

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

SOUTH SUDAN DECEMBER 2024



Executive Summary

In December 2024, at least 40,180¹ South Sudanese arrived in South Sudan, as recorded by border monitoring enumerators deployed at various points notably Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, DRC and CAR. The highest number of these arrived from Sudan (28,895), followed by Ethiopia (8,386) and Uganda (1,883).

UNHCR estimates that out of 40,180 arrivals, the number of returnees were 33,078 (82%) of the arrivals while the remaining were pendular 7,102 (18%) and 17 individuals were transiting South Sudan through other countries for instance Uganda and Kenya.

Analysis of the reasons for return reported by South Sudanese interviewed at the border crossing points indicates that food security particularly reduction in the ration is the most cited reason of travelling (28%). Insecurity (26%) followed closely while permanent return to country of origin from displacement (25%) and lack of employment and livelihood opportunities in the country of asylum were also widely cited. Reasons of return differ by country of asylum indicating contrast in the contextual issues. For instance, in Sudan, insecurity is the predominant reason of South Sudanese travelling to South Sudan as cited by 89% of respondents. In Ethiopia, short visit for family reasons, reunification with family members for permanent return and food security (reduction in food ratio) were the key pushing factors.

¹ The reported figures are cumulative i.e. consisting of December 2024 figures and late submissions of November 2024 treated as cut-off dates (and submitted after 10th of the reporting month).

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Acronyms and Terms

AGD	Age, Gender, and Diversity
CAR	Central Africa Republic
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
IOM	International Organization for Migration
R-ARCSS	Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
RRC	Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SSD	South Sudan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction

South Sudan presents a multi-layered mix of refugees, IDPs, refugee and IDP returnees, stateless persons, and persons at risk of statelessness. According to UNHCR, Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), and partners, more than 650,000 South Sudanese individuals have returned in a self-organized manner and by their own volition from neighbouring countries in the first five years since the signing of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) (by the end of 2022).

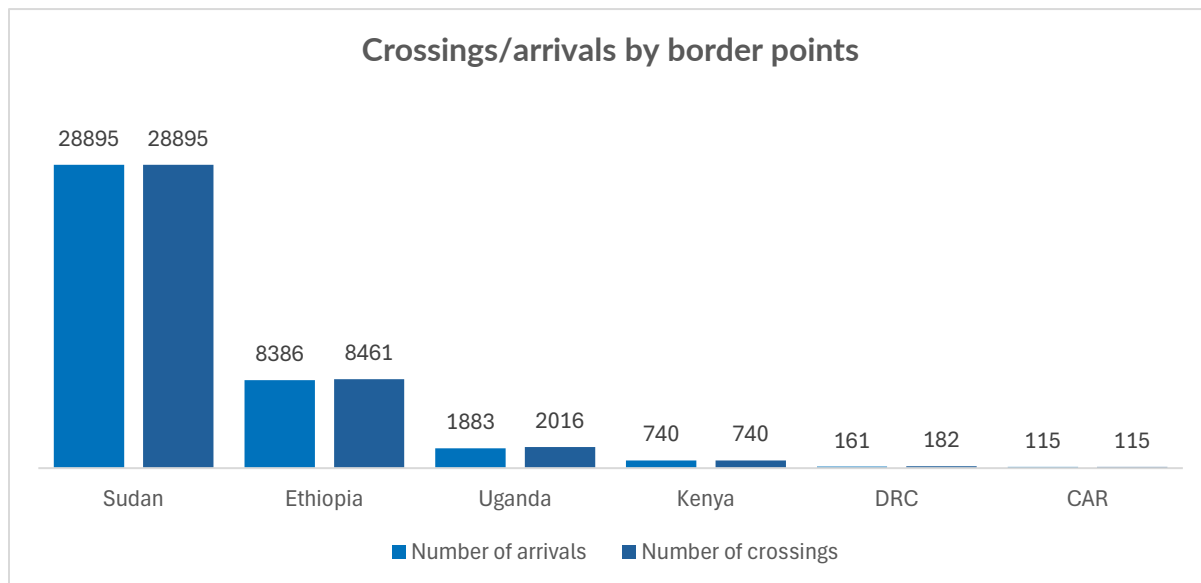
With the onset of the Sudan crisis in 2023, more than 700,000 South Sudanese residing in Sudan were forced to move back to their country of origin due to insecurity and economic factors. The number of spontaneous returnees to South Sudan only in the last two years (2023-2024) reached 970,704 individuals.

Given this context, UNHCR, RRC, and other relevant stakeholders recognized the need to recalibrate approaches to monitor the changing situation and strengthen existing spontaneous refugee returns monitoring system, particularly border monitoring, for a systematic and effective collection and analysis of the relevant qualitative and quantitative data, which enables UNHCR and its partners to gain a better understanding of the scale and the trends of the ongoing spontaneous return movements.

South Sudanese Arrivals in December 2024

Following the roll-out of updated border monitoring tools by UNHCR and RRC in January/February 2024 (and in May 2024 for the border with Sudan in partnership with IOM), UNHCR adopted an updated methodology to calculate the estimated number of returnees, endorsed by RRC starting from September 1, 2024.

In December 2024, at least 40,180 South Sudanese arrived in South Sudan, as recorded by border monitoring enumerators deployed at various points notably Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, DRC and CAR. The highest number of these arrived from Sudan (28,895), followed by Ethiopia (8,386) and Uganda (1,883).



The overall number of weekly arrivals in December was about 7,600 individuals. However, the number of arrivals peak during the second and third week with arrivals ranging between 11,000 to 11,500. This could be attributed to the festivities where individuals crossed to South Sudan to celebrate festivities with their families.

UNHCR estimates that out of 40,180 arrivals, the number of returnees was 33,078 (82%) of the arrivals while the remaining were pendular 7,102 (18%) and 17 individuals were transiting South Sudan through other countries for instance Uganda and Kenya.

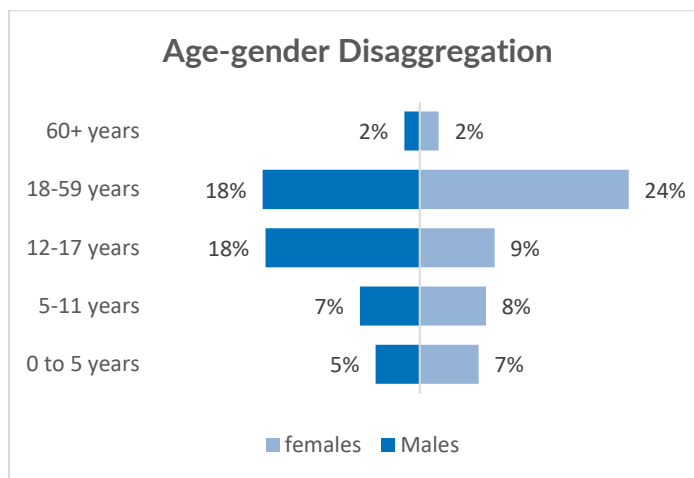
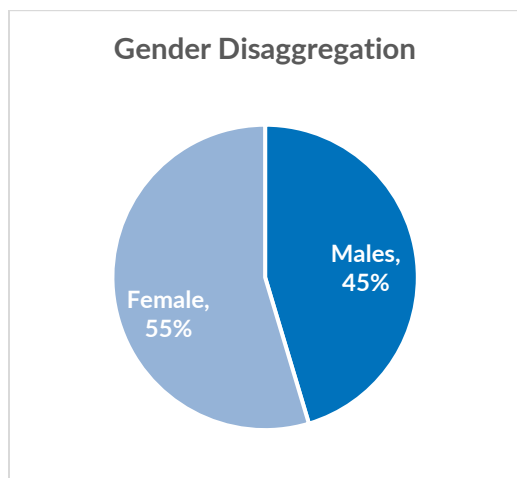
Arrivals: crossing type	# of arrivals	% of total
Returnees	33,078	82%
Pendular Movement	7,102	18%

Note on the methodology.

