



South Sudan

Protection Monitoring Spotlight

July – August 2024

In July-August 2024, protection monitors conducted **444** Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) covering **74** payams in **24** Counties in **5** States (Northern Bahr El-Ghazal, Unity, Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Central Equatoria).

Key PROMO achievements

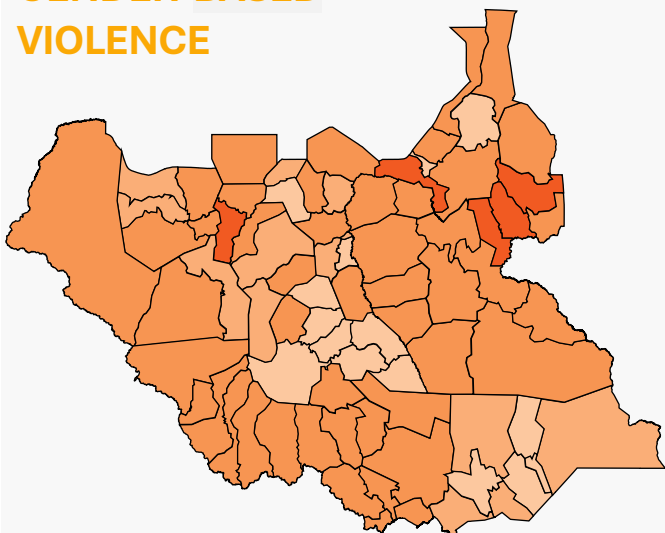
With the support of the protection cluster state-level coordination structures, **Protection Risk Assessments** were conducted nationally in August and the below five risks were identified with the highest prevalence:

- Gender-Based Violence
- Theft, Extortion, Forced Eviction or Destruction of Personal Property
- Child, Early or Forced Marriage
- Discrimination and Stigmatization, Denial of Resources, Opportunities, Services and/or Humanitarian Access
- Attacks on Civilians and Other Unlawful Killings, and Attacks on Civilian Objects



Floods exacerbate the risks faced by women and children already vulnerable in the fragile humanitarian situation of South Sudan.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



According to the Area-based Protection Risk Assessment conducted in August by the Protection Cluster sub-national coordination mechanisms, Gender-Based Violence continues to rank at the highest of the protection risk, as indicated by the communities. This reads that a staggering 79% of the country suffers significant exposure to the risk of GBV with the breakdown of the findings having it considered a very high in five counties (5%), a high risk in 47 counties (59%) and Abyei Area, while a medium risk in 12 (15%) counties of South Sudan.

The overall distribution of severity (darker color represents higher risk severity) of GBV Risk in South Sudan – PRA August 2024

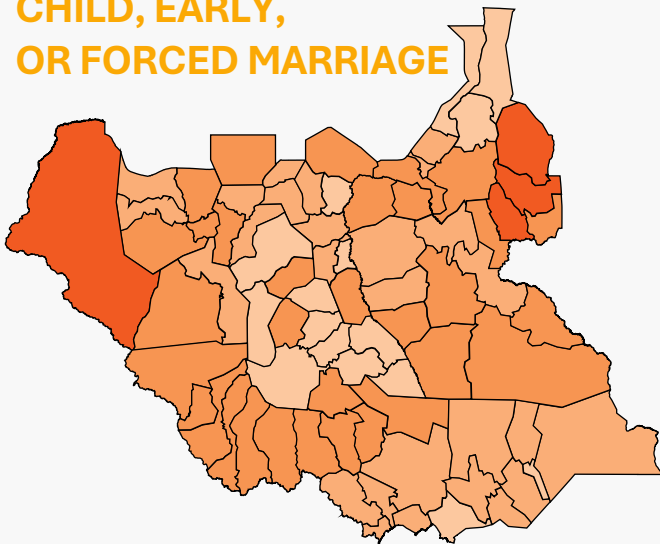


Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a pervasive and critical threat in South Sudan, affecting primarily women and girls who experience greater risk of sexual violence, including rape, sexual harassment, conflict-related sexual violence and domestic violence¹. Serious crimes of GBV nature continue with impunity, and the numerous policies, action plans and laws adopted by the Government have not yet been implemented². South Sudan remains a deeply patriarchal society in which custom and tradition entrench the subservience of women and girls to men. The prevailing inequalities, discrimination and unequal power relations, lack of access to resources and very limited opportunities to quality education result in women and girls being at higher risk to sexual and gender-based violence. This situation is exacerbated by conflicts, displacement due to flooding as well as the very weak economy that impact gender norms and drive the negative survival mechanisms for women and girls³.

