UNHCR SOUTH SUDAN

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

May 2025

20,343 Returnee arrivals to South Sudan in May 2025

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Executive Summary

In May 2025, a total of 28,040 South Sudanese nationals were recorded arriving in South Sudan, as monitored by border enumerators deployed at various crossing points with Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, the DRC, and the CAR. Most arrivals were from Sudan (19,379), followed by Ethiopia (7,665), Uganda (728), DRC (152), and CAR (117).

Of the total arrivals, 20,343 individuals (73%) were returnees. The remaining 7,697 individuals (27%) were pendular movements, meaning they intend to stay in South Sudan for less than one year.

An analysis of the reasons for return reported by South Sudanese nationals interviewed at border crossing points reveals that the primary driver was insecurity, cited by 60% of respondents. Other significant reasons included: family reunification for permanent living (8%), lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (7%), short visits for family-related matters such as funerals, marriages, or caregiving (6%), permanent return to South Sudan from displacement (5%), and limited access to basic services or food insecurity, including reductions in food rations (4%).

When disaggregated by country of asylum, the data show that arrivals from Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) most frequently cited family reunification for permanent live as the main reason for return. In contrast, those returning from Ethiopia and Uganda more often reported food insecurity, including reductions in food rations, as their primary reason. Returnees from the Central African Republic mainly cited fleeing insecurity.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
AGD	Age and Gender Diversity
CAR	Central African 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
IDPs	Internally Displaced Person

Introduction

South Sudan presents a multi-layered mix of refugees, IDPs, returnees (both refugees and IDPs), stateless persons, and persons at risk of statelessness. According to UNHCR, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), and partners, more than 650,000 South Sudanese individuals have returned spontaneously from neighboring 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), reaching the end of 2022. With the onset of the Sudan crisis in 2023, more than 750,000 South Sudanese individuals 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 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 the existing system for monitoring spontaneous refugee returnees, particularly through border monitoring. The collection and analysis of the relevant qualitative and quantitative data enables UNHCR and its partners to understand better the scale and trend of the ongoing spontaneous return movements.

South Sudanese Arrivals in May 2025

In May 2025, a total of 28,042 South Sudanese nationals were recorded arriving in South Sudan, as monitored by border enumerators deployed at various crossing points with Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, the DRC, and the CAR. Most of arrivals were from Sudan (19,380), followed by Ethiopia (7,665), Uganda (728), DRC (152), and CAR (117).

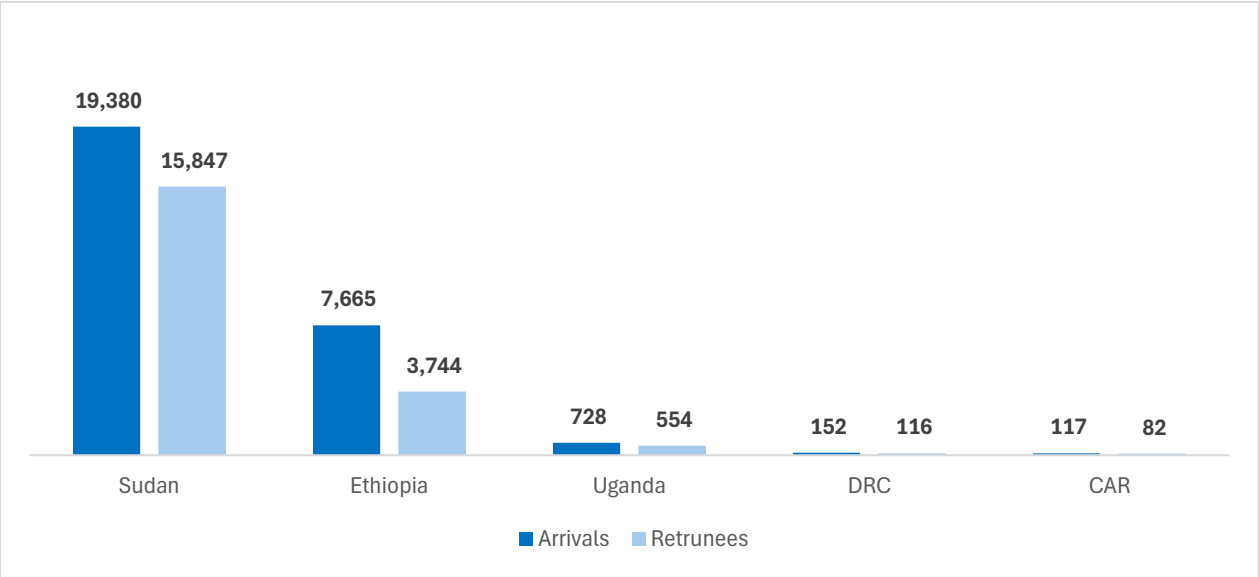
Of the total arrivals, 20,343 individuals (73%) were returnees. The remaining 7,697 individuals (27%) were pendular movements.

