending formal education declined from 45 girls before the war to 32 during the war period. However, within this smaller group, the share citing marriage increased from 24.44% (11 girls) before the war to 31.25% (10 girls) during the war period — an increase of 1.3 times. This indicates that marriage accounts for a growing proportion of the reasons reported by girls who are out of school, even though the total number of girls affected remains relatively small.

In Kassala, both the number of girls out of school and the number citing marriage increased during the conflict period. Before the war, 174 girls were recorded as not attending formal education, among whom 49 girls cited marriage as the reason, representing 28.16% of girls out of school. During the war period, the number of girls recorded as not attending school increased to 444 girls, among whom 143 girls reported marriage as the reason, representing 32.21% of girls out of school. This represents an increase of 1.15 times in the share of girls citing marriage, alongside a substantial increase in the number of girls affected.

In contrast, in Guli marriage does not appear to be a significant driver of school non-attendance, either before the war or during the conflict period.

When considered alongside the analysis based on all girls interviewed, these findings show that marriage has become a more prominent reason among girls who are not attending formal education during the conflict period, particularly in Kassala.

4.5 Children with disabilities before and during the war

Across all regions, the proportion of children reported as disabled increased between the pre-war and war periods. In the three years before the war (2020–2022), a total of 80,119 children were interviewed, among whom 283 children were reported as disabled, representing an average of 94.3 children per year and 0.35% of the total sample. During the three years after the onset of the war (2023–2025), 78,623 children were interviewed, among whom 430 children were reported as disabled, representing an average of 143.3 children per year and 0.55% of the total sample (Figure 7).

Overall, both the absolute number of disabled children and their proportional share increased during the conflict period, rising 1.6 times from 0.35% before the war to 0.55% during the war.

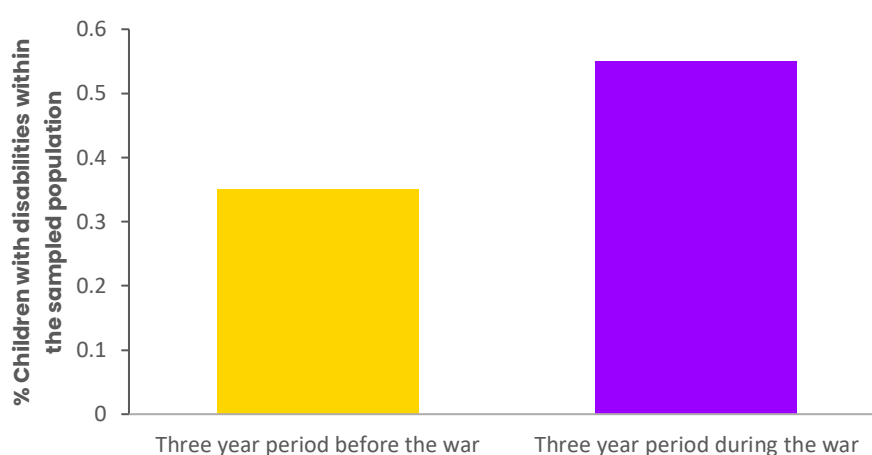


Figure 7: % Children with disabilities before and during the war - within the sampled population

4.6 Children with disabilities before and during the war per region

Guli

In Guli, the total number of children in the sample increased from 34,456 pre-war to 38,116 during the war. Within this population, the number of children with disabilities rose from 94 (0.27%) in the three years before the war to 148 (0.39%) in the three years after the onset of war. This represents both an absolute increase of 54 children and a proportional rise of approximately 1.4 times. The upward shift in both numbers and percentage suggests increased vulnerability, improved identification, and/or increased self reporting of children with disabilities during the conflict period (Figure 8).

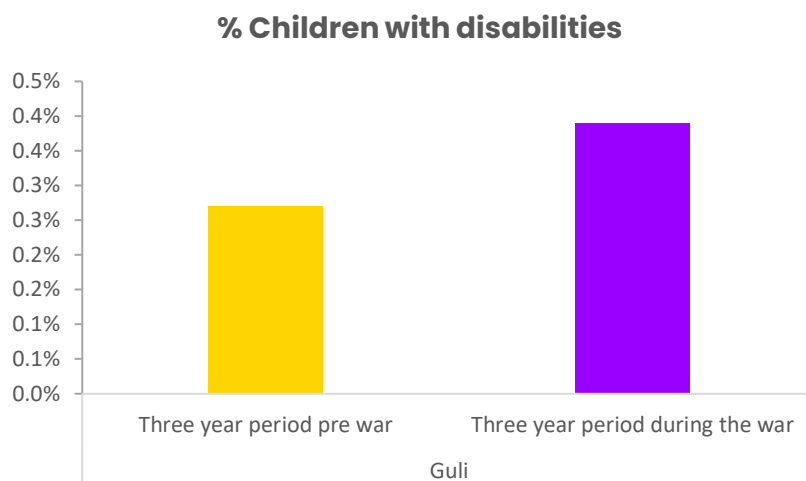


Figure 8: Children with disabilities before and during the war in Guli

Education and children with disabilities before and during the war

Before the war, out of a combined total of 94 children with disabilities (57 girls and 37 boys), 20 children were not attending formal education — 16 girls and 4 boys. After the onset of the war, the total number of children with disabilities increased to 148 (87 girls and 61 boys), but the number not attending formal education decreased to 9 children — 5 girls and 4 boys (Figure 9).

