UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR SOUTH SUDAN

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

February 2025

21,038 Returnees who arrived in South Sudan in February 2025

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Executive Summary

In February 2025, at least **24,711** South Sudanese arrived in South Sudan, as recorded by border monitoring enumerators deployed at various border points notably Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, DRC, and CAR. The highest number of arrivals was from Sudan (20,466), followed by Ethiopia (2,691) and Uganda (1,271). Out of the 24,711 arrivals, **21,038 (85%)** were returnees while 3,673 (15%) were engaged in pendular movement.

An analysis of the reasons for return, reported by South Sudanese interviewed at crossing points, indicates that food security - largely the reduction in food ration (43%) - and insecurity (32%) were the primary reasons for crossing to South Sudan. Other notable reasons include lack of basic services (29%), reunification with family members for permanent living (28%), short visits for family reasons (27%), and permanent return to their country of origin from displacement (21%). However, when examining reasons for return by country of asylum, fleeing insecurity was mostly cited by arrivals from Sudan, while food security concerns were extensively mentioned by arrivals from Ethiopia, DRC, Uganda, and Kenya.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
AGD	Age and Gender Diversity
CAR	Central African Republic
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
IOM	International Organisation 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, 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 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), reaching 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 in just 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 gain a better understanding of the scale and the trends of the ongoing spontaneous return movements.

South Sudanese Arrivals in February 2025

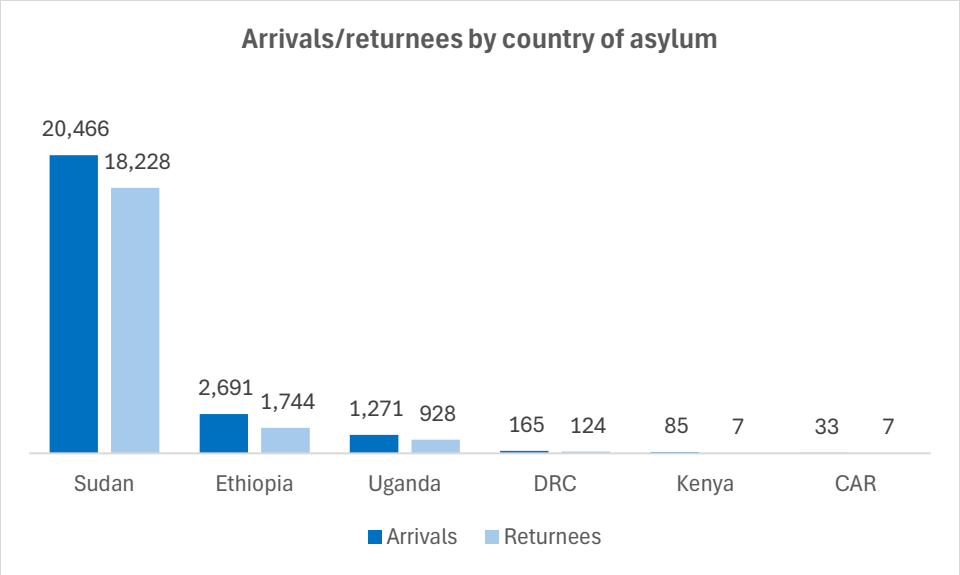
In February 2025, at least 24,711 South Sudanese arrived in South Sudan, as recorded by border monitoring enumerators deployed at various border points, notably Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, DRC, and CAR. The highest number of arrivals came from Sudan (20,466), followed by Ethiopia (2,691), Uganda (1,271) and 283 arrivals from DRC, Kenya, and CAR.

Out of 24,711 arrivals, 21,038 (85%) were returnees, while 3,673 (15%) were engaged in pendular movement.

