

SOUTH SUDAN

Key crises to watch

OVERVIEW

South Sudan grapples with a multifaceted array of challenges, ranging from political instability and economic fragility to the impacts of climate change and conflicts. Intercommunal conflicts, rooted in tribal, political allegiances and pastoralist disputes, persist across the nation, leading to casualties and displacement. According to UNMISS, the incidence of intercommunal violence increased by 24% between January–March 2024 compared to the same period in 2023 (AJ 19/03/2024; OHCHR/UNMISS 17/07/2024).

The latest IPC analysis indicates that many areas will likely experience acute food insecurity at Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse levels during the peak of the lean season from April–July 2024, affecting more than seven million people. Of these, 2.3 million and 79,000 people – including returnees from Sudan – respectively face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) food insecurity levels. This is an increase from the previous period’s projection (December 2023 to March 2024) of 5.7 million, necessitating urgent humanitarian food assistance. The rise in food insecurity stems from climate-related shocks, such as flooding and dry spells; the economic crisis marked by currency depreciation and high food prices; internal conflict and insecurity; low agricultural production; a reduction in humanitarian assistance; and the effects of the continued conflict in Sudan (IPC 06/11/2023 and 03/11/2022; FEWS NET 05/04/2024).

As a result of the conflict in neighbouring Sudan, South Sudan has experienced a steady influx of refugees and returnees since April 2023. By June 2024, South Sudan was hosting more than 720,000 individuals who had crossed over from Sudan, with approximately 560,000 being South Sudanese (OCHA 05/07/2024). A variety of shocks have displaced approximately two million IDPs in need of humanitarian assistance to South Sudan (UNHCR accessed 08/08/2024).

Economic challenges loom large in South Sudan, as inflation has surged in 2024, reaching approximately 54%, eroding purchasing power, and increasing the cost of living for the population (Xinhua 25/03/2024; IMF accessed 22/07/2024). The South Sudanese pound has depreciated significantly against major currencies since 2023, worsening economic instability (WFP accessed 22/07/2024). Oil makes up 95% of South Sudan’s exports, and the country relies on it heavily. A lack of economic diversification poses significant obstacles to sustainable development, leaving the nation vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices. Unemployment remained high at 20% in 2022, and essential sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing are underdeveloped, further hindering economic growth and stability (WB accessed 19/06/2024; The EastAfrican 12/05/2024; WFP accessed 19/06/2024; WB 10/2022).

Map 1: South sudan administrative regions



Source: ACAPS using data from OCHA (accessed 08/08/2024)

95% of the population relies on climate-sensitive livelihoods, including farming, fishing, and herding, which expose people even more to the risks of water scarcity, sanitation challenges, and food insecurity (FAO accessed 09/05/2024). The country also suffered from severe flooding during the 2021–2022 rainy seasons, affecting nearly one million hectares of land and further worsening vulnerabilities to food insecurity, displacement, and health risks (ICG accessed 09/05/2024; WFP 02/05/2024).

Heavy flooding in 2021–2022 in the Greater Upper Nile region, including Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states, and prolonged dry conditions in the same period in Northern Bahr el Ghazal

and Eastern Equatoria states, both aggravated by climate change – alongside endemic diseases and an influx of refugees from neighbouring countries – compound the above issues (FEWS NET 05/04/2024; OCHA 28/11/2023; ICG accessed 17/06/2024). This confluence has led to more poverty, increased displacement, and widespread food insecurity. The Humanitarian Needs Overview estimates that around 9 million (75%) of the country’s 12.4 million people, including refugees, will require humanitarian assistance in 2024 (OCHA 28/11/2023).

South Sudan will hold elections on 22 December 2024, marking the first general elections since the country gained independence in 2011 (Election Guide accessed 14/08/2024). Initially scheduled for February 2023, the elections have faced multiple delays owing to the slow implementation of key aspects of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) that ended the civil war. These delays included issues such as passing crucial electoral laws, unifying conflict parties, and establishing an electoral body to oversee the process (The EastAfrican 23/03/2024; Sudan Tribune 07/07/2024).

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About this report

Aim: this report provides an overview of key humanitarian crises expected to deteriorate or see a significant humanitarian impact in the next five months in South Sudan. It aims to inform humanitarian decision-making and programming by anticipating humanitarian needs in different regions of the country.

Scope: this report highlights current crises and those anticipated to have significant humanitarian impacts in the next five months, but it does not aim to exhaustively list all the crises in the country. Crisis selection was based on contextual knowledge and a close monitoring of the humanitarian situation. The crises in this report are also not listed by order of importance or probability.

