

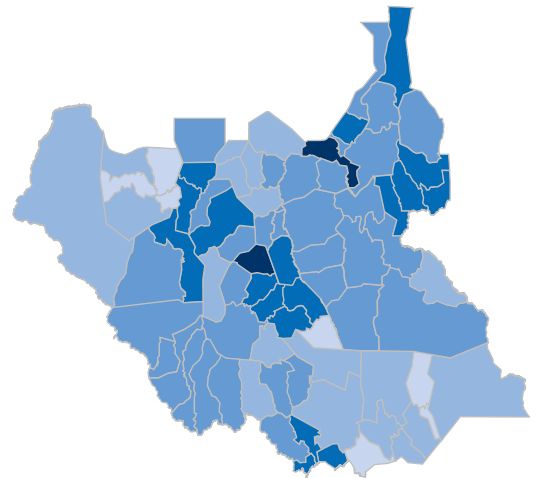


The Protection Monitoring System (PMS) in South Sudan is managed by the Protection Cluster and it relies on contributions by member organizations to collect data via a Key Informant Interview (KII) questionnaire at payam level across eleven thematic areas thereby monitoring the occurrence of protection violations, their scale and impact on communities over time. **In March 2024, protection monitors conducted 245 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) covering 79 payams in 20 Counties in 5 States.**

In March 2024, the Protection Cluster also conducted a state-level Protection Risk assessment seeking expert knowledge on the severities of the [15 GPC risks](#). **The adjacent map shows the overall severities of the 15 GPC protection risks in South Sudan with darker colour representing higher protection risk severity.**

In 2023 and 2024, a significant global initiative was undertaken to establish a repository of secondary data including protection reports, known as DEEP (Data Entry and Exploration Platform). The DEEP is an open-source, collaborative online platform established for humanitarian secondary and qualitative data analysis. This initiative in the Protection Cluster is supported through the Danish Refugee Council.

The protection monitoring data has been complemented with secondary qualitative data collated and structured on the [DEEP platform](#). The Secondary Data review provided contextual information for each of the identified risks, as well as complementing it with other assessments conducted or published in the period under review.

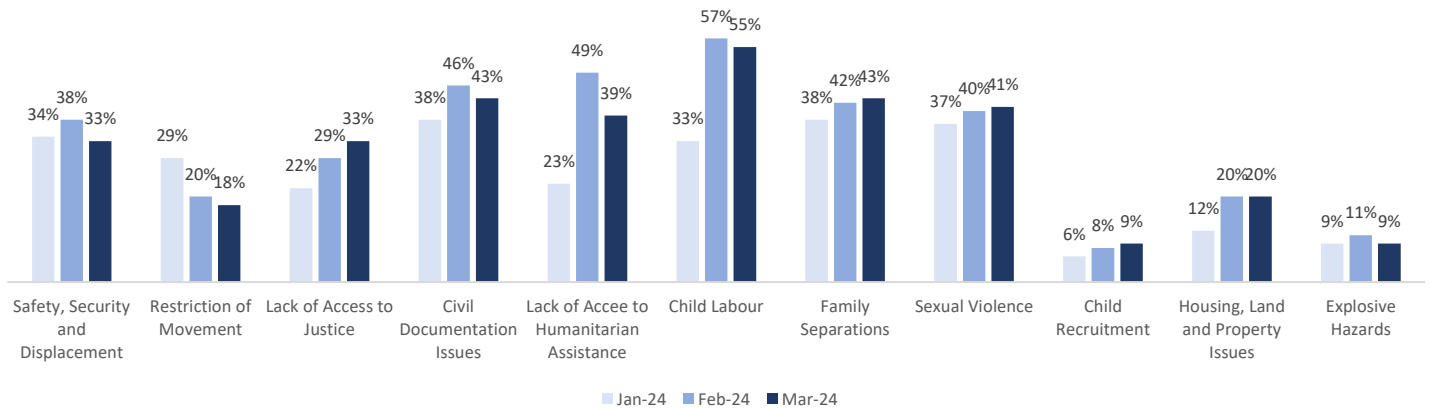


Emerging Protection Risk Trends – Family Separations risk (from 38%* January to 43% in March), Sexual Violence (from 37% in January to 41% in March), Child Recruitment (6% in January to 9% in March) and HLP (from 12% in January to 20% in March) trends continue to rise in South Sudan.