GBV is widespread but goes largely unreported due to the stigma associated with the brutality of those crimes, the dysfunctional court system and perpetrators' impunity, the fear of retaliation as well as inability to report due to lack of awareness or disability. According to South Sudan GBVIMS data, for the first half of 2024, rape and sexual assault constitute 30% of the reported incidents in the country while physical violence counted for 36% of the reported incidents. Data on men and boys survivors of sexual violence is also limited. With customary courts largely serving as the only means to seek justice, GBV criminal cases remain essentially unresolved failing to provide justice and protection to women and girls survivors. Unintended pregnancies, diseases and injuries to reproductive organs, create a continuing cycle of harm. Evidence shows that particularly children born out of rape by security forces are marginalized within their communities and are a constant reminder of the conflict and the harm inflicted on children⁴.

In August, two incidents of a 13-year old girl and a 20-year old young woman who were beaten to death⁵ by their close family members in Bentiu, Unity State, came to light, followed by a media report of another girl being burned alive by her father in their home in Gudele, Juba, and an article about the surge of rape cases largely involving teenage girls, in Yambio county, Western Equatoria. Equal to the outcry for the cruel and atrocious nature of those incidents, is the alarming lack of protection for women and girls safeguarding their rights across the country, the limited representation of women in decision making to promote effective behavioural change programming for women and girls, as well as the weakness of appropriate institutions to hold perpetrators accountable and ensure justice.

CHILD, EARLY, OR FORCED MARRIAGE



According to the Area-based Protection Risk Assessment conducted in August by the Protection Cluster sub-national coordination mechanisms, Child, Early, or Forced Marriage is considered a very high in five counties (5%), a high risk in 32 counties (41%) and Abyei Area, and a medium risk in 27 (37%) counties of South Sudan. This reads that a staggering 83% of the country, mostly girls affected, suffers significant exposure to the risk of early or forced marriages.

The overall distribution of severity (darker color represents higher risk severity) of Child, Early or Forced Marriage Risk in South Sudan – PRA August 2024

¹ IRC 06/03/2024

² A/HRC/55/26

³ A/HRC/40/69

⁴ A_HRC_55_26

⁵ Governor Riek bans child and forced marriages in Unity State - Eye Radio

Child, early or forced marriage is part of the gender-based harmful traditional practices in South Sudan affecting young women and girls across the country. Despite the legal framework (Child Act 2008) setting the minimum age for marriage above 18 years, entrenched traditional and societal norms nurture this practice to this day. Figures estimate that over 50% of girls are married before the age of 18, often forced to marry much older men. In addition, 28% of them get pregnant before even reaching adulthood⁶.

Both in urban and rural settings, a young girl's value is measured by the dowry she could potentially bring to her family. Girls as young as twelve years are married to men for an agreed upon amount of cattle, which often is the only means to provide food and a source of income to their families. Dowries are the main driving force behind child marriages and are inherently linked to poverty and cultural beliefs on gender roles. During the reporting period, displacement occurring in many parts of the country due to the ongoing conflicts and floods, exacerbated the early or forced marriage practices, bridging the survival gap for the whole family.

Girls who refuse their families' wishes to marry or fleeing from their homes, are often beaten or murdered⁷ by older male family members. Suicidal attempts are common and often fatal, among teenage girls to escape marriage arrangements by their families. The harmful effects of child or forced marriage deprives the girls and young women from reaching their full potential, constituting one of the primary reasons why 76% of South Sudanese girls are out-of-school⁸. In addition to the limited education opportunities, the devastating consequences of child or forced marriage, include physical and long-term psychological harm, exploitation, abuse, marital rape, sexual and domestic violence.



Young girls are often not developed enough to bear children and give birth. A high percentage die during pregnancy or childbirth from obstructed labor or prenatal hemorrhage or suffer from obstetric fistulas for the rest of their lives. With destroyed health infrastructure, few roads connecting the largely rural population to hospitals and health clinics, low numbers of qualified health workers and poor quality of health services, maternal mortality rates in South Sudan are among the highest in the world.