Methodology: this report is based on the secondary data review of public sources. For each crisis context, the ACAPS team collected existing information, mapped out relevant crisis drivers, highlighted recent developments, and anticipated the probable evolution and potential impact on humanitarian needs over the coming months.

Limitations: the outlook sections of this report present potential deteriorations and possible developments of the highlighted crises, considering their specific scope and based on information available until July 2024. The emergence of new information and the influence of factors not accounted for may invalidate these outlooks. For some of the crises, it is difficult to accurately estimate the scale of current and future humanitarian impacts.

Key crises to watch

INTERCOMMUNAL VIOLENCE

Context overview

Intercommunal hostilities in South Sudan have led to fatalities and displacement, restricted access to basic services, injured thousands of individuals, and resulted in the widespread raiding of thousands of cattle, along with the extensive destruction of property (GCR2P 31/05/2024; ADF 09/04/2024). In **Upper Nile** region, land disputes, cattle raids, and revenge attacks are common, primarily involving the Nuer, Dinka, and Murle communities. Over the years, the violence has escalated, becoming increasingly disruptive with reports of interference from external or political factors, resulting in high death tolls and significant instability (Kuot 01/01/2024). In **Bahr el Ghazal** region, particularly in Lakes and Warrap states, cattle raids and revenge attacks are prevalent, with competition over scarce resources driving conflict (FES 04/2024). **Jonglei state** has witnessed frequent clashes between the Dinka, Nuer, and Murle communities, with cattle raiding, child abduction, and revenge attacks driving conflict in the region (OHCHR/UNMISS 15/03/2021). Resource competition, historical grievances, political power struggles, and the proliferation of small arms often fuel these conflicts (GCR2P 31/05/2024; VOA 24/06/2020).

Despite the R-ARCSS, violence persists in some parts of the country, perpetuating a cycle of insecurity that profoundly affects the daily lives and wellbeing of South Sudan's people. The R-ARCSS, signed in 2018, aimed to end the civil war that began in 2013, but its lack of full implementation has hindered progress towards lasting peace and stability (RMJEC 25/01/2024; UN SC 06/03/2023; BTI accessed 08/07/2024). Persistent intercommunal conflict disrupts communities, displaces families, and worsens humanitarian crises (OCHA 28/11/2023 and 10/05/2024).

Key drivers and recent developments

- The fragmented political landscape, with numerous non-state armed groups and militias operating independently or in shifting alliances, has allowed local disputes to escalate into broader conflicts (AI 30/03/2023; BTI accessed 08/07/2024). Escalating political rivalries within South Sudan have ignited violent confrontations, exemplified by clashes between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) in January in Unity state (Eye Radio 29/01/2024; Sudans Post 29/01/2024).

- The proliferation of small arms, light weapons, and ammunition during South Sudan's civil war has significantly heightened the risk of violence (UNDP 01/08/2017; UN SC 07/05/2024). The widespread availability of these weapons to civilians and youth groups has worsened conflicts and made intercommunal clashes increasingly deadly, making violent encounters more lethal and persistent across the region (RVI 2024; UN SC 07/05/2024). There are allegations of politicians supporting local armed groups with weapons in an attempt to delay elections (Reuters 06/02/2024).
- During the first quarter of 2024, UNMISS recorded 240 incidents of violence affecting more than 900 civilians nationwide. This reflects a 24% increase from the 194 incidents documented during the same period in 2023. Underreporting means the current number is likely higher. Community-based militias and civil defence groups, driven by intercommunal and intracommunal conflicts, often instigate this subnational violence. Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, and Warrap states are the most affected regions (OHCHR/UNMISS 17/07/2024).
- Since February 2024, Abyei state, a contested region on the border of South Sudan and Sudan, has witnessed escalating violence and fatalities. Conflicts have intensified between the Twic Dinka and Ngok Dinka ethnic groups because of disputed state border locations, issues with local administration, and revenue capture in southern Abyei and northern Twic counties. Many attacks originate from Warrap state, where Twic Dinka youth have been clashing with the Ngok Dinka community. These assaults resulted in at least 130 deaths between January–February. Reports indicate a lack of state intervention, leaving the Ngok Dinka vulnerable to attacks (UNMISS 18/03/2024; VOA 28/01/2024; Reuters 05/02/2024 and 29/01/2024). The region also reports incidents of abductions, looting, property destruction, and demonstrations for better protection, while leaders deny involvement in the violence (UNMISS 18/03/2024).
- In April, armed attacks in Kajo-keji county, Central Equatoria state, displaced over 3,800 people, with some seeking refuge in Uganda. Clashes in Nasir county, Upper Nile state, killed civilians and displaced an estimated 10,000 people (OCHA 15/04/2024 and 25/03/2024). Western Bahr el Ghazal state witnessed intercommunal violence in Tharkueng, Jur River county, killing dozens and displacing nearly 20,000 people to neighbouring villages. Attacks in Moje Boma, Juba county, Central Equatoria state, displaced around 12,500 people to Wonduruba and Lainya towns (OCHA 25/03/2024). Those displaced continue to be in dire need of humanitarian assistance, including immediate support with food, healthcare, nutrition, protection, shelter, and WASH services. Displaced people are often located in areas where humanitarian operations are already stretched or scarce (OCHA 28/11/2023; UNICEF 26/05/2024).