*Percentage portrays the per cent of Key Informants that claim a particular risk is threatening or affecting their community)

Emerging situations- There is an increase in the number of attacks on civilians in Gakdong and Walgak payams of Akobo county where two out of ten households were attacked leading to the killing of four individuals, these attacks are expected to continue as they are driven by revenge killings between the two clans. Also in Leer county, HLP issues are significantly rising as the local authorities continue to forcefully evict returnees. On 18-21 March, 120 returnee families were evicted due to land survey carried out at Rubjiech IDP site by the local authorities.

Protection Risks trends January - March 2024



According to data published by the UNHCR-IOM inter-agency coordination responding to the situation in Sudan since mid-April 2023, cumulative arrivals of returnees, asylum-seekers and refugees from Sudan reached 629,358 individuals as of 31st of March 2024. South Sudanese returnees represent 79% (496,192 individuals), mostly arriving from Khartoum (50%) and White Nile (29%).

Initial surveys of the intention of final destination indicate that 41% intend to go to Renk, 11% intend to go to Juba, 9% intend to go to Malakal, 7% intend to go to Rubkona, 3% intend to go to Aweil East, each 2% intend to go to Wau, Fangak, Maban, Luakpiny/Nasir, Aweil North, Fashoda, Raja and Manyo, and the rest 12% intend to go to different locations in South Sudan.

It is important to note that initial intentions do not necessarily demonstrate that people have reached those destinations in percentages shown and it is now clear that intentions are subject to change over time and heavily influenced by the availability of core support in those areas. Additionally, the locations mentioned are to be understood as hubs from which returnees might attempt secondary movements to more granular locations.

To assist the prioritization of humanitarian support to newly arrived returnee communities including core protection support, the PROMO investigated the highest risks affecting returnee communities based on available data and information in South Sudan's states most impacted.

UPPER NILE STATE

While Upper Nile State is the most affected by the influx from Sudan as more than 80% of the new arrivals enter South Sudan through the Joda border point in Renk County, the transit sites are not subject to this analysis (see [joint Protection Cluster and UNHCR Protection Analysis Update from February 2024](#) for more details on protection concerns of the transitory element of the influx). Also, it is important to note the existence of groups of returnees lingering in the vicinity of transit and reception facilities whose intentions for onward movement, integration, or other options are yet to be assessed in a harmonized way by field stakeholders. Current assumptions voiced by protection actors in Renk currently point towards the intentions of these groups of South Sudanese to go back to Sudan as soon as safely possible.

According to the March 2024 risk assessment conducted by the Protection Cluster, the highest-ranking risks affecting returnees in the state are child, early or forced marriage, access to humanitarian assistance, gender-based violence, impediments to legal identity and justice, psychological distress, HLP issues, and ongoing displacement all of which assessed to be severe in needs for assistance and mitigation.

Key informants interviewed in the first quarter of 2024 in Upper Nile State flag displacement issues (54% of interviewed KIs), civil documentation issues (54% of interviewed KIs), lack of access to humanitarian assistance (46% of interviewed KIs), child labour (68% of interviewed KIs), family separations (59% of interviewed KIs) and HLP issues (37% of interviewed KIs) as mostly affecting their communities, including returnee communities.

As previously mentioned, most new arrivals to South Sudan enter through Upper Nile State border points. This state already faces a severe humanitarian crisis exacerbated by recurring floods, which leave residents without food or arable land, that being said, new arrivals strain response capabilities¹.

The humanitarian situation is exacerbated further due to high levels of food insecurity; post-harvest food security projections anticipate Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes due to prolonged conflict impacts, poor economic conditions, high numbers of returnees, and rapid depletion of food stocks². Additionally, a significant influx of people in Upper Nile counties has triggered intercommunal violence in fragile communities, particularly around Malakal³. In Renk, both host communities and newcomers—refugees and returnees—are receiving humanitarian aid, which is causing some tensions. Community feedback from Renk County in February 2024 indicates rumors of inadequate humanitarian aid and security incidents in Maban, discouraging further transport assistance⁴.

As of January 2024, humanitarian operations in Upper Nile State face significant access challenges, including government interference and community demands for higher payments by casual laborers in Malakal and security forces in Renk. These demands have caused operational delays. Access challenges in other states also hinder the movement of newcomers in Upper Nile, for example, security issues in the Abyei Administrative Area have prevented the transport of returnees from Renk to Abyei⁵.

According to the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) for 2024 and a recent re-evaluation exercise conducted by the Needs Assessment Working Group (NAWG), Fashoda County (Extreme protection deprivations), Panyikang County (Extreme protection deprivations), Luakpiny/Nasir County (Elevated protection deprivations) and, Melut County (Elevated protection deprivations) are mostly in need for inter-sectorial support, especially within the context of a meaningful, dignified and safe (re)integration of returnees from Sudan.

