Introduction

The last quarter (Q4) of 2020 was characterised by cross-border movement and food insecurity driven by insecurity, flooding and declined crop production. Climatic changes further affected access to basic services, such as clean drinking water and solid shelter structures, and insecurity hindered people accessing markets and preferred water sources. In addition, COVID-19 related restrictions continued to negatively impact access to basic services, increasing the vulnerability of people living in Eastern Equatoria State (EES) and their need of humanitarian assistance.

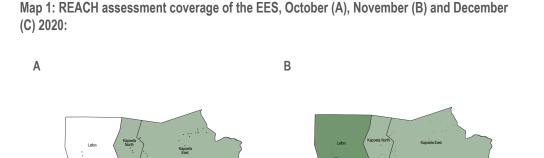
As insufficient regular assessments are conducted across the region due to access and resource constraints, limited accurate information is available to humanitarian actors to inform their response. To inform humanitarian actors, REACH has conducted assessments of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since December 2015. Data is collected on a monthly basis through interviews with key informants (KIs) with knowledge of a settlement. This Situation Overview uses this data to analyse changes in observed humanitarian needs across EES in Q4 of 2020.

Methodology

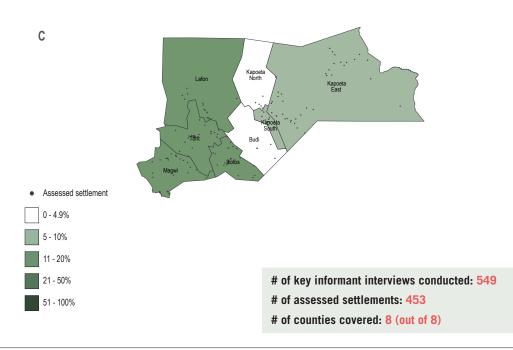
To provide an indicative overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of CES, REACH conducts interviews with KIs who have recently arrived from, recently visited, or receive regular information from a settlement or "Area of Knowledge" (AoK). Information for this report was collected from KIs remotely by phone call from Juba covering CES, between October and December 2020.

In-depth interviews on humanitarian needs were conducted on a monthly basis using a structured survey tool. After data collection was completed, all data was aggregated at settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal or most credible response. When no consensus was found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting.

Only counties with interview coverage of at least 5% of all settlements in a given month were included in the analysis.¹ Due to access and operational constraints, the specific settlements assessed within each County each month may vary. In order to reduce the likelihood that variations in data are attributable to coverage differences, over time analyses were only conducted for counties with at least 70% consistent payam² coverage over the reporting period. More details of the methodology can be found in the <u>AoK ToRs</u>.



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1. To calculate the percentage of AoK coverage, the total number of settlements per county is based on OCHA settlement lists in addition to new settlements mapped by KIs reached each month. 2. Payam is the administrative unit below the county-level.



Key Findings

Displacement: Reported displacement was seemingly concentrated within Greater Torit, with pockets of new displacement across the region during the reporting period. IDP presence seemingly varied between counties, with the highest proportion of assessed settlements where IDPs were reportedly present found in Magwi (71%) and Lafon (64%) counties in November. The main push factor for displacement reported in Lafon County was flooding, which was reported in 66% of assessed settlements in November, whereas insecurity and lack of access to land were the main reported push factors in Magwi County (both reported in 50% of assessed settlements in December). The reports on presence of IDP returnees increased notably in Greater Torit from being reported in 17% of assessed settlements in September to 58% in December. For refugee returnees in Greater Torit, reporting on this also increased between September (55% of assessed settlements) and December (82%).

Food Security and Livelihoods: Access to food continued to appear precarious across EES during the reporting period. KIs reported that most people had adequate access to food in only 5% of assessed settlements in November, indicating a prolonged period of inadequate access to food since September (1%). A series of shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, flooding and low harvest yields, the abrupt depreciation of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) mid-October and high food prices, and road insecurity have likely increased the population's vulnerability to food insecurity.³ Across EES, inadequate access to food appeared to be especially high in Greater Kapoeta during the reporting period (reported in 99% of assessed settlements in September compared to 93% in November). Additionally, in these areas, KIs in nearly half (40%) of the assessed settlements in November reported that people skipped days without eating to cope with lack of access to food in the 30 days prior to the data collection, and in almost all (97%) assessed settlements KIs reported hunger being severe.

