



AAFA protection staff conducting Key Informant Interview with a female community leader in Unity State

In October 2022, the Protection Cluster (PC) initiated a pilot of the Protection Monitoring System (PMS) in South Sudan. After a comprehensive testing phase, a modified PMS questionnaire was deployed in April 2023. The PMS is coordinated through the Cluster's Protection Monitoring (PROMO) working group.

The PMS relies on contributions from PC member organizations to collect data via a Key Informant Interview (KII) questionnaire at Payam level across eleven protection risks, monitoring the occurrence of protection violations, their scale, and their impact on communities over time.

KEY PROMO ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2023

- In 2023, 40 PROMO members conducted more than 3,800 key informant interviews across South Sudan. This effort resulted in monitoring coverage in 210 of the 510 payams (local administrative units) in the country, which corresponds to 41% of these areas. Comparatively, this coverage signifies 35% of the total targeted interviews for the year, set at 11,000, and achieves 68% of the year's goal to cover 60% of South Sudan's payams. One of the primary challenges identified by PROMO members in achieving greater reach throughout the year was the absence of sustainable and consistent funding for protection activities. This financial shortfall directly affects the deployment of protection officers in the field, subsequently diminishing their operational footprint. Additionally, a significant impediment to efficient data delivery was the lack of reliable internet connectivity in various regions of South Sudan, which hindered the prompt transmission of collected data.
- In 2023, a collaborative effort between the Protection Cluster and the South Sudan Needs Assessment Working Group (NAWG) focused on enhancing the NAWG's assessment methodology. A key aspect of this collaboration was prioritizing inputs from the Protection Monitoring System (PMS) for monthly priority assessments and streamlining the data sharing processes between the PMS and NAWG systems. This initiative resulted in a significantly improved assessment process, which now more accurately and credibly reflects the scale of protection risks in the counties of South Sudan, as evaluated by members of the PROMO team.
- During the 2023 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan Cycle, the Protection Cluster effectively incorporated the results of the Protection Monitoring System (PMS) into its processes. These PMS findings served as a key reference for most Areas of Responsibility (AoRs) in assessing the severity and scope of needs. This integration led to notably improved precision, reliability, and relevance in targeting initiatives aimed at mitigating the most severe protection risks. Additionally, the PMS results were made accessible to other clusters, thereby aiding in the refinement of their respective programming strategies.
- In August 2023, the PROMO team and the state-level protection coordination teams conducted a comprehensive, nation-wide Protection Risk Assessment, covering all [15 risks as defined by the Global Protection Cluster](#) and produced an extensive report. This prompted a call for the further expansion of the PMS to serve as a regular risk assessment tool. In response, plans were initiated to commence this expansion in 2024, with the support of both the Global Protection Cluster and various donors.
- In 2023, the Protection Cluster with support from UNHCR and ECHO distributed 50 tablets to PROMO members to enhance the quantity of contributions to the PMS.
- Throughout the year, the Protection Monitoring (PROMO) team engaged in extensive information dissemination and stakeholder engagement. This included conducting eight plenary meetings and publishing a series of key documents: 12 iterations of the online dashboard, 10 update documents, and seven thematic analysis and recommendations reports. These outputs were broadly disseminated to a wide range of stakeholders and donors through the global website and

email distribution lists. As a result, PROMO's outputs are widely recognized and respected as valuable sources of information on protection issues in South Sudan.

- Throughout the year, a significant global initiative was undertaken to establish a qualitative repository of protection reports, known as [DEEP \(Data Entry and Exploration Platform\)](#). This initiative, led by the Danish Refugee Council and supported by the protection cluster, was introduced in South Sudan. Efforts are currently underway to fully integrate the DEEP system into the routine operations of the Protection Monitoring (PROMO) team. Notably, the DEEP system played a crucial role in the compilation of this annual report

IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COUNTRY AND BACKGROUND TO PROTECTION MONITORING

- Between April and June 2023, the Human Rights Division (HRD) of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) comprehensively documented 222 incidents of violence impacting 871 civilians in the country. These incidents comprised 395 fatalities, 281 injuries, 166 abductions, and 29 cases of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) (UNMISS HRD, 2023). It is important, however, to recognize the potential for underreporting, particularly in CRSV cases, due to societal stigma, the risks associated with reporting, and the scarcity of accessible reporting mechanisms (UNMISS HRD, 2023). Despite these reporting challenges, the data indicates a significant 18% increase in violent incidents against civilians compared to the same timeframe in 2022.
- By the end of 2023, the influx of conflict-driven migration resulted in over 477,000 individuals arriving in South Sudan, with 81% of the displaced population being South Sudanese returnees (UNHCR, 2023). Many internally displaced persons (IDPs) are enduring prolonged displacement in dire conditions, lacking access to essential services like food, water, sanitation, and healthcare. The absence of durable solutions for IDPs intensifies protection risks, inflicting severe harm and hindering recovery and resilience (UNHCR, 2023).
- Cattle raiding, historically a source of communal violence, has transformed into a highly militarized and lethal practice. Recent reports highlight ongoing incidents in Jonglei State and GPAA, with cattle raids in Duk County, Jonglei State, on January 6, 2024, resulting in at least 10 deaths and over 20 wounded (VOA, 2024). Cross-border cattle raiding further adds to regional tensions, with instances reported along porous borders involving the Dodoth of Uganda and the Turkana of Kenya (UNDP, 2023).
- The influx of Sudanese refugees and returnees into South Sudan has been a source of increasing tension and instability, aggravating existing local disputes and placing additional strain on resources. For example, the return of over 100,000 individuals in Upper Nile counties has sparked intercommunal violence in already fragile communities, this particularly evident in areas like Malakal.
- Disputes related to Housing, Land, and Property (HLP) are increasingly leading to displacement and homelessness, thereby negatively impacting the process of returns. The root of these challenges lies in the deficiency of efficient land administration services and the lack of formal institutions at the subnational level, which complicates access to essential HLP-related services. This ongoing situation of unresolved HLP disputes continues to contribute to the persistence of homelessness and displacement, thereby affecting the rate at which individuals can return to their homes (Protection Cluster South Sudan, 2023).

- Despite efforts, the realization of women's HLP rights remains elusive, constrained by cultural norms and social barriers. Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against women and girls continues to be widespread and systematic, with a documented increase in incidents during the first quarter of 2023 (UNMISS HRD, Amnesty, 2023). Gender-based violence (GBV), including intimate partner violence, is driven by cultural and economic factors, exacerbating insecurities and conflicts (CSRF, Saferworld, UNHCR, UNFPA, Amnesty, OHCHR, 2023).
- The prevalence of abductions, forced marriages, and early marriages remains a concern, driven by cultural norms and economic incentives. The lack of a robust rule of law and weak judiciary systems contribute significantly to gender-based violence (OWP, UNFPA, CSRF, RT, 2023).
- Children in South Sudan face severe vulnerabilities, including grave violations such as abduction, killing, maiming, and targeted attacks on educational institutions. A particularly alarming issue is the lack of demobilization and reintegration programs for child soldiers. This absence of structured support for children involved in armed conflict poses a significant concern, as it hinders their ability to transition back safely and effectively into civilian life.
- Humanitarian access to internally displaced persons (IDPs) is hindered by conflict, bureaucratic challenges, and ongoing insecurity, disrupting the delivery of crucial aid (OCHA, WFP, 2023).
- The ongoing conflict in South Sudan is exacerbating the existing food crisis, further compounded by the heightened risks posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance. This complex situation necessitates urgent and multifaceted humanitarian responses to effectively address the escalating challenges (Protection Cluster, 2023).