Category	*# of arrivals*	*%*
Returnees	21,038	85%
Pendular	3,673	15%

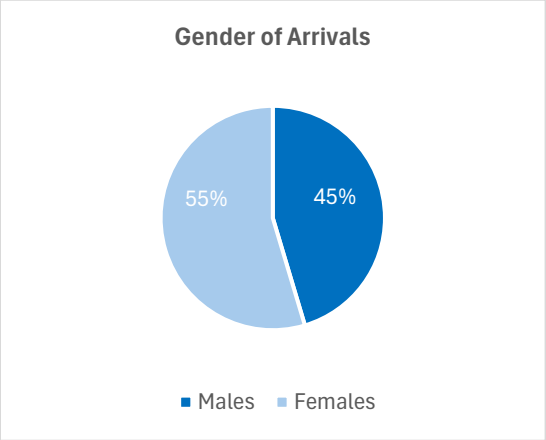
Note on Methodology

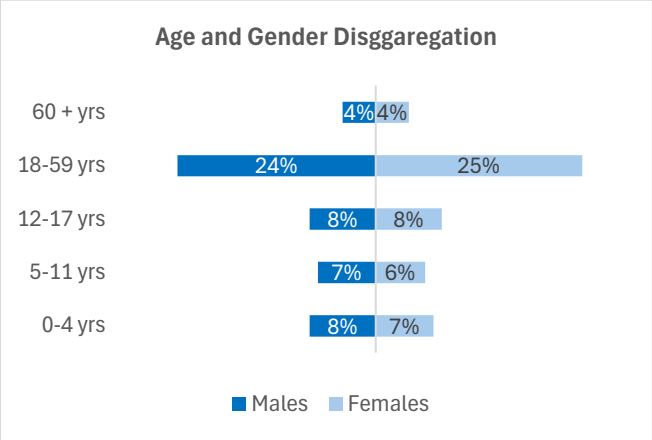
UNHCR South Sudan, in consultation with the RRC, introduced an updated methodology for the identification of returnees since September 2024. According to this methodology, only households with the intention to stay in South Sudan for one year or longer are counted as returnees to South Sudan. Those with 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")



Demographic Characteristics of the Crossing Population

Females constituted the highest proportion (55%) of the arrivals, compared to males (45%). In terms of age and gender categories, adults aged 18 to 59 years made up the majority (49%), while elderly individuals aged 60 years and above represented the smallest group (8%).

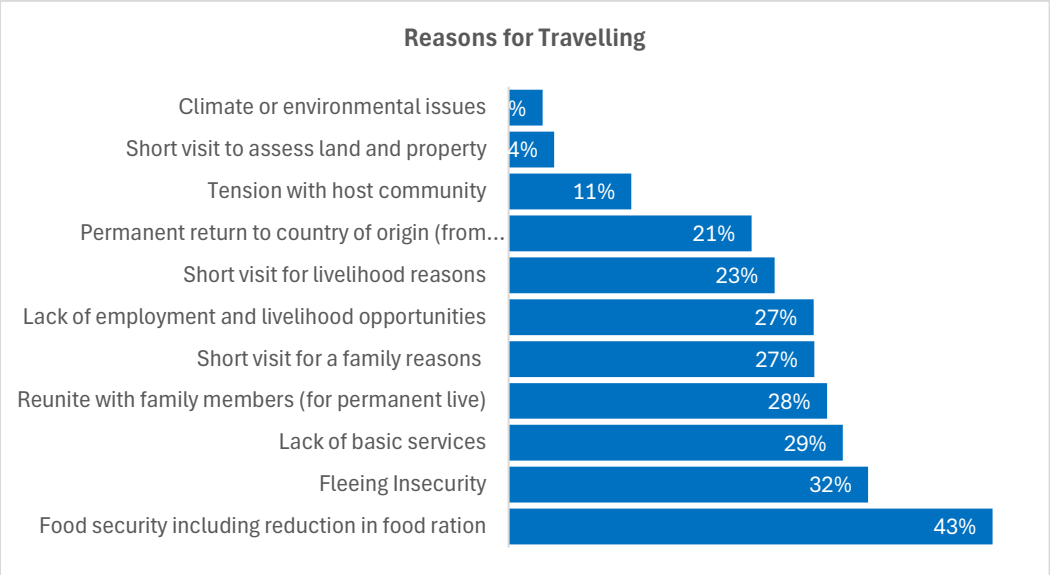




Reasons for Return

An analysis of the reasons for return, as reported by South Sudanese interviewed at crossing points, indicates that food security - mainly the reduction in food rations (43%) - and insecurity (32%) were the primary reasons for crossing into South Sudan. Other notable reasons include lack of basic services (29%), reunification with family members for permanent living (28%), short visits for family reasons (27%), and permanent return to their country of origin from displacement (21%). However,

when examining reasons for return by country of asylum, fleeing insecurity was mostly cited by arrivals from Sudan, while food security concerns were extensively mentioned by arrivals from Ethiopia, DRC, Uganda, and Kenya. This indicates differences in socio-economic and political contexts in various countries of asylum.