Protection: Reporting on the perception of safety slightly decreased during the reporting period, with KIs from 63% of assessed settlements reporting that most people felt safe most of the time in November, compared to 78% in September. This is likely related to increased tension among the communities due to cattle migration for pasture and water with the start of the dry season. The proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported domestic violence as a protection concern for women, and alcohol usage among men doubled to 38% and 34% in November, respectively, compared to September (18% and 10%, respectively). For both girls and boys, reporting of early marriage increased considerably since the school closures aiming to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the end of March (57% and 14%, respectively, in November compared to 30% for girls, 3%



World Food Program. South Sudan – Market Situation Update. Third Week of October 2020.
 Sudan Tribune. South Sudan closes schools, suspends religious events over COVID-19. 21 Mar. 2020.
 UNICEF Press release. UNICEF and UNESCO welcome the decision to reopen schools in South Sudan 21 September 2020.
 Eve Radio. Norway gives about \$10 million for 'safe' reopening of schools. 12 November 2020.

for boys in March).⁴

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH): While access to a functional borehole appeared generally stable between September (reported in 86% of assessed settlements) and December (87%), reports on use of unimproved water sources for drinking water increased from being reported by KIs in 20% of assessed settlements in September to 36% in December. This was likely due to distance to water points, queuing and lack of functional boreholes. River was the most commonly reported main water source in assessed settlements in Torit (50%), Budi (33%), and Lafon (27%) counties in November, while swamps reportedly were the main water source in 25% of assessed settlements in Kapoeta. Concerning latrine usage, findings indicate some improvement across EES, with KIs from only 49% of assessed settlements reporting that none was available in December, compared to 72% in June. Furthermore, despite KIs from 97% of assessed settlements reporting that most people were aware of how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, hand washing with soap was only reported by KIs in 15% of assessed settlements in December.

Health: Health facilities generally remained accessible across EES in Q4, with KIs in almost all (99%) assessed settlements reporting presence of a functional health facility within walking distance in November. However, KIs in 20% of settlements reported it took over an hour to reach it. Beside the distance to the health facility, in three out of four settlements in December (71%), KIs reported lack of medication as the main barrier in accessing health care services. Malaria being reported as the main perceived health problem nearly doubled by from December (70%) to September (43%). Additionally, findings suggest that the high levels of food insecurity negatively affected the nutritional status of children in EES, with KIs from 57% of assessed settlements reporting the presence of severely malnourished children in their settlement, and in 11% KIs reported that malnutrition was worse than last year.

T

Shelter/ Non Food Items (NFI): Access to a reliable shelter generally remained stable across EES during the reporting period. While host communities reportedly mainly used solid structures for shelter (reported in 86% of assessed settlmenets), IDPs and IDP returnees were reported to live in less solid structures, such as rakoobas (20% for IDPs, 8% for IDP returnees in December).

Education: On the 5th of October, candidate classes (primary eight and senior four classes) resumed education, while non-candidate classes were only expected to resume in April 2021, following the closure of education institutions in March 2020 due to COVID-19.^{5,6} As such, reporting of access to educational services increased from KIs in 13% of assessed settlements reporting this in October to 39% in December.

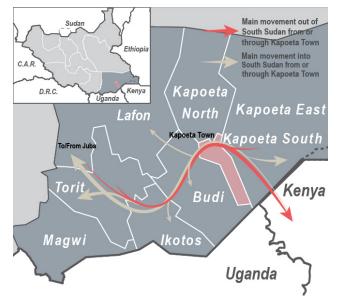
\cancel{R} Population Movement and Displacement

Displacement

Across EES, reported displacement appeared relatively low in Q4, similar to Q3. In December, KIs in only 6% of assessed settlements reported that half or more than half of the population left the settlement in the 30 days prior to the data collection (5% in September). Across EES, in assessed settlements where some people reportedly left the settlement (22%), the most commonly reported push factors in December was lack of access to food (reported in 57% of assessed settlements). Additionally, in Magwi County, sub-national conflict and lack of livelihood opportunities were reported as the main push factors in approximately half of assessed settlements.