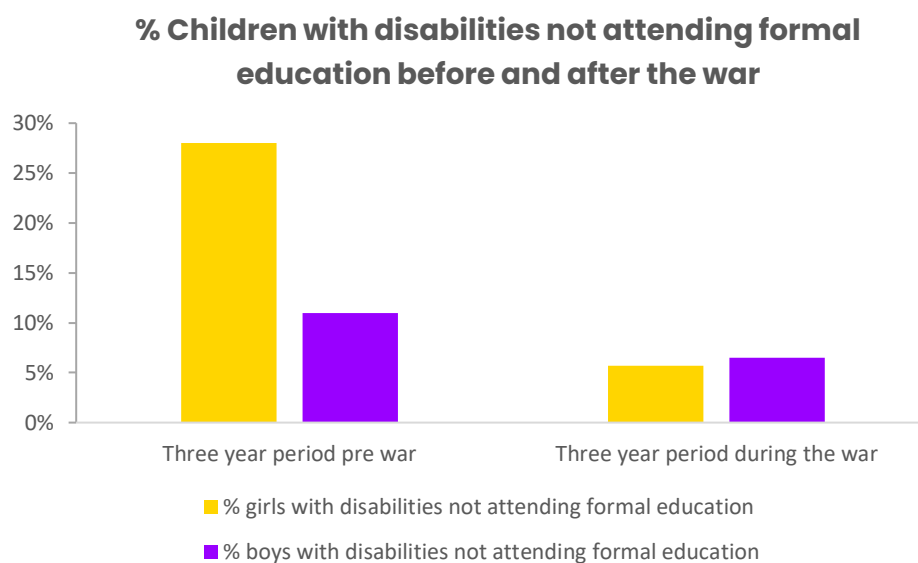


Figure 9: % Children with disabilities before and during the war by gender in Guli

This means that while the overall number of children with disabilities increased during the war period, the number excluded from formal education fell from 20 to 9 children, and the proportion out of school dropped substantially for girls and moderately for boys. The gender gap observed pre-war narrowed considerably during the war, with both girls and boys showing similar levels of school participation.

Overall, these results suggest improved formal school inclusion among children with disabilities during the war period within the sponsored population.

Kassala

In Kassala, the total sample increased from 27,940 pre-war to 31,717 during the war. The number of children with disabilities rose from 143 (0.51%) to 242 (0.76%). This is an increase of 99 children in absolute terms and approximately 1.5 times higher in proportional terms. The consistency between rising totals and rising percentages indicates a clear and substantial increase in the share of children with disabilities during the war period in Kassala (Figure 10).

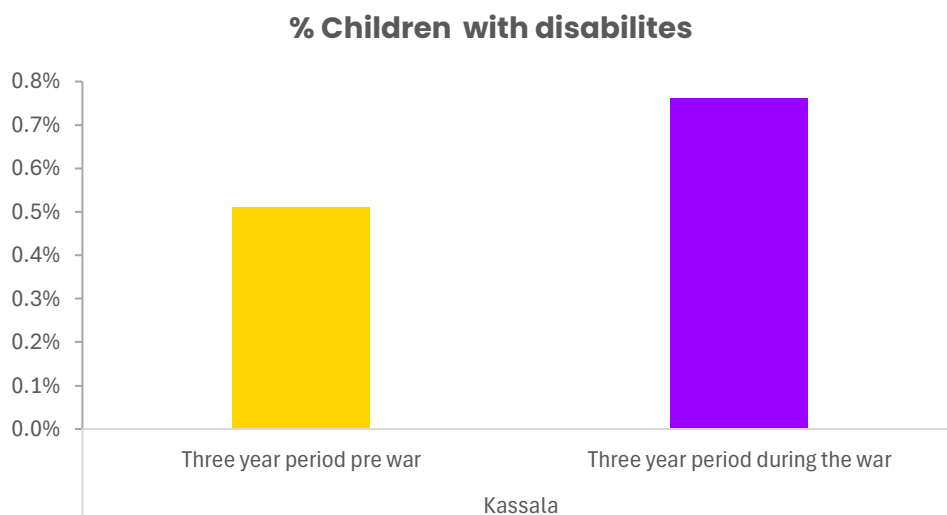


Figure 10: % Children with disabilities before and during the war in Kassala

Education and children with disabilities before and during the war

Before the war, out of a combined total of 143 children with disabilities (111 girls and 32 boys) in Kassala, 75 children were not attending formal education — 59 girls and 16 boys. This represented 53% of girls and 50% of boys. During the war period, the total number of children with disabilities increased substantially to 242 (153 girls and 89 boys). Of these, 118 children were not attending formal education, with 61 girls and 57 boys (Figure 11).

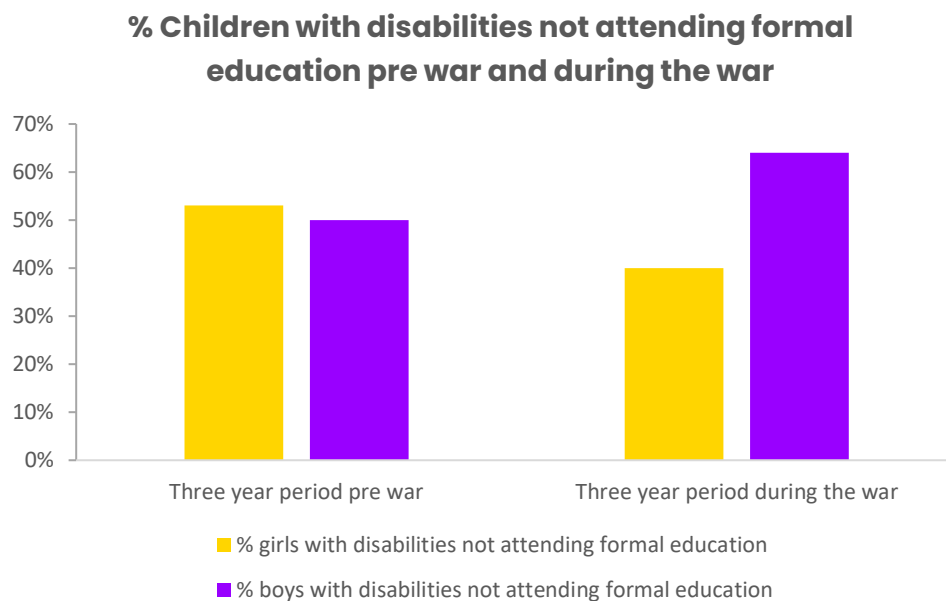


Figure 11: % Children with disabilities before and during the war by gender in Kassala

For girls, although the absolute number out of school increased slightly (from 59 to 61), the proportion declined from 53% to 40%, indicating improved school participation relative to the larger cohort.