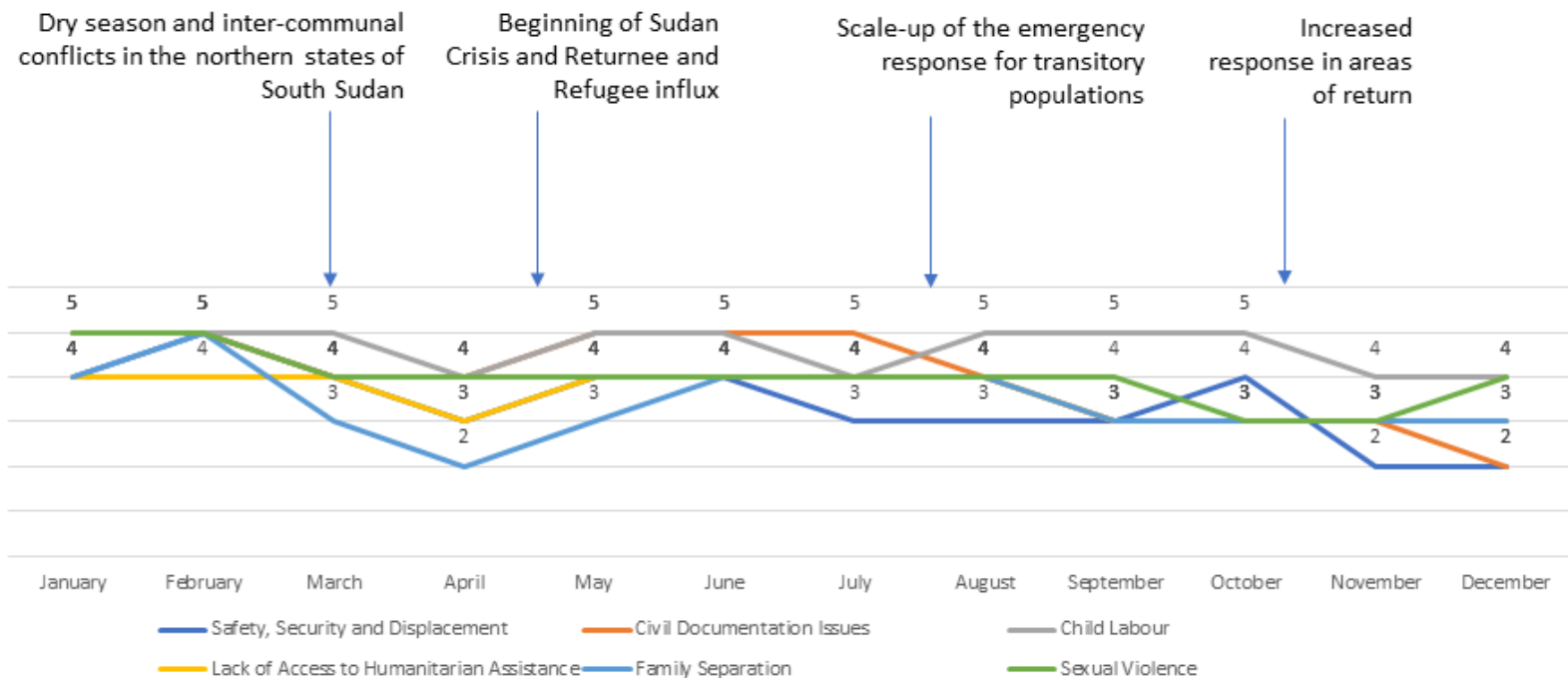
PROTECTION RISKS

The below are the **top reported protection issues and risks as flagged by KI*** in the country in 2023.

CHILD LABOUR	CIVIL DOCUMENTATIONS ISSUES	LACK OF ACCESS TO HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE	FAMILY SEPARATIONS	SEXUAL VIOLENCE and SAFETY, SECURITY AND DISPLACEMENT
58% of KI	52% of KI	44% of KI	40% of KI	39% of KI

**These issues are a result of various factors including conflict, cultural practices, and economic hardship. With 73% of South Sudan's population living in extreme poverty, these challenges are exacerbated, leading to negative coping strategies. This situation is particularly evident in child labor and sexual violence cases, as well as in governance-related areas like justice, documentation, and housing, land, and property issues.*

The below presents a **consolidated and average trend analysis of the severities of top protection risks**, rated on a scale from 1 (less severe) to 5 (most severe), **in the three South Sudanese states most affected by the Sudan Crisis: Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, and Upper Nile**. The analysis aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolving nature and intensity of these risks, offering valuable insights into the specific challenges faced in areas most affected by the Sudan crisis.