In EES, displacement was seemingly concentrated within Greater Torit, with pockets of new displacement reported across the region during the reporting period. Overall, in Greater Torit, KIs in around half of assessed settlements reported the presence of IDPs in November (49%), similar to findings prior to the rainy season (50% in January and 65% in March) when people often return to their settlement of origin to farm. In comparison, a low proportion of assessed settlements in Greater Kapoeta reportedly continued to host IDPs, with KIs from 4% of assessed settlements reporting this in November. Across EES, reported presence of IDPs was highest in assessed settlements in Magwi (71%) and Lafon (64%) counties in November. In Lafon County, flooding

Map 2: Main population movement within and out of EES, December, 20207:



(66% in November) and lack of food (33%) were the most commonly reported reasons IDPs left their previous location. In Magwi County, the main push factors reported by KIs were insecurity and lack of access to land, which were both reported in 50% of assessed settlements in December. Potentially linked to the relatively high proportion of settlements with reported presence of IDPs, the community relations between most IDPs and the host community members were reportedly poor in Magwi County (reported in 36% of assessed settlements in November), and worse compared to the average proportion for Greater Torit, where KIs from 75% of the assessed settlement reported that the relationship was good.

IDP and refugee returnees

In Greater Torit, the proportion of assessed settlements with reported presence of IDP returnees increased from 17% in September to 58% in December, likely linked to an ease in cross-border movement in July, and because of the harvest season where people usually travel back to harvest. The most common reason reported for IDPs to return was insecurity (reported in 35% of assessed settlements) folloed by lack of food (24%). In Greater Torit, the proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported the presence of refugee returnees also increased between Q3 (reported in 55% of assessed settlements, in September) and Q4 (82% in December). In the majority of assessed settlements, the most recently arrived refugee returnees reportedly came from Uganda (77% in December), most of whom reportedly returned due to insecurity (reported in 41% of assessed settlements), possibly due to fear of violence linked to the presidential election in Uganda in mid-January 2021.⁸ Furthermore, in 11% of assessed settlements, lack of food was reported as the main push factor in December, corresponding to the food assistance rations steadily decreasing for refugees in Uganda, and difficulties accessing food due to the COVID-19 lockdown.⁹

Even Security and Livelihoods

Access to food continued to appear precarious across EES during the reporting period. KIs reported that most people had adequate access to food in only 5% of assessed settlements in November¹⁰, indicating a prolonged period of inadequate access to food since September (1%). Likely linked, in 70% of assessed settlements across EES, most people reportedly ate only one meal or less per day in November (89% in September). These findings are consistent with the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, in which an estimated 457,000 people (41.6% of the population of EES) was projected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse acute food insecurity during the October to November post-harvest period.¹¹ While parts of EES are prone to food insecurity, especially the semi-arid areas of Greater Kapoeta, a series of shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, flooding and low harvest yields, the abrupt depreciation of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) mid-October and high food prices. Additionally, road insecurity has likely increased the population's vulnerability

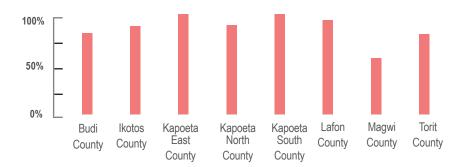
IPC. South Sudan IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis, October 2020 - July 2021. Issued December 2020. FEWS NET, Livelihoods zone map and descriptions for the Republic of South Sudan (updated), August 2018 World Food Program. South Sudan – Market Situation Update. Third Week of October 2020.