Humanitarian constraints

Humanitarian operations in South Sudan face significant challenges because of violence against aid workers, assets, and supplies. Incidents of looting, theft, and ambushes targeting humanitarian convoys are common, along with threats, harassment, and intimidation directed at aid workers, particularly in Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states (OCHA 25/03/2024; EC accessed 14/08/2024; Eye Radio 10/03/2024; Barron's 20/03/2024).

In February 2024, 33 reported incidents impeded humanitarian access to populations in need (UNMISS 09/02/2024). Active hostilities in Jur River in Western Bahr el Ghazal, Abyei Administrative Area, and Nasir in Upper Nile state significantly hindered the movement of supplies and personnel. These hostilities led to the suspension of humanitarian programmes, looting of assets, and injuries to humanitarian staff, worsening the already dire situation for those in need of assistance (OCHA 25/03/2024; ECHO 29/01/2024; UNMISS 09/02/2024).

Outlook

Increased clashes between different communities in Jonglei, Lakes, and Upper Nile states will likely affect humanitarian access. This will impede movement and result in more attacks on humanitarian personnel and assets (OCHA 11/05/2024).

Climate hazards, particularly those driven by climate change, such as floods and droughts, are expected to worsen conflicts in South Sudan. The dry season (November–April) frequently witnesses a surge in intercommunal violence because of a scarcity of water and grazing land, which intensifies competition and leads to conflicts over critical resources among pastoralist communities. The Dinka and Nuer tribes, in their search for wetter areas, often cross over to territories claimed by other groups. This migration often leads to resource conflicts and cattle raids (Climate Diplomacy accessed 12/07/2024; RVI 2024; IHE 02/05/2023).

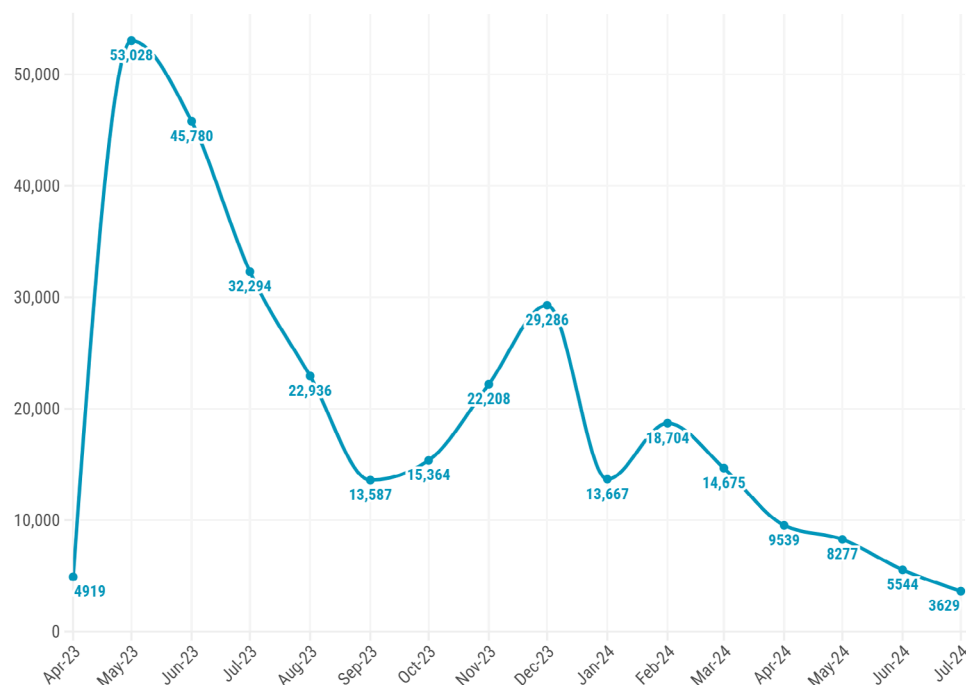
In states such as Lakes and Warrap, where cattle raiding is prevalent, the scarcity of grazing land and water will likely fuel further intercommunal clashes. In flood-prone states such as Jonglei and Upper Nile, increased flooding will displace communities, escalating competition for diminishing resources, including pastures and water. In contrast, the rainy season (May–October) generally limits mobility but can still see localised increases in violence. Flooding and impassable roads will isolate communities, heightening tensions and conflicts. In Jonglei state, most residents are pastoralists and relocate with their animals to the Equatoria states during floods. The Equatorian people are primarily farmers, and the arrival of pastoralists often causes tensions over scarce resources that can lead to conflict (World Relief 11/02/2022; Accord 13/04/2022; FES 09/12/2023).