IDENTIFIED MAJOR DRIVERS OF PROTECTION RISKS

- Since mid-April 2023, conflict in Sudan has caused the return of 396,000 South Sudanese nationals and the arrival of 78,000 refugees and 1,500 third-country nationals into South Sudan. Additionally, tens of thousands of South Sudanese refugees returned from Ethiopia. In 2024, it's estimated that 420,000 returnees and 80,000 refugees will arrive in South Sudan. Protection actors estimate that 5.53 million people need protection services, targeting 2.2 million in 2024 with a budget of \$120 million. By December 2024, South Sudan is expected to host 450,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily from Sudan. (The refugee population grew by 19% in 2023 from 64,225 families of 308,374 individuals to 87,525 families of 381,248 individuals).
- Throughout the year, child recruitment has been identified as a significant protection risk, as indicated by 14% of key informants. Notably, there is a marked increase in reports of this risk during the dry season, with 22-23% of key informants noting its occurrence. This spike suggests a correlation between the increased mobility of armed groups during this period and the consequent recruitment of children by communities for defense against these groups. Furthermore, negotiations with armed actors are cited by 50% of the interviewed key informants as the most common method of mitigation. This highlights the complex nature of the violation, which often involves kidnapping and/or gender-based violence. Significantly, 5% of key informants report that girls are among the populations affected by these practices.
- Family separation, a pressing issue according to 40% of KIs, is largely attributed to the civil conflict, particularly in Greater Jonglei and along the South Sudan-Sudan border, where the crisis has had a profound impact. Among the six grave violations, abduction, attacks on schools, and killing and maiming are identified as major concerns during 2023. These findings underscore the complex

dynamics of child protection risks, with seasonal variations and negotiations with armed actors playing crucial roles in mitigating these challenges.

- In 2023, there was a notable increase in EO-related accidents, (reaching 25 compared to 17 in 2022). This surge in incidents led to (26 fatalities, surpassing the 11 recorded in 2022). Additionally, (injuries spiked to 49 from the previous year's count of 29). The increase is partly attributed to the unplanned explosion at the Bentiu Division 4 military base in June 2023, resulting in injuries to 19 individuals.
- In South Sudan, gender-based violence (GBV) is a pressing concern, as highlighted by the 2022 national prevalence study. The study revealed that 58% of women and girls experienced at least one form of GBV in the past 12 months. Notably, from January to September 2023, the GBV Information Management System reported a rise to 26% of child survivors compared to 20% in 2022, with physical violence accounting for 37%, emotional violence 23%, sexual violence 24%, forced marriage 6%, and denial of services and resources 10%. In Juba IDP Sites 3 and 1, living conditions exacerbate vulnerability, leading to increased risks of GBV, including emotional violence (37%), physical assault (32%), and sexual violence (25%). Notably, 93% of alleged perpetrators in these sites are unemployed.
- The exit of humanitarian organizations from Juba IDP Sites 3 and 1, coupled with decreased funding, reflects a deteriorating situation, posing challenges to GBV partners in implementing emergency programming. The inadequate provision of child-friendly spaces has led to the formation of gang groups and safety concerns, emphasizing the need for comprehensive interventions in these areas. Urgent actions are required to address GBV comprehensively, encompassing prevention, risk mitigation, survivor support, legal remedies, and community engagement, with a focus on challenging harmful gender norms and enhancing security measures to foster safety and equality in Juba IDP sites.

KEY RECCOMENDATIONS

Intercommunal Violence:

- The Government of South Sudan should strengthen monitoring mechanisms and allocate resources for child protection programs.
- Protection partners should scale up prevention, monitoring, and mitigation activities aimed at Peace building and the prevention of human rights violations.
- All parties to the conflict must immediately cease the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

Access to Basic Services:

- The Government of South Sudan should strengthen security measures for humanitarian workers and streamline administrative procedures for efficient aid delivery.

Gender-Based Violence:

- The international community should strongly advocate for immediate steps to prevent and address gender-based violence, including sexual violence, exploitation, trafficking, and conflict-related sexual violence.
- The Government of South Sudan must ensure GBV survivors have access to justice, medical care, and essential services like MHPSS and safe houses. This holistic approach is vital for their physical, psychological, and social recovery.

Housing, Land, and Property Rights Violations:

- Humanitarian and development actors should incorporate HLP rights in emergency, humanitarian, peace, and development responses, recognizing their critical role in displacement cycles.

- All stakeholders should advocate for safe and unimpeded access to a dignified and safe environment for all populations in need, regardless of location or affiliation.
- The Government of South Sudan should adopt a costed implementation framework to the recently passed National Land Policy and establish and strengthen land management units and empower communities with HLP rights awareness.

Humanitarian Response Funding:

- Given the everchanging dynamics of the South Sudan context, funding should be more flexible to enable humanitarian actors to prioritize and respond to emerging shocks/crises.
- Advocate for increased funding for the humanitarian response, enabling organizations to fulfill their life-saving mandates promptly.
- Emphasize the importance of timely funding to prevent devastating consequences for civilians facing displacement and violence.