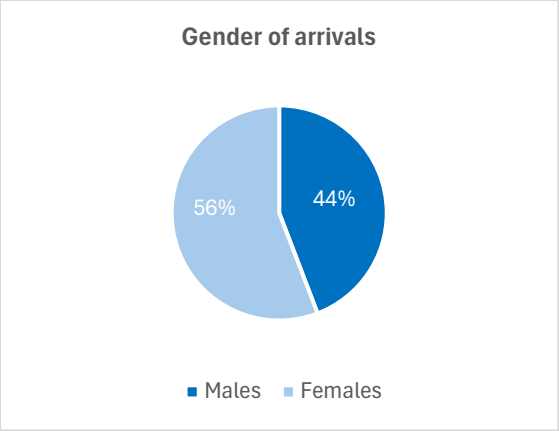
Border Monitoring Trends: Sudan

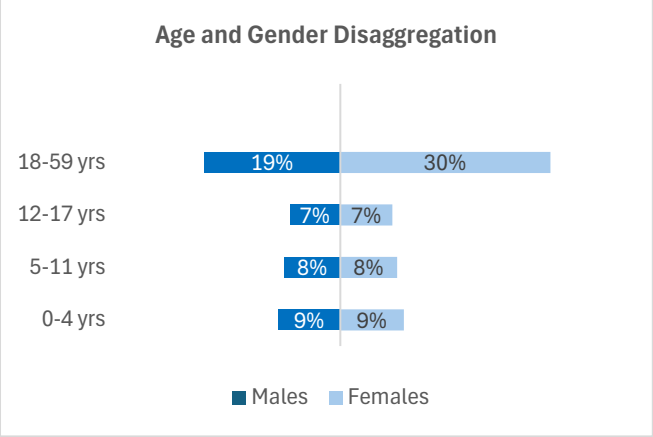
In February 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 20,466 South Sudanese crossing from Sudan through multiple points of entry. Out of these arrivals, 18,228 (90%) were returnees intending to stay for a longer period, either permanently or for more than a year, while 2,238 (10%) were engaged in pendular movement.

Category	*# of arrivals*	*%*
Returnees	18,228	90%
Pendular	2,238	10%

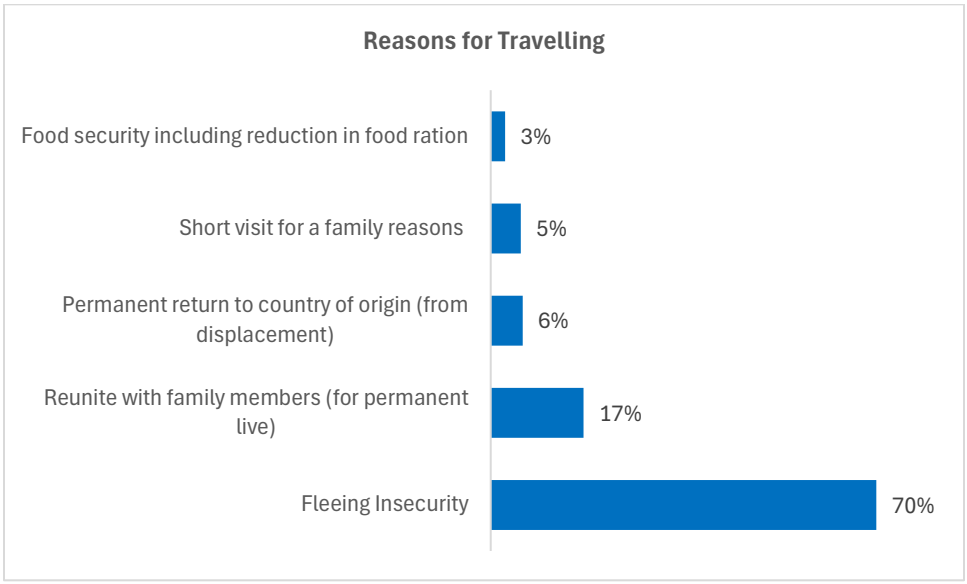
The average weekly crossings are estimated at 4,500, with the first week of the month recording about 5,000. Wunthou (8,346) and Majokyinthiu (4142) were the major crossing points, while Babnis (2,213) and Amiet (1,640) recorded a significant number of crossings.

