

In March 2025, the South Sudan Protection Cluster with support of its AoRs and cluster members has concluded the first quarter of Protection Risk Assessments across South Sudan. The findings were analysed by the Area of Responsibility (AoR) experts with the below six risks presenting the highest severity:

Gender-Based Violence

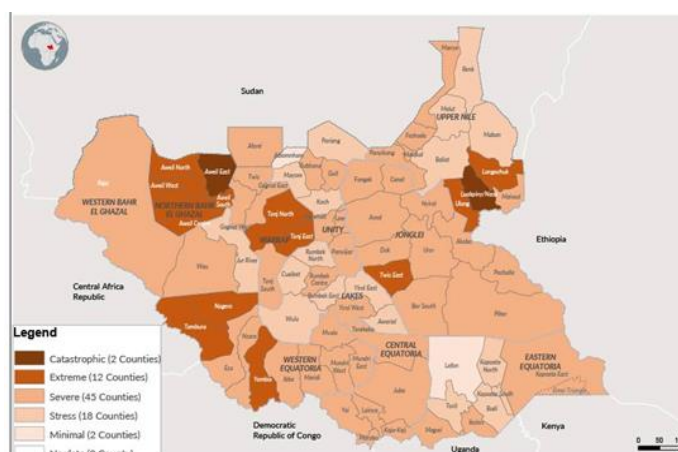
30 out of 79 counties (38%), in South Sudan reported a high to very high severity of gender-based violence (GBV), predominantly affecting women and girls. Contributing factors include gender inequality, harmful traditional practices, extreme poverty, the challenges of communal living and insufficient resources, especially for refugees, returnees and displaced individuals, and a rise in both inter-communal and state-armed conflicts. These issues persistently place GBV as a critical risk for the population.

Theft, Extortion, Forced Eviction or Destruction of Personal Property

Nationwide, 14 out of 79 counties (18%), indicated a high to very high level of risk related to housing, land, and property violations. Additionally, 45 counties, accounting for another 57%, report a medium level of exposure to these risks, further intensifying the vulnerability of the population. The majority of these violations are associated with the aftermath of conflicts and a wide range of tenure insecurities, which are exacerbated by gender inequality, a weak judiciary, tribalism, and a general absence of governance to safeguard property rights.

Child, Early or Forced Marriage

Extreme poverty, entrenched cultural practices, and the displacement of families and communities have led to 51 counties experiencing medium levels of risk, while 12 counties report high to very high exposure. This means that 80% of the country is grappling with serious issues, including those related to GBV, psychosocial support (PSS), and health concerns for girls and young women.



Child and Forced Family Separations

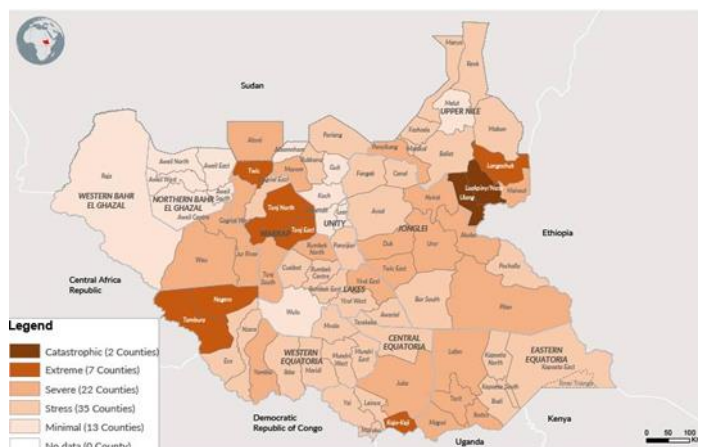
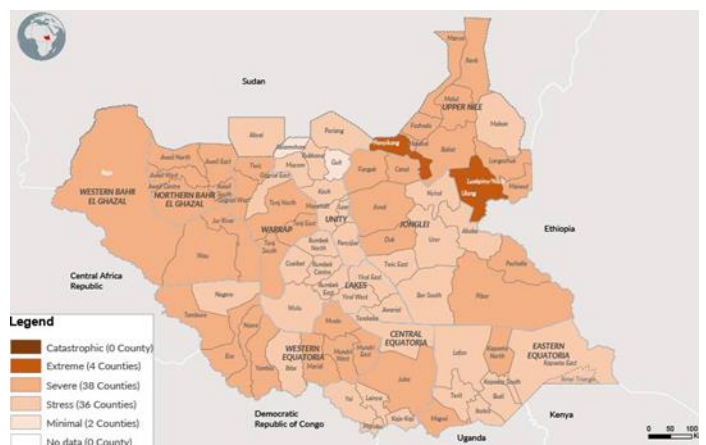
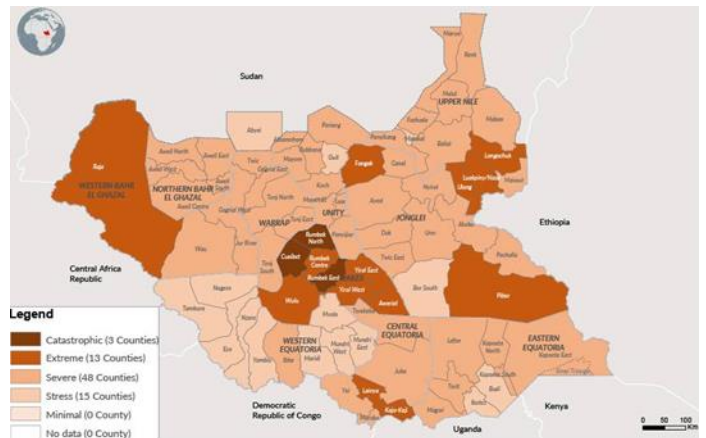
Traditional practices, natural disasters, epidemic outbreaks, conflicts, and widespread efforts to address extreme poverty, including child labor, are leading to family separations and forced separations of children. Out of 79 counties, 16 indicate a high or very high risk exposure, while an additional 48 counties report a medium level of risk. More than 81% of the population requires assistance in risk mitigation and the management of individual cases.