The Penal Code does not criminalise those who procure child marriage but contains a provision to criminalise “kidnapping or abducting a woman to compel her to get married”. The definition of rape and sexual intercourse in the Penal Code remains unclear as under the Code, the age of sexual consent is 18 and excludes the definition of rape by a married couple. Different ethnic groups have customary laws that may contradict national laws and often discriminate against women and girls. Customary courts are accessible, familiar and are therefore widely used. The views of the customary courts do not usually enforce the rules in the Child Act and decision making is oriented by cultural norms usually harmful towards the rights of women and girls.

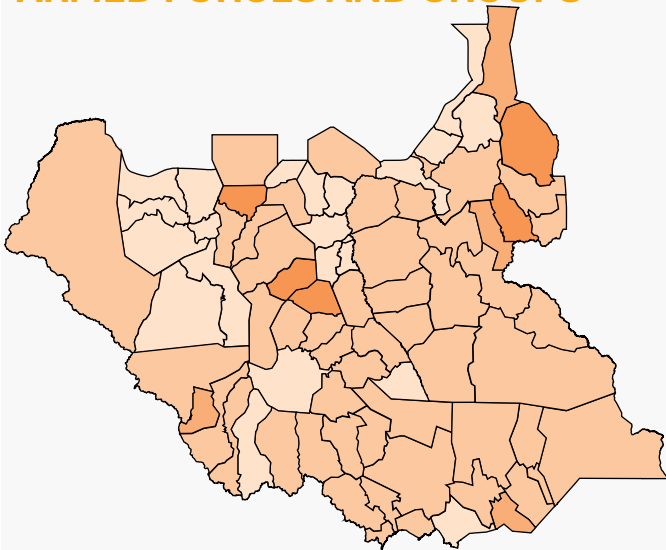
With the justice system in South Sudan suffering from severe jurisdictional, security and capacity impediments, impunity fuels cyclical violence and human rights violations. The high levels of instability, economic decline, erosion of services, hunger and malnutrition perpetuate negative coping mechanisms and allow harmful traditional practices such as child, early, or forced marriage to persist.

⁶ Ending child marriage should not be a choice but a necessity | UNICEF South Sudan

⁷ Governor Riek bans child and forced marriages in Unity State - Eye Radio

⁸ 'Born to be married': addressing child, early and forced marriage in Nyal, South Sudan | Oxfam International

FORCED RECRUITMENT AND ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN IN ARMED FORCES AND GROUPS



According to the Area-based Protection Risk Assessment conducted in August by the Protection Cluster sub-national coordination mechanisms, Forced Recruitment and Association of Children in Armed Forces or Groups is considered a high risk in 5 counties (5%) and a medium risk in 4 (5%) counties of South Sudan. However, it is important to note that PROMO assesses the results linked to the current rainy season and floods. Both factors reduce the prevalence of Forced Recruitment and Association of Children in Armed Forces or Groups that typically increase during the dry months in South Sudan and remains a grave violation and a serious risk across the country.

The overall distribution of severity (darker color represents higher severity of risk) of Forced Recruitment and Association of Children in Armed Forces or Groups Protection Risk in South Sudan – PRA August 2024

The continuing clashes between armed forces and armed groups, and ongoing intercommunal violence, places children in South Sudan at heightened risk of abduction and forced recruitment. Despite a decrease of incidents noted in the recent years and reflected in the latest report of the [Secretary-General on the children and armed conflict](#) (Jun.2024), grave violations committed against children, including the recruitment and use of children, notably by government security forces, remain of great concern in South Sudan. The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict is one of the most egregious violations of children’s rights, depriving them of their innocence and childhood, with lingering physical, emotional and social effects in their lives. During their period of association with armed forces or armed groups, girls and boys are used in a variety of ways from support roles, such as cooking or portering, to active fighting, laying mines or spying. Girls are frequently forced into marriage and used for sexual purposes.

Children in South Sudan are abducted or forcibly recruited, and girls often serve as “wives” to the soldiers. Other motives to join is poverty, lack of access to education and vocational training opportunities, by circumstances of political or social exclusion, lack of parental care and support, and lack of security and protection in the community, or the desire to seek revenge for violence committed against them or their families. Some children are manipulated to join armed groups with false promises or appeals to identity or increased social status. In 2022, three 15-year-old boys were abducted by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in Opposition (SPLA-IO) in Western Equatoria state. The boys were deceived by an alleged “youth empowerment group”, taken to SPLA-IO barracks and were intended to be trafficked to an armed group of the Azande community operating in the Central African Republic⁹. Other children are encouraged by their families and communities to participate in armed conflict or become part of locally organized armed groups, or community defense forces tasked with protecting their homes¹⁰.