As cattle remain a significant source of wealth, social status, and marriage dowries, competition over these resources is expected to continue to drive violence (RVI 2024; Geneva Call 21/12/2023). Clashes will likely continue, especially between communities in Warrap state and Abyei, as the Ngok and Twic Dinka groups contend with unresolved issues regarding the state border, local administration, and revenue capture in southern areas of Abyei and northern Twic counties. These groups will likely seek to control territories before the upcoming general elections. Home to oil fields, farmland, and pasture, Abyei holds strategic importance that heightens competition and conflict over this area (ACLEDD 09/02/2024). The lack of a unified government has enabled local disputes to escalate into broader conflicts. The upcoming elections in December will likely heighten tensions even further around political alignment, territorial control, and resource allocation (UN SC 05/03/2024; The EastAfrican 14/04/2024). With different groups supporting the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and opposing factions, areas such as Bentiu, Juba, and Malakal are particularly divided, with significant support for both the Government and opposition (PKSOI 24/02/2021; Radio Tamazuj 14/05/2023).

INFLUX OF REFUGEES AND RETURNEES

Context overview

Refugees and Returnees from Sudan (Apr 2023- July 2024)



Source: UNHCR, IOM accessed 08/08/2024

Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has experienced episodes of displacement from internal conflicts, ethnic violence, and economic hardships. These have resulted in approximately 2.2 million South Sudanese seeking refuge in neighbouring countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, and Uganda (UNHCR 05/10/2022 and 24/07/2023).

By 31 May 2024, more than 1.4 million South Sudanese refugees had returned to live in South Sudan since the signing of the R-ARCSS in 2018 (UNHCR accessed 16/07/2024; UNHCR 08/04/2024). According to UNHCR data from 2022, refugees from South Sudan constituted the largest

group of returnees, with nearly 150,000 individuals primarily returning from Ethiopia, Sudan, and Uganda (UNHCR 24/07/2023). In December 2023 alone, nearly 46,000 South Sudanese returned from Sudan, while approximately 7,700 returned from Ethiopia. The counties with the most cumulative returns from October 2018 to December 2023 were Kajo-Keji, Magwi, Renk, Rubkona, and Yei (RI 27/07/2023; UNHCR 06/02/2024).

South Sudan faces significant challenges in hosting a large refugee population, as the country is grappling with a humanitarian crisis with multiple interconnected drivers. These include the effects of decades of civil war, intercommunal violence, economic hardship, frequent flooding, climate change, and the recent conflict in neighbouring Sudan. The country's poor infrastructure and limited educational opportunities, especially in rural areas, give refugees few chances for self-reliance. As a result, many refugees face serious humanitarian challenges, including protection concerns, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of access to basic services (AJ 08/02/2024; Protection Cluster 29/03/2024; UNHCR 15/07/2024).

Key drivers and recent developments

- South Sudan continues to receive refugees and returnees from neighbouring countries, including Sudan. By July, more than 770,000 people had arrived from Sudan since the conflict began in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. These returnees and refugees settled in Central Equatoria, Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile states and Greater Pibor Administrative Area (UNHCR 01/05/2024; UNHCR accessed 22/05/2024; UNHCR accessed 16/07/2024; UNHCR/IOM accessed 05/08/2024). Out of these arrivals, approximately 75% are South Sudanese returnees, while the rest are Sudanese and Eritrean refugees (UNHCR/IOM accessed 07/08/2024).
- In 2023, severe humanitarian crises and widespread violence forced thousands of South Sudanese refugees to flee from Gambela region in Ethiopia to South Sudan, mostly to Jonglei state (OCHA 28/08/2023 and 21/11/2023). The situation worsened when allegations of food aid diversion suspended humanitarian aid (OCHA 28/08/2023). This suspension reduced food availability in refugee settlements, causing unusually severe food insecurity across Gambela's camps. Escalating violence in and around the camps restricted movement and hindered households from engaging in vital livelihoods or coping activities. Consequently, many sought refuge in South Sudan, where services were available (OCHA 28/08/2023; REACH 21/02/2024 and 25/09/2023). Even after conditions had improved, some returnees chose to remain in South Sudan, placing additional strain on the communities in Jonglei and Upper Nile states (REACH 21/02/2024).
- The influx of refugees and returnees strains the country's already limited resources even further, highlighting gaps in basic service provision. Those who flee to South Sudan often find themselves arriving in regions with limited capacity to support them and in overcrowded camps lacking the necessities such as food, water, and shelter. Many

are unable to return to their original villages, which fighting between rival factions has devastated or which floods have severely affected over the past four years (TNH 24/05/2023; DW 10/07/2023; USAID 01/02/2024).