Females constituted more than half (56%) of the arrivals, compared to males (44%). Moreover, in terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 years formed the majority (49%), followed by children under 5 years (18%), children aged 5 to 11 years (16%), children aged12 to 17 years (14%) while elderly individuals aged 60 years and above were the least represented (3%).





The primary reason influencing the travel of arrivals was insecurity, cited by 70%. Other reasons included reunification with family members for permanent living (17%), permanent return to their country of origin from displacement (6%), short visits for family reasons (5%) and food insecurity – largely the reduction in food rations (3%).



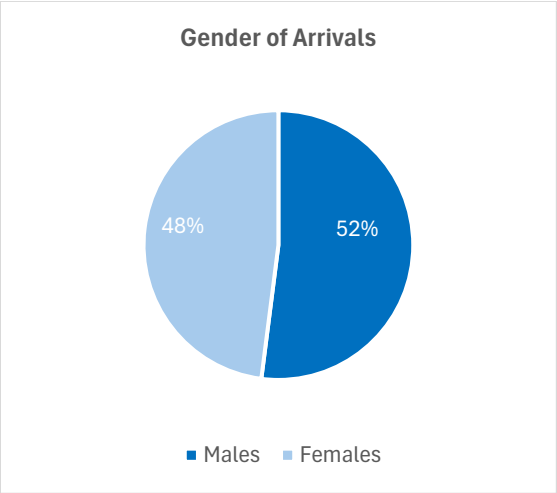
Border Monitoring Trends: Ethiopia

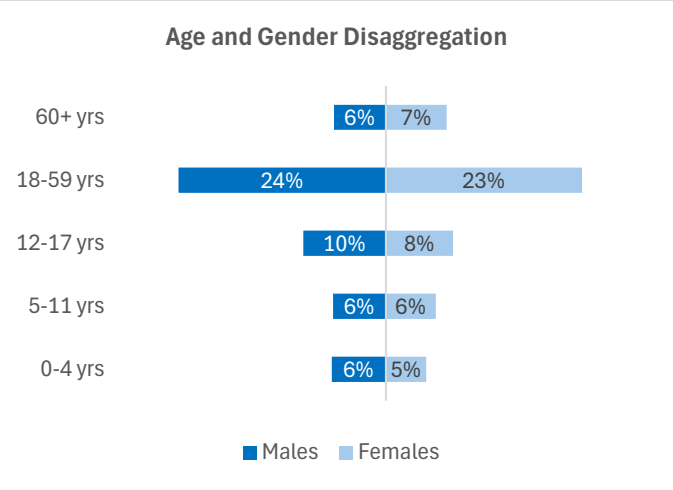
In February 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 2,691 South Sudanese crossing from Ethiopia into South Sudan through Burebiey, Akobo, Burator, and Akiela. Of these arrivals, 1,744 (65%) were returnees intending to stay for a longer period, either permanently or more than a year, while 947 (35%) were engaged in pendular movement.

