EXTERNAL UPDATE #1

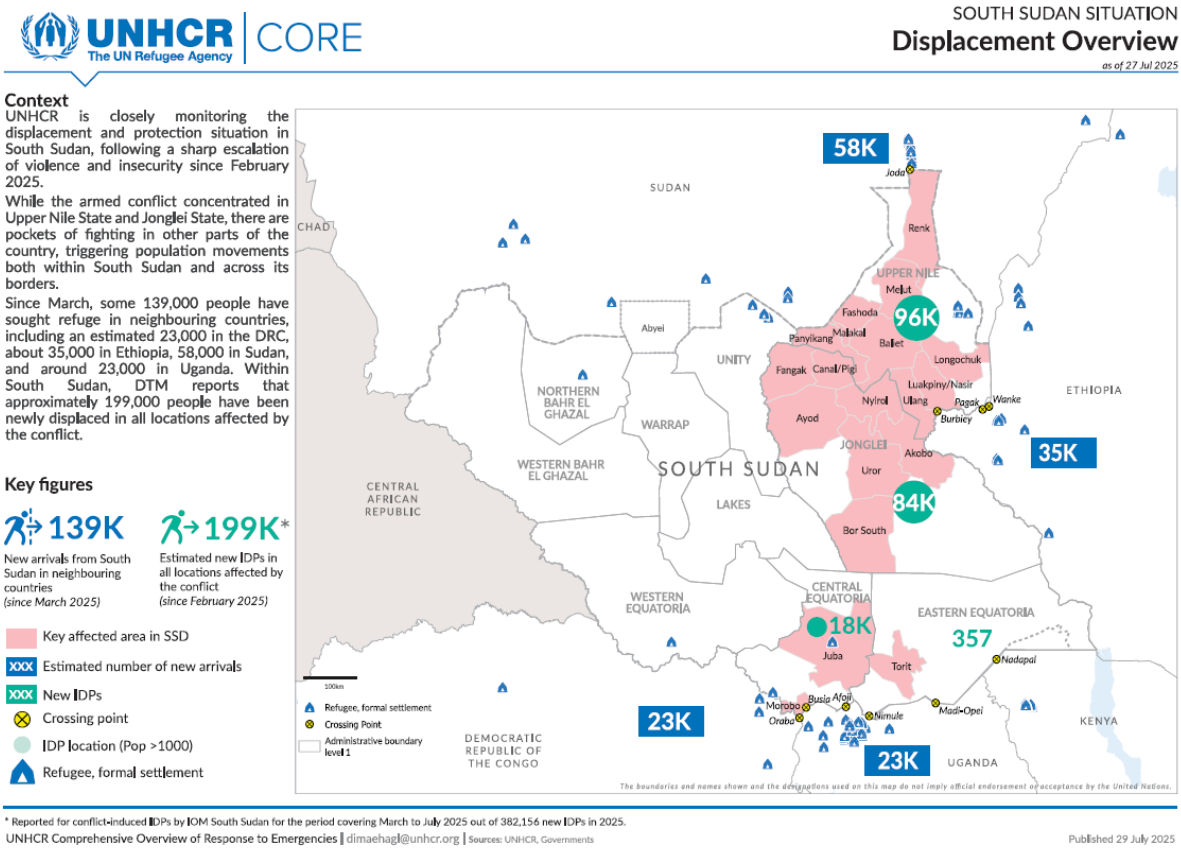
SOUTH SUDAN SITUATION

February - June 2025

Makeshift shelters along the riverbank at Burdiey, Gambella in Ethiopia, where South Sudanese refugees from Nasir and Ulang counties endured dire conditions after fleeing violence in South Sudan. © UNHCR / Reath Riek.