<u>Cross-Border Population Movement, Kapoeta Road monitoring, December 2021.</u>
 <u>Deutsche Welle. Uganda: Fears of further violence ahead of election. 11 January 2021.</u>
 World Food Programme. WFP cuts refugees' food rations in Uganda as funding declines. 22 December 2020.
 Data for all counties in EES is not available for December.

to food insecurity and the need for food assistance to meet basic needs.^{12,13}

The acute food insecurity in EES appears to have resulted from low harvest yields leading to early depletion of food stocks and increased market dependency. In November, in the majority of assessed settlements across EES (81%), KIs reported crop production being disrupted and in over half (53%) of assessed settlements KIs reported that people expected the harvest to be worse than the previous one. KIs most commonly reported flooding or too much rain (reported in 51% of assessed settlements) and crop diseases and pests (11%) as the main reason for most people not having enough food in November. Possibly as a consequence, KIs from around half of assessed settlements (48%) reported that most people obtained food from the market in November, compared to around a quarter (29%) in September, suggestive of depleted food stocks and high market dependency. Seasonal scarcity of food and the floodings in 2020 (with limited recovery from the previous floods), will likely result in an increase of acute food insecurity in the beginning of 2021 during the lean season.¹⁴

Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements where inadequate food was reported, by County, December 2020 (Budi and Kapoeta counties reporting from November):



15. Ibid

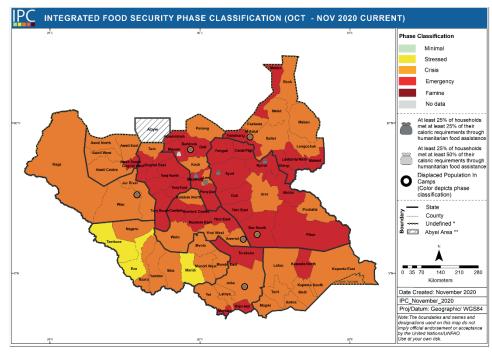
Areas of concern - Greater Kapoeta

Across EES, adequate access to food appeared to be most challenging in Greater Kapoeta during the reporting period. In November, KIs in the majority (85%) of assessed settlements in Greater Kapoeta counties reported that people only ate one or less than one meal per day (sligh decrease from 97% in September). In the Greater Kapoeta region, KIs from nearly half (40%) of the assessed settlements reported that people skipped days without eating to cope with a lack of access to food in the 30 days prior to data collection in November, similar to September (35%). Likewise, KIs from the majority (85%) of assessed settlements in November reported that people reduced the number of meals eaten per day, similar to the reports of this in September (82%).

Likely as a consequence of limited access to and availability of food, in the vast majority (89%) of assessed settlements, KIs reported hunger being severe. This was an increase from 71% in September, suggesting that the situation in Greater Kapoeta deteriorated during the reporting period. Flooding and too much rain were the most commonly reported reasons preventing most people from accessing enough food, reported by KIs in 79% of assessed settlements across Greater Kapoeta in November.

Reflective of these findings, Kapoeta North County was the only county in EES that was classified as facing an "Emergency" level of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4) between October and November 2020, and Budi County was classified as "Critical" for acute malnutrition (AMN) (IPC AMN Phase 4) for November 2020 to March 2021.¹⁵ These areas, located in the southeastern semi-arid pastoral zone, are vulnerable to interruptions in market access, due to their dependence on livestock and trade for basic food items, especially during livestock migration periods, and these finding could therefore be concerning.¹⁶

Map 3: : IPC Acute Food Insecurity Situation Map for October-November 2020.¹⁷



17. IPC. South Sudan IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis, October 2020 - July 2021. Issued December 2020.



14. IPC. South Sudan IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis, October 2020 - July 2021 Issued December 2020.

16. FEWS NET, Livelihoods zone map and descriptions for the Republic of South Sudan (updated), August 2018

Market access

Market access was seemingly impeded by distance to market and bad road conditions throughout the reporting period. KIs in 13% of assessed settlements reported that people did not have access to any markets in November. For Greater Kapoeta, markets were spread out, with KIs from nearly half of assessed settlements (42%) reporting that it took over 3 hours to reach the nearest market and in around one in ten assessed settlements, KIs reportes that it took a full day (9%) in November. Likewise, in Budi County, the main barriers reported by KIs for people to access their preferred markets were distance (reported in 74% of assessed settlements) and bad roads (44%) in November. In Lafon County, markets were reportedly only accessible in 45% of assessed settlements in Lafon County, KIs reported distance as a barrier to accessing markets, as well as bad roads (47%) and flooding (36%).