For boys, both the absolute number (from 16 to 57) and the proportion (from 50% to 64%) increased significantly. This suggests a marked deterioration in school participation among boys with disabilities during the war period.

North Kodofan

In North Kordofan, the total number of children in the sample declined from 12,720 pre-war to 8,790 during the war. The number of children with disabilities decreased slightly from 46 to 40, yet the proportion increased from 0.36% to 0.46%. Although this reflects a reduction of 6 children in absolute terms, the sharper decline in total sample size results in a proportional increase of approximately 1.3 times. This indicates that children with disabilities represent a larger share of the sponsored population during the war period, despite the smaller overall cohort (Figure 12).

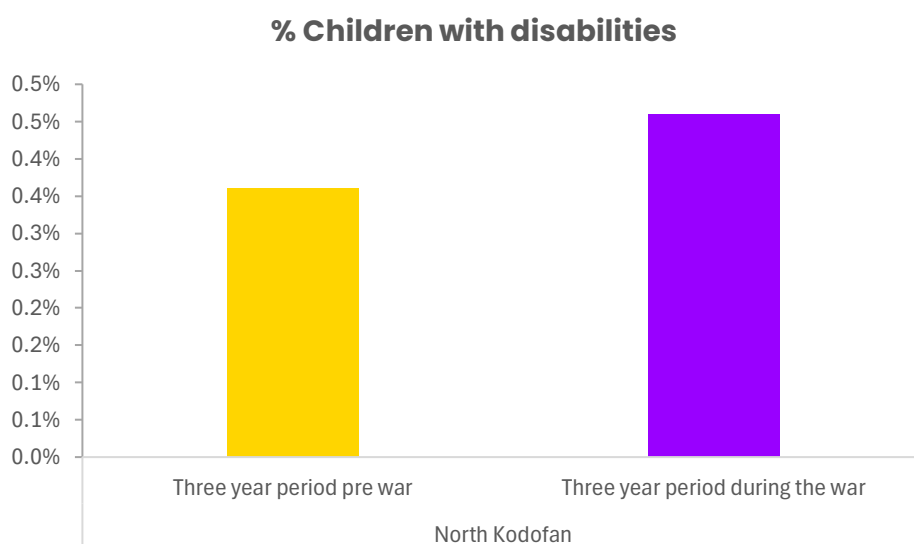


Figure 12: % Children with disabilities before and during the war in North Kordofan

The most pronounced increases occur in Kassala and Guli, where both absolute numbers and proportional shares rose. In North Kordofan, the share increased despite a decline in total enrolment.

Overall, the data show a consistent upward trend in the proportional representation of children with disabilities across sponsorship areas during the conflict period.

Education and children with disabilities before and during the war

Before the war, a total of 46 children with disabilities were recorded in North Kordofan, with 24 girls and 22 boys. Of these, 24 children were not attending formal education, representing more than half of the cohort. Specifically, 11 out of 24 girls (45.8%) and 13 out of 22 boys (60%) were not in formal schooling. This indicates that school exclusion among children with disabilities was already high prior to the conflict, particularly among boys. During the three years after the onset of the war, the total number of children with disabilities declined slightly to 40 children — 25 girls and 15 boys. Among them, 15 children were not attending formal education. This includes 13 out of 25 girls (52%) and 2 out of 15 boys (13.3%). See Figure 13.

% Children with disabilities not attending formal education pre war and during the war

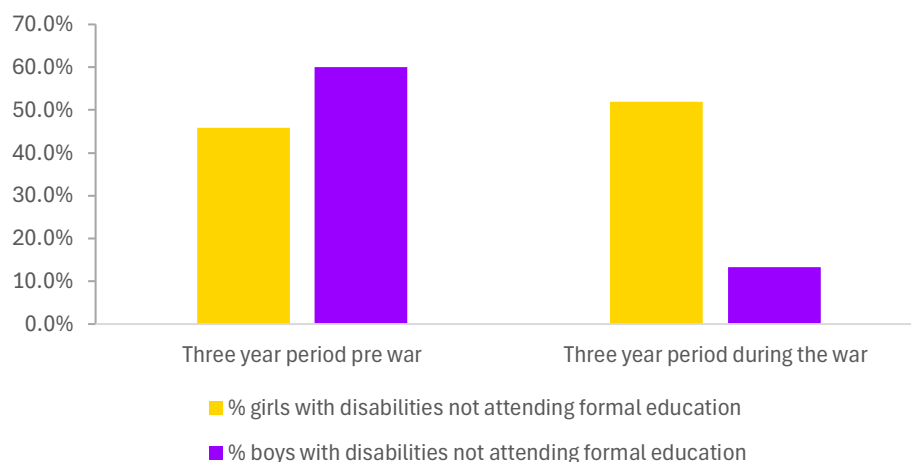


Figure 13: % Children with disabilities before and during the war by gender in North Kordofan

Overall, while the total number of children with disabilities decreased modestly (from 46 to 40), the number not attending formal education fell from 24 to 15 children. However, this overall reduction masks significant gender differences. For girls, both the absolute number (from 11 to 13) and the proportion (from 45.8% to 52%) out of school increased, indicating worsening exclusion. For boys, the opposite pattern is observed: the number out of school fell sharply from 13 to 2, and the proportion declined dramatically from 60% to 13.3%. In summary, while overall school exclusion among children with disabilities decreased in North Kordofan during the war period, participation improved substantially for boys but deteriorated for girls.