- Returnees are arriving with little to no assets and are heavily reliant on aid or the support of host households for food and income. They also face significant protection concerns, including threats of violence, exploitation, and lack of access to essential services, which further heighten their vulnerability. Existing vulnerabilities in host communities, such as floods and intercommunal violence, further compound these challenges (FEWS NET 14/03/2024; Protection Cluster 29/03/2024).

Outlook

In 2024, 420,000 returnees and 80,000 refugees are projected to arrive in South Sudan from Sudan as conflict persists in Kordofan and Darfur regions, a situation that rising food insecurity and constrained aid access have only made worse (Protection Cluster 29/03/2024; FEWS NET 14/03/2024). The influx of returnees and refugees will place additional pressure on already scarce food resources, potentially increasing the prevalence of malnutrition and aggravating health issues related to inadequate nutrition (IPC 06/11/2023; REACH 21/02/2024).

With the increase in arrivals and the population set to grow, and as the rainy season continues, the risk of more severe humanitarian challenges looms large. Limited access to flooded areas during this period is expected, posing significant concerns for public health conditions and the capacity of health systems. Increasing numbers of refugees and returnees may also intensify intracommunal tensions locally, especially in areas near entry points such as Renk and Malakal. Tensions between host communities and refugees will likely escalate, as refugees in camps may receive support while host communities facing similar challenges in the same locations are left without assistance (Protection Cluster 29/03/2024).

FOOD INSECURITY

Context overview

Food insecurity in South Sudan has reached unprecedented levels compared to recent years. Jonglei, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, and Upper Nile states are the most food-insecure, with more than half of their populations expected to experience IPC 3 or worse levels between April–July 2024 (IPC 06/11/2023).

Conflict, both local and in neighbouring Sudan, continues to displace populations, disrupt livelihoods, and impede humanitarian aid delivery. These issues intensify market instability and trade disruptions, leading to increased food prices. Persistently poor macroeconomic conditions, partly owing to local currency depreciation, inflate prices and further limit food access (ICPAC 01/2024; AGRA 14/05/2024; FEWS NET 14/03/2024).

Approximately 95% of South Sudanese rely on farming, herding, or fishing. Any disruption to this sector causes ripple effects and has the potential to harm South Sudan's overall economy (FAO accessed 14/05/2024). Localised poor harvests, given the intensity of climate shocks, have made prices higher for staple foods, particularly cereals, in local markets (AGRA 09/07/2024). This scarcity drives up prices and worsens food insecurity for vulnerable populations. Sharp currency depreciation and high supply costs have caused staple food prices to rise earlier than usual across major reference and rural markets. In August 2023, 50kg of sugar cost SSP 30,000 (230 USD); by August 2024, this had increased to SSP 130,000 (998 USD). Sorghum prices in Aweil Centre, Juba, and Wau counties also increased from 17–39% between April–May (Eye Radio 14/06/2024; FEWS NET 07/06/2024). Low household purchasing capacity contributes to reducing the demand for food items, adding complexity to the region's food prices (FEWS NET 01/03/2024; REACH 02/05/2024).

Key drivers and recent developments

- The severe food security situation's primary factors are the high returnee influx, inadequate food stocks, the lingering consequences of consecutive years of extensive flooding, prolonged macroeconomic difficulties leading to elevated inflation, and instances of intercommunal violence that disrupt livelihoods, trade, and food assistance (FAO 30/04/2024).
- Environmental factors, such as erratic weather patterns, floods, and recurring droughts, also contribute to food insecurity by affecting agricultural productivity and worsening food shortages (ForAfrika 17/11/2023).
- Seasonal migration in some regions and a decrease in available pasture and grazing areas mean that many households in pastoral and agropastoral areas have limited access

to livestock products in the markets (FEWS NET 01/03/2024). Unusually high temperatures recorded in March 2024 have also caused heat stress among livestock, leading to illness and death (The EastAfrican 18/03/2024; MFA 04/2018).