Table 1: Movement category of South Sudanese arrivals

Category	# of arrivals	%
Returnees	20,343	73%
Pendular	7,697	27%

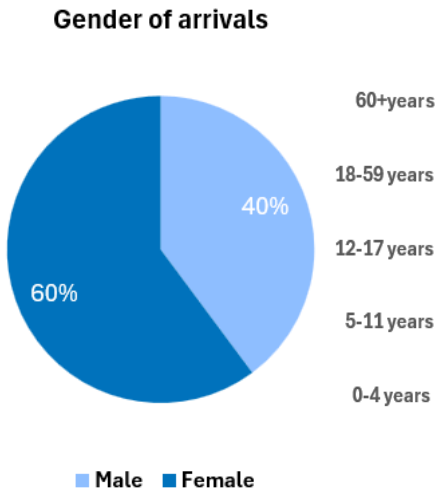
Note on Methodology

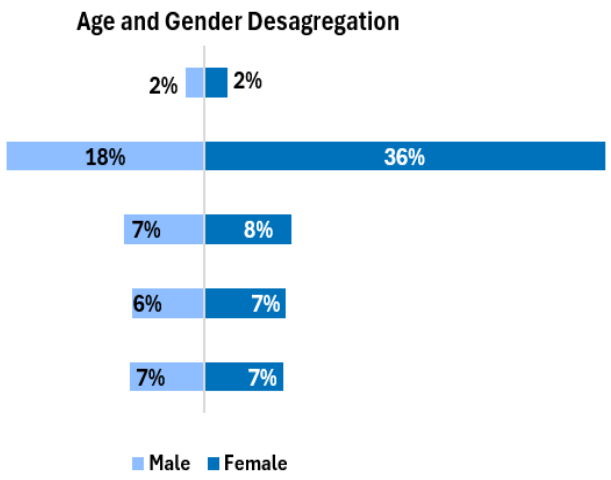
UNHCR South Sudan, in consultation with the RRC, introduced an updated methodology for identifying returnees since September 2024. According to this methodology, only households that stay in South Sudan for one year or longer are counted as returnees to South Sudan. Those who remain in South Sudan for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



Demographic Profile of the Arrival Population

Females constituted the highest proportion of arrivals, making up 60% compared to 40% male. In terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 represented the largest group (54%), followed by adolescents aged 12 to 17 (15%), children under 5 (14%), children aged 5 to 11 (13%). Elderly individuals aged 60 and above were the least represented, comprising just 4% of the total arrivals.



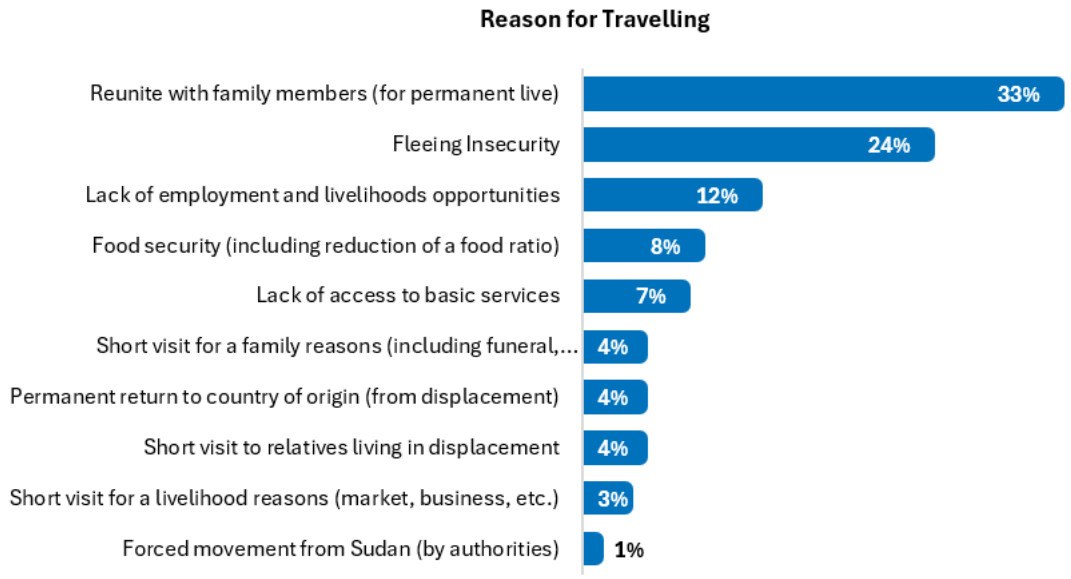


Reasons for Return

An analysis of the reasons for return reported by South Sudanese nationals interviewed at border crossing points reveals that the primary reasons were family reunification for permanent live (33%) and fleeing insecurity (24%). Other significant reasons included: lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (12%), food insecurity, including reductions in food rations (8%), lack of access to basic services (7%), short visits

for family-related matters such as funerals, marriages, or caregiving or permanent return to South Sudan from displacement or short visit to relatives living in displacement (4%) and short visits to assess land, housing, property (3%). A small number also cited forced movement from Sudan by authorities (1%)