Category	*# of arrivals*	*%*
Returnees	1,744	65%
Pendular	947	35%

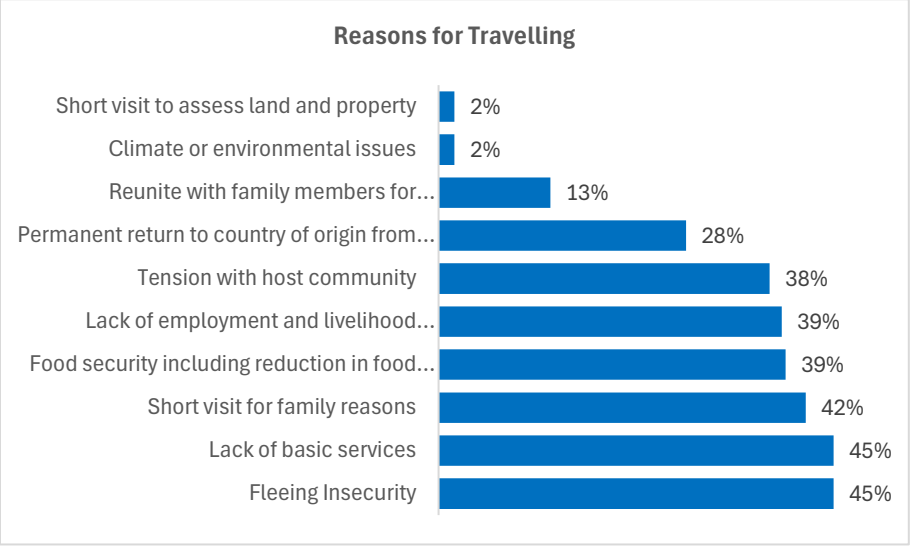
The average weekly crossings were estimated at 870, with the first week of the month recording 1,464 crossings. Burebiey (2,451) and Akobo (130) were the major crossing points, while Akiela (35) and Burator (23) recorded a significant number of crossings.

Males constituted more than half (52%) of the arrivals, compared to females (48%). Moreover, in terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 years formed the majority (47%), followed by children aged 12 to 17 years (18%), elderly individuals aged 60 years and above (13%), children aged 5 to 11 years (12%), while children under 5 years were the least represented (11%).





The primary reason influencing the travel of arrivals were insecurity and lack of basic services in the country of asylum, each cited by 45%. Other reasons included short visits for family reasons (42%), food insecurity (39%), tensions with the host community (38%), permanent return from country of displacement (28%), and reunification with family members for permanent living (13%).



Border Monitoring Trends: DRC

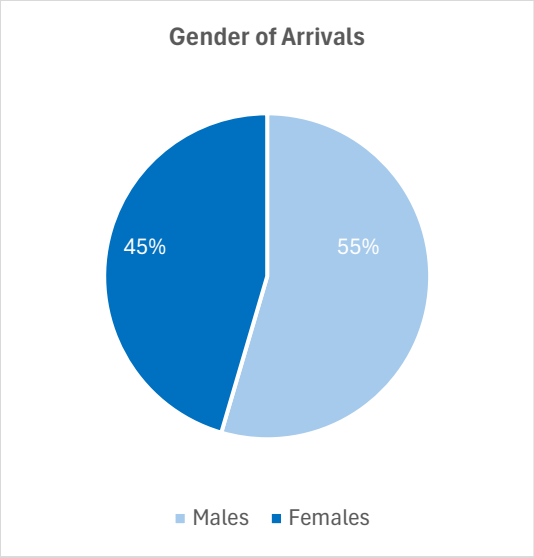
In February 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 165 South Sudanese crossing into South Sudan from DRC through Isebi, Gangura, Ezo, Sakure, Rasul, Kindi and Libogo. Of these arrivals, 124 (75%) were returnees intending to stay for a longer period, either permanently or for more than a year, while 41 (25%) were engaged in pendular movement.

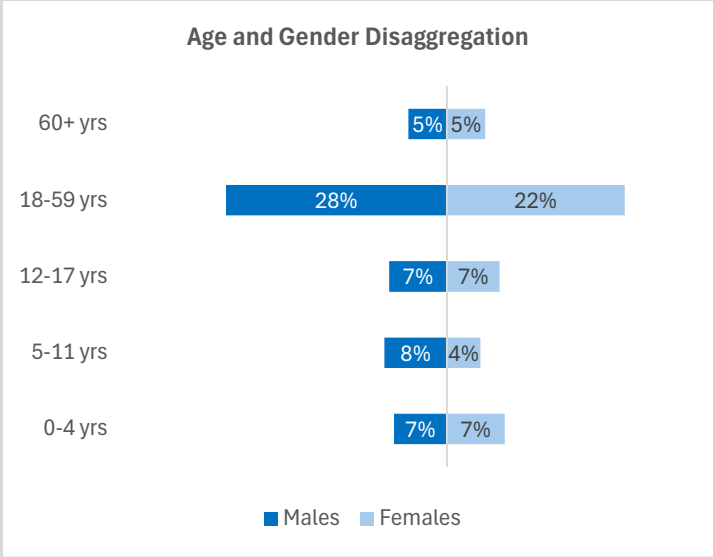
Category	*# of arrivals*	*%*
Returnees	124	75%
Pendular	41	25%