UNHCR South Sudan, in consultation with the RRC, introduced an updated methodology for the identification of returnees since September 2024. According to this methodology, only households with the intention to stay in South Sudan for one year or longer are counted as returnees to South Sudan. Those with the intention to stay in South Sudan for less than one year are defined as pendular movements. In addition to returnees and pendular movements, this updated methodology also highlights individuals passing through South Sudan to reach other countries (“transiting”).

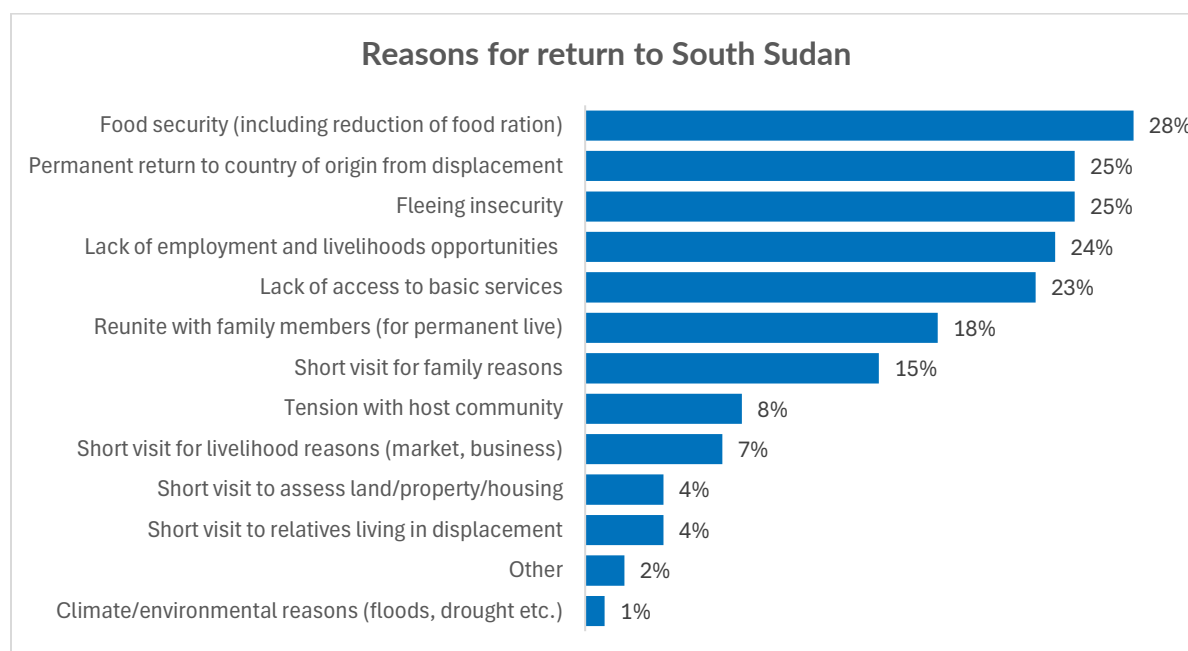
Demographics characteristics of crossing population

The figures indicate that in December 2024, females (55%) constituted the highest number of arrivals compared to males (45%). In terms of age category, female adults of 18 to 59 years of age comprised the majority (24%) followed by adult males of 18 to 59 years (18%) and males between 12 and 17 years (18%) while elderly (2%) comprised the least among the group.



Reasons for Return

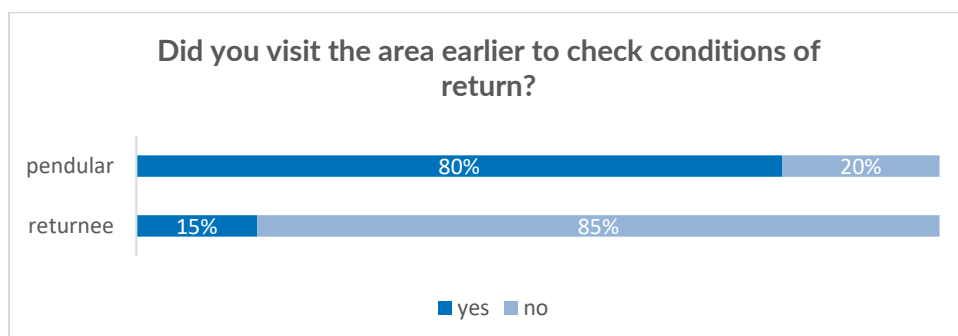
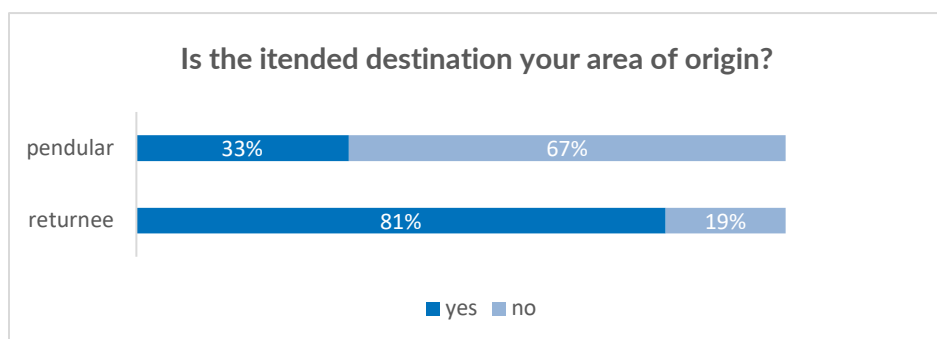
Analysis of the reasons for return reported by South Sudanese interviewed at the border crossing points indicates that food security particularly reduction in the ration is the most cited reason of travelling (28%), Insecurity (26%) followed closely while permanent return to country of origin from displacement (25%) and lack of employment and livelihood opportunities in the country of asylum was also widely cited.



Reasons of return differ by country of asylum indicating contrast in the contextual issues. For instance, in Sudan, insecurity is the predominant reason of South Sudanese travelling to South Sudan as cited by 89% of respondents. In Ethiopia, short visit for family reasons, reunification with family members for permanent return and food security (reduction in food ration) were the key pushing factors. In Kenya, lack of employment and livelihood opportunities and short visit for family reasons were the primary reasons of travelling. In Uganda, food security and reunification with family members were the main reasons for travelling while South Sudanese from DRC cite lack of access to basic services and permanent return to country of origin from displacement as factors influencing their travels.

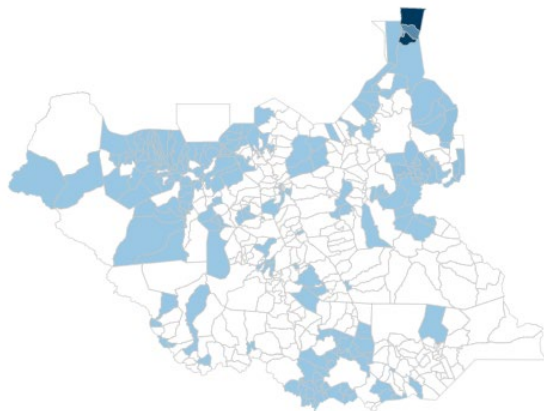
Travel Destination of Returnees

Travel destinations for those returning to South Sudan differ by country of asylum, with notable contrasts in destination preferences based on the length of stay and origin. From Sudan, long-term returnees mostly head to their areas of origin deeper within the country, while short-term arrivals prefer locations near the border. Over 95% of arrivals from Ethiopia aim to reach their areas of origin, with pendular movements primarily staying near the border. Uganda's arrivals mostly head to their places of origin, which is similar to, arrivals from Kenya who intend to stay in counties of Kapoeta and Budi bordering Kenya.