Discrimination and Stigmatization, Denial of Resources, Opportunities, Services and/or Humanitarian Access

The risks linked to barriers in accessing resources, opportunities, services, and humanitarian aid are frequently tied to the absence of assistance (significant reductions in humanitarian funding hinder the ability to meet needs). However, broader issues such as economic crises, conflicts, and mismanagement of resources, coupled with corruption, play a substantial role in the fact that 41 countries, or 52% of the total, report a medium to high level of risk severity.

Attacks on Civilians and Other Unlawful Killings, and Attacks on Civilian Objects

31 counties, representing 39% of the nation, are experiencing moderate to severe attacks on civilians and other unlawful killings. Recent political instability has led many local communities to escalate communal conflicts, drawing in both state and non-state armed groups, as well as exacerbating cycles of retributive killing.



Protection Risk Severities and Service Mapping

In March 2025, South Sudan Protection Cluster updated the national service mapping of Protection and AoR partners on the [Protection Cluster Dashboard](#). Partners are encouraged to continue updating the data sets to enhance the system's accuracy. Additionally, the Protection Cluster has introduced an analytical page within the dashboard that **integrates quarterly risk analysis with service mapping**. This feature allows coordination mechanisms and partners to better identify gaps in addressing the protection risks, the resulting protection needs, and to employ a more focused risk-reduction approach in strategic planning, prioritization, service consolidation. It also provides opportunities for a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of activities on protection risks reduction, mitigation or prevention of setbacks.

Analysis of Protection Services vs. the Protection Risks (sample cases):

- In **Upper Nile State**, the ongoing conflict in Nasir and Ulang counties forced many humanitarian actors to temporarily suspend their activities or, where service delivery remains possible, to prioritise urgent, life-saving service delivery. This has hindered the ability to collect timely primary data on major increases of severity for some protection risks, increasing reliance on secondary data source that provide only a glimpse of the overall catastrophic situation in the region.
- In **Pibor, Jonglei State**, the risk of child and forced family separation is assessed to be high. There are 11 protection organizations in Pibor that are providing 18 out of the 31 protection services available nationally, covering a wide range of essential GBV and child protection initiatives. However, given the severity of this risk [i.e. child and forced family separation] and insufficient response of available service providers in Jonglei, analysis suggests the need for consolidated advocacy aimed at highlighting the urgent need for humanitarian intervention to reduce this risk. Concurrently, it also informs the governmental and development stakeholders to invest in addressing the underlying causes.
- In **Twic, Warrap State**, GBV is identified as a pertaining risk affecting the civilian populations. As an example of good practices, the GBV Protection Partners are well-equipped to provide protection services to the survivors, enhancing the overall risk reduction severity. Analysis indicates that service providers employed an effective system of referrals and services that improve the overall protection environment in the county. However, there is a notable gap of child protection case management actors which can effectively complement GBV activities by focusing on child survivors. Service mapping reveals that current child protection efforts are primarily focused on awareness-raising activities identifying a significant gap. Furthermore, general protection case management poses a significant gap to address the complex protection needs of men, boys, women, and girls affected by conflict dynamics and other protection risks.