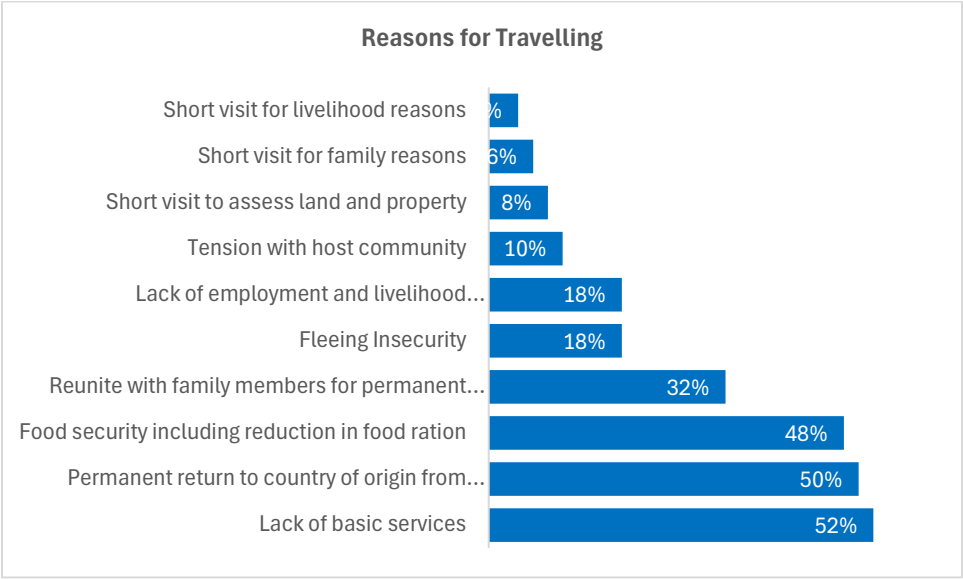
The average weekly number of crossings are estimated at 55, with the third week of the month recording a peak of 62 crossings. Isebi (54), Sakure (35), Ezo (32), and Gangura (31) were the major crossing points.

Females constituted the majority (55%) of arrivals compared to males (45%). Moreover, in terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged18 to 59 years were the majority (50%), followed by children aged12 to 17 years (14%), children under 5 years (14%), children aged5 to 11 years (12%), while elderly aged 60 years and above were the least represented (10%).

The primary reasons influencing the travel of arrivals were lack of basic services in the country of asylum cited (45%) and permanent return to their country of origin from displacement (50%). Other reasons included food insecurity (48%), reunification with family members for permanent living (32%), fleeing insecurity (18%), lack of employment and livelihood opportunities (18%), and tension with the host community (10%).







Border Monitoring Trends: Uganda

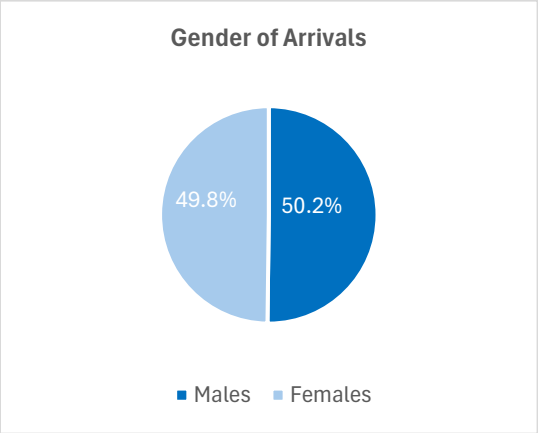
In February 2025, UNHCR's partner enumerators recorded 1,271 South Sudanese crossing into South Sudan from Uganda through multiple points of entries. Of these arrivals, 928 (73%) were returnees intending to stay for a longer period, either permanently or more than a year, while 343 (27%) were engaged in pendular movement.

