



Protection Cluster  
South Sudan

# South Sudan Protection Monitoring Spotlight

## April – May 2024

In April and May 2024, protection monitors conducted **748** Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) covering **125** payams in **32** Counties in **5** States (Western Bahr El-Ghazal, Unity, Jonglei, Upper Nile and Central Equatoria).

In April 2024, the Protection Cluster conducted state-level Protection Risk Assessments seeking expert knowledge on the severities of the **15 GPC risks**.

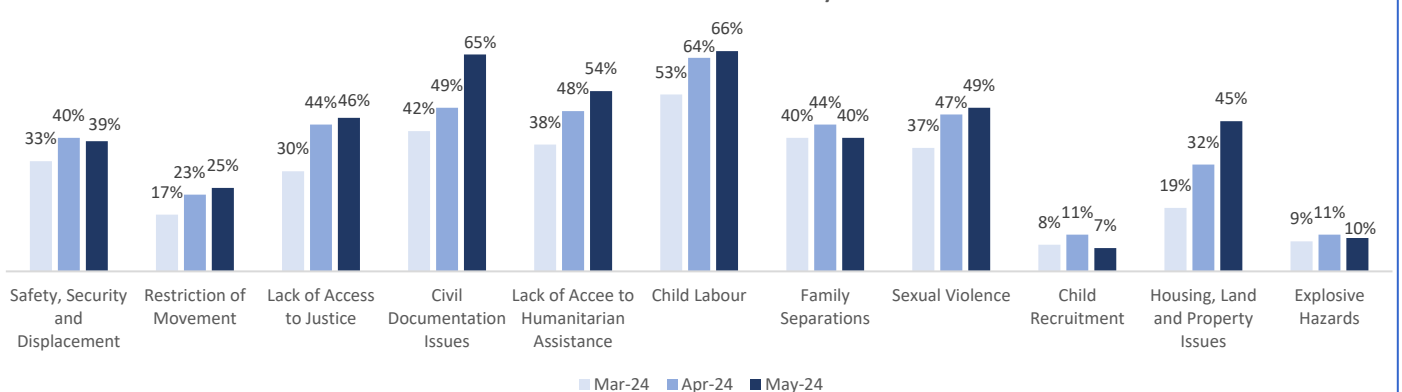
The assessments identified as **top-five most severe protection risks** in South Sudan:

- Gender-Based Violence (GBV),
- Discrimination and stigmatisation, denial of resources, opportunities, and services and/or humanitarian access,
- Theft, extortion, forced eviction, and destruction of personal property,
- Unlawful impediments and restriction of movement and forced displacement,
- Child and forced family separation.



*Displacement due to flooding poses a considerable protection threat in South Sudan*

Protection Risks trends March-May 2024



## Emerging Protection Risk Trends

- **Restriction of Movement** (from 17% in March, to **25%** in May)
- **Lack of Access to Justice** (from 30% in March, to **46%** in May)
- **Civil Documentation Issues** (from 42% in March, to **65%** in May)
- **Lack of Access to Humanitarian Assistance** (from 38% in March, to **54%** in May)
- **Child Labour** (from 53% in March, to **66%** in May)
- **Sexual Violence** (from 37% in March, to **49%** in May)
- **HLP issues** (from 19% in March, to **45%** in May).

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

**Emerging situations:** Theft incidents significantly increased during April and May, occurring mainly in Rubkona, Malakal, Akobo, Payangai and Panakuach, according to the weekly updates provided by the sub-national Protection Cluster Coordinators. Humanitarian actors operating in the mentioned locations report that the prevalence of these incidents is attributed to several factors such as inflation, limited access to livelihood opportunities and unemployment in the country. With the upcoming floods, access to livelihood opportunities will further deteriorate.

Cattle raiding continues to be an alarming issue in Kieckun payam of Malakal, Likuangole of Pibor, Dengjock payam of Akobo and Mayom of Unity State. It is usually accompanied by the looting of property and abduction of women and children. On 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, a press release by Eastern Equatoria State Civil Society Organization Network (EESCON) stated that on the 23 April, the Murel tribe from Pibor, raided cattle from the Toposa tribe in Kauto village Kapoeta East causing the death of 30 individuals, 50% destruction of property, looting over ten thousand livestock (cattle, goats and sheep) and abducting over hundred women and children.