When disaggregated by country of asylum, the data show that arrivals from Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) most frequently cited family reunification for permanent live as the main reason for return. In contrast, those returning from Ethiopia and Uganda more often reported food insecurity, including reductions in food rations, as their primary reason. Returnees from the Central African Republic mainly cited fleeing insecurity.



Border Monitoring Trends: Sudan

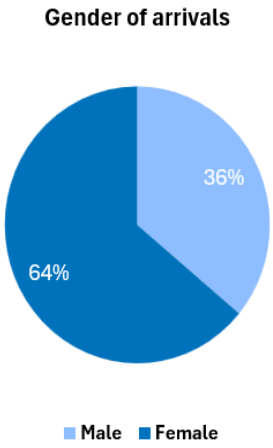
In May 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 19,380 South Sudanese nationals arriving from Sudan through multiple points of entry. Of these, 15,847 individuals (82%) were returnees intending to stay for an extended period, either permanently or for more than a year, while 3,533 (18%) were pendular movements.

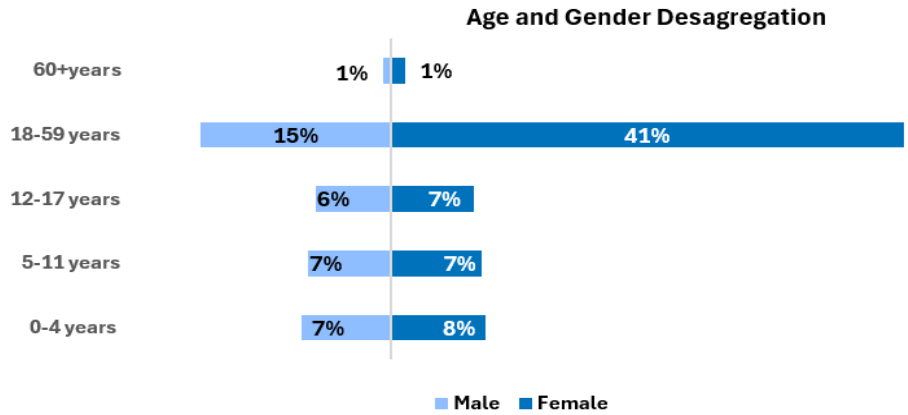
Table 2: Movement category of arrivals from Sudan

Category	# of arrivals	%
Returnees	15,847	82%
Pendular	3,533	18%

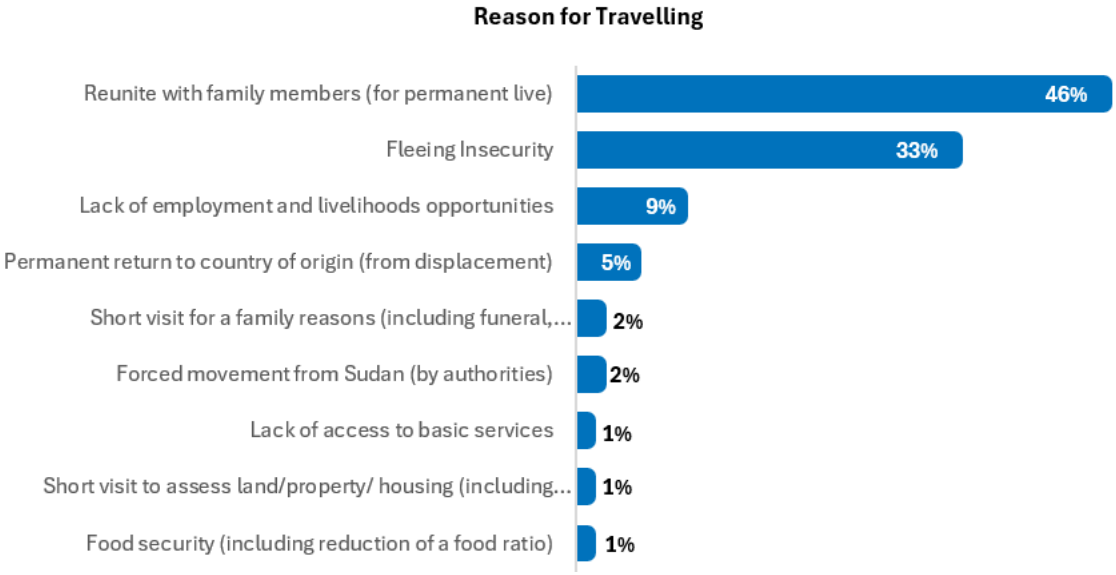
The average weekly number of crossings in May 2025 was estimated at 3,826 individuals, with the highest volume recorded during the second week of the month (4,590). The main points of entry were Joda/Wunthou (11,490), Majokyinthiu (1,840), and Emtidad (1,270), while the remaining 4,748 individuals entered through other border points.