UNITY STATE

According to the March 2024 risk assessment conducted by the Protection Cluster, the highest-ranking risks affecting returnees in the state are child, early or forced marriage, disinformation, and denial of access to information, gender-based violence, restrictions to access to legal identity and justice, psychological distress, theft, extortion, and eviction and HLP issues. Furthermore, key informants interviewed in the first quarter of 2024 in Unity State flag displacement issues (59% of interviewed KIs), civil documentation issues (65% of interviewed KIs), lack of access to humanitarian assistance (73% of interviewed KIs), child labour (75% of interviewed KIs), family separations (29% of interviewed KIs) and HLP issues (49% of interviewed KIs) and movement restrictions (56% of interviewed KIs) as mostly affecting their communities, including returnee communities.

According to the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) for 2024 and a recent re-evaluation exercise conducted by the Needs Assessment Working Group (NAWG), Rubkona County (Extreme protection deprivations) and, Leer County (Elevated protection deprivations) are mostly in need for inter-sectorial support, especially within the context of a meaningful, dignified, and safe (re)integration of returnees from Sudan.

In addition to the arrivals coming from Sudan, most recently in February 2024, there has been a reported arrival of over 900 civilians in Unity State who were repatriated after being stranded in the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) camp in Abyei after repeated clashes between the Ngok Dinka and the Bul Nuer youths in the Abyei Administrative area⁶. This influx of displaced is likely to continue to exert pressures on the already stretched basic services and humanitarian assistance. It is important to note that food insecurity remains of concern in Unity State with Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes expected in some counties in Unity. Conditions remain especially severe in Rubkona of Unity, with households reportedly lacking assets, while severely limited in their coping capacity, and high dependent on assistance⁷. At the same time, active hostilities in Rubkona in Unity State have significantly hampered humanitarian efforts to assist the affected population⁸.

¹ Health Cluster, WHO 12/09/2023

² FEWS NET 06/02/2024

³ Protection Cluster South Sudan 12/02/2024

⁴ Internews 06/03/2024

⁵ OCHA 12/01/2024

⁶ Radio Tamazuj 26/02/2024

⁷ FEWS NET 06/02/2024

⁸ OCHA 08/03/2024

In South Sudan, subnational violence continues to be an issue, including in Unity State⁹, which is driven by cattle raids¹⁰, and rising political tensions¹¹. These incidents of violence impacts access to basic services and humanitarian assistance. For example, fighting erupted on January 29 between SSPDF and SPLA-IO in Barkuol Ngol of Rubkona in violation of the peace deal, leading to the temporary closure of the road between Rotriak and Rubkona Town, disrupting trade and aid flows¹².

NORTHERN BAHR EL GHAZAL

According to the March 2024 risk assessment conducted by the Protection Cluster, the highest-ranking risks affecting returnees in the state are gender-based violence, psychological and emotional abuse, child and forced family separations as well as, HLP issues.

Furthermore, key informants interviewed in the first quarter of 2024 in Northern Bahr el Ghazal (NBeG) State flag displacement issues (90% of interviewed KIs), civil documentation issues (90% of interviewed KIs), lack of access to humanitarian assistance (60% of interviewed KIs), child labour (40% of interviewed KIs), family separations (90% of interviewed KIs) and HLP issues (30% of interviewed KIs) as mostly affecting their communities, including returnee communities. Of note is the fact that PMS coverage in NBeG is limited due to decreased availability of protection actors active in PROMO.

According to the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) for 2024 and a recent re-evaluation exercise conducted by the Needs Assessment Working Group (NAWG), Aweil East County (Elevated protection deprivations) is the most in need of inter-sectorial support, especially within the context of a meaningful, dignified, and safe (re)integration of returnees from Sudan.

While NBeG has lower numbers of arrival in comparison to other borderland states, numbers are still significant due to NBeG's smaller size and population. The returnees to the state have been forced to start a new life in South Sudan, often bringing little or nothing with them and substantially dependent on international humanitarian organizations or their communities. Returnees who had not lived in NBeG for many years or in some cases ever and had no close family or community to return to, were often left with nowhere obvious to go and have ended up living in very difficult circumstances with little support¹³. It is also worth noting that children made up 70% of the newly arrived returnees and refugees from Sudan in NBeG State, with many are now arriving alone, and therefore leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse¹⁴.

The war and the arrival of returnees from Sudan has caused a shock to the local economy. The influx of returnees and refugees increased demand on basic commodities and led to some price rises. This was compounded by the disruption of cross-border trade, which made some commodities harder to find, and contributed to inflation¹⁵.