4.7 Health before and during the war

Across the three regions of Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan, a total of 76,116 children were interviewed in the three years before the war, including 52,424 girls and 23,692 boys. Among them, 448 children were reported as unhealthy, representing 0.59% of the total sample. This included 326 girls (0.62%) and 122 boys (0.52%).

During the three years after the onset of the war, a total of 78,623 children were interviewed, including 54,340 girls and 24,283 boys. Among them, 459 children were reported as unhealthy, representing 0.58% of the total sample. This included 337 girls (0.62%) and 122 boys (0.50%).

Overall, the absolute number of children reported as unhealthy increased slightly from 448 to 459, while the proportion of children reported as unhealthy remained broadly stable, declining marginally from 0.59% before the war to 0.58% during the war period. For girls, the share remained virtually unchanged at around 0.62%, while for boys it declined slightly from 0.52% to 0.50%.

These aggregated results suggest that reported child health status remained relatively stable across the sponsored population during the conflict period, although it is important to understand how this pattern may differ by region.

4.8 Health before and during the war per region

Guli

Before the war, a total of 35,456 children were interviewed in Guli, with 23,317 girls and 12,139 boys. Among them, 27 children were reported as unhealthy: 17 girls (0.07%) and 10 boys (0.08%).

During the three years after the onset of the war, the total sample increased to 38,116 children interviewed — 24,873 girls and 13,243 boys. Among them, 29 children were reported as unhealthy: 18 girls (0.07%) and 11 boys (0.08%).

Overall, both the absolute numbers (27 to 29) and the percentages remained largely stable. For girls, the share remained virtually unchanged (0.07% pre-war to 0.07% during the war). For boys, the proportion remained broadly similar (0.008% pre-war to 0.08% during the war). In Guli, there is therefore no substantial shift in reported child health status between the two periods.

Kassala

Before the war, a total of 27,940 children were interviewed in Kassala — 20,736 girls and 7,204 boys. Of these, 254 children were reported as unhealthy: 202 girls (0.97%) and 52 boys (0.72%). During the war period, the total increased to 31,717 children interviewed — 23,563 girls and 8,154 boys. The number reported as unhealthy rose to 390 children: 287 girls (1.22%) and 103 boys (1.26%). See Figure 14.

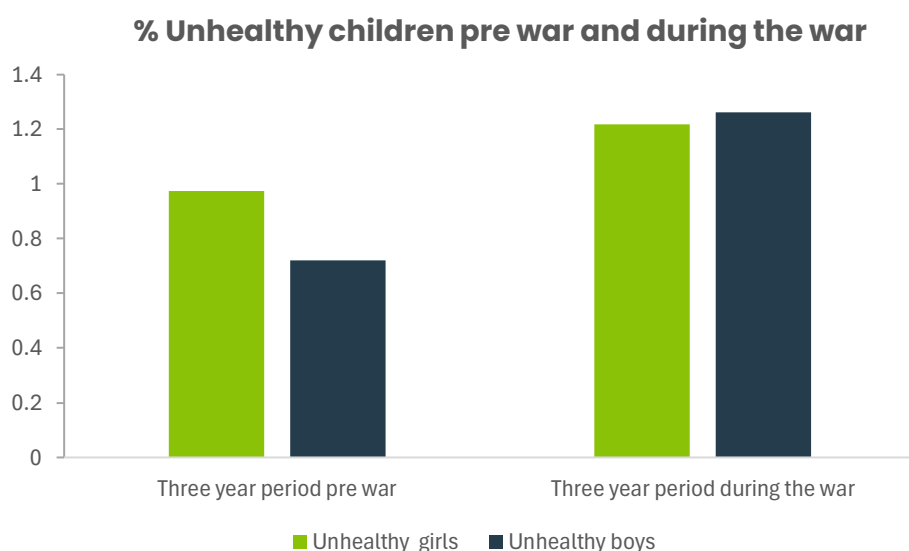


Figure 14: % Unhealthy children before and during the war by gender in Kassala

This represents a substantial increase in both absolute numbers (+136 children) and proportional terms. Among girls, the share increased from 0.97% to 1.22%. Among boys, the rise was even more pronounced, rising 1.7 times from 0.72% to 1.26%. Kassala therefore shows a clear deterioration in child health outcomes during the war period.

North Kordofan

Before the war, a total of 12,720 children were interviewed — 8,371 girls and 4,349 boys. Of these, 167 children were reported as unhealthy: 107 girls (1.28%) and 60 boys (1.38%). During the war period, the total declined to 8,790 children interviewed — 5,904 girls and 2,886 boys.

The number reported as unhealthy decreased to 40 children: 32 girls (0.54%) and 8 boys (0.28%). See Figure 15.