Females constituted more than half (64%) of the arrivals, compared to males (36%). Moreover, in terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 formed the majority (56%), followed by children under 5 (15%), children aged 5 to 11 (14%), and children aged 12 to 17 (13%). In comparison, elderly individuals aged 60 and above were the least represented (2%).





The primary reasons reported by arrivals for returning to South Sudan were family reunification for permanent return (46%) and general insecurity (33%). Additional reasons included the lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (9%), the intention to permanently return from displacement (5%), and short visits for family-related matters or forced movement by authorities in Sudan (2%). A small number also cited lack of access to basic services or short visits to assess land, housing, property, or food insecurity, particularly linked to reduced food rations (1%).



Border Monitoring Trends: Ethiopia

In May 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 7,665 South Sudanese arrivals from Ethiopia through the Pagak, Jekow, Maker, Phil, and Matar/Burebiey border entry points. Of these, 3,744 individuals (49%) were returnees intending to remain in South Sudan for an extended period, either permanently or for more than a year, while 3,921 (51%) were pendular movements.

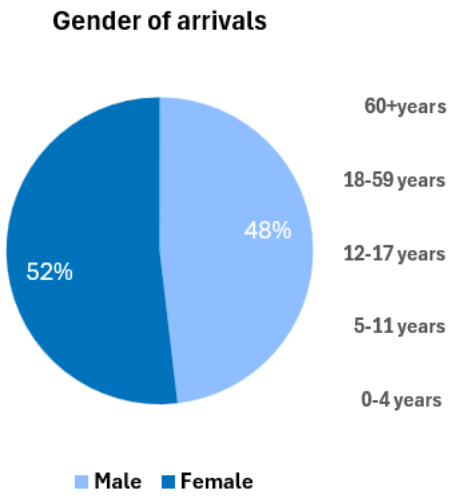
Table 3: Movement category of arrivals from Ethiopia