Over 80% of returnees intended to return to their area of origin. Generally, those are areas close to the borders with the respective countries of asylum. Only 15% of returnees who arrived in December visited the area earlier to check for conditions of return. Among those who did not initially travel to assess conditions for return before moving with their families are primarily returnees from Sudan and Kenya.

Intended destination of interviewed families



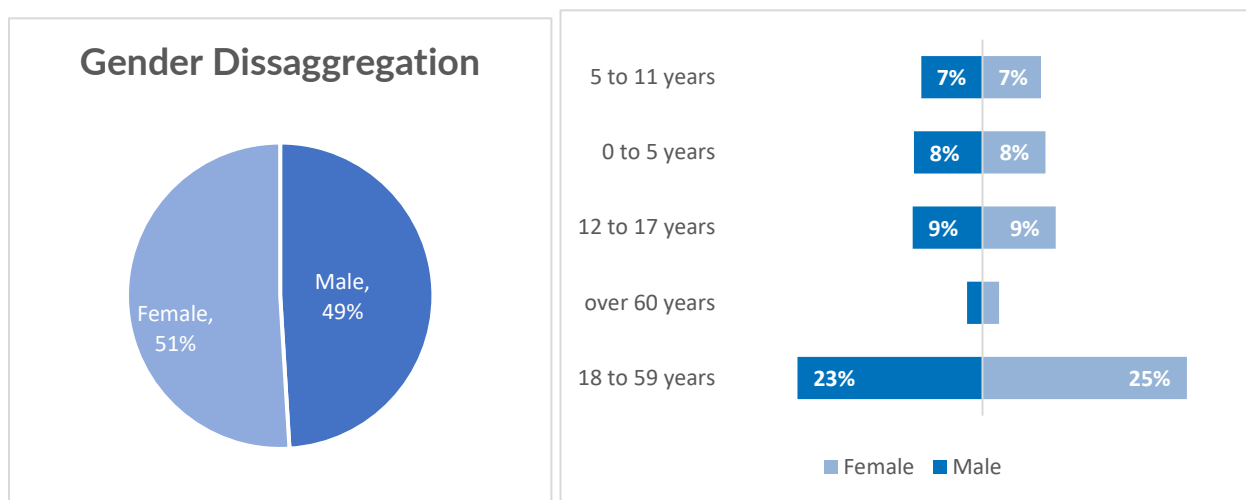
Border Monitoring Trends: Sudan

In December 2024, UNHCR’s partners recorded 28,895 South Sudan nationals crossing the border to South Sudan from Sudan. UNHCR estimated that 24,600 returnees travelled to South Sudan with intention of staying for about a year or more (85%) while 4,295 (15%) persons intend to stay for a shorter period less than a year.

Arrivals (Sudan): Per category	# of arrivals	% of total
Returnees	24,600	85%
Pendular Movement	4,295	15%

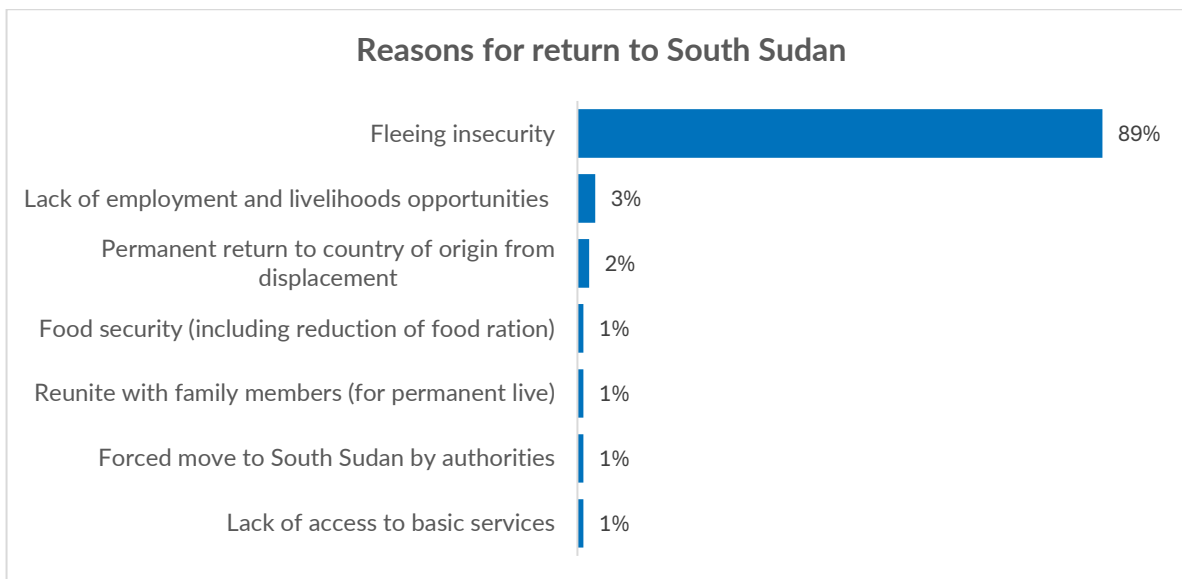
The average daily crossings are approximated at 6,000 per week like daily crossing trends during the month of November. Majority number of returns were recorded at Wunthou (Joda) constituting nearly a half (45%) and Atam (21%) border points respectively.

There is not much difference in the composition of gender of the arrivals with females being 51% compared to males (49%). In terms of age group composition, majority of the arrivals (48%) were between the ages of 19 to 59 years while the least constituted were elderly of 60 years and above (3.9%).



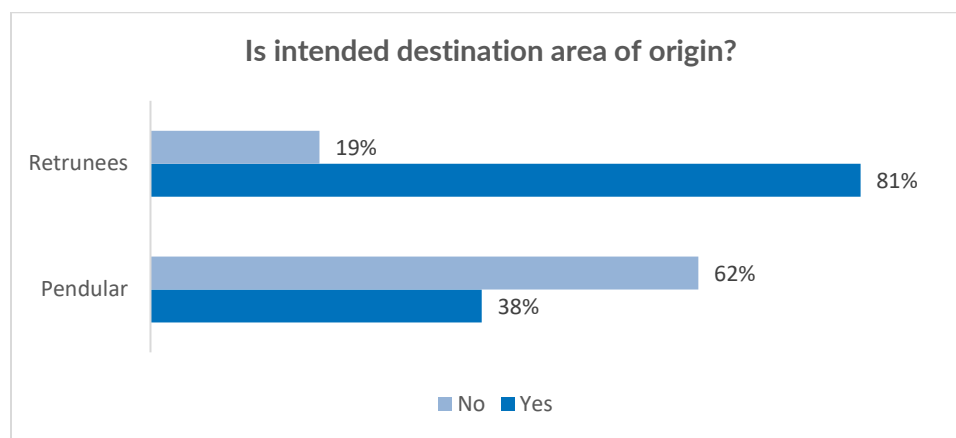
The major reasons that influenced crossings of the arrivals were insecurity (89%), and lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (3%). Other factors were permanent return to country of

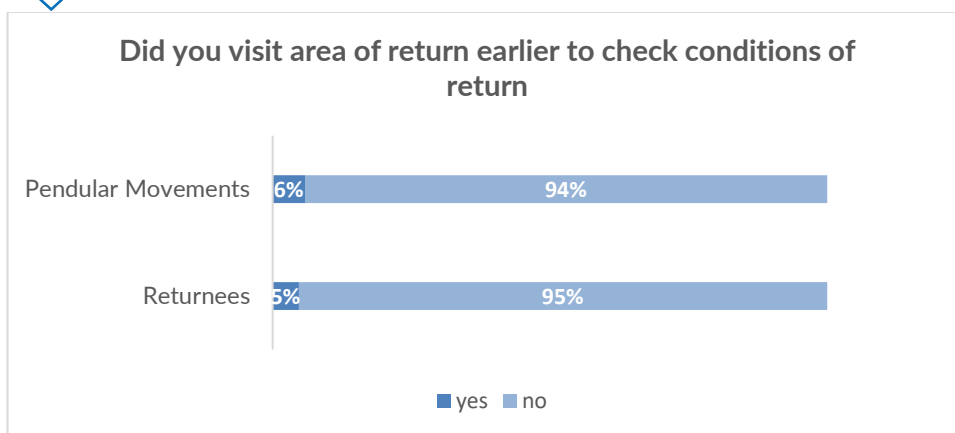
origin from displacement, forcefully moved by authorities, reunification with family members for permanently living and lack of access to basic services.