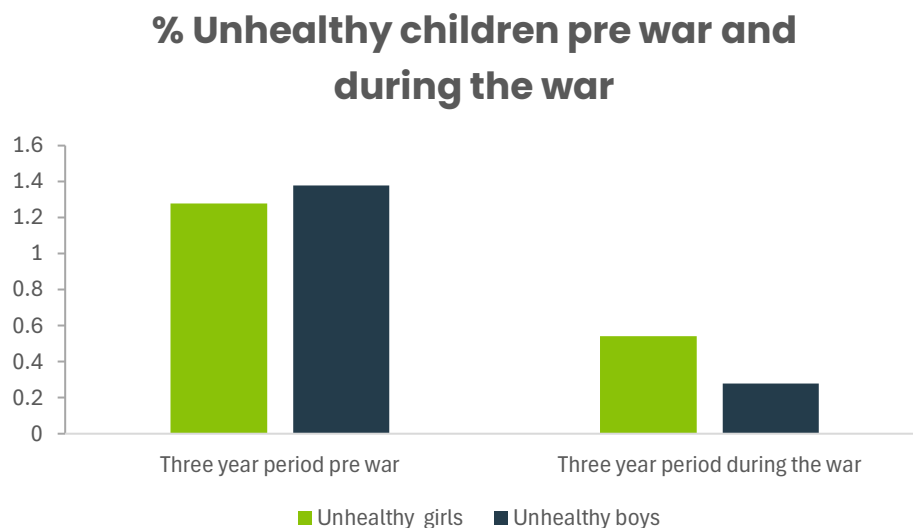


Figure 15: % Unhealthy children before and during the war by gender in North Kordofan

This represents both a reduction in absolute numbers (from 167 to 40 children) and a substantial proportional decline.

Unlike Kassala, North Kordofan shows a marked improvement in reported child health during the war period, although this coincides with a reduction in overall sample size.

4.9 Drinking water sources before and during the war

Across the three regions of Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan, access to unimproved water sources increased over the six-year period. In 2020, a total of 21,514 children were interviewed, among whom 7,257 children were reported as using unimproved water sources⁵, representing 33.73% of the total sample. In 2021, out of 25,661 children interviewed, 9,778 children (38.10%) were reported as relying on unimproved water sources. By 2022, the total number of children interviewed increased to 28,944, among whom 11,453 children (39.57%) were reported as using unimproved water sources (Figure 16).

During the conflict period, the share of children relying on unimproved water sources continued to rise. In 2023, 12,169 children (41.59%) out of 29,260 interviewed were reported as using unimproved water sources. In 2024, 11,438 children (44.75%) out of 25,558 interviewed relied on unimproved water sources, and in 2025, 10,606 children (44.55%) out of 23,805 interviewed were reported as using unimproved water sources (Figure 16).

⁵ Unimproved water sources refers to water access through dug well, water from spring, tanker-truck, cart with small tank/drum and bottled water. By contrast improved water sources refer to water piped into dwelling; piped into compound, yard or plot; piped to neighbour; public tap/standpipe and tube well, borehole.

% Children relying on unimproved water sources

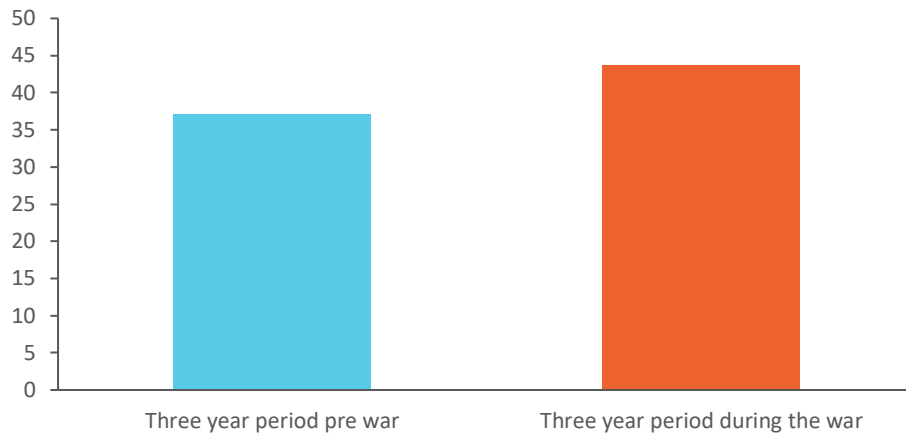


Figure 16: % children relying on unimproved water sources before and during the war

Overall, the results show a substantial increase in the share of children relying on unimproved water sources. The proportion rose by around 11 percentage points, rising 1.2 times from 33.7% in 2020 to about 44.6% by 2025, meaning that more than four in ten children interviewed were drinking water from unimproved sources during the later years of the conflict period. This trend suggests a deterioration in water access conditions across the sponsored child population during the war period.

4.10 Drinking water sources before and during the war per region

Guli

Before the war, a total of 35,456 children were interviewed in Guli, with 23,317 girls and 12,139 boys. Of these, 16,937 children were reported as using unimproved water sources: 11,424 girls (48.99%) and 5,513 boys (45.42%). During the three years after the onset of the war, the total increased to 38,116 children interviewed, with 24,873 girls and 13,243 boys. Among them, 19,976 children were reported as using unimproved water sources: 13,363 girls (53.72%) and 6,613 boys (49.94%). See figure 17.