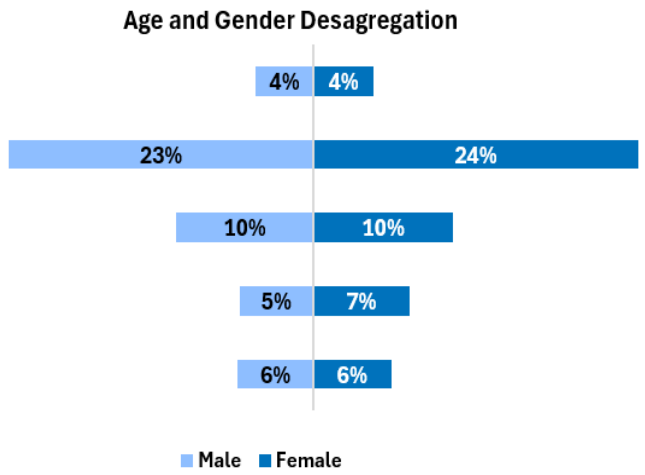
Category	# of arrivals	%

Returnees	3,744	49%
Pendular	3,921	51%

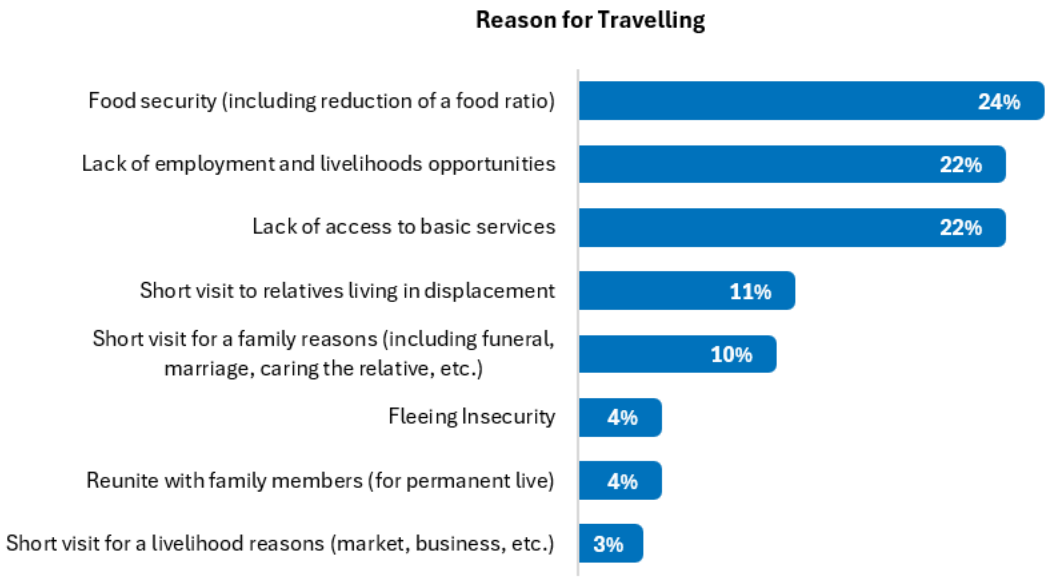
The average weekly number of crossings from Ethiopia in May 2025 was estimated at 1,533 individuals, with the second week recording the highest influx (3,392 individuals). The main points of entry were Pagak (1,925), Jekow (1,388), Maker (1,388), Phil (1,120), and Matar/Burebiey (871), while the remaining 973 individuals crossed through other entry points.

Females constituted more than half (52%) of the arrivals, compared to males (48%). Moreover, in terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 constituted a significant proportion (47%), followed by children aged 12 to 17 (20%), children aged 5 to 11 (12%), and children under 5 years-old (12%). In comparison, elderly individuals aged 60 and above were the least represented (8%).





The primary reasons influencing the travel of arrivals were food insecurity, particularly reduction of food rations (24%), lack of employment and livelihood opportunities in the country of asylum (22%), and lack of access to basic services in the country of asylum (22%). Additional reasons included short visit to relatives living in displacement (11%), short visit for family reasons (10%), fleeing insecurity or reunification with family members for permanent living (4%) and short visit for a livelihood reasons (3%).



Border Monitoring Trends: Uganda

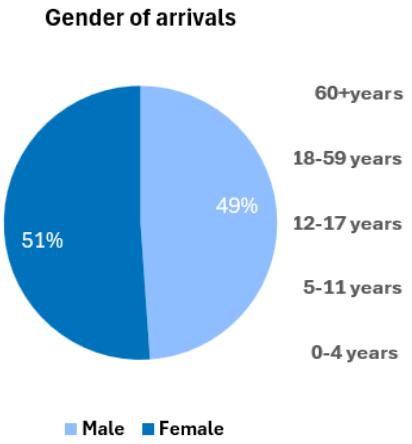
In May 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 728 South Sudanese arrivals into South Sudan from Uganda through multiple points of entry. Of these arrivals, 554 (76%) were returnees intending to stay for a longer period, either permanently or for more than a year, while 174 (24%) were pendular movements.

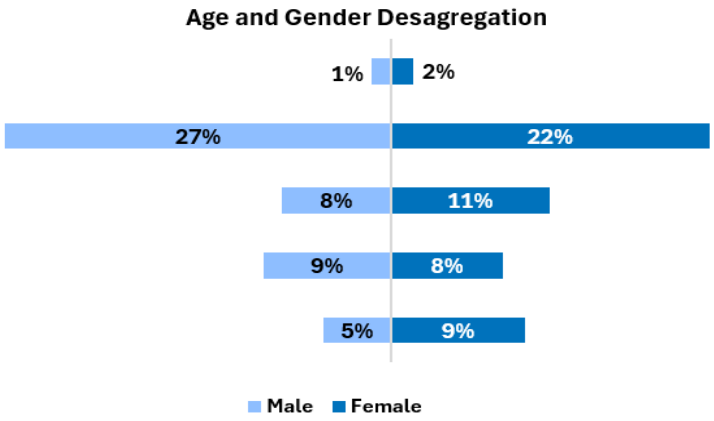
Table 4: Movement category of arrivals from Uganda