Highlights

- Escalating violence and conflict in South Sudan since February 2025 have triggered renewed displacement and growing humanitarian needs across the region. The situation has further deteriorated due to a mix of factors, including surging food and commodity prices, recurrent extreme weather events, and declining humanitarian funding.
- Since the start of the conflict, some 139,000 people have sought refuge in neighboring countries, including an estimated 23,000 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), about 35,000 in Ethiopia, 58,000 in Sudan, and around 23,000 in Uganda. Within South Sudan, approximately 199,000 people have been newly displaced in various locations affected by conflict, bringing the total of newly displaced in 2025 in South Sudan to 337,000.
- UNHCR is seeking $36.25 million to strengthen preparedness and deliver initial life-saving protection and assistance to new internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Sudan and up to 303,000 new refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees in neighboring countries.
- UNHCR has declared an internal Level 2 emergency for Ethiopia and Sudan due to the escalating crisis in South Sudan, which will remain in force for six months until November 2025.



Situation and Operational Response

SOUTH SUDAN

Operational Context

- The conflict in South Sudan has escalated since February 2025, with the national army confronting troops loyal to the opposition. There have also been multiple changes in leadership within the transitional government. The first Vice President, Riek Machar, has been put under house arrest. In early June, a six-month state of emergency was declared in Warrap State and Mayom County of Unity State, in response to escalating communal violence and insecurity.
- In June, armed clashes between the SSPDF and opposition forces in Upper Nile, Jonglei, Eastern, Central, and Western Equatoria were compounded by airstrikes in Panyijiar (Unity), New Fangak and Fangak (Jonglei), and Gogrial East (Warrap), leading to mass displacement within and outside South Sudan, and damages to civilian infrastructure and property. For example, airstrikes in Panyijiar County have displaced over 29,000 people, destroyed livestock herds, and led to the temporary relocation of humanitarian staff, prompting agencies to suspend operations as of the end of June, according to OCHA.
- On 17 May, MSF reported that its facility in Old Fangak—one of the few remaining health lifelines in northern Jonglei—was struck by shelling, highlighting the escalating risks faced by medical services in conflict-affected areas. Almost a month later, on 20 June, armed assailants attacked Morobo County Hospital in Central Equatoria, one of only two functional health facilities serving 150,000 people, destroying two ambulances and looting critical medical supplies. These incidents underscore a disturbing trend of targeted violence against health infrastructure in South Sudan.
- The fighting has led to the closure of critical river routes used by traders and humanitarian organizations to carry supplies to the north of the country, further hindering access and delaying life-saving assistance. As the rainy season approaches, road conditions continue to worsen.

- Additionally, South Sudan is currently experiencing its most severe cholera outbreak on record. As of 30 June, 78,672 cases and 1,414 deaths have been reported across 55 counties in nine states and three administrative areas, and despite ongoing vaccination efforts, the onset of the rainy season, declining population immunity, and access challenges continue to drive high cholera transmission with the risk of a sharp rise in new infections.

Population Movements

Since February 2025, the intensification of the national conflict has internally displaced some 194,000 people across Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Central, Western and Eastern Equatoria, bringing the total new IDP caseload for 2025 to 337,930. In June alone, 12,301 individuals were uprooted in Ayod and Fangak counties (Jonglei) as well as Panyikang county (Upper Nile), on top of the 89,231 displaced by intercommunal violence.

With many IDPs displaced to the neighbouring communities in the same county or nearby, numerous returns have been reported, including to Ulang and Nassir. Most recently, in Udier Payam, Longochuk County (Upper Nile), a gradual return of IDPs began after the May clashes between the SSPDF and the opposition forces. In total, 2,054 people have gone back to their homes. However, urgent assistance is still needed, as many houses and essential services—including health centres and schools—were heavily damaged during the airstrikes.

Protection

UNHCR and partners conduct protection monitoring and protection assessments in Malakal, Nasir, Ulang, Maiwut, Longechuk, and Fashoda (Kodok), supported by local authorities and communities. Limited access to the areas affected by the conflict, where most IDPs have been displaced, remains one of the main challenges, resulting in limited assistance reaching the most vulnerable.

Family separations are increasing due to airstrikes and mass displacement, with children facing risks of exploitation and limited access to tracing or reunification support. Freedom of movement is severely restricted by roadblocks, checkpoints, and armed threats; civilians are trapped and unable to access aid or flee safely.