The analyses presented in the cases above utilize the findings from the service mapping tool. Through these findings we can analyse data and enhance coordinated response, addressing and mitigating protection risks to identified protection service gaps.

Heightened risks for displaced people in Upper Nile and Jonglei



Photo by @UNHCR

Since July 2024, sporadic hostilities between SSPDF and armed youth also known as the White Army, resumed in Nasir and Ulang counties of Upper Nile State claiming the lives of combatants and civilian population. Tensions

between the two parties intensified by early March 2025 when the government deployed troops to replace those stationed in the area. This move was perceived by the local youth as a move to disarm and control their military strength, leading eventually to the military offensive in Nasir and Ulang targeting alleged White Army positions.

This conflict between the two armed formations and the subsequent degradation of the protection environment have triggered the civilian displacement to the nearby counties along the Sobat corridor, throughout the northern counties of Jonglei State and to Ethiopia. This included the movement of over 525 households into Ethiopia, as noted by ADRA. On the 24th of March, an IRNA was conducted in the area of Nasir, with civilians reporting casualties, including children, women, elderly and men, affecting around 29,000 individuals. Also, the [REACH assessment](#) of Nasir, Ulang and Longochuk counties suggests that since February 2025 and the outbreak of military violence, there have been estimated 80,000 people displaced.

While the situation remains volatile and fluidity of civilian movement in displacement continues, reports vary in numbers. Nevertheless, the conditions for the displaced populations remain critical in locations like Nasir, Ulang, Akobo, Fangak and Ayod. Many women and children are seeking shelter under the trees and others occupying public buildings like schools. Beyond the evident threat of attacks on civilian and their property, they face significant protection risks such as child separation, discrimination, denial of resources and services, movement restrictions, forced displacement, and psychological trauma.

Growing gaps in protection risks mitigation in Renk

Since the beginning of the war in Sudan in April 2023, over 800,000 people fled to South Sudan via the Joda/Wuntau border. The border flow monitoring data indicates that around 53% of these individuals are women and children, including pregnant women, individuals with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), the elderly, survivors of GBV, as well as other marginalized communities. Since November 2024, Renk has received an influx of over 120,000 new arrivals, primarily Sudanese, entering through unofficial routes in the Eastern Corridor, such as Emtidad, Jerbena, Bobnis, Atam, and Chemedi. This surge significantly increased the demand for essential services, including health, water, sanitation, hygiene (WASH), shelter, and protection. With limited funding for the Sudan response prior to the global funding cuts in February 2025, which have further impacted 50% of the protection actors in South Sudan, humanitarian actors, including local organizations, NGOs, INGOs, and UN agencies, are currently constrained to the provision of one-time assistance for food, WASH, and shelter, while critical health and protection needs are identified and addressed through case management and psychosocial support that is needed at a greater scale than currently available. **Protection, Health, and WASH services have been particularly hard-hit by these funding reductions.**



Most severe protection risks

Between January and March 2025, incidences of **theft, extortion, and physical violence** reached a staggering 35%, predominantly affecting women and girls. This alarming trend has been exacerbated by the lack of socio-economic opportunities among populations in transit centres, noting that a large number among young individuals resort to drug use as a coping mechanism. New arrivals continue to report **violence and exploitation, including extortion and looting** during their journey to South Sudan and upon arrival at transit centres in Renk. Armed personnel and other individuals have been implicated in these acts, with refugees recounting instances of looting personal belongings—money, phones, clothes, and cooking utensils—often at **gunpoint**. In Renk,

targeted **thefts and robberies** of essential items have been reported, allegedly perpetrated by fellow new arrivals or economically challenged youths from Renk town. Many newcomers have faced severe delays in their journey due to lack of money, insecurity from armed elements, and roadblocks, with robbery occurring even along the safer Khartoum-Renk route.

The **loss of income** and ongoing theft has left refugees and returnees economically vulnerable, heightening their protection needs. Economic marginalization has contributed to the root causes of these protection risks, delaying their arrival at final destinations. Additionally, **GBV** remains a critical concern at the entry points to South Sudan, putting at risk predominantly women and girls. Reports indicate that women and girls have experienced sexual assaults, harassments, and exploitation during their journeys, particularly at the checkpoints. Furthermore, a safety audit conducted in the mid-2024 highlighted an increase in intimate partner violence, driven by limited gender inequality, unmet basic needs and socio-economic constraints within households. Congestion and poor living conditions in transit centres have further exacerbated GBV cases, while children are increasingly vulnerable to **child labour, family separation, and exploitation**. These risks are particularly pronounced for children associated with armed groups. Compounding these issues, many new arrivals at Renk transit centres **lack essential legal documentation**, making it difficult to obtain nationality documents due to a complex and costly process. Finally, the **lack of access to justice** for refugees and returnees in Renk is evident, as some remain imprisoned for months without a fair trial, highlighting the urgent need for legal support and intervention.