Category	# of arrivals	%
Returnees	554	76%
Pendular	174	24%

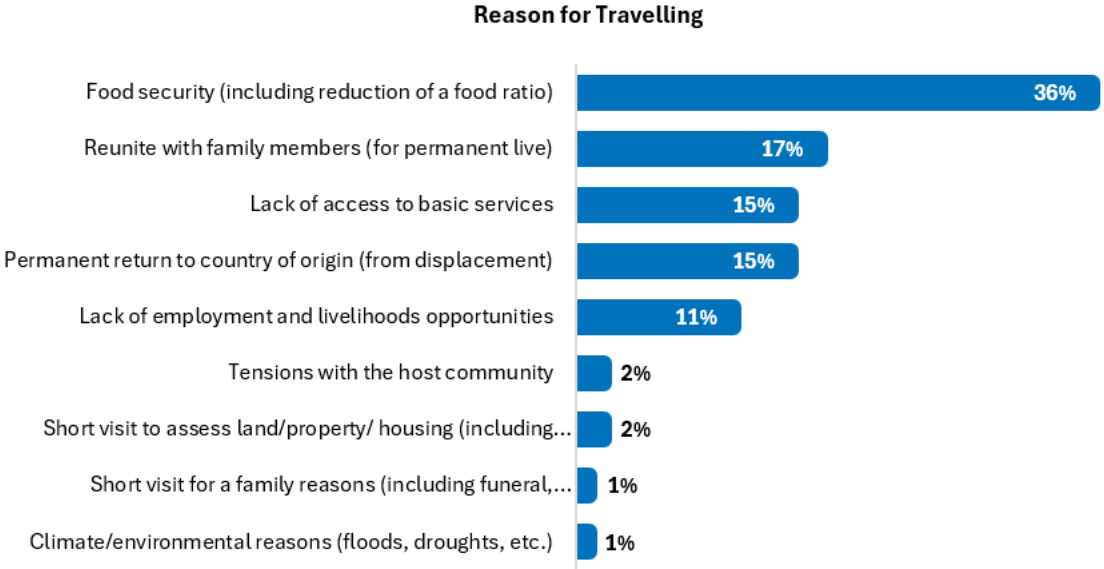
The average number of crossings is estimated at 147 individuals, with the third week of the month recording the highest number (221). The main points of entry were Bamurye(159), Meruwa (112), Jale (92), Litoba (79), Pure(63), Kagiri (62), Kaya (56), while the rest (105) crossing through other points.

Females constituted a slight majority of arrivals, accounting for 51% compared to 49% male. In terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 years made up the largest group (47%), followed by adolescents aged 12 to 17 (19%), children aged 5 to 11 years (17%), and children under 5 years old (14%). Elderly individuals aged 60 years and above were the least represented, comprising just 3% of the arrivals.





The primary reasons reported by arrivals for returning to South Sudan were food insecurity, particularly reduction of food rations (36%) and reunification with family members for permanent settlement (17%). Other significant reasons included lack of access to basic services (15%), permanent return from displacement (15%), and limited employment opportunities in the country of asylum (11%). Less frequently mentioned reasons included tensions with host communities and short visits to assess land, property, and housing (2% each), as well as short visits for family reasons and climate or environmental factors (1% each).



Border Monitoring Trends: DRC

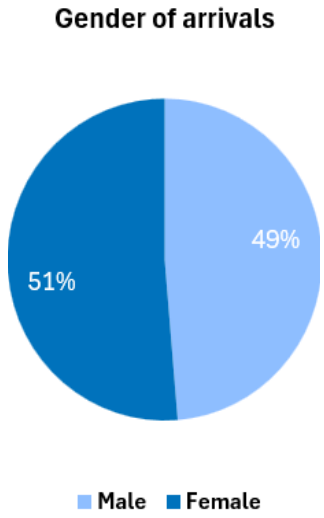
In May 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 152 South Sudanese arrivals to South Sudan from DRC through multiple points of entry. Of these arrivals, 116 (76%) were returnees intending to stay for a longer period, either permanently or for more than a year, while 36 (24%) were pendular movements.

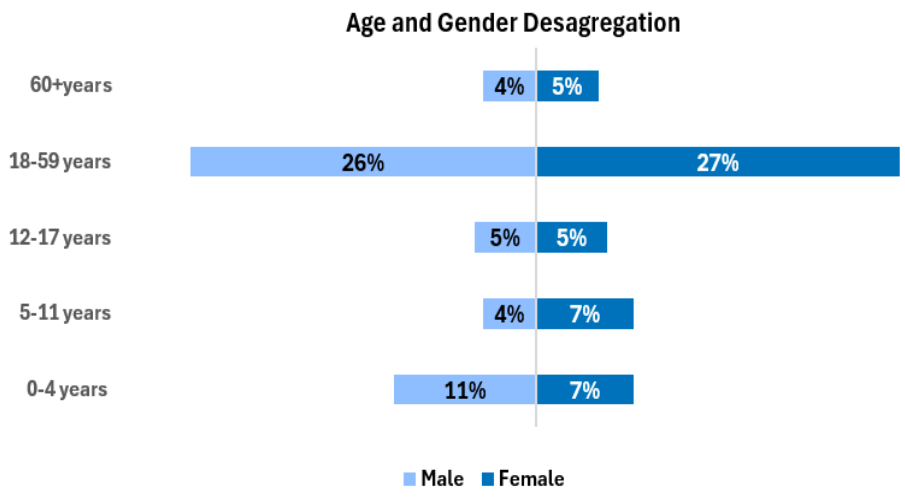
Table 5: Movement category of arrivals from DRC