- Since 2023, the conflict in Sudan has disrupted supply chains, significantly affecting markets reliant on supplies from Juba. The closures of trade routes from Sudan to South Sudan have driven up the prices of basic commodities (Sudan Tribune 15/08/2023; FEWS NET 05/04/2024). South Sudan, which largely depends on neighbouring countries for food imports, faces additional challenges, with road closures from northern Sudan preventing the import of grain and other goods, contributing to inflation (ICG 15/05/2024).
- South Sudan's economy heavily relies on crude oil revenue, comprising 90% of government revenue (WB accessed 14/05/2024). The conflict in Sudan worsened the situation in February 2024 when South Sudan declared a force majeure on crude loadings from Port Sudan in response to pipeline damages (AJ 26/03/2024; Sudan Tribune 19/03/2024). This interruption in oil revenue poses a severe threat to South Sudan's economic stability, which further affects the income of civil servants who had not been paid for at least six months by July. Until May, the pipeline had not been repaired, allowing only 30–35% of the regular oil flow (Eye Radio 11/02/2024; AJ 18/04/2024; ICG 15/05/2024; VOA 09/07/2024).

Outlook

The lack of purchasing power in South Sudan severely hampers food access, with extreme poverty and high inflation making necessities unaffordable for many households (IRC 21/12/2023). Other factors, such as unemployment – which contributes to diminishing households' ability to purchase food and other essential items – further intensify the situation, increasing food insecurity across the country (AI 10/07/2024; Radio Tamazuj 01/07/2024).

Oil disruptions in South Sudan could hasten the devaluation of the domestic currency, making poverty and violence worse. This will likely compel more individuals to resort to coping strategies with potentially harmful consequences, such as taking up arms and reducing food intake. An increase in intercommunal conflicts and heightened tensions in anticipation of the December 2024 elections have the potential to disrupt livelihoods, trade, and food assistance programmes.

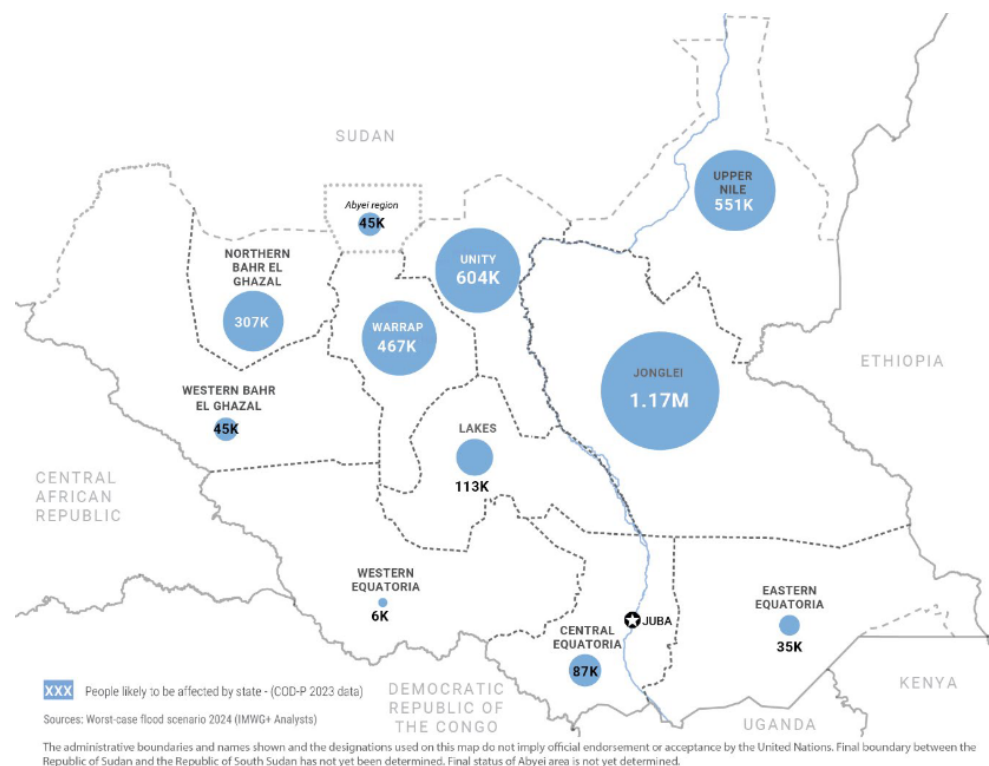
There is a looming threat of severe flooding expected from July–September, with some areas, such as the Sudd wetlands, still recovering from the significant floods experienced between 2020–2022.

If the conflict in Sudan persists, South Sudan expects a higher number of returnees, who may be heavily reliant on assistance and host households for sustenance, further straining already scarce resources (ECHO 15/03/2024).