Moreover, KIs reported robberies (in 36% of assessed settlements) and inter-communal violence (27%) on the way to the market place as a barrier to accessing the market. This could be due to the fact that people were commonly reported to access markets in Torit Town, which can take people multiple days to reach on foot (reported in 60% of assessed settlements that reportedly had access to markets), during which they have to pass areas with an assumed high risk of road ambushes. Correspondingly, insecurity was also commonly reported as a barrier to access people's preferred market place in lkotos (44%) and Torit counties (35%) in November. Access and barriers to markets during Q1 2021 will likely remain the same, and may be further aggravated by the onset of the rainy season in Q2, during which especially the Greater Kapoeta region is likely to be cut off of markets and assistance due to impassable roads and flooding.

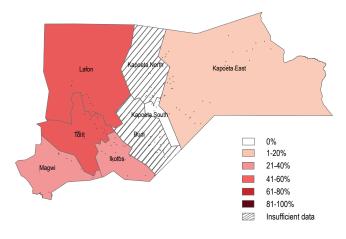
water from boreholes during the dry season.

A report conducted by the Association of volunteers in International Service (AVSI) also highlighted limited access to water in Magwi County including barriers on access due to distance to improved water sources and time spent queuing, which forced some communities to rely solely on river or surface water.¹⁹ As children under 15 years old were responsible for fetching water in nearly one in four households, the challenges accessing clean water likely hindered school attendance, and could potentially put them at risk of security incidents while fetching water.²⁰

The lowest proportion of assessed settlements where access to functional boreholes was reported, was in Kapoeta North, Torit, and Budi counties in November (reported in 56%, 59% and 67% of assessed settlements, respectively). Correspondingly, rivers were reported as the main water source in 50% of assessed settlements in Torit County and in 33% of assessed settlements in Budi County, and swamps in 25% of assessed settlements in Kapoeta North County in November.

Use of unimproved water sources likely affected the health of these communities due to standing water being a common breeding site for vector-borne diseases, such as malaria. Correspondingly, malaria was reported as the main perceived health problem by KIs in 70% of assessed settlements in November, and was particularly commonly reported in Kapoeta North County (94%). (see health section).

Map 4: Proportion of settlements where KIs reported unprotected water sources as the main source of drinking water, per county, December 2020.



Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

While access to a functional borehole appeared generally stable between September (reported in 86% of assessed settlements) and December (87%), reports on use of unimproved water sources ¹⁸ as drinking water increased from being reported in 20% of assessed settlements in September to 36% in December. In Lafon County, even though the presence of a functional borehole was reported in 82% of assessed settlements in December, a borehole was only reported as the main source of drinking water in one-third of assessed settlements, while KIs in 41% of assessed settlements reported the river as the main water source instead. Similarly, in Magwi County, KIs from all assessed settlements people reportedly used river water for drinking. The relatively low reports of the use of boreholes as the main water source could indicate that some boreholes continued being inaccessible or damaged due to flooding, or because of bad quality of

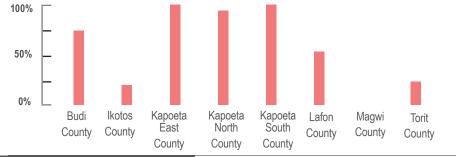


Despite the reported presence of functional boreholes, time spent collecting water, and limited safety at the water points likely created barriers to accessing safe drinking water in EES. Overall, fetching water²¹ reportedly took under 30 minutes in the majority of assessed settlements (63%) and 30-60 minutes in 23% of assessed settlements in December. Conversely, water collection in Kapoeta East County reportedly remained time consuming, with KIs in 36% of assessed settlements reporting fetching water taking one hour to half a day in December, similar to September (28%), likely due to water points being distant from the settlements or broken, and water shortages due to the start of the dry season.²²

In addition, with the onset of the dry season and cattle migration, the proportion of assessed settlements where safety concerns when fetching water was reported increased in Ikotos (from 0% in September to 20% in December) but remained stable in Torit County (from 21% in November to 14% in December), and decreased in Lafon County (from 29% in September to 12% in December). Additionally, in 67% of assessed settlement in Ikotos County with reported presence of unexploded ordnances (UXOs), KIs reported that people believed that rivers were contaminated by UXOs, hindering their access to clean water, hindering their access to clean water. Low access to adequate quantity and quality of water could influence hand-washing and other hygiene practices, which have shown to shape how households prepare food, and influence the nutrition status of the family.²³

Across EES, the proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported that none of the people in their settlement used latrines decreased from 62% in September to 49% in December, indicating an improved, however still low, access to latrines. Reports on low use of latrines continued to be particularly high in Greater Kapoeta, where KIs from nearly all assessed settlements (90%) reported this in November, similar to September (90%). The most commonly reported reason for not using latrines was that none was available (92% in November).