Among those interviewed who intend to stay in South Sudan for a year or more, 81% revealed that they were returning to their area of origin but only 5% visited the area earlier to check conditions of return. In contrast to those who intend to stay for shorter period, only 6% visited area of return earlier to assess conditions of return. This can be attested by the fact that only over a third (38%) mentioned that they were travelling to their area of origin.

Long-term returnees preferred destinations, closer to point of entries for instance Renk, Aweil East, Maban and Juba. The rationale of preference of mentioned locations could be due to their proximity to areas of departure and availability of economic opportunities.





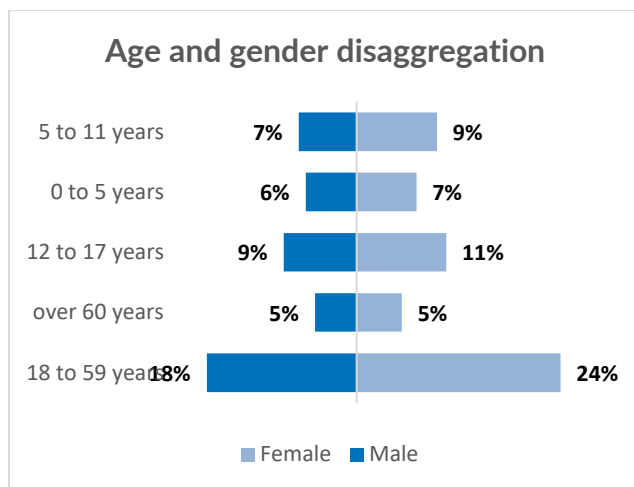
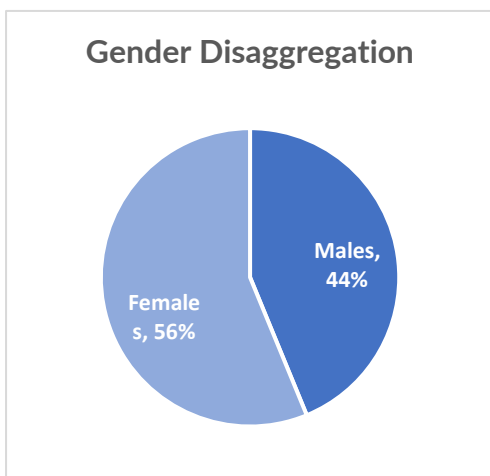
Border Monitoring Trends: Ethiopia

In December 2024, 8,386 South Sudan nationals were recorded by UNHCR partner enumerators crossing the border towards South Sudan from Ethiopia. Out of the total arrivals, 7,112 (85%) were returnees (10% higher than number recorded in November), while 1,274 (15%) intend to stay for shorter period less than a year with none transiting.

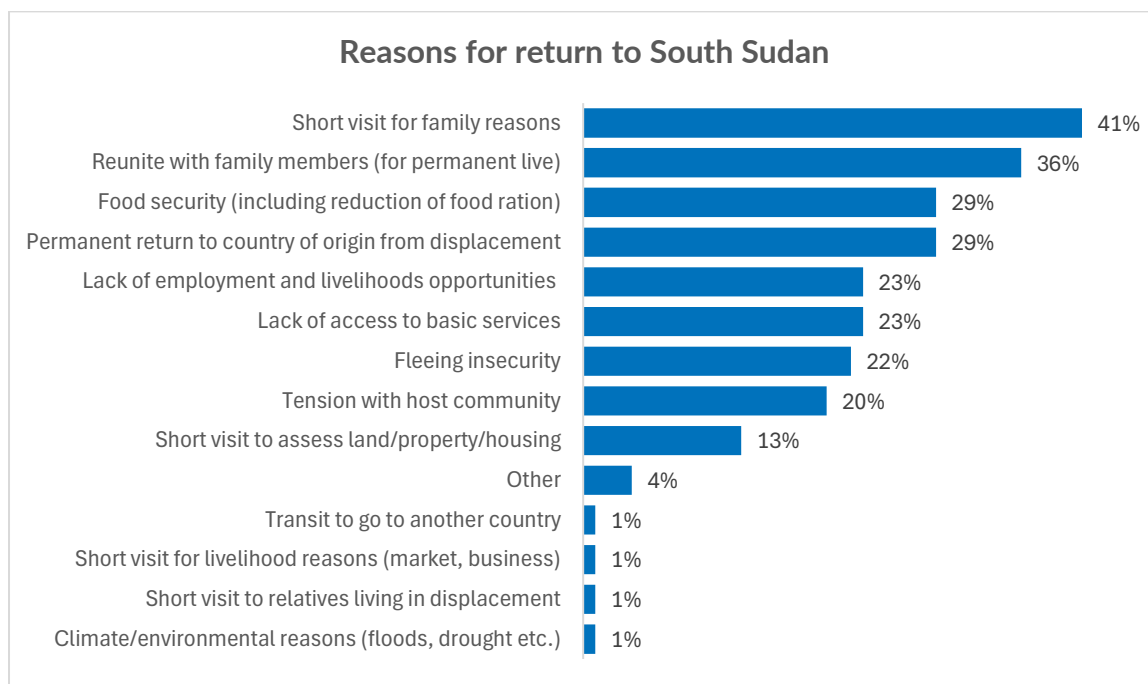
Arrivals (Ethiopia): Per category	# of arrivals	% of total
Returnees	7,112	85%
Pendular Movement	1,274	15%

Most of the arrivals from Ethiopia are females comprising of over a half (56%) while 44% are males. Additionally, in terms of age group composition close to a half (42%) are adults of 18 to 59 years of age while elderly constituted the least (10%).

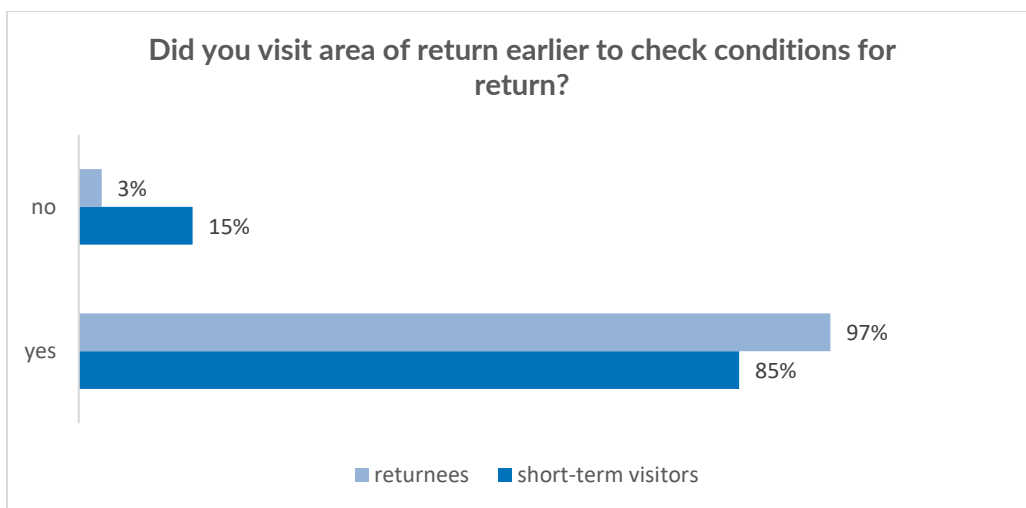
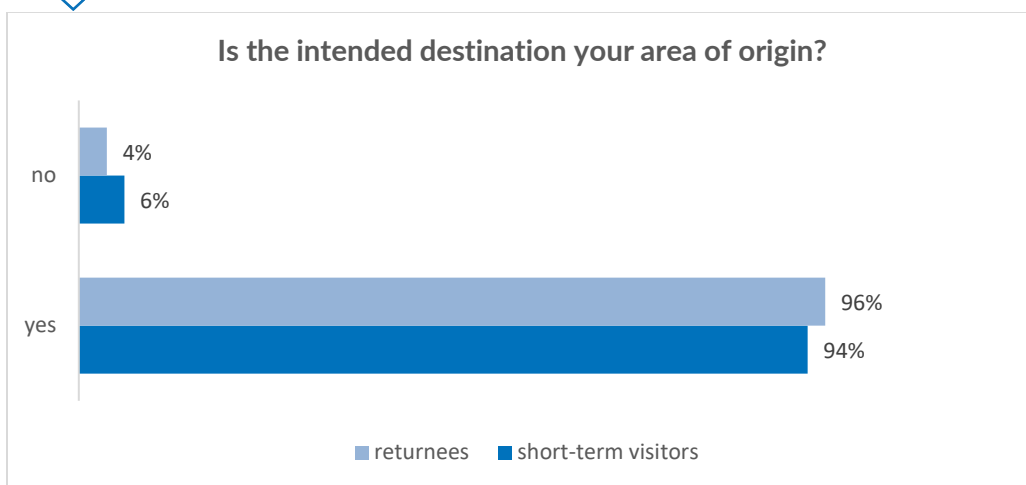
Moreover, there is balance in age category for both genders with the exception of adults of 18 to 59 years where there is imbalance with more females (24%) compared to males (18%).