The disruption to the local economy, particularly cross-border labour systems, has meant that thousands of young men, who were accustomed to travel to Sudan as labour migrants, have returned to NBeG without the money they would usually earn as agricultural labourers. Local people associate this with a reported rise in crime in the region¹⁶. Northern Bahr el Ghazal has already been impacted by food insecurity due to recurring floods which have left people without food and viable land for cultivation¹⁷, while food insecurity is expected to worsen due to high returnee burden and faster-than-normal depletion of household food stocks¹⁸.

JONGLEI

According to the March 2024 risk assessment conducted by the Protection Cluster, the highest-ranking risks affecting returnees in the state are child and forced family separation, child marriage, gender-based violence, psychological distress, HLP issues, trafficking in persons, forced labour or slavery-like practices, and restriction of movement. Furthermore, key informants interviewed in the first quarter of 2024 in Upper Nile State flag displacement issues (59% of interviewed KIs), civil documentation issues (65% of interviewed KIs), lack of access to humanitarian assistance (49% of interviewed KIs), sexual violence (52% of interviewed KIs), child labour (45% of interviewed KIs), family separations (56% of interviewed KIs) and HLP issues (15% of interviewed KIs) as mostly affecting their communities, including returnee communities.

⁹ UNMISS 21/02/2024

¹⁰ Radio Tamazuj 16/03/2024

¹¹ OHCHR 01/03/2024

¹² FEWS NET 06/02/2024

¹³ Rift Valley Institute 28/03/2024

¹⁴ OCHA 12/01/2024

¹⁵ FEWS NET 06/02/2024

¹⁶ Rift Valley Institute 28/03/2024

¹⁷ Health Cluster, WHO 12/09/2023

¹⁸ FEWS NET 06/02/2024

According to the Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) for 2024 and a recent re-evaluation exercise conducted by the Needs Assessment Working Group (NAWG), Canal/Pigi County (Extreme protection deprivations), Ayod County (Extreme protection deprivations), Fangak County (Elevated protection deprivations) and, Akobo County (Elevated protection deprivations) are mostly in need for inter-sectorial support, especially within the context of a meaningful, dignified and safe (re)integration of returnees from Sudan.

In Jonglei State, cattle-raiding¹⁹ and inter-communal attacks continue to be reported. Alleged armed Murle elements from the Greater Pibor Administrative (GPAA) continue to pose threats against civilians, particularly women and children, who were subjected to abductions during the attacks²⁰. Active hostilities in Duk in Jonglei State hampered humanitarian efforts²¹.

Jonglei is among the states impacted by floods and food insecurity²². Now, with the arrival of refugees and returnees from Sudan, the state's capacity to respond to these needs has been stretched. Additionally, the ability of households to address the likely protection risks resulting from floods and food insecurity has been curtailed. In fact, as households' food stocks are depleted²³ and humanitarian aid continues to be blocked by hostilities, households are likely to resort to coping mechanisms such as child labor, child and forced marriage, and trafficking.

Key Findings and Messages/Recommendations by the Protection Cluster South Sudan PROMO working group:

In the prioritised counties there is a need for a comprehensive return support package that assists the returning families with:

- ✓ Security of tenure over re-claimed land, assigned land or government-allocated land.
- ✓ Demining and EORE (in Canal/Pigi, Fashoda, Panyikang and Melut).
- ✓ Returnees, depending on household circumstances, also need support with shelter and core NFI.
- ✓ Support is needed with initial food packages, WASH and basic livelihood assistance (such as seeds, agricultural tools, fishing gear, etc.)
- ✓ Identification of people with special needs (PSNs) and referral to functioning protection (as well as health and nutrition) mechanisms which may include case management, WGFS and/or CSF programming, dignity kits distribution, basic mental health and PSS services, family reunification, services for unaccompanied or separated children, etc.
- ✓ The establishment of community-based protection mechanisms including dispute resolution and peacebuilding²¹²³⁴ is essential for the sustainability of return.
- ✓ Linking returned people to education or training opportunities and development projects increases the sustainability of return.

Organizations contributing to the PMS in the reporting period: Danish Refugee Council, Hope Restoration South Sudan, Humanitarian & Development Consortium, International Organization for Migration, Norwegian Refugee Council, Survivor Aid, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Hope Restoration South Sudan, INTERSOS, Mission to Alleviate Suffering in South Sudan, United Humanitarian Development Organisation AND United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. **Thank you to all the member organizations for their contributions!**

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¹⁹ ibid

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²³ Health Cluster, WHO 12/09/2023

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