*The Protection Monitoring System (PMS) used for the below Key Informants (KIs) interviews is currently being upgraded to align with the 15 Global Protection Cluster Risks, harmonizing with the global risks terminology and concepts. Thus, the below six outcomes may differ from the GPC standardised risk terminology and context used in the first page. However, they remain relevant by illustrating the risks with the sharpest increase within the reporting period as identified by the communities.*

## Child Labour

487 out of 748 KIs interviewed noted that child labour is challenging their community.

- 73% of those (487 KIs) mentioned the lack of work opportunities for heads of households as the main reason for child labour in their community.
- 54% of KIs see exploitation and abuse as the most crucial effect of child labour in their community
- 27% claiming it leads to increased violence
- 16% mentioned possible detention against the child's will.

Child labour includes activities such as selling water, polishing shoes<sup>1</sup>, working in construction, restaurants, and markets, at food stands, brickmaking, cattle herding, and in the mining sector, including gold mining<sup>2</sup>

The current economic decline is exacerbating this issue, as households struggle to make ends meet. Illustrating the financial problem, the government is unable to fund the 400% salary increase outlined in the 2023/2024 budget<sup>3</sup>. As of May 2024, most South Sudanese public employees have not received a salary since October 2023<sup>4</sup>, which is likely to increase cases of child labour. Reports indicate that children are dropping out of school or attending irregularly to help provide for their families or pay their school fees.

Street children and child labour are predominantly noted in urban settings, where the economic consequences can be more severe. The cost of living is higher, and there are fewer alternative sources of livelihood compared to rural areas, where activities like fishing and farming are more accessible<sup>5</sup>. In the village you could do fishing or farming, but in urban settings less so. In fact, as of July 2023, 2.8 million school-aged children are out of school, 46% of children are engaged

<sup>1</sup> VOA 05/03/2024

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR 13/06/2023

<sup>3</sup> VOA 05/03/2024

<sup>4</sup> ICG 15/05/2024

<sup>5</sup> Joint Protection Analysis Workshop, 29-30 May 2024

in child labour and one of every two girls are married before the age of 18<sup>6</sup> – which also has an economic incentive behind it. Additionally, some children are abducted for child labour and recruitment purposes.

In general, when children are forced to produce, search for, or prepare food to meet their food needs, they may also be exposed to child protection risks such as neglect, hazardous child labour, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, recruitment, and use by armed forces and armed groups, and dangers and injuries such as road accidents, falls or burns<sup>7</sup>. Having said that, it is important to note that children sometimes do not report these violations. According to an assessment in Yei County, Central Equatoria State conducted in late 2023, a significant portion of abused children (47%) do not report the incidents to anyone, potentially due to fear, shame, or lack of awareness about available support systems<sup>8</sup>.

### Civil Documentation Issues

418 out of 748 KIs interviewed noted that lack of access to civil documentation is challenging their community.

- 54% of those (418 KIs) mentioned unreachable registers,
- 49% mentioned the lack of understanding of the process of obtaining civil documentation,
- 37% mentioned security concerns when traveling to the nearest register.

32% of KIs mention birth certificates as the most unobtainable document.

The ability to be employed is mentioned as the largest negative effect by 54% of KIs.

This requirement introduces bias against those who lack a social network or do not have the appearance typically associated with South Sudanese identity. This issue primarily affects returnees, and with no official statistics on their numbers, it is difficult to estimate the extent of the problem. Overall, there are no national procedures in place to facilitate the provision of identity documents for returnees<sup>12</sup>.

This lack of documentation profoundly impacts access to public services and complicates family reunification efforts<sup>13</sup>. It also affects land and property ownership. Furthermore, there are concerns that individuals without the required national documentation may be blocked from voting in the planned elections in December<sup>14</sup>.

### Lack of Access to Humanitarian Assistance

377 out of 748 KIs interviewed noted a lack of access to humanitarian assistance challenging their community.

- 49% of those (377 KIs) mentioned corruption,
- 49% mentioned a lack of awareness of the availability of services,
- 42% of KIs note local community leaders as biggest contributors to the lack of access to services.

Obtaining nationality documents in South Sudan is a cumbersome and expensive process. Individuals must produce an age assessment or birth certificate, a blood test, and four photographs, and pay various fees<sup>9</sup>. The cost for obtaining a nationality certificate and national identity card for South Sudanese by birth is approximately USD 25, while reclaiming a lost nationality certificate costs around USD 50<sup>10</sup>. These high fees, combined with long travel distances and corruption—often in the form of demands for bribes—create significant access constraints, especially those with mobility issues, and limited financial means.