⁹ 2410784_CAAC_AnnualReport_Summary_2023_WEB-23Jul24.pdf (un.org)

¹⁰ CAAFAG Programme Brief 2019.pdf (wvi.org)

Testimonies have children as early as 10 years old being initiated into activities using guns to acquire skills needed to defend their communities¹¹. Allegations by the communities also have children who joined armed gangs being arrested and recruited into armed forces in the absence of a judicial system and as a solution to “take them off the streets”.

Children make up over 60 per cent of South Sudanese internally displaced persons and refugees. Intercommunal conflicts and the recent floods across the country, resulted to many children to be separated from their parents and guardians, undertaking arduous, risky journeys to safety often unaccompanied. They are particularly vulnerable to recruitment into armed forces and armed groups, physical violence including sexual, psychological distress from being exposed to traumatic events, and limited access to education and health care¹². The rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups, remains a challenge in South Sudan, given the shortage of services, including in hard-to-reach areas, the lack of social and psychosocial resources, the lack of education and employment opportunities and the risk of re-recruitment.

PROMO Working Group - Protection Cluster South Sudan

Key Findings and Messages/Recommendations:

Gender-Based Violence – Child, Early, or Forced Marriage - Forced Recruitment and Association of Children in Armed Forces or Groups

Considering the interrelation of the risks the recommendations are:

- Humanitarian, Development, Peacekeeping missions and the State to prioritize the protection of women and girls and, guarantee and protect the substantive equality of women and girls in society.
- Adequate resource allocation by the state for functional and effective rule of law and justice institutions, including for investigations and prosecutions, and ensure the independence and impartiality of rule of law institutions, including gender balance and ethnic diversity.
- Tackle legislative and institutional gaps that foster impunity.
- Prioritize prevention, holding perpetrators of sexual and gender-based crimes accountable.
- Provide sufficient allocation of resources to the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare to undertake the coordination and implementation of State commitments to address sexual and gender-based violence.
- Implement commitments to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions at all levels.
- Prioritize the rights of children and, ensuring and fulfilling the rights of children to health, food and education, including through funding.
- End recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups, and provide resources for the activities of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Commission.
- Comply with national and international laws providing for rights of children, including to prevent and punish grave violations against children in conflict.
- Support local and national education systems to adapt and partner with other government agencies to ensure reintegration, including short-term education programs, with tailored enrichment materials. Where possible, implement PSS and health activities through schools to support all students and teachers affected by conflict.
- Invest in multi-sectoral child protection systems at formal and informal levels (with adaptations made for age, maturity, gender, disability), that are community-based and tied to infrastructure improvements, such as schools, as part of reintegration.

¹¹ [prevention-of-the-use-of-children-in-armed-force-and-or-armed-group.pdf \(drc.ngo\)](#)

¹² [g1906505.pdf \(un.org\)](#)

Protection Cluster Stocktaking Exercise and Retreat

The Protection Cluster organized a three-day Retreat from 5-7 August and a two-day Stocktaking Exercise 8-9 August at Crown Hotel, in Juba, South Sudan. During the retreat, the Protection Cluster and its AoRs successfully brought together national and sub-national Coordinators and Co-Coordiators, Donors and key Protection stakeholders representing Eastern, Central and Western Equatoria, Northern and Western Bahr El-Ghazal, Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile, Lakes and Warrap states of South Sudan. The total number of registered participants reached 90 members (29F/ 61M) during the retreat, while at the stocktaking, a blended representation of 70 members (27F/ 53M) with Coordinators and Co-Coordiators from across the country, UNMISS, local NGO and Civil Society actors actively participated in the exercise. During the first two days of the Retreat, the Protection Cluster and the AoRs had the opportunity to present an overview of their strategies, achievements and directions, areas of focus and way forward for 2025, with inputs to be included in the HNRP 2025.



