



Vulnerability profiling of South Sudanese returnees in Northern Bahr el Ghazal

The Protection Monitoring Work Group (PROMO) Protection Monitoring System (PMS) Analysis provides a monthly snapshot designed to supplement the monthly statistical report. This analysis offers a comprehensive examination of the data and information gathered, including insights from Key Informant Interviews conducted through the PMS. The primary objective of this analysis is to inform stakeholders involved in the humanitarian response in South Sudan about protection-related findings, advocacy efforts, and essential messages presented by the Protection Cluster.

BACKGROUND

Since the onset of the armed conflict in Khartoum on April 15, there has been a significant increase in the number of people fleeing Sudan. South Sudanese authorities have identified multiple border entry points along the border, and humanitarian actors are establishing transit facilities to accommodate arriving South Sudanese returnees, refugees, asylum seekers, and third-country nationals.

With the endorsement of the South Sudanese Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), UNHCR and IOM collect and analyze data at various Points of Entry, where different population groups are arriving in South Sudan. By the end of May, nearly 100,000 people had crossed the border seeking safety, with 93% of them being South Sudanese nationals. It is important to note that these figures only represent individuals identified by humanitarian actors at the border, and the actual numbers are likely higher than reported.

The arrival of thousands of people is exacerbating the already critical humanitarian situation in South Sudan, as 75% of the country's population is grappling with the impacts of conflict, endemic violence, climatic shocks such as flooding and localized drought, and food insecurity.

The disruption of imports from Sudan has already impacted the northern states, causing the prices of food, fuel, and commodities to rise. This is particularly concerning, as more than 65% of the population in South Sudan was already severely food insecure at crisis or emergency levels before the current shock. The risk of a lean season and further flooding is expected to worsen the situation.

INFORMATION

On May 18, based on the available data at the time, the Protection Cluster (PC) called for protection monitoring and assessment of the protection situation in areas most frequently mentioned as intended destinations for people arriving from Sudan. The PC requested member organizations to increase their engagement in collecting data from Key Informants and conducting flash qualitative assessments to enhance the overall cluster understanding of the potential impact of the influx on the protection environment in those locations (primarily Malakal, Rubkona, Juba, Aweil counties, Wau, Maban, and Fangak). By the end of the month, PROMO members increased their engagement in PMS in the northeastern part of the country, while the northwestern states were not covered to an extent that could provide credible analysis.

During the regular PROMO meeting on June 8, 2023, the Protection Cluster PMS focal points gathered to review the statistical findings obtained from the system. They compared these findings with the information collected by the inter-agency response team working on the Sudan situation at border points, focusing on the return intentions of South Sudanese returnees.

PROTECTION ANALYSIS

Malakal and Renk in Upper Nile are currently the locations most affected by the influx, experiencing increasing protection challenges. However, the inter-agency coordination mechanisms present there provide sufficient reports and analysis on the situation to enable the advocacy for a comprehensive response. As a result, the PROMO concentrated on initiating in-depth research in areas of intended return where the initial effects of the Sudan influx are tangible and require mitigating measures to cope with the influx and the negative impact on local protection environment.

Central Equatoria, Juba

According to the most recent data collected by the UNHCR-IOM Border Monitoring tool (primarily at the Wunthow (Juba) border crossing) in May, Central Equatoria was identified as the intended destination for approximately 25% of returnees, excluding data pointing to Renk. It is important to note that Renk is likely not the destination for the many of the people, but rather considered an immediate safe haven upon fleeing from Sudan.

The Protection Monitoring System reports that key informants in Central Equatoria have observed a deteriorating situation regarding access to humanitarian assistance, with a 23% increase in informants reporting this challenge. Incidents of sexual violence have also risen (from 44% of informants reporting it in April to 60% in May 2023), and child labor violations flagged by informants increased from 58% in April to 78% in May.

In Juba County, the analysis of the PMS data reveals a significant increase in the lack of access to justice, rising from 22% in April to 50% in May. Furthermore, Key Informants noted a surge in family separations, from 39% in April to 58% in May, and an escalation in HLP challenges, from 67% in April to 75% in May. Specifically, in Juba, Key Informants reported a substantial gap in accessing humanitarian assistance, which more than doubled from 33% to 67% in May.

Of particular concern are the Key Informant reports indicating that 50% of all affected individuals in Juba do not have access to humanitarian assistance, while only 25% have partial access. The population most impacted by this lack of access to humanitarian aid includes internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees. The primary reasons for this violation are corruption, bribery, lack of awareness, and the absence of civil status documentation required to access certain services.



PHOTO: HDC, Mangateen IDP site in Central Equatoria where returnees seek humanitarian support.

Protection Cluster members operating in Juba have noted that many newly arrived individuals in Juba are attempting to access humanitarian support in Mangateen, Thongpiny, Lologo, and the Juba IDP Camps. However, many have been seen dispersing across the city and county in search of shelter and assistance.

Protection actors in Juba are currently underfunded to respond to the pre-influx situation, and there is a need for additional support to address the increasing demand for protection services in Central Equatoria.

Preliminary findings from rapid assessments conducted by UNHCR/ HDC suggest the deployment of multi-sectoral and multi-agency mobile teams to map locations of return and identify people with special needs among the returnees.