Additionally, applicants must find a credible witness who can attest to their origin. This witness can be community leaders, traditional authorities, church leaders, Payam/Boma officials, or sub-chiefs for their tribe<sup>11</sup>.

Data from Malakal PoC highlights some of these challenges faced by returnees, refugees, and host communities in accessing humanitarian assistance. Some elderly people, separated from their families, missed out on provisions and expressed concerns about damaged benches at distribution sites. Isolated cases of missing names in the biometric system impacted access to food distributions, leading to requests for faster cross-checking. Additionally, some returnees missed services

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF 24/07/2023

<sup>7</sup> ibid

<sup>8</sup> AVSI 09/02/2024

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, last accessed 05/06/2024

<sup>10</sup> Eye Radio, 29/11/2022

<sup>11</sup> UNHCR, last accessed 05/06/2024

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of State, 22/04/2024

<sup>13</sup> Joint Protection Analysis Workshop, 29-30 May 2024

<sup>14</sup> VOA, 12/04/2024

- 38% mentioned a lack of registration/food distribution cards,
- 37% of KIs mention people with disabilities
- 36% mention IDPs/Returnees as the population most affected.

due to non-compliance with registration procedures or attempts to double register in Malakal town camps and the PoC<sup>15</sup>.

Tribalism, which can be regarded as a source of corruption, and can exacerbate these challenges by sometimes influencing the distribution of humanitarian assistance.

In food distribution scenarios, certain groups can be prioritized over others if biased tribal leaders are involved in the process<sup>16</sup>. Overall, national elites often amplify tribal sentiments for personal gain, resulting in biased resource distribution that favours their tribal affiliations<sup>17</sup>. This lack of governance and oversight allows local leaders to discriminate and abuse power, hindering equitable access to humanitarian aid and perpetuating community divisions, thereby making it harder for vulnerable populations like IDPs and returnees to receive needed assistance.

Additionally, checkpoints not only cause movement restrictions but also impact access to humanitarian aid. As humanitarian relief is an important influx of resources in a cash-strapped economy, the transport of humanitarian relief serves as a major source of revenue at checkpoints across the country. While no viable statistics are available, humanitarian bulk transport is estimated to make up about half of all bulk transport in South Sudan, and over half of this transport is outsourced by humanitarian organizations to commercial transporters, which are subject to extortion at checkpoints<sup>18</sup>.

### Lack of Access to Justice

336 out of 748 KIs interviewed noted a lack of access to justice challenging their community.

- 45% of those (336 KIs) mentioned corruption,
- 22% mentioned fear of intimidation,
- 17% mentioned fear of physical retaliation.
- 22% of KIs mentioned Returnees and IDPs and 20% mention people with disabilities as the group most affected.

**77% of KIs perceive Customary Law as the most appropriate justice mechanism**, while the most cited reasons for seeking justice are:

- 64% note HLP issues,
- 53% note family disputes,
- 51% mention GBV

While corruption impacts many aspects of the daily life of the population, the PMS data shows that according to KI, corruption plays a significant role in stifling justice. Common forms of corruption in South Sudan include embezzlement of public funds, tribalism, and bribery, all of which likely impact access to various services, including justice. Bribery is one of the most common means of facilitation for accessing public services, meaning that poorer households and those with limited financial means – such as women and people with disabilities – are disproportionately impacted when accessing justice services.

It is also important to note that overall, the justice services are inadequate, characterized by limited professional capacity of investigations, limited number of prosecutors and judges, and lack of infrastructure.

This has led to an overwhelming backlog of cases, prolonged detention, and prison overcrowding. For example, Juba National Prison is overcrowded at 476% over capacity<sup>19</sup>.