Figure 2: Proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported that none of the people in their settlement used a latrine, by County, December 2020 (Budi and Kapoeta counties reporting from November):



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Despite KIs in 97% of assessed settlements reporting that most people were aware of how to prevent the spread of COVID-19, most people reportedly washed their hands with soap in just 15% of assessed settlements in December, unchanged from September. The relatively low proportion of assessed settlements with reported use of soap when washing hands, might be a consequence of reported access barriers to clean water, and increasing soap prices.^{24,25}

🕏 Health

Reports on access to health care facilities remained high in Q4 across EES, but the reports of distance to the nearest functional health facility varied across EES. KIs in almost all (99%) assessed settlements reported that most people had access to a functional health facility within walking distance in November, among which KIs in 13% of assessed settlements reporting that people had access to a hospital. Conversely, some areas of Budi County reportedly never had a health facility within walking distance, reported in 7% of assessed settlements in November. While in nearly half of assessed settlements (41%) most people reportedly could access a health facility in under 30 minutes, in 20% it reportedly took one hour to half a day in November. As communities commonly access health services on foot, the distance could particularly hinder access for vulnerable and/or critical care patients.

Lack of medication at the health facilities was the main barrier to accessing health care reported by KIs in the majority of assessed settlements across EES (71% in November). Furthermore, unpredictable opening hours was the most commonly reported main challenge in assessed settlements in Kapoeta North (63%), Kapoeta South (50%), and Kapoeta East (42%), while inadequate number of health workers commonly emerged as the main challenge in Magwi (36%), Torit (24%), and Ikotos (24%) counties. These challenges were reflected in reports of health officials in the local news, which described that the Magwi Primary Health Care Center (PHCC), the only health facility in the area, lacked essential medication, sufficient hospital beds, surgical equipment, and electricity.²⁶ Reduced access to health care services, including treatment, might have led to delays in seeking health care as well as an increase in otherwise treatable diseases, such as malaria.

The proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported malaria as the most common perceived health problem increased from 43% in September to 70% in December across EES. Potentially due to the limited access to food, KIs reported the presence of severely malnourished children in 55% of assessed settlements in December (increase from 29% in September) and, in 11% of assessed settlements KIs reported that malnutrition was worse compared to last year (5% in September).²⁷ The proportion of assessed settlement where the presence of malnourished

 21. This included the time spent reaching and accessing the water source and returning with water.
 25. REACH. South Sudan JMMI. 1–7 October 2020.

 22. Radio Tamazuj. Water shortage hits Kapoeta East County. 11 February 2021.
 26. Radio Tamazuj. Magwi health center short of drugs, overcrowded and understaffed. 8 October 2020

 23. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). South Sudan
 27. KIs are shown a picture of a severely malnourished child before answering this question. Therefore this refers to self-reported cases of severely malnourished children

 24. REACH. South Sudan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI). 1–7 September 2020.
 27. KIs are shown a picture of a severely malnourished children

children was the most commonly reported was in Lafon County, where KIs from 82% of assessed settlements reported half or more of the children being severely malnourished in December, and in 18% of assessed settlements KIs reported that the nutrition situation was worse compared to last year (decrease from 64% in November). The reported severe malnutrition in Lafon County was likely due to floods that destroyed food stocks and shelters (see Shelter section), the distance to markets, and the rising cost of living.²⁸

Protection

During Q4, reports on the perception of safety slightly decreased in EES, with KIs from 63% of assessed settlements reporting that most people felt safe most of the time in November, compared to 78% in September. The highest proportion of assessed settlements where most people reportedly felt unsafe was in Kapoeta North, Lafon and Kapoeta East counties in November (63%, 45%, 39%, respectively).