Moreover, immediate action is required to provide food, shelter, non-food items (NFIs), cash-based assistance, water supply, health, and nutrition services, as well as specialized child protection and gender-based violence (GBV) services.

Unity State, Bentiu, Leer, Mayendit and Koch

Data from the UNHCR-IOM Border Monitoring tool reveals that approximately 27% of returnees plan to reach Unity State. According to key informants' reports in Unity State, there has been a 16% increase in safety, security, and displacement issues compared to April figures. Reports of restrictions of movement have risen (from 8% of informants reporting it in April to 47% in May 2023), and within the same timeframe, the lack of access to humanitarian assistance flagged by informants has increased from 37% in April to 88% in May.

Although Bentiu has been recognized as a place where returns are occurring, it seems that the southern counties of Unity State, specifically Leer, Mayendit, and Koch, are also experiencing the impact of the influx. Moreover, Leer has become a transit hub for returnees heading towards greater Naiser and greater Fangak. In the county headquarters of Leer, 47 households were discovered seeking shelter in the open or under trees within the residential compound of Leer's commissioner. They are awaiting any assistance that can facilitate their onward movement across the Nile. The risk of protection issues is significant, with food and shelter being the most urgent needs.

Although the PMS data for May is insufficient to provide a credible analysis for Mayendit and Koch, Key Informants in Leer County reported a very high level of protection violations and challenges. Family separations increased from 30% in April to 50% in May. Additionally, a lack of access to humanitarian assistance has been consistently flagged by all Key Informants (100%) since March 2023, and HLP issues remained at a high level of 55% in May. While the majority of Key Informants cited all groups as being equally affected by the lack of access to humanitarian assistance, many highlighted the elderly, women and girls, and people with disabilities as being particularly impacted. The main reasons for the lack of access to humanitarian assistance in Leer, as identified by Key Informants, include corruption and bribery, lack of awareness of available services, absence of registration cards, and discrimination based on age and gender.

According to the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) field office in Bentiu, returnees continue to arrive in Unity State through the Panakuach entry point. Reportedly some 10,000 people have arrived in Bentiu, with most of them originating from Unity State. Many returnees are settling in Rotriak; however, humanitarian partners are only offering outreach services due to the area's political sensitivity and the desire to avoid the creation of a more permanent settlement. Concerns have been raised about access to the area during the rainy season, as the only road becomes inaccessible.

Despite poor shelter conditions and limited space, returnees are currently housed in the Bentiu camp with their relatives and friends. These shelters are transforming into communal spaces, increasing the risk of gender-based violence (GBV) for women and girls. In Bentiu, host communities are unable to support the returnees as they are already facing significant needs.

Nonviolent Peaceforce also highlights the immediate impact of the crisis on the supply chains of commodities in some local markets in Upper Nile and Unity States that depend on supplies from Sudan. This has led to scarcity and increased prices of essential goods such as sugar, salt, soap, and food items.

The impact on NP operations and other humanitarian actors includes increased field operational costs and pressure to increase the number of patrols and protective presence in locations where affected populations are being

supported through registration and non-food item (NFI) distribution. NP field teams have also reported changes in transportation services as a result of the crisis.

Aweil counties in Northern Bhar el Ghazal

Data from the UNHCR-IOM Border Monitoring tool indicates that approximately 20% of returnees plan to reach the Greater Bhar el Ghazal area (Northern Bhar el Ghazal, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Warrap states), with Aweil serving as the central hub for new arrivals. Currently, arriving individuals are being received at a transit location where refugees and asylum-seekers are temporarily sheltered, and vulnerable returnees are assisted with onward movement to their desired locations.

In late May, the Wider Aid & Development Agency (WADA) participated in a joint assessment conducted by the NBGS Child Protection AoR team operating in the state at the Wedwil Transit Site, where returnees and refugees from Sudan are received. The assessment aimed to rapidly evaluate the general situation. At the time, despite visible improvements by humanitarian actors, the overall situation was considered stressful, with urgent needs for shelter, food and nutrition, access to water, and health services, particularly for pregnant and laboring women. Dignity kits for women are also in high demand. The conflict has left many people in need of psychosocial support to address the trauma they have experienced.



Wedwil Transit Camp for returnees and refugees, Aweil West County, NBGS. 25th May 2023

The joint child protection assessment mission also identified the need for specialized assistance for unaccompanied or separated children, measures to address observed instances of child labor, protection for excluded children, and psychosocial support for children, especially orphans who have witnessed violence and the murder of their parents or caregivers in Sudan.

OTHER PROTECTION THEMES IN THE SPOTLIGHT

At the national level, the Protection Monitoring System reports that 54% of Key Informants in May identified sexual violence violations, representing an increase compared to April when 48% of informants flagged it as a recurring issue. While fear of stigma and fear of retaliation by perpetrators remain the most common barriers to reporting GBV, establishing or improving reporting mechanisms (with humanitarian actors and police or local authorities) has been identified as a primary coping mechanism.

This is primarily due to ongoing advocacy efforts and concrete actions such as establishing Women and Girls Friendly Spaces, conducting advocacy and training with women-led organizations, and implementing development projects that strengthen police engagement in addressing reported GBV incidents. These measures seem to have increased the trust of victims in reporting to authorities, with the expectation of a positive resolution to their reports.