

Sudan Crisis - protecting forcibly displaced women and girls

Context

South Sudan is hosting **453,918 refugees and asylum-seekers** as of March 2024. Ninety-three per cent of them are from Sudan, with **130,146 new arrivals** since April 2023. **Women and girls constitute 50 per cent** of the refugees and asylum seekers. Since the onset of Sudan crisis, UNHCR and its partners have been addressing GBV as a priority in emergencies by establishing referral pathways, introducing Women and Girls Safe Spaces (hereinafter, WGSS), conducting safety audits, and supporting field offices in Renk, Maban, Aweil/Wedweil, Jamjang, Malakal, and Gorom.

The risks of GBV and sexual exploitation and abuse have escalated for women and girls due to funding constraints across humanitarian responses, including a **50 per cent reduction in food aid, limited access to livelihood opportunities**, and the adverse effects of the climate change. General insecurity in camps has also contributed to GBV risks, with fragile shelters, crowded latrines, lack of public lighting, and increasing thefts. The most reported GBV incident was **psychosocial violence, followed by physical violence and sexual violence**.

UNHCR South Sudan **coordinates GBV under the Refugee Response Plan 2024 both at the national and field levels** through a coordination mechanism in Juba, Jamjang, Renk, and as part of the Protection Working Group in other locations. As of April 2024, five partners work in the field of GBV in the refugee setting, of which four are directly implementing GBV response programs alongside GBV prevention and women and girls' empowerment activities. As a localization initiative, UNHCR **has also initiated engagement with a Women refugee-led Organization (WRLO)** with the support of the Safe from the Start funds (SftS).

Key result

232,960 refugees and asylum seekers reached through specialized GBV prevention and response programs in 2023

GBVIMS+ rolled out through the training of 54 partner and UNHCR staff members

4 WGSS supported with new construction, staffing, furniture, and programmes

22,395 women and girls benefitted from dignity kits and **350 vulnerable women and girls** supported with **solar lanterns** as part of emergency support.

1 WRLO trained and **girls empowerment project developed** under the grant scheme



First training for a WRLO (named Women for Peace, Culture, and Development) to initiate partnership @UNHCR



A WGSS constructed for the refugees in Gorom camp, Juba following the arrival of refugees from the Sudan conflict @UNHCR

GBV trends

- According to the data collected by UNHCR in 2023, out of the total reported incidents, 96 percent of the survivors were women and girls, of whom 16 percent were minors. The predominant forms of reported GBV incidents were psychological violence, followed by physical violence, sexual violence, denial of resources, and forced marriage, including child marriage.
- In terms of safety, newly displaced women and girls reported experiencing psychological distress due to the recent trauma from the conflict in Sudan. They have shared that WGSSs are helping them reduce anxiety and feel safer. Currently, there are 24 WGSS available in the areas where UNHCR operates, with 16 located in refugee settings, including Maban, Renk, Wedweil, Jamjang, Malakal, Gorom, and Yambio. WGSS provides psycho-social support, case management, and life skills training for women and girls, including the newly displaced from Sudan. UNHCR supported the establishment of a new WGSS and equipped three WGSS with furniture, staffing, and programmes in 2023 and two new WGSSs are planned in Renk and Wedweil Refugee Settlement in 2024.
- Prevalence of theft and general insecurity was also reported as heightening GBV risks for women and girls across all camps as it can easily lead to GBV. Lack of public lighting, overcrowded latrines, firewood collection, limited number of female police officers, and long waiting at water points were also commonly mentioned as safety issues. Current food reduction (50 percent) and targeted food distribution in 2024 is going to be a risk factor for GBV and sexual exploitation and abuse under the current dire economic conditions in South Sudan.
- Accessing a formal legal system is one of the biggest challenges that GBV survivors face due to the limited presence of courts and the long distance. In most situations, GBV is handled at the community level through traditional dispute resolution mechanisms, and even when a survivor wishes to pursue official legal procedures, perpetrators and their families exert pressure on the survivors to drop the case. A GBV court was established in Juba in 2020 with the support of UNDP, and in 2024, UNHCR advocated to UNMISS for the establishment of mobile courts to support Maban and Renk. In general, lack of proper safe houses also hinders survivors' reporting of GBV, increasing further GBV risks.
- Child marriage is significantly under-reported (3 percent in 2023 according to the GBV data collected by UNHCR), while a recent study from UNFPA documents that child marriage is widely practiced (nationally, 34.6 percent). A high level of out-of-school rates also indicates an elevated risk for child marriage. In 2023, in refugee settings, 58 percent of girls were presumed to be out of primary school, and 96 percent of girls were out of secondary school. In terms of secondary schools, in 2024, UNHCR provides support in Maban and Jamjang, while other locations could not be supported due to a lack of funding.
- Access to livelihood also remains limited, while the vulnerability of women to GBV and SEA increasing amidst the reduction in food rations (50 percent) and planned targeted food distribution in 2024 onwards under the tight funding situation. UNHCR and livelihood partners aimed to target a minimum of 70 percent of female beneficiaries as set out in the UNHCR South Sudan operation's targets. However, with the current funding, only 12 percent of the total refugee population of working age could be targeted by the ongoing initiatives.