Civilian infrastructure, including health clinics, has been damaged or destroyed in aerial attacks, especially in UN, Jonglei and Unity, leading to mass displacement**.**

Shelter and Core Relief Items (CRIs)

In Morobo County, Central Equatoria, UNHCR conducted a four-day emergency mission from 10–14 May 2025 following clashes between SSPDF and SPLA-IO forces in Panyume Payam that led to mass displacement. In coordination the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), UNHCR distributed non-food items (NFIs) to 268 households (1,307 individuals) in Morobo town, including those displaced by the April clashes and earlier fighting in Arimbe village, Lujulo Payam. This marked the first humanitarian access to the area since the onset of the conflict.

In Malakal, Upper Nile State, UNHCR distributed CRIs to 700 households from 18–25 June 2025; most recipients were persons with specific needs (PSNs) from Nasir and returnees from Sudan residing in Hai Matar and Baliet. The distributed items included plastic sheets, blankets, mats, jerry cans, mosquito nets, kitchen sets, buckets, and soap. Meanwhile, in Fangak, over 450 women and girls benefited from dignity kits, along with access to psychosocial support services and awareness sessions focused on GBV and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA).

UNHCR and partners distributed NFIs such as mosquito nets, mats, soap, jerry cans, and hygiene kits to displaced households in Paguir and Toch in Fangak County, Jonglei State. Despite this support, shelter needs remain critical in areas impacted by partner departures, including Nasir, Ulang, Panyikang, and Kodok in Upper Nile State, where access to reliable protection data remains limited.

ETHIOPIA

Highlights

- Renewed conflict near the South Sudan–Ethiopia border has triggered a second wave of displacement into Ethiopia. Fatalities from heavy machine gun fire in crowded civilian areas have intensified refugee arrivals and internal movements towards Matar, Muon, and nearby kebeles in Wanthoa Woreda, Gambella Region.
- In Ethiopia, the conditions in Matar and Muon rapidly deteriorated as a continuous arrival of South Sudanese refugees along with the displacement of Ethiopians from Burbiey near the border put mounting pressure on local resources. Heavy rains have also compounded the crisis, exacerbating the lack of shelter and limiting humanitarian response. Many affected individuals including recent arrivals and vulnerable local populations are now residing in overcrowded public areas such as school buildings and abandoned shelters along the Muon-Matar corridor. A considerable number of people are sheltering beneath trees, awaiting essential life-saving support.
- The ongoing instability is severely limiting regular protection and border monitoring activities. UNHCR and partners are depending on local authorities for situational updates due to access constraints. Although targeted assistance is being provided where possible, the response is hampered by scattered new arrivals, inconsistent population data, and persistent security threats.
- UNHCR, working in close collaboration with the RRS and humanitarian partners has formulated comprehensive interagency emergency preparedness and response plans. To ensure coordinated implementation and timely decision-making, weekly interagency coordination meetings are being conducted on-site, with leadership provided by both UNHCR and RRS.

Registration and Relocation

The number of new South Sudanese arrivals in Ethiopia is estimated at 35,000 people.

On 18 June, the Government's Refugees and Returnees Service (RRS) approved L1 registration and the relocation of the new arrivals to Luokdong, the designated site identified by a joint assessment team.

Protection

Ongoing instability continues to obstruct regular protection and border monitoring activities, forcing UNHCR and its partners to rely on local authorities for situational updates. Although targeted assistance is being provided wherever possible, the humanitarian response remains hampered by sporadic refugee arrivals, inconsistent population data, restricted access, and persistent security threats. These challenges complicate the delivery of evidence-based analysis, even as updates on the evolving situation are regularly shared.

Child protection and screening

Women and children continue to make up the majority of those displaced. In response to mounting concerns around registration, child protection, and ensuring access to asylum and civilian character of asylum, protection support missions have been deployed to Gambella.

Site Preparation and Shelter

Following the approval of Luakdong site by the RRS, UNHCR has deployed a site planner to oversee site development activities. Infrastructure progress includes the completion of a 3.65-kilometre access road and an additional 6-kilometre stretch connecting Luakdong to the main road. Plans are underway for UNHCR and Plan International Ethiopia (PIE) to erect communal hangars in both Matar and Luakdong. Family tents will be installed to support persons with specific needs transiting through Gambella, ensuring temporary shelters and essential protection during their relocation.