Capacity Building Initiatives

- During the reporting period July-August 2024, the protection cluster embarked on the capacity building of protection actors in field locations, on Protection Risk Analysis and identification of key risks prevailing in Eastern Equatoria, Warrap, Western Equatoria, Northern and Western Bahr El Ghazal. These workshops were conducted in each state with inclusive participation from National and International NGOs, field AoRs, community representatives and the line Ministries.
- 21-23 August 2024 Minimum Services Package MHPSS for PC partners



Min Services Package MHPSS workshop, 21-23 Aug. 2024, Juba, UNHCR

Bibliography

- Stakeholders consulted ranged from key informants, sub-national protection cluster reports, UN agencies, International and National NGOs, Civil Society actors and academia.
- Africa: Strengthen Steps to End Child Marriage, Human Rights Watch, 9 December 2015, [Africa: Strengthen Steps to End Child Marriage | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)
- As Young as Twelve: South Sudan's Child Marriage Epidemic, Amber Maze, 11 April 2013, Enough Project, [As Young as Twelve: South Sudan's Child Marriage Epidemic - The Enough Project](#)
- 'Born to be married': addressing child, early and forced marriage in Nyal, South Sudan, Elysia Buchanan, Oxfam, 18 February 2019, ['Born to be married': addressing child, early and forced marriage in Nyal, South Sudan | Oxfam International](#)
- CAAFAG Theory of Change Narrative, UNICEF, April 2022, [CAAFAG Theory of Change.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#)
- Call for Action as rape surge in Yambio County, Emmanuel Mondello, City Press, 28 August 2024
- Child, early and forced marriage : revised draft resolution / Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Belize, Benin, Canada, Central African Republic, Costa Rica, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Georgia, Ghana, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Monaco, Mongolia, Netherlands, Paraguay, Romania, South Sudan, Spain, Zimbabwe and Zambia, General Assembly, A/C.3/73/L.22/Rev.1, 12 November 2018, [Child, early and forced marriage : \(un.org\)](#)
- Child Marriage and the Hunger Crisis in South Sudan: A Case Study, World Vision, 31 Jan 2022, [Child Marriage and the Hunger Crisis in South Sudan: A Case Study - South Sudan | ReliefWeb](#)
- Children and armed conflict, General Assembly Security Council, 5 June 2023, [n2314496.pdf \(un.org\)](#)
- Children and armed conflict in South Sudan, Report of the Secretary-General, S/2023/99, Security Council, 10 February 2023, [n2304192.pdf \(un.org\)](#)
- Children and armed conflict Report of the Secretary-General, General Assembly Security Council, A/78/842-S/2024/384, 3 June 2024, [Children and armed conflict : \(un.org\)](#)
- Children Associated with Armed Forces & Groups, World Vision, [CAAFAG Programme Brief 2019.pdf \(wvi.org\)](#)
- Ending child marriage should not be a choice but a necessity- *Young voices calling for an end to child marriage in South Sudan*, UNICEF, 08 December 2023, [Ending child marriage should not be a choice but a necessity | UNICEF South Sudan](#)
- Gaps and Needs for Successful Reintegration of children associated with armed groups or armed forces, Global Coalition for reintegration of Child Soldiers, [Gaps-and-needs-for-Successful-Reintegration-of-CAFAAG.pdf \(un.org\)](#)
- Girls not Brides – South Sudan, [South Sudan - Girls Not Brides](#)
- Governor Riek bans child and forced marriage in Unity State, 19 August 2024, Eye Radio, [Governor Riek bans child and forced marriages in Unity State - Eye Radio](#)
- Investigating Maternal Mortality to Save Lives in South Sudan, HealthNet TPO, 7 Feb 2023, [Investigating Maternal Mortality to Save Lives in South Sudan - South Sudan | ReliefWeb](#)
- Opportunities and Barriers to Preventing the Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Forces and Armed Groups, *InterAction*, [Opportunities and Barriers to Preventing the Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Forces and Armed Groups - Interaction RBP](#)
- Prevention of the use of Children in Armed Forces and/or Armed Groups (CAAFAG) project summary*, Danish Refugee Council, Jul.2023,
- Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, 2019, A/HRC/40/69, [g1906505.pdf \(un.org\)](#)
- Report of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/55/26, 26 February–5 April 2024
- South Sudan: Slow Progress for Conflict-Affected Children as Humanitarian, Security Situations Remain Dire, 15 March 2023, Children in Armed Conflict, Office of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict [South Sudan: Slow Progress for Conflict-Affected Children as Humanitarian, Security Situations Remain Dire – Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict \(un.org\)](#)
- Supporting Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Groups, *A practical guide to the socio-economic reintegration of girls formerly associated in South Sudan*, UNICEF, [Supporting Children Formerly Associated with Armed Forces and Groups | UNICEF South Sudan](#)
- Witness claims father burned daughter to death, police unaware of the incident, Baria Johnson and Darlington Moses, 22 August 2024, Eye Radio, [Witness claims Gudele father burned daughter to death, police unaware of incident - Eye Radio](#)

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.

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