FLOODING AND RAINY SEASON

Context overview

Map 2: Worst Case Scenario for Flood 2024



Source: Logistics Cluster 25/06/2024

South Sudan is particularly vulnerable to climate shocks, ranking as the second-most at-risk country worldwide on INFORM's climate risk index (EC accessed 20/05/2024). Its rainy season typically begins in April and lasts until November, with the heaviest showers occurring between May–September (WB accessed 27/05/2024). During previous seasons, intense and prolonged rainfall had often led to flooding, especially in low-lying areas. The 2019–2022 floods, in particular, have had a long-term effect, affecting nearly two-thirds of the country and over one million people in 36 counties. States such as Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile

have been particularly vulnerable to flooding, with severe consequences, including the displacement of communities, home and infrastructure damage, a lack of access to markets and basic services, and transportation disruptions (OCHA accessed 17/05/2024; WHO 27/04/2023; OCHA/UNICEF 20/09/2023; WFP 02/05/2024). Poor road networks and inadequate transportation options make around 60% of the country's roads impassable during the rainy season (FSC 22/02/2022). The floods also pose health risks, including waterborne diseases, and create challenges for delivering aid and essential services to affected populations (OCHA accessed 17/05/2024; WHO 27/04/2023; OCHA/UNICEF 20/09/2023; WFP 02/05/2024).

Key drivers and recent developments

- Water levels from the previous rainy seasons had remained high in some parts of the country by April 2024 (UNOSAT 25/04/2024). As per FEWS NET, water from previous floods persisted in many areas of the Sudd wetlands and low-lying regions of Uror and Nyirol until March 2024. Residual floodwaters in Twic East and western Duk in Jonglei state, as well as in Leer, Mayendit, and Rubkona in Unity state, continue to disrupt trade and assistance flows (OCHA 09/05/2023; FEWS NET 01/03/2024; WFP 02/05/2024). In Unity and Western Bahr el Ghazal states, flooding is evident, with breached dykes already visible (Eye Radio 11/07/2024). In May, in Unity state's Panyijiar county, about 5,000 people had to evacuate their homes near the River Nile because of rising water levels (OCHA 21/06/2024).
- Rainfall in upstream countries elevates the water levels of Lake Victoria and Lake Albert, increasing the flow of other sources feeding the White Nile and amplifying downstream flows in South Sudan. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry has raised concerns that heavy rainfall in the Great Lakes region will likely raise Nile water levels, significantly affecting South Sudan (Eye Radio 27/03/2024 and 15/05/2024; Radio Tamazuj 18/05/2024). By 5 July, flooding had already affected Unity state, affecting over 1,300 people in Leer county (Eye Radio 05/07/2024).

Outlook

Forecasts project above-average rainfall between June–September, with the highest probability occurring in the eastern part of the country. This, coupled with the significant release of water from the Jinja dam after the May 2024 rains, is expected to cause severe flooding, exceeding the levels seen in 2020–2022 (FEWS NET 09/07/2024; ICPAC accessed 02/08/2024). These floods are anticipated to affect over three million people across 20 counties in the central to eastern states, including Central Equatoria, Jonglei, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, Upper Nile, and Warrap, and will likely be prominent between September–December 2024 (REACH 02/07/2024; Eye Radio 28/06/2024; ICPAC accessed 08/07/2024; Radio Tamazuj 18/05/2024; IFRC 01/08/2024).

South Sudan is projected to experience above-average rainfall, which could improve agricultural yields (ICPAC accessed 15/05/2024; ICPAC 21/02/2024; FAO 02/2024). Even so, this will likely lead to increased flood risks, particularly from mid-2024 onwards, because of the expected overflow of the River Nile and its tributaries (FAO 30/04/2024). These heightened flood risks will likely pose threats of livelihood loss, disease outbreaks, and food insecurity, pressuring affected communities, overwhelming local coping mechanisms, and preventing the displaced from travelling back to their homes. Some communities will also be isolated and are likely to experience psychological distress. Flooding will likely also cause displacement in flood-prone states such as Jonglei, Unity, and northern Upper Nile (FSC 27/06/2024; MSF 16/07/2024 and 24/07/2024).

Flood-prone areas have high population densities and significant vulnerability levels. The impact of the coming rainy season is projected to be worse compared to previous seasons (Xinhua 30/07/2024; FEWS NET 09/07/2024). The floods will have a particularly severe impact on communities already experiencing high vulnerability after previous shocks. Many communities in flood-prone areas of Jonglei, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, Upper Nile, and Warrap states are already projected to face extreme food insecurity, with some areas experiencing pockets of IPC 5 levels. These regions host large numbers of IDPs and returnees, making the challenges these populations face even more difficult (IPC 06/11/2023; FEWS NET 09/07/2024; MSF 24/07/2024). Over 700,000 refugees and returnees are currently joining more than two million IDPs who already lack access to proper WASH and health facilities. Floods will increase the risk of waterborne diseases to these populations (MSF 24/07/2024; UNHCR accessed 05/08/2024; UNHCR/IOM accessed 31/07/2024).