While some initiatives such as mobile courts have worked to address some of these challenges in the formal justice system reducing the overall case backlogs<sup>20</sup>, bringing justice to locations lacking access to formal legal systems, and addressing more complex legal cases which customary courts can struggle with<sup>21</sup>, challenges persist. As a result, these factors have likely contributed to the population's preference for informal judicial systems. The preference to Customary Law is supported by other studies showing that the most popular venues for adjudicating community

<sup>15</sup> Internews 06/03/2024

<sup>16</sup> Joint Protection Analysis Workshop, 29-30 May 2024

<sup>17</sup> FES, 04/2024

<sup>18</sup> IPIS Research 10/12/2021

<sup>19</sup> UNDP, 06/03/2024

<sup>20</sup> ibid

<sup>21</sup> UNMISS, 28/05/2024

disputes are traditional courts headed by local chiefs. These courts are easily accessible and less bureaucratic compared to official routes. They are also conducted in open air, allowing the community to listen to the arguments and the rulings<sup>22</sup>. Disputes that are resolved before customary courts, estimates put it between 80%<sup>23</sup> to 90%<sup>24</sup>, despite challenges such as the lack of facilities to hold criminals or those prosecuted<sup>25</sup>, and the inconsistent application of customary law, which remains non-codified. Common inconsistencies include gaps in upholding the rights of women and girls<sup>26</sup>, as well as the disproportionate impact on traditionally marginalized groups.

### Sexual Violence

361 out of 748 KIs interviewed noted that sexual and gender-based violence is challenging their community.

- 43% of KIs consider their community members as the factors increasing the risk,
- 28% note armed actors as risk-increasing factors

The low or complete lack of reporting GBV incidents is attributed to:

- 68% fear of stigma,
- 38% note a lack of knowledge on rights and availability of response resources.

**58% KIs consider compensation paid to families, as the most common resolution mechanism for GBV disputes**

Given that women are mostly affected by GBV incidents, underreporting, is even more of an issue when GBV affects men and boys<sup>27 28</sup>. These findings can be partly explained by cultural norms that view girls as a source of financial gain due to the high dowries their families can receive. In many cases, girls are not considered the sole responsibility of their nuclear family but are seen as belonging to the extended family, including uncles and brothers.

Such patriarchal cultural norms disproportionately impact women and girls and are often enforced by close community members<sup>29</sup>. Additionally, overcrowding, lack of privacy, poor facilities, and insufficient street lighting in some displacement settings can expose women and girls to GBV from community members living in close proximity. For example, in Renk, increased reports of sexual assault have been linked to overcrowding at transit and reception centres<sup>30</sup>.

The finding that armed actors increase the risk of GBV is supported by data showing that the proliferation of arms and the increasingly militarized patriarchal society of South Sudan, where women and girls are viewed as subordinate to men and boys, has led to an increase in conflict-related gender-based violence<sup>31</sup>. Impunity and the lack of a functioning judicial system that holds perpetrators accountable continue to drive GBV and hinder efforts to address these threats<sup>32</sup>. Although there are currently two GBV courts in Juba, they are not functioning efficiently due to a lack of judicial infrastructure, capacity, and mechanisms for case follow-up and monitoring. With these constraints and the rising number of cases—having doubled since the courts were established in 2020 despite the stigma around reporting<sup>33</sup> – it is likely that families will continue to seek alternative coping mechanisms, including compensation paid to families.

### Restriction of Movement

298 out of 748 KIs interviewed noted restriction of movement challenging their community.

- 40% of those (298 KIs) mentioned fear of death and injury as well as fear of GBV,

Available data shows that pockets of insecurity across the country, along with recurring attacks by state and non-state armed groups (NSAG) on major routes such as Yei-Juba and Nimule-Juba roads, continue to curtail the free movement of people and goods<sup>34</sup>. Insecure areas along these roads are also sites of various forms of

<sup>22</sup> FES, 04/2024

<sup>23</sup> UNDP, 06/03/2024

<sup>24</sup> IOM, 30/04/2024

<sup>25</sup> Joint Protection Analysis Workshop, 29-30 May 2024

<sup>26</sup> IOM, 07/03/2024

<sup>27</sup> Amnesty International 18/05/2022

<sup>28</sup> CSRF 30/08/2023

<sup>29</sup> Joint Protection Analysis Workshop, 29-30 May 2024

<sup>30</sup> OCHA 12/02/2024

<sup>31</sup> Amnesty International, 18/05/2022

<sup>32</sup> Joint Protection Analysis Workshop, 29-30 May 2024

<sup>33</sup> The City Review, 24/11/2022

<sup>34</sup> FES, 04/2024



- 36% mentioned fear of kidnapping,
- 28% mentioned fear of arrest or detention (including at checkpoints).
- 42% of KIs mention women and girls as the group most affected.