Potentially linked to the perception of safety, in Lafon County in November, KIs in 18% of assessed settlements reported that that at least one incident of conflict killing a civilian took place and in 11% of assessed settlements KIs reported incidents of looting in the 30 days prior to data collection. Likewise, in 15% of assessed settlements in Torit County in November, KIs reported that at least one incident of conflict killing a civilian had taken place in the 30 days prior to data collection, and at least one incident of looting had reportedly taken place in 24% of assessed settlements during the same timeframe. These incidents and reports on perception of unsafety may be linked to inter-communal violence and tensions between communities in this area.

In November, South Sudan received a five-year extension to clear all anti-personal mines by July 2026, due to an inability to meet the initial ten-year post-independence deadline of July 2021.²⁹ Currently, areas contaminated by explosive remnants of war (ERW) cover roughly 18.8 square kilometers (~2,554 football pitches) country-wide, with Eastern Equatoria State being the second most heavily affected, after Central Equatoria State.^{30,31} Correspondingly, KIs in assessed settlements in Magwi (32%), Torit (12%) and Ikotos (9%) counties reported the presence of mines or UXO in December. Furthermore, in a few assessed settlements in Magwi (8%) and Ikotos (4%) counties, landmine or UXO related accidents, including both accidents with civilians and livestock, reportedly occurred in the 30 days prior to data collection in December, highlighting the importance of safe land to carry out livelihood and daily activities, and to enable safe return.

The depreciation of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP), increase of market prices, and lack of employment possibilities could potentially have contributed to an increase of violence against

women.³² Overall, the proportion assessed settlements where KIs reported domestic violence as the main protection concern among women, increased from 18% in September to 38% in November. Generally, women in EES are considered responsible for a range of activities including cultivation, building houses, cooking, care-taking, fetching water and collecting fire woods, and other domestic chores.³³ Because of the high and increasing market prices, women's responsibility to support their family may be further challenged, which may have contributed to an increase in domestic violence. In the same time period, alcohol reported as the main protection concern among men increased from 10% in September to 34% in November, which potentially also could be linked to the increase in reporting of domestic violence as the main protection concern among women.

As the schools in South Sudan were closed in March to prevent the spread of COVID-19, evidence has suggested an increase in the prevalence of early marriages, teenage pregnancies and sex work across Equatoria states.^{34,35} Correspondingly, the proportion of assessed settlement where child marriage was reported as the main perceived protection concern for boys and girls increased from 3% and 30%, respectively, in September to 14% and 57%, respectively, in November. If the schools remained closed, it may lead to further child marriages.³⁶

Figure 4: Main reported protection concern for women, men, boys, and girls in EES in November 2020:

Women		Men		
38%	1 Alcohol usage	34%		
	Boys			
57%	Early marriage	14%		
		38% Alcohol usage Boys		

Shelter/ NFI

The proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported that most people had access to a solid shelter³⁷ across EES slightly decreased during Q4. While host communities in the majority of assessed settlements reportedly lived in sold structures in December, a slight deterioration of access to solid shelters was observed in Q4 (reported in 86% of assessed settlements in December, compared to 97% in September). Flooding seemingly continued to impact access to reliable shelters in Lafon County (reported in 73% of assessed settlements in November, and 100% in September) - hardly hit by seasonal flooding in 2019 as well.³⁸ Flooding also reportedly destroyed shelters in Torit (reported in 53% of assessed settlements), Ikotos (32%) and Magwi

	28. Radio Tamazuj. Citizens in Eastern Equatoria complain of poor economic conditions. 29 September 2020	33. Association of Volunteers in International Service (AVSI). Field Assessment in	36. AVSI. Field Assessment in Greater Kapoeta East County. 21-28
	 Radio Tamazuj. Citizens in Eastern Equatoria complain of poor economic conditions. 29 September 2020 Radio Tamazuj. South Sudan has until 2026 to clear all anti-personnel mines. 24 November 2020. United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Dual Threats Addressed As Un Mine Action Service Visits Sites 	Greater Kapoeta East County. 21-28 March 2019.	March 2019
humanitarian action	30. United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS). Dual Threats Addressed As Un Mine Action Service Visits Sites	34. Sudan Tribune. South Sudan closes schools, suspends religious events over	37. Tukuls, permanent shelters, abandoned houses.
	In Eastern And Central Equatoria. 18 January 2021.	COVID-19. 21 Mar. 2020.	38. Radio Tamazuj. Flood victims in dire need of aid in Lafon County.
	31 Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor. South Sudan Mine Action. 11 December 2017.	35. Xinhua Net. South Sudan registers over 1,500 cases of child marriage in five	<u>17 October 2019.</u>
	32. World Food Programme (WEP). Market Update: Depreciation of South Sudanese Pound (SSP). 30 Sep 2020.	months: survey. 4 September 2020.	