% Access to unimproved water sources reported by children pre war and during the war

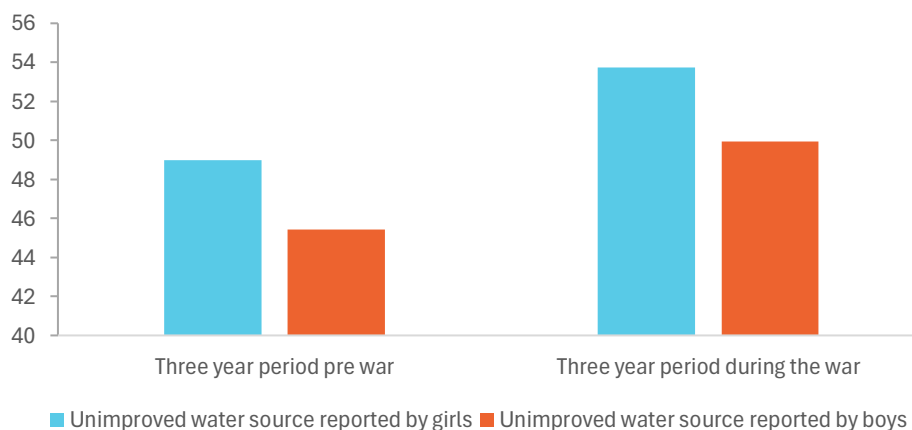


Figure 17: % Access to unimproved water sources before and during the war by gender in Guli

Overall, both the absolute number and the proportion of children with unimproved access to water increased during the war period. For girls, the share rose from 48.99% to 53.72%. For boys, it increased from 45.42% to 49.94%. This suggests a clear deterioration in water access conditions in Guli during the conflict period.

Kassala

Before the war, 27,940 children were interviewed in Kassala, with 20,736 girls and 7,204 boys. Of these, 11,178 children were reported as using unimproved water sources facilities: 9,085 girls (43.81%) and 2,093 boys (29.05%). During the war period, the total increased to 31,717 children interviewed, with 23,563 girls and 8,154 boys. The number using unimproved water sources rose to 14,005 children: 11,330 girls (48.08%) and 2,675 boys (32.81%). See Figure 18.

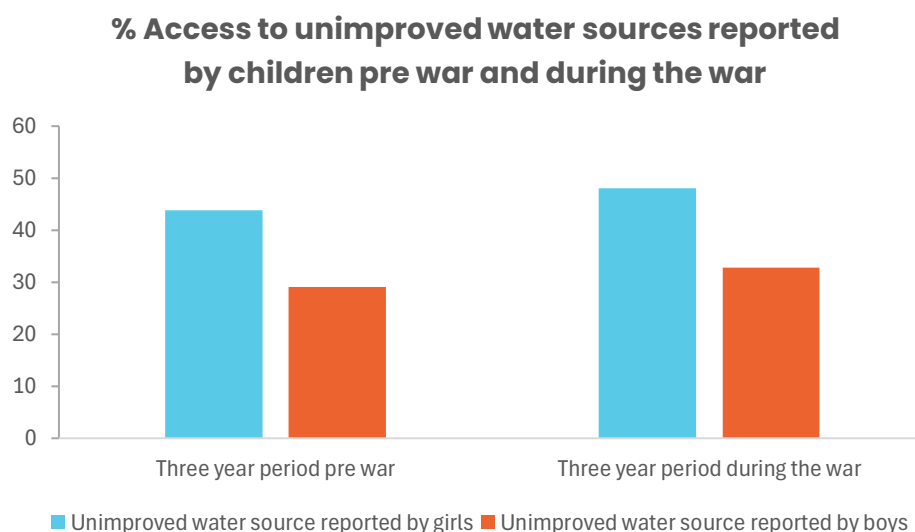


Figure 18: % Access to unimproved water sources before and during the war by gender in Kassala

This represents a substantial increase in both absolute numbers (+2,827 children) and proportional terms. Among girls, the share increased from 43.81% to 48.08%. Among boys, it rose from 29.05% to 32.81%. Kassala therefore shows a clear worsening in water access during the war period.

North Kordofan

Before the war, 12,720 children were interviewed, with 8,371 girls and 4,352 boys. Of these, 373 children were reported as using unimproved water facilities: 236 girls (2.82%) and 137 boys (3.15%). During the war period, the total declined to 8,790 children interviewed, with 5,904 girls and 2,886 boys. The number using unimproved water sources fell to 232 children: 162 girls (2.74%) and 70 boys (2.43%). See Figure 19.

% Access to unimproved water sources reported by children pre war and during the war

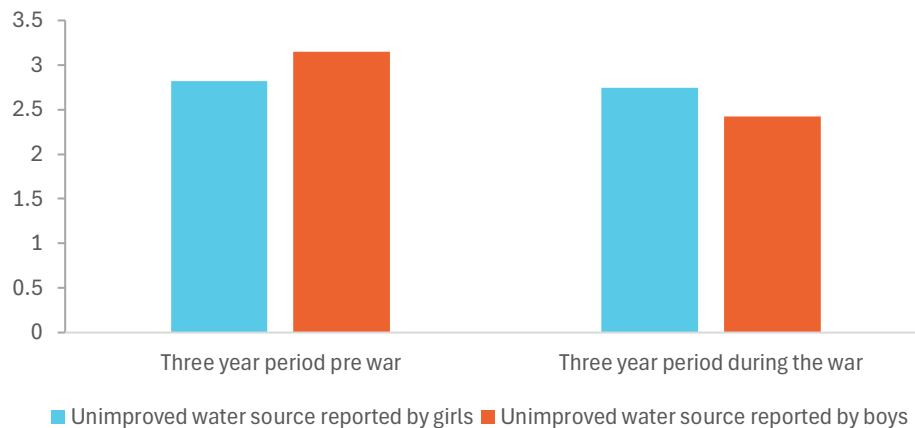


Figure 19: % Access to unimproved water sources before and during the war by gender in North Kordofan

This represents a reduction in absolute numbers (from 373 to 232 children) and a slight proportional decline for both girls (2.82% to 2.74%) and boys (3.15% to 2.43%).

Unlike Guli and Kassala, North Kordofan shows a modest improvement in water sources conditions during the war period, though this coincides with a decrease in total interviews.