Core Relief Items (CRIs)

In collaboration with UNHCR, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), through the Ethiopian Red Cross, facilitated the distribution of CRIs to 500 vulnerable South Sudanese families residing in Matar and Muon. Each household received two blankets, two sleeping mats, two jerricans, one plastic sheet, and one kitchen set, aimed at addressing immediate basic needs. Despite this effort, the distribution has not sufficiently covered the broader vulnerable population, whose needs remain pressing and unmet.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

In Matar town, UNHCR's operational partner ZOA launched the initial phase of water trucking, delivering approximately 21,000 liters per day from the MSF-treated water center located 30 kilometers away. This supply, though amounting to less than one liter per person per day, has alleviated pressure on the town's sole functional hand pump and enhanced water access for recently arrived individuals.

To alleviate the pressure on local resources, ZOA established three water distribution sites, strategically located based on the arrival settlement patterns. Two of the water points, each fitted with a four-tap system, were installed, one within the school compound and the other adjacent to the Catholic church. In addition, arrivals continue to rely on operational hand pumps located within the school grounds. However, these pumps are facing heavy overuse and are at increasing risk of breakdown.

Food Security and Nutrition

On 12 and 14 June, WFP and PIE conducted a second round of High Energy Biscuit (HEB) distributions in Matar and Muon where a total of 21,745 individuals across 2,538 households received HEBs, supporting nutritional needs among displaced populations and host communities.

PIE has also pre-positioned a truckload of HEBs in Matar for the newly arrived individuals. In addition to immediate food support, PIE has confirmed its commitment to providing key services in child protection, nutrition, and WASH for the newly displaced population. Further, HEB deliveries are planned once the current stock is exhausted, as part of PIE's broader objective to ensure coverage for all new arrivals.

On 5 June, Lutheran Trinity Church—a faith-based organization based in Gambella—distributed 80 bags of sorghum (each weighing 100 kg) to newly arrived individuals in Matar. The distribution was carried out in coordination with Wanthoa Woreda authorities and segmented by county and payam. Community representatives were consulted, and their agreement supported the delivery process.

The Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate for children aged 6–23 months stands at 14%, evenly split between moderate (7%) and severe (7%) cases, just below the emergency threshold. 24% of pregnant and lactating women are malnourished, highlighting increased nutritional vulnerability in this demographic. These figures underscore the urgency for targeted nutrition interventions, including supplementary feeding programs, maternal care support, and community-based screening and referrals.

Health and Nutrition

With support from UNICEF, the Regional Health Bureau is carrying out vaccination campaigns against measles, polio, and cholera in Matar and Muon, alongside the distribution of vitamin A supplements and deworming treatments. Meanwhile, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is actively delivering primary healthcare services and facilitating patient referrals.

SUDAN

Highlights

- Since the beginning of the latest crisis, approximately 58,000 South Sudanese individuals have crossed into Sudan, seeking refuge from escalating instability.
- Most of these new arrivals have settled in White Nile State, while others are being hosted in Blue Nile, Darfur, and Kordofan States.
- Critical challenges continue to hinder humanitarian operations in Kordofan and Darfur, particularly in refugee-hosting areas. Access remains restricted, while encampment policies have curtailed freedom of movement and integration prospects for displaced populations. Lengthy security screening procedures are delaying registration and relocation efforts. Refugee sites face severe overcrowding, placing immense pressure on essential services such as WASH, shelter, and health. Compounding the situation is an inadequate supply of NFIs, limiting the scope of emergency response. Operational capacity has been further strained by limited staffing across key sectors.

Registration and Relocation

On 23 June, the Sudanese Commissioner for Refugees (COR) and UNHCR were granted approval to begin registering new arrivals in White Nile State.

In Blue Nile State, newly arrived refugees are primarily concentrated in Tadamon locality, where they are expected to stay temporarily until conditions permit for voluntary return. Humanitarian access was restored on 19 June, allowing aid organizations to resume operations. COR is actively registering new arrivals.