GBVIMS+ training conducted for 31 partner staff in person and 23 UNHCR staff online @UNHCR



Transit Center, Renk, South Sudan @UNHCR

Main Activities

UNHCR South Sudan benefitted from the Safe from the Start deployment scheme between October 2023 and April 2024 to enhance its response to the growing number of displacements following the Sudan crisis. The Safe from the Start projects aim to mainstream GBV prevention, response, and risk mitigation programmes at the onset of an emergency as a live-saving intervention.

Prevention

UNHCR and its partners reached 232,389 refugees and asylum seekers through GBV prevention programs, including EMAP, SASA, and Girl Shine and outreach programs in 2023. To promote community-based approach and program sustainability for GBV prevention, a localization initiative was also introduced, identifying one WRLO, Women for Peace, Culture, and Development. The WRLO will conduct a specialized prevention program (Girl Shine) in Juba, for which nine WRLO members have been trained on sexual exploitation and abuse, GBV safe disclosure and referrals, anti-fraud measures, and basic finance and procurement. A project has been developed with the support of UNHCR and SftS funding was allocated for the WRLO to conduct a Girl Shine project, which targets out of school adolescent girls and their caregivers. Furthermore, UNHCR supported the WRLO in developing funding proposals for other funding sources such as UN Trust Funds for sustainability of projects.

Response



GBV partners participating in a 5-day GBVIMS+ training @UNHCR

An Inter-Agency GBVIMS/IMS+ training has been conducted in coordination with the global GBVIMS coordinator (UNHCR) and the South Sudan GBVIMS coordinator (UNFPA) to enhance the GBV data collection process for GBV partners in South Sudan and to ensure safe, confidential, ethical data management. Six partners are planning to roll out GBVIMS+ in 2024, and Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) was revised to reflect refugee data systematically. GBV referral pathways were also updated in each location, and 120 new GBV posters, 2,920 leaflets, 9 banners, and 4 signposts were created in English and in Arabic to disseminate GBV key messages and service information widely. UNHCR continues its efforts for quality GBV case management and response services through coaching, monitoring, and advocacy including a mobile court for remote locations.

Risk Mitigation

To assess the risks of GBV, four missions were conducted to Renk, Maban, Wedweil/Aweil, and Gorom and concrete recommendations were shared to mitigate GBV risks through the provision of dignity kits, solar public lights, gender-disaggregated latrines, hiring of more female police officers, and introduction of new Women and Girls Safe Spaces, etc. Safety audit training has been conducted for field offices in 2024 and currently, safety audits have been completed in Renk and Jamjang while the other refugee locations are planned to conduct safety audits for the first half of 2024. To support newly arrived women and girls, UNHCR also secured SftS funding and has supported 4,218 women and girls in Maban through risk mitigation measures.



An FGD with newly arrived women, Kaya camp, Maban, South Sudan @UNHCR

Coordination

To enhance the GBV coordination mechanism in refugee settings in South Sudan, the GBV Sub-Working Group was established under Sudan RRRP and its first meeting was organized at the national level under Sudan RRRP 2024, and a GBV coordination group was also established in Renk. A Terms of Reference (TOR) has been introduced, and the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been redrafted. UNHCR continues its efforts to further expand the GBV sub-working group in other locations such as Wedweil and Maban for better coordination.

Capacity Building

Fifteen GBV training sessions were conducted for 257 individuals, including GBV partners, health workers, community frontline workers, and UNHCR GBV focal persons to enhance their capacity in GBVIMS+, clinical management of rape, GBV minimum standards, safety audits, and safe disclosure and referrals. WRLO members were trained to build their institutional capacity to initiate GBV and women empowerment projects under the small grant scheme. Nine WRLO members learned about sexual exploitation and abuse, anti-fraud measures, GBV safe disclosure and referrals as well as basic finance and procurement procedures.



Safe disclosure and referral training for frontline workers, Wedweill Transit Center, South Sudan @UNHCR

Priorities

The following are the priorities for UNHCR's GBV prevention, risk mitigation, and response in South Sudan:

- **Women Empowerment:** To diversify livelihoods and life skills opportunities to strengthen resilience and improved capacity of women to prepare, withstand, recover from the displacement and worsening impacts of climate change.
- **Engagement with WRLOs:** To work with WRLOs and build their capacity for program continuity and localization.
- **Streamlining GBV response programs:** To roll out GBVIMS+ and case management capacity building through training and coaching for partners under RRRP.
- **GBV data analysis:** To provide periodic GBV trend analysis to inform effective GBV programming.
- **Continuous support for GBV prevention programs:** To provide SASA!, Girl Shine, and EMAP programs in Maban, Renk, Jamjang, Gorom, and Yei, and expand them in Wedweil and other locations, funding permits.
- **GBV risk mitigation:** To conduct safety audits both in refugee and IDP locations to coordinate closely with non-GBV sectors (livelihood, CBI, shelter, WASH, energy, education, child protection, protection, health).
- **GBV coordination:** To establish GBV coordination both at the national and field level.

Funding

In 2024, the GBV Sector at the inter-agency level appealed for \$14,563,781 for refugee programs under RRP, and UNHCR's GBV funding needs are USD 3,067,853 in 2024.

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