Short visit for family reasons is the most cited reason of travelling (41%) to South Sudan. The other key reasons for travelling are reunification with family members for permanent return (36%), food security (reduction in food ration) (29%), permanent return to country of origin (23%) and both lack of access to basic services and lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (23%).



Over 90% of arrivals (both short-term and returnees) intends to move to their areas of origin. When comparing the proportion respondents intending to move to their areas of origin between the two groups, there is no significant difference. Additionally, almost all travellers (91%) both short-term and returnees indicated that they visited areas of return earlier to check the conditions prior to settling permanently.



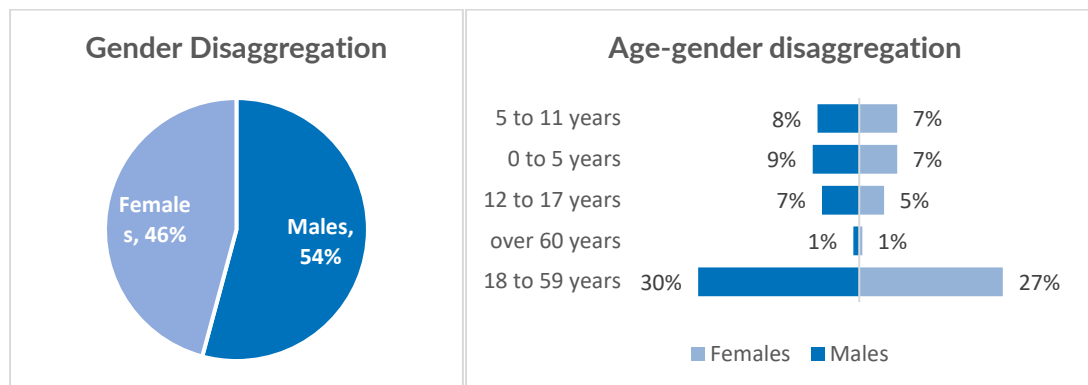
Border Monitoring Trends: Kenya

In December 2024, 740 South Sudanese crossed from Kenya to South Sudan. Out of 740 arrivals, 183 (25%) were returnees planning to stay for long-term while the rest were short-term visitors (75%). Comparing the number of arrivals to November, there is no variation in the number of arrivals with the difference being minimal (-4 individuals).

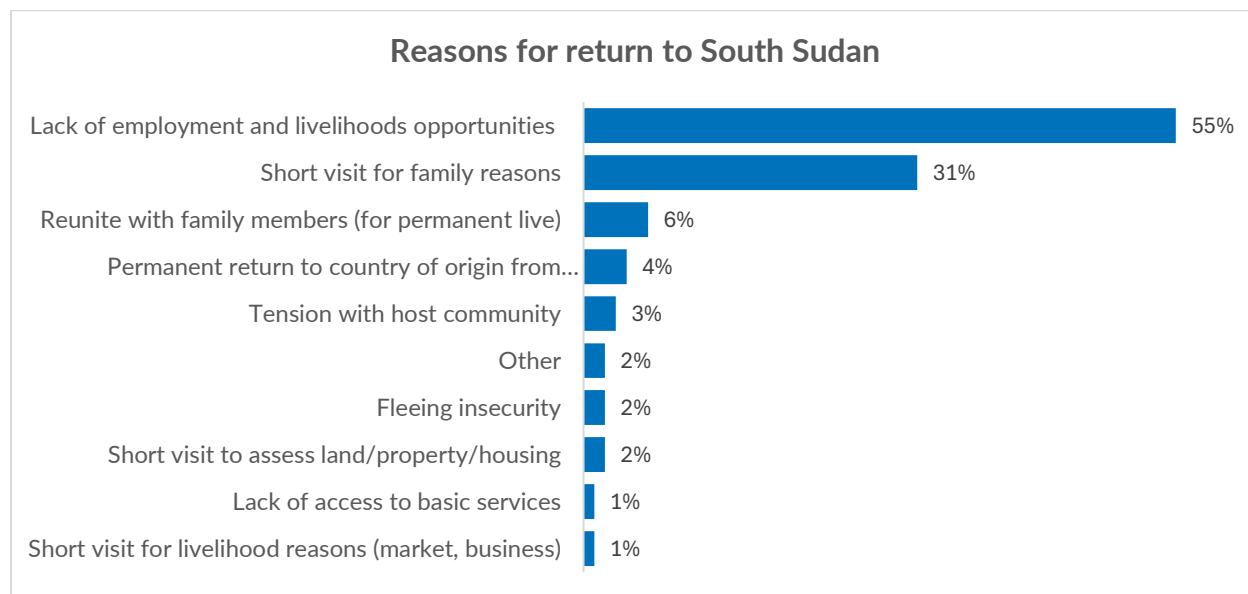
Arrivals (Kenya): Per category	# of arrivals	% of total
Returnees	183	24%
Pendular Movement	557	76%

The gender analysis indicates that a higher proportion of males (54%) than females (46%) crossed to South Sudan from Kenya. The proportion of school-going age children is low due to ongoing

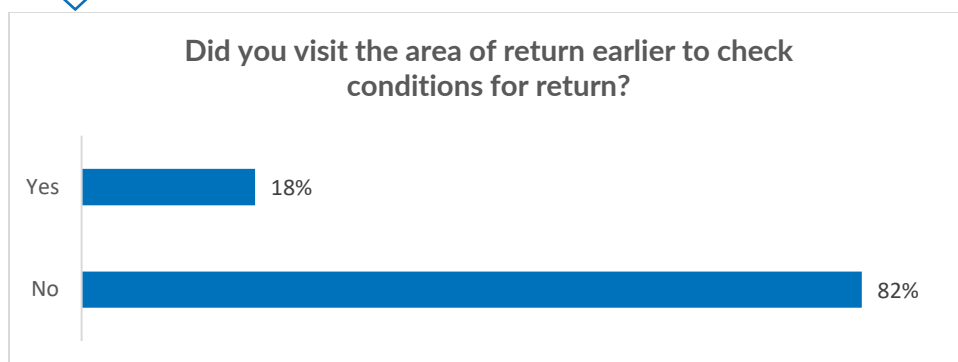
learning activities. Additionally, the proportion of elderly age-group is low as this could be attributed to the precarious nature of the movement.