In White Nile State, 91% of the newly arrived South Sudanese refugees have been relocated to camps, including 14,000 in Um Sangour, 4,000 in Dabat Bosin, 2,000 in Alagaya, and 6,000 across seven other camps. Due to limited shelter capacity, many are staying with relatives, friends, or in makeshift shelters. The remaining 9% are being temporarily hosted at the Joda Reception Centre, awaiting further relocation.

Protection

In Darfur and Kordofan States, UNHCR and partners are implementing both the protection and humanitarian response through protection monitoring to assess risks and ensure safety, distribute non-food items to vulnerable households, and provide case management support to survivors of GBV and children at risk. Community structures have also been mobilized to help identify and track new arrivals, reinforcing coordination and service delivery in both regions.

UNHCR and the COR have strengthened border monitoring efforts across several strategic entry points. This includes the deployment of permanent staff to Joda in White Nile State and ongoing plans to expand presence at Al Megenis and Al Kuweik border points. Coordination with COR has also enabled broader monitoring activities in Blue Nile State. Additionally, partner organizations continue to lead monitoring at border crossings throughout Darfur and Kordofan States. Efforts are underway to enhance cooperation with immigration authorities to facilitate better information exchange and early warning systems.

Core Relief Items and Assistance

UNHCR is currently providing hot meals at the reception centre while coordinating with WFP to provide food assistance and NFIs to the newly arrived population. Although water, sanitation, and health services are operational, they are under significant strain due to overcrowding.

UGANDA

Highlights

- In Uganda, most of the new arrivals are fleeing the conflict-affected states of Western Equatoria, Upper Nile (Malakal and elsewhere), Fangak, Jonglei, Aweil, Eastern Equatoria, and Unity (Bentiu).
- There are persistent gaps in nutrition, protection, and shelter support at reception facilities receiving new arrivals from South Sudan. Despite efforts to move refugees to the settlements quickly, there is no additional support going to areas receiving new arrivals because of the funding constraints.

Population Movements and Registration

Uganda has so far received around 23,000 South Sudanese refugees since the escalation of the violence in late February, bringing the cumulative number of South Sudanese new arrivals between January and June 2025 to 36,613 South Sudanese refugees, with women and children making up 89% of the new arrivals. Currently, only registered refugees and asylum seekers are relocated to settlements.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Highlights

- Towards the end of March 2025, local administrative authorities raised alerts about a sudden influx of people arriving from Morobo District in South Sudan. In response, the National Commission for Refugees (CNR), together with UNHCR and other humanitarian partners, launched coordinated efforts to evaluate the situation and respond to the immediate needs of those newly displaced.

Population Movements and Registration

CNR confirmed the presence of approximately 23,000 asylum seekers who have arrived in the DRC since April 2025.

Protection

CNR staff were deployed to the border points where daily arrivals of asylum seekers fleeing violence in Morobo District continue. The deployment aimed to ensure territorial access, uphold fair asylum procedures, and implement initial protection measures to guard against violence, abuse, and discrimination. A dignified reception framework was established, upholding the fundamental rights of those affected.

CNR also conducted profiling activities aimed at improving the response for newly arrived populations. These efforts focused on confirming arrival trends, identifying heads of households, and individuals with specific needs who require immediate assistance.

Given the presence of several humanitarian actors operating in the affected areas including MSF, COOPI, ICRC, Malteser, and the DRC Red Cross, UNHCR's Protection team assumed a coordination role to ensure a coordinated response framework was established, clarifying responsibilities and addressing operational gaps. Coordination meetings have been held to align priorities, improve collaboration, and facilitate strategic planning among the various stakeholders.

KENYA

Kenya has not observed any spike in new arrivals from South Sudan but continues to receive new refugees and to monitor arrival trends.

Response Plans and Funding Situation

South Sudan: Preparedness and initial Response needs, May – October 2025

UNHCR is seeking $36.25 million to strengthen preparedness and deliver initial life-saving protection and assistance to new IDPs in South Sudan and up to 303,000 new refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees in neighboring countries.

Resources

- UNHCR's Operational Data Portal (ODP) for the South Sudan Situation provides weekly updates on the refugee and returnee arrivals in South Sudan's neighbouring countries.
- South Sudan: Preparedness and initial Response needs, May – October 2025