counties (14%) the 30 days prior to data collection in November.

IDPs and IDP returnees seemingly continued to live in less permanent shelter types compared to members of the host community. KIs in 65% and 20% of assessed settlements with IDP presence reported that IDPs lived in tukuls and less-solid rakoobas, respectively. KIs in 79% of assessed settlements with IDP presene reported more permanent structures for IDP returnees, while rakoobas or improvised shelters were reported in 12%, the latter most commonly reported in Magwi County (25%). Access to adequate shelters is the cornerstone for dignified and sustainable returns.

Education

Schools re-opened for candidate classes (primary eight and senior four classes) on the 5th of October 2020, following the closure of education institutions in March 2020 as part of a nation-wide COVID-19 related preventive measure.³⁹ As such, KIs in an increasing proportion of assessed settlements reported that education services were not available in walking distance from their settlement in EES, with KIs from 13% of assessed settlements reporting this in October, 33% in November, and 39% in December – lagging behind the 50% March, pre-closure rate. The continued limited access to educational services reported in December was likely due to a delay of opening schools due to maintenance of school structures and WASH facilities, and mobilization of students and teachers. Furthermore, not all schools re-opened as not all offer candidate classes, especially in rural areas.

In Greater Kapoeta, low access to educational services persisted, and was reportedly impacted by the COVID-19 closures, with children in only 24% of assessed settlements reportedly having access to educational services in November (compared to 43% in March). In November, the lowest proportion of assessed settlements with reported access to educational services in EES was observed in Kapoeta South (0% of assessed settlements), Kapoeta North (6%), and Kapoeta East (11%) counties. The remoteness, lack of infrastructure, isolation during the rainy season due to impassable roads, and the mobile culture of the pastoralist communities may have contributed to limited access to educational services hindering educational in these areas.⁴⁰

In November in Greater Kapoeta, the most commonly reported reason for lack of access to educational services was lack of school facilities (reported in 34% of assessed settlements). Furthermore, girls' reported access to education persisted to be much lower than boys', with KIs from all assessed settlements in Greater Kapoeta reporting that less than half or none of the school-aged girls attended school compared to 82% where half or more than half of the school-aged boys attended school. The most commonly reported barrier for girls and boys to attend

school was lack of ability to pay school fees in November (68% and 45% of assessed settlements, respectively). In addition, teenage pregnancies were reported as a barrier for girls to attend school in 14% of assessed settlements, while agricultural or similar labour activities was reported as a barrier for boys to attend school in 35% of assessed settlements.

While school attendance was generally low before the school closures in EES, especially in Greater Kapoeta, school closures contributed to a rise in teenage pregnancies, early marriages, and substance abuse and risk taking behavior among boys, according to humanitarian partners.^{41,42} According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return, and the more they are at risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation, as well as undernutrition and mental health issues.⁴³

Conclusion

The findings presented in this situation overview illustrate how nearly all counties across EES face high intersectoral needs, largely driven by issues in accessing food, despite the expected increase in food availability from September following the harvest season. Food insecurities were in particular concerning in Greater Kapoeta County, where severe hunger was reported in nearly all assessed settlements. Additionally, due to flooding and insecurity, especially in assessed settlements in Kapoeta North, Torit, and Budi counties, communities reportedly continued to face limited access to basic services, such as solid shelter structures and WASH infrastructures, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases and likely vulnerability to COVID-19 transmission. Despite limited access to food reported across EES, findings from Greater Kapoeta counties stood out as being slightly worse and could be particularly concerning if the coming harvest does not produce the yields needed.

About REACH Initiative

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

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