Category	# of arrivals	%
Returnees	116	76%
Pendular	36	24%

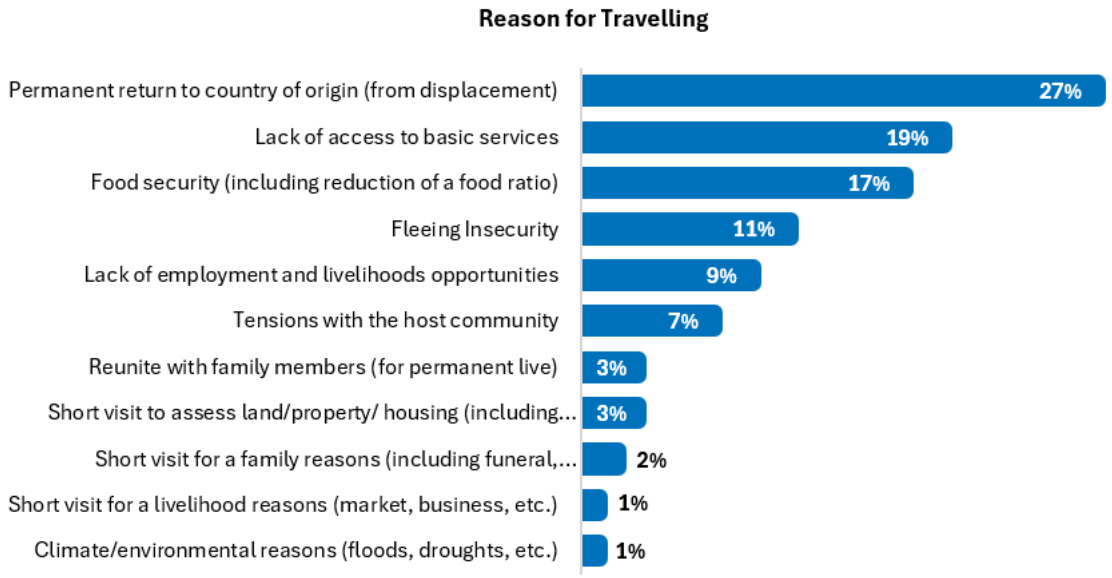
The average number of crossings is estimated at 30 individuals, with the second week of the month recording the highest number (38). The main points of entry were Ezo (45), Sakure (38), and Isebi (32), while the rest (37) crossing through other points.

Females constituted the majority of arrivals (51%), compared to males (49%). In terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 were the majority (53%), followed by children under 5 years-old (18%), children aged 5 to 11 years-old (11%), and children between 12 and 17 years (10%). Elderly individuals aged 60 and above accounted for 9% of arrivals.





The primary reasons reported by arrivals for returning to South Sudan were permanent return from displacement (27%), lack of access to basic services (19%), food insecurity, particularly due to reduced food rations in the country of asylum (17%), fleeing insecurity (11%), lack of employment and livelihoods opportunities in the country of asylum (9%) and tensions with host community (7%). Additional reasons included reunification with family members for a permanent live or short visit to assess land, property or housing (3% each), short visit for family reasons (2%), and short visit for livelihood reasons or climate /environmental reasons (1% each)



Border Monitoring Trends: CAR

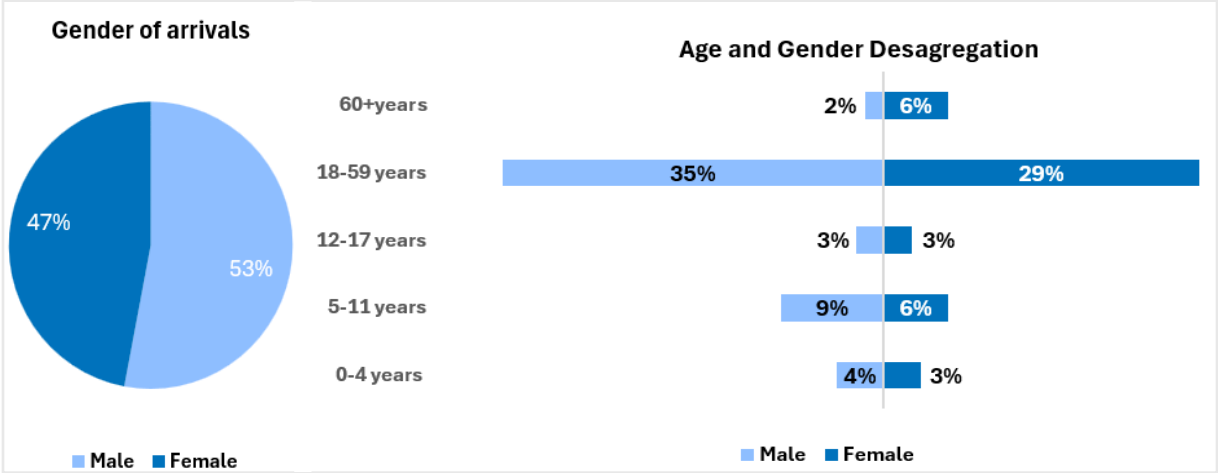
In May 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 117 South Sudanese arrivals to South Sudan from CAR through two points of entry. Of these arrivals, 82 (70%) were returnees intending to stay for a longer period, either permanently or for more than a year, while 35 (30%) were pendular movements.