4.11 Empowerment before and during the war

To evaluate empowerment only children who were 8 years old and older were asked about their agreement to 7 statements. These statements reflect children’s perceptions of their agency, confidence, and ability to express themselves and make decisions.⁶

Across the three regions of Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan, the average empowerment score remained relatively stable between the pre-war and war periods. In the three years before the war, the empowerment statements averaged 3.12 based on responses from 16,762 children.

During the three years after the onset of the war, the average empowerment score declined slightly to 3.09, based on a larger sample of 23,078 children interviewed.

Overall, these results indicate that children’s reported levels of empowerment remained broadly consistent during the conflict period, with only a very small decline in the average score (from 3.12 to 3.09) despite the increase in the number of children interviewed. This suggests that children’s perceptions of their agency, confidence, and ability to express

⁶ Empowerment was measured by averaging the responses to seven statements using a four-point Likert scale (1 Strongly disagree, 2 Disagree, 3 Agree, 4 Strongly agree). 1: I am able to do things as well as most other children, 2: I feel that I have a number of good qualities, 3: My opinions are asked for and considered in my community, 4: I feel comfortable speaking in front of a group of friends or adults, 5: I take action when I think there is something wrong in school or the community, 6: I have sufficient opportunities to get on in life and achieve my goals and 7: I feel like I can make my own decisions regarding my future.

themselves remained relatively resilient during the conflict period across the three regions. Stable levels of empowerment during a period of conflict is notable, as instability, displacement, and disruption to community life can weaken children's sense of confidence and ability to influence decisions affecting their lives. However, it is important to understand how these results may differ depending on region.

4.12 Empowerment before and during the war per region

Guli

In Guli, the average empowerment score remained broadly stable for both girls and boys between the two periods. Before the war, the index averaged 3.29 for girls (3,346 interviewed) and 3.22 for boys (1,857 interviewed). During the war period, the average declined slightly to 3.24 for girls (4,348 interviewed) and 3.19 for boys (2,451 interviewed). Although the sample size increased substantially in both cases, the overall change in the empowerment index is modest, suggesting only a slight decline in reported agency and confidence among children during the conflict period (Figure 20 and 21).

Kassala

In Kassala, the empowerment index shows a slight upward trend for both girls and boys between the two periods. Before the war, the average empowerment score was 2.95 for girls (5,817 interviewed) and 2.95 for boys (2,620 interviewed). During the war period, the index increased to 2.96 for girls (9,294 interviewed) and 2.99 for boys (3,692 interviewed). This represents a small but perhaps unnoticeable increase in the empowerment index among boys (Figure 20 and 21).

Kassala shows a slight upward trend in empowerment scores for both girls and boys during the conflict period, contrasting with the small declines observed in Guli.

North Kordofan

In North Kordofan, the empowerment index declined slightly for both girls and boys between the two periods. Before the war, the average score was 3.33 for girls (1,988 interviewed) and 3.28 for boys (1,134 interviewed). During the war period, the average declined to 3.27 for girls (2,143 interviewed) and 3.21 for boys (1,150 interviewed). While these changes are relatively small, they indicate a modest reduction in empowerment levels during the conflict period (Figure 20 and 21).

Overall, empowerment levels remain relatively stable across all three regions, with only modest shifts between the pre-war and war periods. Guli and North Kordofan show small declines in the empowerment index for both girls and boys, whereas Kassala shows a slight improvement for both genders. Despite the ongoing conflict, the overall levels of reported empowerment among children appear broadly resilient.

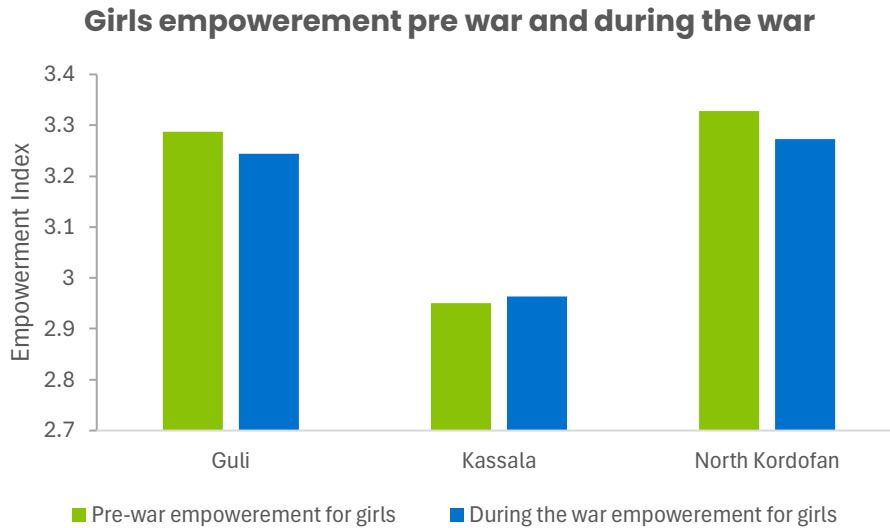


Figure 20: % Empowerment Index before and during the war for girls across regions