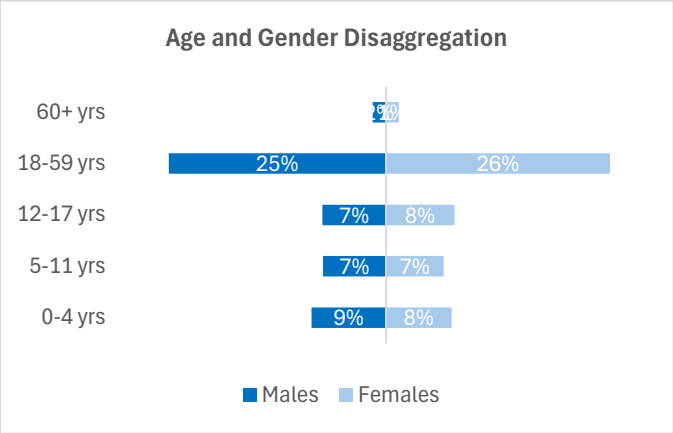
Category	*# of arrivals*	*%*
Returnees	928	73%
Pendular	343	27%

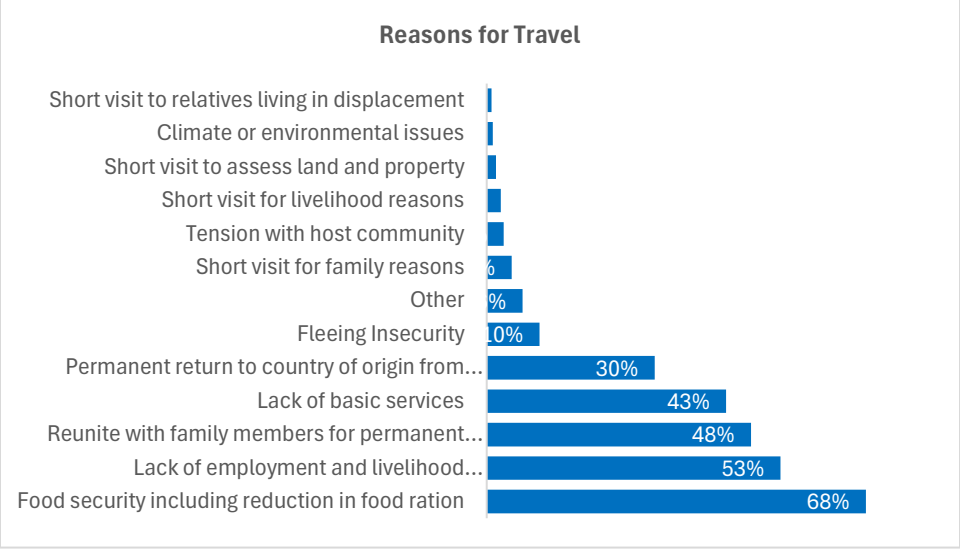
The average weekly number of crossings is estimated at 230, with the fourth week of the month recording 245 crossings. Bamurye (182), Kaya (145), Indidapa (94), and Khor Kaya (83) were the major crossing points, with the rest (329) crossing through other points.

There is a near equal distribution in the gender of travelers, with males constituting 50.2% and females 49.8%. Moreover, in terms of age and gender disaggregation, adults aged 18 to 59 years were the majority (51%), followed by children under 5 years (17%), children aged 12 to 17 years (15%), children aged 5 to 11 years (14%) while elderly aged 60 years and above were the least represented (3%).

The primary reason influencing the travel of arrivals is food security in the country of asylum, cited by 68%, and lack of employment opportunities, cited by 53%. Other reasons included reunification with family members for permanent living (48%), lack of basic services (43%), and permanent return to country of origin from displacement (30%).







Annexes

Border Monitoring Methodology

UNHCR South Sudan's border monitoring aims to improve information about the flow of South Sudanese returning to South Sudan from 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 both 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 households crossing 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 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 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 is 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 provided.

BORDER MONITORING REPORT

2025

Spontaneous Refugee Returns Monitoring

February 2025

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