The key rationale of South Sudanese crossing into South Sudan from Kenya is lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (55%) and short visit for family reasons (31%) indicating pendular nature of the returnees since they intend to stay for short-term. Additional reasons cited as influencing their travel were reunification with their family members for permanent return (4%) and tension with host community (3%).



Almost all (80%) of the arrivals reported that it is their first time to visit South Sudan to assess conditions for permanent return. Moreover, over a third (35%) indicates that they were travelling to their areas of origin that are of proximity to the border notably counties of Kapoeta and Budi in addition to Juba.

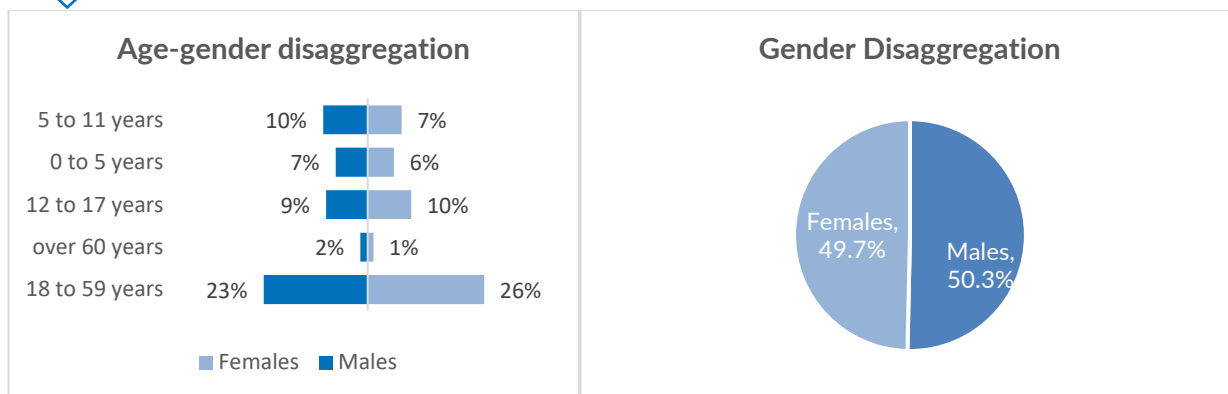


Border Monitoring Trends: Uganda

In December 2024, 1,883 South Sudanese nationals crossed over from Uganda. Out of these arrivals, 1,011 (54%) were returnees intended to stay for over a year or more while 872 (46%) were visitors planning to stay for short-term period.

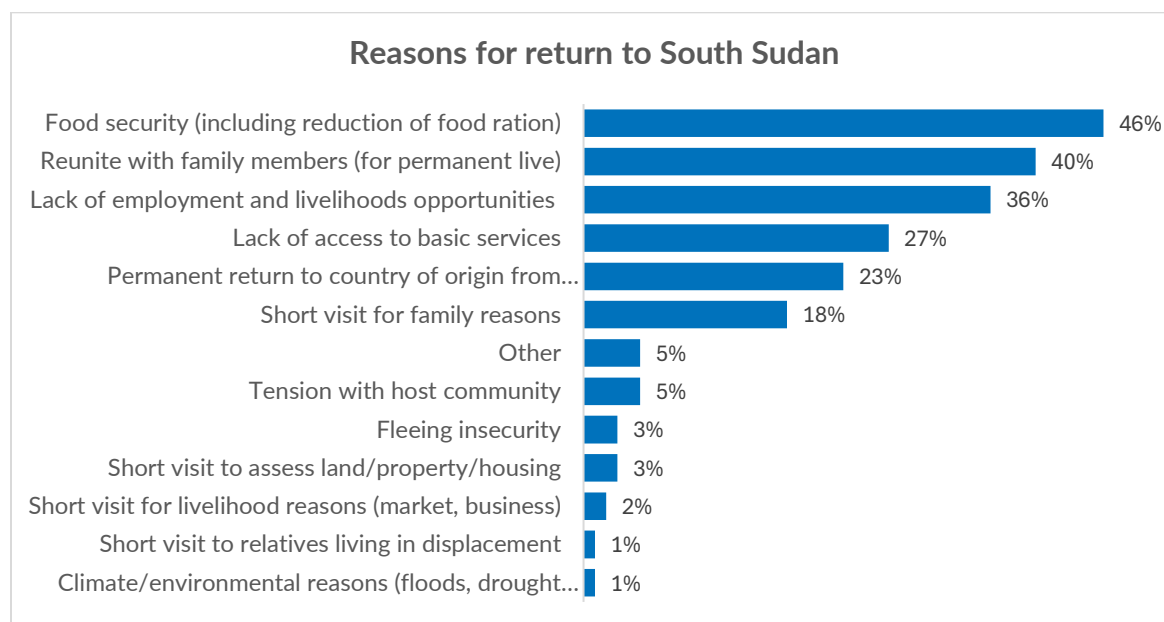
<i>Arrivals (Uganda): Per category</i>	# of arrivals	% of total
<i>Returnees</i>	1,011	54%
<i>Pendular Movement</i>	872	46%

The age and gender disaggregation among the arrivals from Uganda differs from the other border points since there is balance in the genders of both arrivals (50.3% males to 49.7% females). However, among the most populous age group of adults (18 to 59 years), males have higher proportion (26%) than females (23%). Additionally, the proportion of elderly is low compared to other age groups.

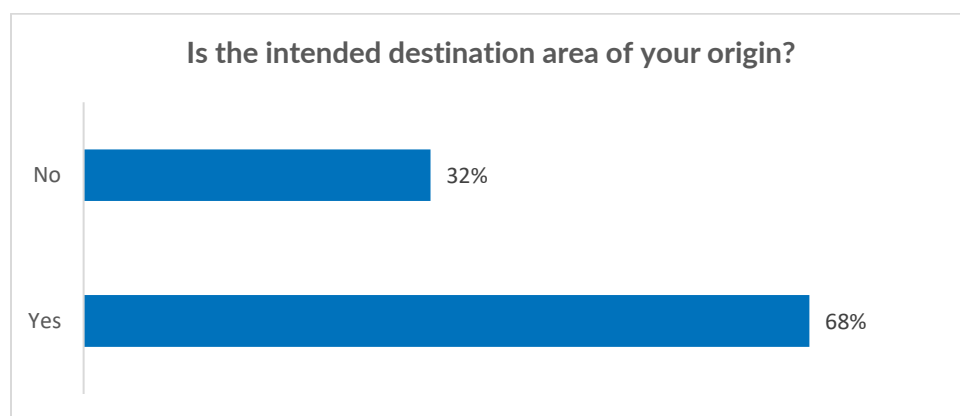
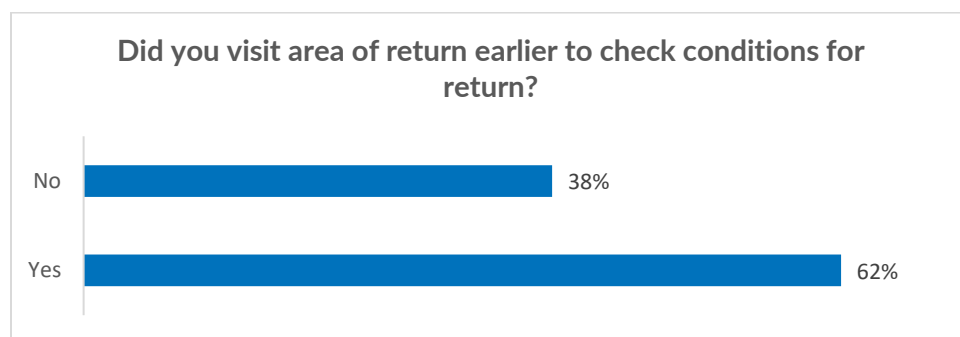


Analysis of South Sudanese returnees crossing from Uganda shows that close to a half (46%) cited food insecurity, along with reunification with family members (for permanent living) (40%), (lack of employment (36%) and lack of access to basic services (27%). Pull factors like permanent return from displacement (23%) and short visit for family reasons (18%) influenced travelling.