The impact of restrictions,

- 64% note lack of access to lifesaving services,
- 60% mention lack of access to livelihood,
- 29% note lack of access to education

primary incentive behind these checkpoints<sup>37</sup>. As the economic situation continues to worsen, with civil servants and soldiers not receiving their salaries, it is likely that these roadblocks will continue mushrooming despite government efforts to crack down on them<sup>38</sup>.

violence, including GBV, unlawful detention, injuries, and sometimes death.

Specifically checkpoints and roadblocks – often illegal – have become a major source of movement restrictions. Reports from 2021 indicate that since 2011, the number of checkpoints has nearly doubled, and checkpoint taxes have increased by 300%<sup>35</sup>. Armed men at checkpoints extort money from drivers and abuse people, especially women, exposing them to the risk of GBV.

Additionally, these illegal roadblocks and checkpoints across the country are making delivery of humanitarian aid difficult and expensive<sup>36</sup>. Financial gain is the

## Capacity Building Initiatives

During the reporting period, the Protection Cluster in South Sudan and the AoRs, in close cooperation with the Global Protection Cluster and DRC, with support from USAID, UNHCR and ECHO, conducted a series of online and hybrid training as well as a Protection Analysis Workshop on 29-30 May, intended to increase the capacity of cluster partner staff to collect and analyse data and information in line with the Protection Analytical Framework as stipulated by the GPC.

Below are some of the trainings conducted online

- **Planning for analysis using DEEP**, 27 March Introducing DEEP as an analytical tool, and the qualitative analysis process.
- **Basics of humanitarian needs analysis**, 03 April Introducing basic elements of humanitarian needs analysis (descriptive, explanatory, etc.), and showcasing methods of summarising data and establishing associations among data points.
- **Data Triangulation**, 30 April. Using qualitative data to validate and reinforce quantitative data collected by the cluster through the PMS, for more comprehensive analysis.



Protection Analysis Workshop 29-30 May 2024, Juba, South Sudan Protection Cluster



<sup>35</sup> Global Bar, 15/12/2021

<sup>36</sup> Eye Radio, 28/12/2023

<sup>37</sup> IPIS Research, 10/12/2021

<sup>38</sup> Eye Radio, 05/03/2024

PROMO Working Group  
Protection Cluster South Sudan



## Key Findings and Messages/Recommendations:

### Child Labour

- Considering the status of children and community perceptions, it is recommended to continue adequate support to projects responding to Child Protection risks and violations across South Sudan.
- Promote *Child Care* and Child Protection multi-staged information campaign and advocacy aimed at a gradual shift in public perception and communities, through media and governmental stakeholders such as the Child and Social Welfare ministry, to reduce neglect, exploitation, abuse and violence against children.
- Development actors to support livelihoods schemes for vulnerable households in an effort to transition from the dependency on humanitarian aid to self-reliance for the provision of food and ensure a safe environment where children can grow and develop.
- Promote free formal education and female empowerment trainings as well as introduce sports activities to keep boys and girls engaged and away from the streets.

### Civil Documentation

- Development actors to promote civil registration process at county level, reducing overall the costs as well as the time required to obtain civil documentation.
- Consider joint government mobile registration projects to remote areas with the support of humanitarian organizations that have the expertise and the capacity
- Development actors to advocate with the government to lead a solutions initiative for HLP issues.

### Lack of access to justice

- Peace actors to support the capacity building and improvement of policing.
- Development actors to support the government with capacity building to promote the rule of law in the justice system, moving away from customary law, reducing impunity and fear of intimidation.

### Sexual Violence

- Joint efforts by humanitarian, development and governmental stakeholders to address effective access to justice related to GBV, fear of stigma, including men and boys survivors who are widely underreported and lack of knowledge on rights and services.

### Restriction of Movement

- The deployment of the unified forces would ensure the elimination of illegal checkpoints across the country. This will improve the safe movement especially of women and children, assist in the effective delivery of humanitarian aid, as well as boost economic activities and trade within the country.

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 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 provides contextual information for each of the identified risks, as well as complements it with other assessments conducted or published in the period under review.

**Organizations contributing to the PMS in the reporting period:** Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Agency for Women and Children Development, Alight, Danish Refugee Council, Hope Restoration South Sudan, Humanitarian & Development Consortium, International Organization for Migration, INTERSOS Humanitarian Aid Organization, Mission Community Development Agency, Mission to Alleviate Suffering in South Sudan, Mobile Humanitarian Agency, Norwegian Refugee Council, Survivor Aid, and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

**Thank you to all the member organizations for their contributions!**

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