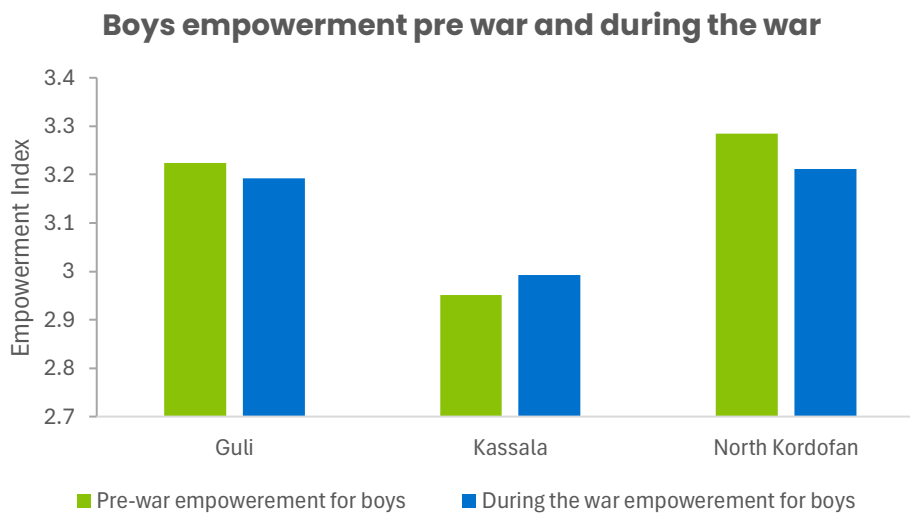


Figure 20: % Empowerment Index before and during the war for boys across regions

5. Conclusion

This analysis shows that the effects of Sudan’s conflict on sponsored children vary across regions, revealing both resilience and emerging risks. One of the most notable findings is that marriage as a reason for school non-attendance has increased during the conflict period, and has become a much more prominent reason for school exclusion among girls who are out of school during the war, particularly in Kassala, reinforcing concerns that conflict conditions can heighten risks of early marriage and disrupt girls’ education.

The results also point to growing pressures on children’s living conditions in some areas. In Kassala, several indicators move in a negative direction during the conflict period: child health outcomes have worsened, reliance on unimproved water sources has increased, and there has been a rise in the share of children not attending formal education. At the same time, marriage as a reason for school non-attendance has increased, both overall and more

markedly among girls who are already out of school. Taken together, these patterns suggest that children in Kassala may be experiencing a combination of pressures across multiple dimensions during the conflict period.

Across the regions more broadly, additional shifts are also visible. The number of children reported as having disabilities has also risen, which may reflect increased vulnerability during the crisis. Despite these challenges, formal education participation has remained very high across Guli, Kassala, and North Kordofan, and in some cases has even increased during the conflict period.

Taken together, these findings present a nuanced picture. On one hand, the persistence of high levels of school participation suggests that many families and communities continue to prioritise education even under extremely difficult circumstances. On the other, pressures on children's health, access to safe water, and protection risks, particularly those affecting adolescent girls, are becoming more visible as the conflict continues. While these analyses do not establish causal links between sponsorship and children's outcomes, these findings sit alongside Plan International's long-term presence in these communities through its child-centred community development programmes. These programmes include sustained engagement with sponsored children, their families, and communities, and aim to support children's wellbeing, protection, and development, including their ability to continue learning and participating in community life during periods of instability.

The findings highlight an important lesson: even during conflict, schooling can persist and children's sense of empowerment can remain stable. At the same time, the results point to growing pressures on children's health, living conditions, and protection risks, reminding us that sustaining children's futures requires continued and intensified attention to the broader conditions shaping their lives – in this instance, war.

6. Appendix: Additional Findings

Finances and helping the family as reasons not to attend formal education per region

Guli

Before the war, economic hardship accounted for a small share of children being out of formal education in Guli. Among girls not in formal education, 3.0% cited economic reasons, compared to 0.6% of boys. Overall, 2.2% of children out of school reported financial constraints as the reason. No children reported helping the family as a reason for non-attendance.

During the war period, none of the children not in formal education reported economic hardship or family support responsibilities as the reason for being out of school.

North Kodofan

Looking specifically at reasons for exclusion, economic hardship accounted for a small share in periods. Pre-war, 3 girls (1.38%) and 4 boys (3.39%) cited economic reasons. During the war, 4 girls (5.13%) and 1 boy (2.27%) reported economic constraints. No girls or boys in either period reported helping the family as a reason for not attending formal education.

Kassala

Patterns differ somewhat for girls and boys. Before the war, 847 girls were recorded as not being in formal education; among them, 8 girls (0.94%) cited economic reasons and 10 girls (1.18%) reported helping the family. During the war period, the number of girls not in formal education increased to 1,275, of whom 9 girls (0.71%) cited economic reasons and 29 girls (2.27%) reported helping the family. For boys, 244 were not in formal education pre-war; 2 boys (0.82%) cited economic reasons and 3 boys (1.23%) reported helping the family. During the war, the number of boys not in formal education rose to 411, with 6 boys (1.46%) citing economic reasons and 17 boys (4.14%) reporting helping the family.

Overall, economic hardship remains a small contributor to school exclusion for both girls and boys across both periods. However, helping the family becomes more prominent during the war period — particularly among boys, where the share rises from 1.23% to 4.14%. This suggests that household responsibilities may have intensified under conflict conditions, with a more pronounced effect on boys in Kassala.



Until we are all equal

About Plan International

We are Plan International. We stand with girls [in over 80 countries] to tear down barriers, save lives and build a world where equality for girls leads to progress for all. Across the globe, girls face more risks and fewer choices. We back them to lead on what matters most. We partner with girls and communities to make sure progress never stops – keeping girls’ needs, rights and voices front and centre. When girls lead, communities rise and a future where we are all equal becomes possible. Working together with girls, young people, supporters and partners we strive for a just world, where we are all equal. To do that we tackle the root causes of the challenges and inequalities that girls face. We’re with girls from birth until adulthood and we enable all children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge. For over 85 years, we have rallied other determined optimists to transform the lives of all children in more than 80 countries.

We won’t stop until we are all equal.

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Cover photo: 16-year-old Nejuwa fled Khartoum with her family after war broke out in Sudan. Now living in a transit centre, she has lost her school and friends, but not her dream of becoming a doctor. © Plan International / Peter Caton