Additionally, about 8% of respondents interviewed disclosed fleeing insecurity or tensions with the host community as the reason for crossing.



Close to two-thirds (62%) of the respondents visited their areas of return to assess conditions for permanent return. Additionally, 68% intend to move to their areas of origin that are closer to the border mostly Magwi with significant proportion moving towards Juba.

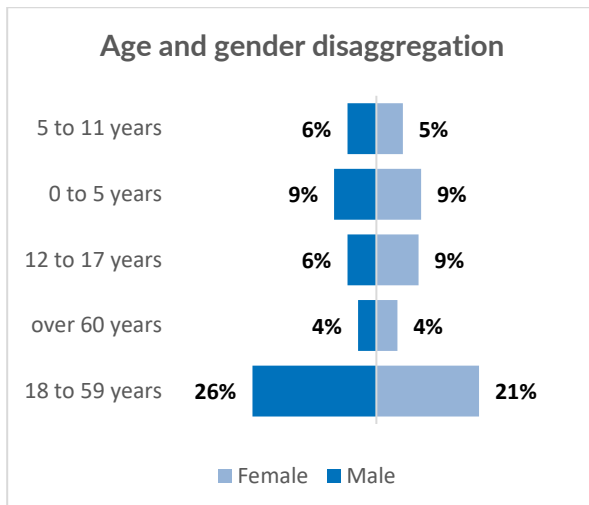
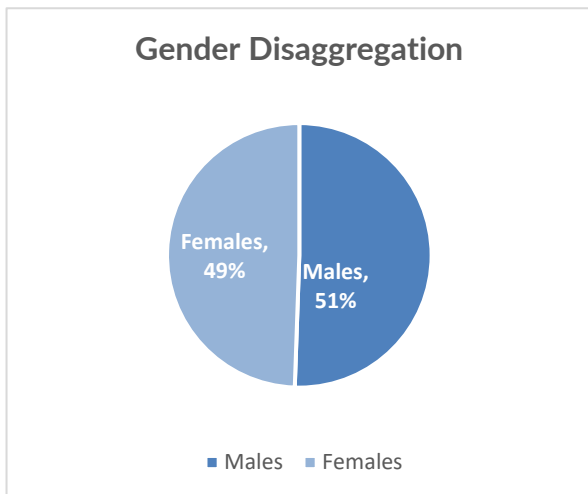


Border Monitoring Trends: DRC

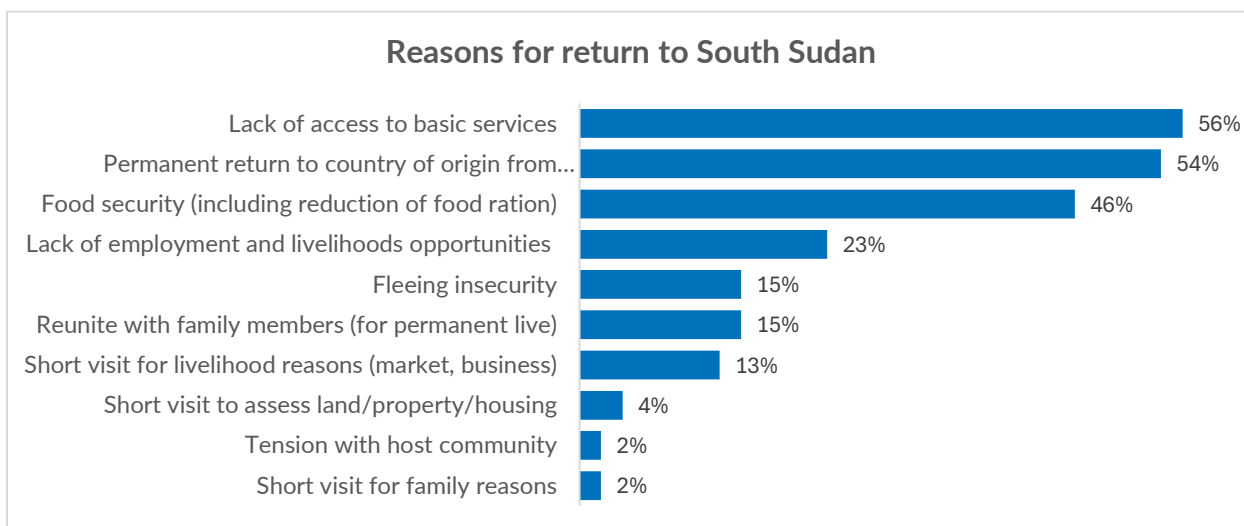
In December 2024, at least 161 South Sudanese arrived from DRC. UNHCR's partners recorded 131 returnees (81%) who intend to stay for long-term permanently or more than a year while 31 individuals (19%) are short term visitors.

Arrivals (DRC): Per category	# of arrivals	% of total
Returnees	131	81%
Pendular Movement	30	19%

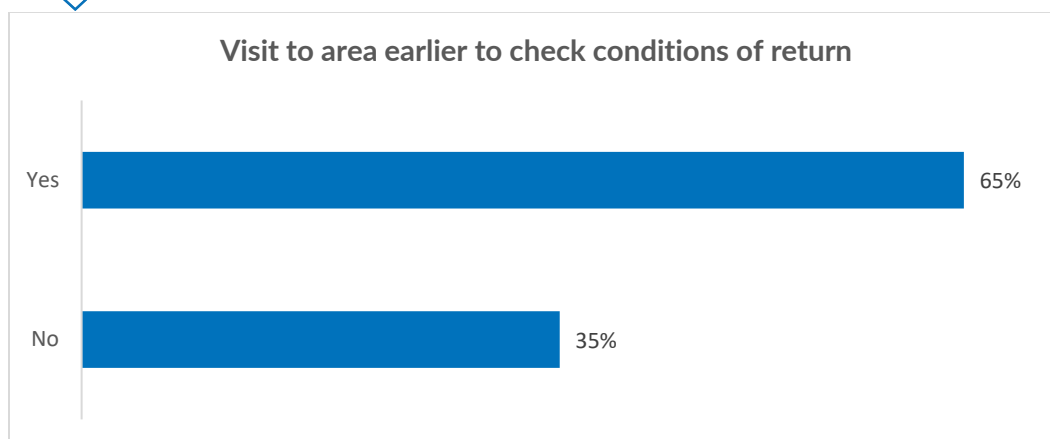
The age and gender analysis of arrivals from DRC indicates that there is a slight difference in the proportion of males (51%) compared to females (49%). Further analysis of age category by gender indicates that majority of arrivals were adults of 18 to 59 years (47%). Moreover, there is balance in the age category among the gender with exception of 12 to 17 years where the proportion varies (6% male to 9% female) and 18 to 59 years (26% male to 21% female).



The primary reasons of travelling cited by the arrivals were lack of access to basic services (56%), permanent return to country of origin (54%) and food security (46%).



All the arrivals from DRC headed to their areas of origin which are closer with the border. However, despite majority of arrivals heading to their areas of origin, only 83% visited earlier to check conditions of return. The proportion of arrivals that visited the areas to check conditions of return is almost like the proportion reported in November 2024 (82%).