Population most exposed to protection risks

The needs arising from displacement have worsened due to family separations, increased safety concerns, and limited access to essential services. This situation has significantly affected everyone, especially those with specific needs, including **older adults lacking caregivers, individuals with disabilities, at-risk children (unaccompanied or separated), adolescent girls, vulnerable women (such as single mothers and pregnant or breastfeeding women), people with serious medical conditions** requiring assistance, households led by children, **survivors of GBV** and **individuals without legal documentation**.



Gaps in Response Services

The Protection sector in Renk is currently facing significant funding challenges, resulting in many projects being short-term and lacking the efficiency and continuity necessary to fully support communities with comprehensive services at scale. Recent funding cuts have exacerbated these issues, leading to a growing gap in ensuring continuity and sustainability of essential services. GBV services have been particularly limited, with an emphasis on response rather than prevention activities due to staffing constraints, especially in the eastern corridors. Although GBV, child protection, and general protection case management and referrals have been prioritized to provide urgent attention to survivors within 72 hours, the overall lack of resources relative to demand remains a critical gap. Additionally, while efforts to identify at-risk children are ongoing, there is limited support for caregivers, which poses challenges for children exposed to labour and abuse who require psychosocial and specialized care. The demand for mental health and psychosocial support has increased since November 2024, yet funding cuts have reduced the number of specialists serving at the transit centre and local hospitals to just one. These gaps exacerbate limited medical care options for individuals with mental health needs.

Protection risk assessments have highlighted community anxiety, as one-time food assistance is insufficient to meet the growing health, WASH, shelter, and protection demands, particularly in areas where basic services are critically needed. Onward transportation poses another challenge, with over 700,000 returnees and more than

14,000 refugees facing difficulties reaching their final destinations within South Sudan due to a lack of funds. Although protection partners are facilitating Individual Protection Assistance and Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance at the individual and household levels, the heightened vulnerability of the population remains inadequately addressed. Access to justice services have been provided, yet gaps persist in terms of technical support and the presence of a high court judge during hearings, underscoring the need for a long-term solution. Moreover, while the government has proposed the allocation of land as a long-term solution for returnees, no concrete plans or timelines have been established for its provision. Lastly, there is a notable lack of capacity building among staff and government officials, which hampers their knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to ensure continuity in support efforts.

Recommendations and advocacy points

- To address the pressing needs of children at risk, survivors of GBV, and other individuals with specific needs, it is imperative to ensure timely responses with enhanced capacity for psychosocial support, mental health services, case management, and protection monitoring (Humanitarian actors).
- Given the limitations of current resources, a coordinated response mechanism is essential, integrating health, WASH, shelter, protection, and psychosocial support services across Upper Nile State (Humanitarian).
- Prioritizing localization efforts will empower local and national partners by providing the necessary resources for sustainable, long-term solutions, particularly in strengthening community-based protection mechanisms related to child protection and GBV (Humanitarian-Development actors and the government).
- Investing in capacity building for local staff and government officials is essential to ensure they possess the required knowledge and skills (Humanitarian-Development actors and the government).
- Collaboration of development and peacebuilding actors to engage into durable solutions and long-lasting stability for the areas of returnees and their integration, foster the dialogue on peaceful co-existence, employ the leadership of the government and local community structures, including support of building a functional and independent judiciary system.
- Ensure the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Capacity building of armed groups and armed forces on IHL (ICRC, UNMISS).
- Allow access for humanitarian aid in areas of displacement of Nasir crisis (state and peacebuilding actors).

ⁱ For more information and methodology of Protection Risk Monitoring and severity ranking, please, refer to:
<https://globalprotectioncluster.org/publications/1986/policy-and-guidance/tool-toolkit/protection-cluster-south-sudan-protection-risk>

Protection Monitoring System (PMS) in South Sudan is managed by Protection Cluster and it relies on contributions by member organizations through data collection via Protection Risk Monitoring System, including KIIs, Observation tools, and FGDs across fifteen thematic areas thereby monitoring the occurrence of protection violations, their scale and impact on communities over time.

We are grateful to PROMO members for their valuable inputs