Table 6: Movement category of arrivals from CAR

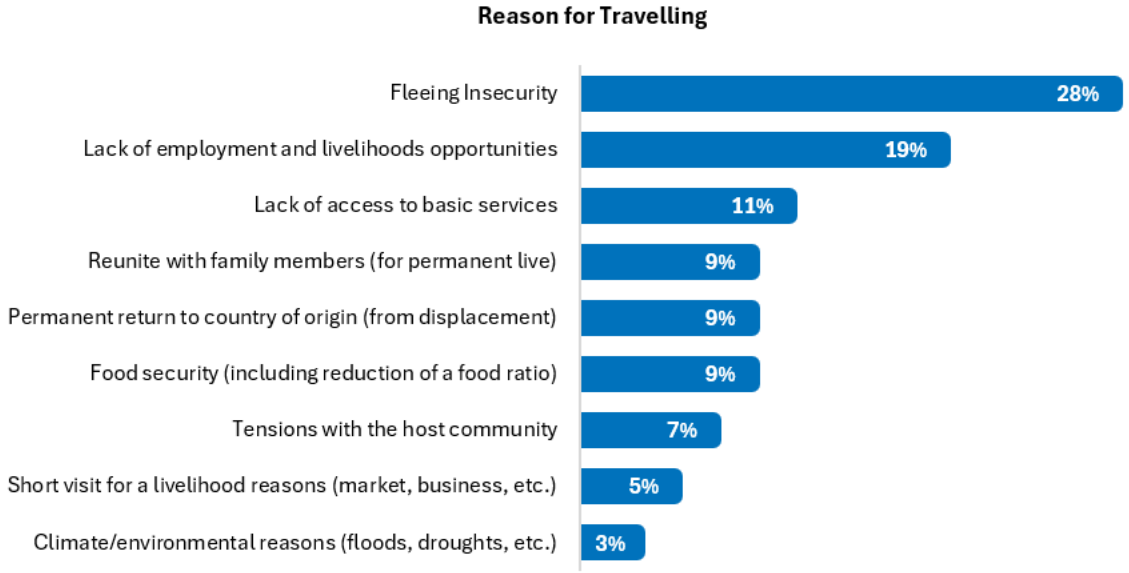
Category	# of arrivals	%
Returnees	82	70%
Pendular	35	30%

The average number of crossings is estimated at 29 individuals, with the fourth week of the month recording the highest number (39). The points of entry were Dingimo (62) and Source Yubu (55).

Males constituted the majority of arrivals, accounting for 53%, compared to females at 47%. In terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 made up the largest group, representing 64% of the population. This was followed by children aged 5 to 11 (15%), elderly individuals aged 60 and above (8%), children under 5 years old (7%), and adolescents aged 12 to 17, who comprised 6% of arrivals.



The primary reasons cited for return included fleeing insecurity (28%) and lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (19%). Other significant reasons included lack of access to basic services (11%), reunification with family members for permanent settlement (9%), the intention to permanently return from displacement (9%), food insecurity, particularly due to reduced food rations in the country of asylum (9%) and tensions with host communities (7%). Less frequently mentioned reasons included short visits for livelihood-related reasons (5%) and climate or environmental reasons (3%).



Annexes

Border Monitoring Methodology

UNHCR South Sudan's border monitoring aims to improve information about the flow of South Sudanese nationals returning to South Sudan from neighboring countries. This helps understand the current return movement trends, assess protection needs of the returnee population, and better prepare the operational response in South Sudan at both national and field 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 households crossing the border points. For spontaneous return monitoring, border monitors identify and interview South Sudanese nationals travelling into South Sudan (inflow movement). This excludes individuals or groups participating in recognised daily or pendular movements. UNHCR partners exercise a presence and collect data at 42 official border points on 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 South Sudanese returnees use. Border monitoring enumerators conduct household-level interviews at least five days a week, eight hours daily. 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, the number of arrivals probably 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 provided.

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

May, 2025

Spontaneous Refugee Returns Monitoring

May 2025

UNHCR Information Management Unit – Juba, South Sudan

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