Floods will likely affect food security by increasing food prices, with harvested stocks and market functionality dwindling. Submerged land prevents people from growing crops and their livestock from grazing. This is expected to significantly constrain farm access, making the cultivation of sorghum and other crops increasingly challenging (WFP 08/01/2024; IPC 06/11/2023; Golden Times 12/05/2024).

Flooding will restrict road access, preventing communities from reaching essential locations such as healthcare centres, markets, and schools. These access constraints will likely hinder movement out of flooded areas and obstruct aid delivery to affected populations (FSC 27/06/2024).

During the rainy season in South Sudan, conflict and violence may temporarily decrease. Heavy rains and flash floods make transportation and movement more difficult, which can limit the ability of armed groups to launch attacks and conduct raids (ACLEDD 13/11/2014; Coulibaly and Managi 28/10/2022). Livestock losses from extensive flooding make intercommunal tensions worse, particularly in regions heavily reliant on cattle herding. This dependency fuels high-fatality cattle raids and leads to new waves of displacement from violence (Protection

Cluster 25/07/2024). A sudden influx of displaced individuals into host communities after large-scale flooding may occur, however, and significantly strain existing infrastructure and social services, leading to overcrowding and heightened competition for limited resources such as food, water, and shelter. This situation is likely to escalate tensions between displaced communities as they vie for access to basic services (REACH 27/06/2024; MSF 24/07/2024).

UPCOMING ELECTIONS

Context overview

South Sudan's first-ever presidential election, scheduled for 22 December 2024, has faced multiple postponements since its initial scheduling for 2022, then 2023. This event marks a significant milestone for the nation since its independence in 2011 (Africanews 04/04/2024; VOA 10/04/2024; AP 04/08/2022; Sudan Tribune 07/07/2024). Several critical issues from the 2018 peace agreement remain unresolved and urgently need to be addressed, including the drafting of a permanent constitution and the establishment of a unified military command (The EastAfrican 14/04/2024; Radio Tamazuj 01/03/2024).

President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar are both likely to run in this election (The EastAfrican 14/04/2024). SPLA-IO has declared its refusal to participate in the upcoming elections, citing violations of the 2018 peace agreement. This decision comes amid escalating tensions over the implementation of the peace accord and allegations of political constraints during the campaign period. Politicians from both SPLA-IO and Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Government have accused each other of restricting access, alleging the denial of entry to certain administrative locations and interference with political rallies (VOA 05/03/2024; Radio Tamazuj 01/03/2024).

Key drivers and recent developments

- Concerns about South Sudan's election readiness stem from several factors. Intensified fights over resources, high unemployment rates, and fierce political competition among the ruling elite contribute to the country's instability. Increased intercommunal clashes and the added strain of returnees and refugees escaping the conflict in Sudan heighten the situation, further complicating the nation's ability to conduct the electoral process (UN SC 05/03/2024).
- Voter registration was scheduled for June 2024 amid protests from various stakeholders on the Government's lack of preparation and the country's continued insecurity (The EastAfrican 14/04/2024). By July, however, voter registration had yet to begin (Sudan Tribune 07/07/2024).

- On 16 May, a commitment declaration was signed in Nairobi with South Sudan opposition groups who had been excluded from the 2018 peace agreement process. This is seen as a positive step towards maintaining peace as the elections approach (Africanews 17/05/2024; Monitor 17/05/2024).

Outlook

Election preparations in South Sudan face several significant challenges. The rainy season, which spans from April–November, will likely disrupt preparation efforts and voter registration, which is scheduled to take place around this time, because of deteriorated road conditions and limited access to remote areas. By August 2024, it was unclear if voter registration had commenced (ACAPS accessed 21/05/2024; Sudan Tribune 07/07/2024).

The displacement crisis, with over two million people currently internally displaced, presents another hurdle, as IDPs are unlikely to be able to have access to the identification documents necessary for voting. IDPs may also be hosted in areas where they are not registered to vote (FES 16/04/2023).

Elections in South Sudan could lead to political violence and polarisation caused by deep-rooted rivalries and unresolved tensions between major political factions, particularly between President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar (VOA 20/03/2022; UN SC 05/03/2024). The competition for power may increase ethnic divisions, fuelling intercommunal clashes and unrest. Accusations of electoral fraud or manipulation could spark protests and violent confrontations, further destabilising the fragile peace and potentially leading to widespread violence across the country (UN SC 05/03/2024).

Anticipated tensions and conflicts leading up to the 2024 presidential elections are likely to undermine humanitarian operations and access to communities in need.