Border Monitoring Trends: CAR

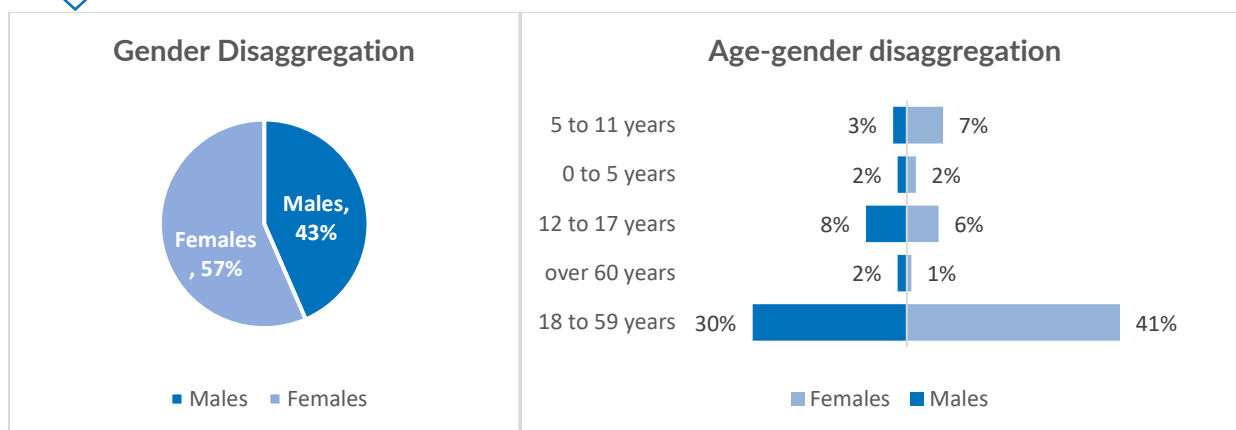
In December 2024, UNHCR’s partner enumerators recorded 115 arrivals from CAR (slightly lower than December). Of these crossings, 63 crossed into South Sudan at the border points with CAR, while 52 arrived through border points with DRC. In the same month 41 (36%) were returnees intending to stay for at least a year or more while 74 (64%) were short-term visitors.

Arrivals (DRC): Per # of arrivals Bordering DRC Bordering CAR % of total category

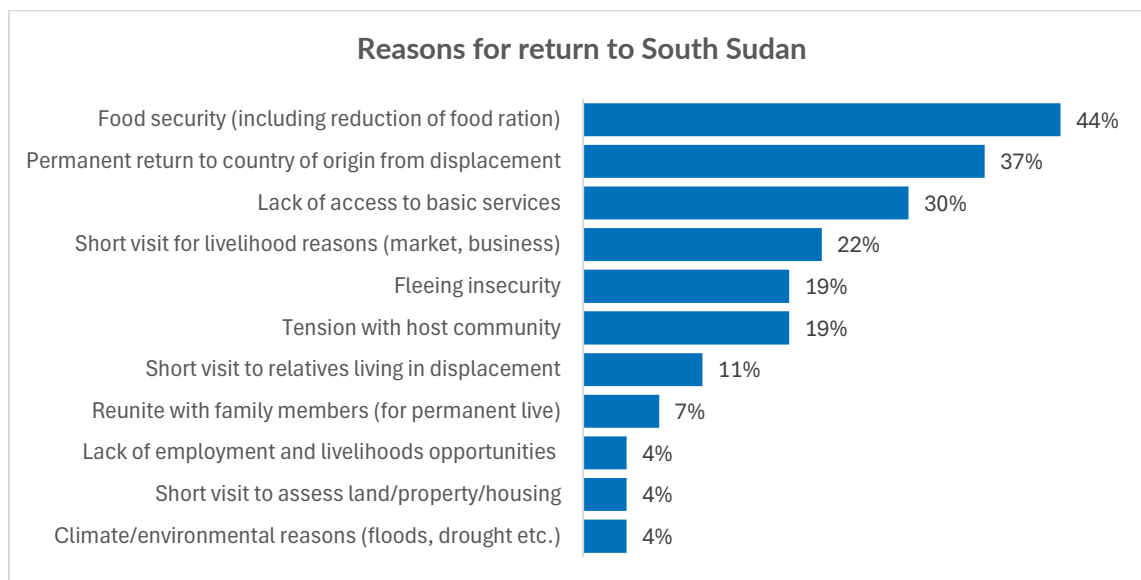
category	# of arrivals	Bordering DRC	Bordering CAR	% of total
Returnees	41	17	24	36%
Pendular Movement	74	35	39	64%

The gender analysis trends from CAR indicate that most arrivals were women who were over a half (57%) with proportion of males being 43%.

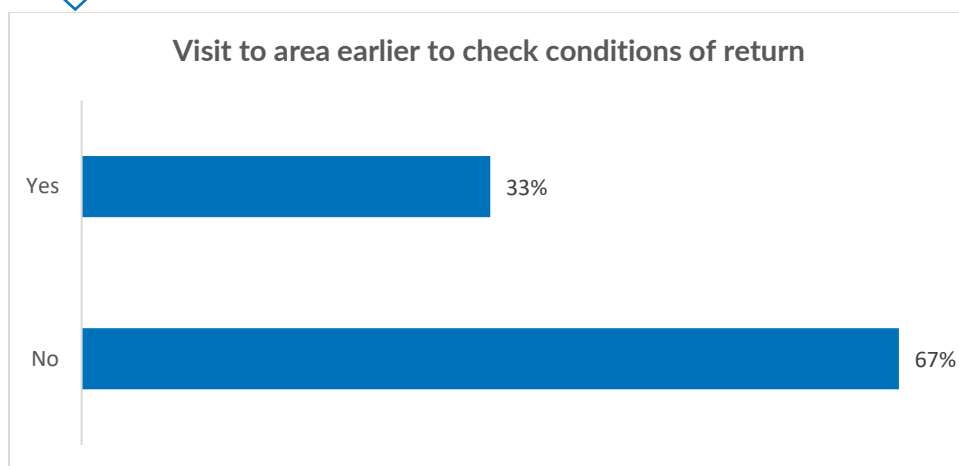
The age-gender disaggregation patterns shows that most of the arrivals were adult of 18 to 59 years of age contributing to almost three-quarters (74%) followed by age group of 12 to 17 years of age (14%).



Most reasons for travelling to South Sudan were food security (including reduction of food ration) (44%), permanent return to country of origin (37%), lack of access to basic services (30%) and short visit for livelihood reasons (22%).



All the arrivals from CAR headed to their areas of origin. Moreover, despite expressing their intentions to locate to their area of origin only a third (33%) visited the area earlier to check conditions of return.



Annexes

Border Monitoring Methodology

Objectives

UNHCR South Sudan border monitoring aims to improve information about the South Sudanese population's flow of returning to South Sudan from its neighbouring countries. This helps understand the current return movement trends, assess the protection needs of the returnee population, and better prepare the operational response in South Sudan at the national and field office levels.

Analytical framework, data collection methods and analysis

Border monitoring is conducted by border monitors and enumerators hired by UNHCR's partners with the support of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC). Joint UNHCR/IOM/RRC border monitoring occurs at the border crossing points with Sudan and Ethiopia. Enumerators collect data directly from incoming and outgoing individuals and families the border points. For the spontaneous return monitoring, border monitors identify and interview South Sudanese nationals travelling into South Sudan (inflow movement). This excludes individuals or groups who are part of recognized daily or pendular movements. UNHCR partners exercise a presence and collect data at 42 official border points at South Sudan's borders with Sudan, Chad, Ethiopia, CAR, DRC, Uganda, and Kenya. The South Sudan Government (RRC) has identified these border points as the main crossing points used by South Sudanese returnees. Border monitoring enumerators conduct household-level interviews daily, at least five days each week, eight hours per day. IOM/UNHCR maintains a 24/7 presence at the Wunthou (Joda) border point in Renk County.

Limitations

The number of arrivals serves as an indicator, reflecting the border points where UNHCR, IOM, RRC, and their partners currently operate. However, it's probable that the actual number of arrivals exceeds those captured by the border monitoring tool, as some individuals may be using unofficial (unmonitored) border crossings or travelling at night. UNHCR does not collect personal data from individuals crossing the borders, preventing them from tracking subsequent journeys or verifying any information given.

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

2024

Spontaneous Refugee Returns Monitoring

December 2024