

Malakal City Profile

February 2025

Context

Malakal Town, situated in Malakal County, is the capital of Upper Nile State. Previously a thriving cosmopolitan hub roughly equidistant from Juba and Khartoum, it was devastated by the South Sudanese Civil War 2013-18. Since the outbreak of conflict, living standards have decreased significantly and secondary sources indicate worsening relationships between the predominant ethnic groups.¹ Malakal has hosted a large Protection of Civilians (PoC) site since the outbreak of conflict in 2013, the last remaining PoC site in South Sudan, though this assessment primarily focuses on Malakal Town.²

Objective

This assessment seeks to understand the broad dynamics of urbanization in Malakal, with a particular focus on conflict trends, socio-economic conditions, governance, and climate change impact, in order to create data-informed urban profiles that support donor programming focused on urban development.

Topics

Specifically, this assessment aims to reveal key information on the city structure, population dynamics and sources of livelihood, and key infrastructure and services. It also explores the dynamics of insecurity and social cohesion and the management of governance. Finally, it explores the extent to which Malakal Town is exposed to climate-related hazards.

A combination of primary and secondary data collection was used to answer these questions:



Extensive secondary data review, including a review of NGO, UN, South Sudanese government documents and academic reports, as well as South Sudanese news.



Geo-data, including remote sensing and other GIS tools.



12 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), each with 6 community members (totalling 72), divided by gender and displacement status, carried out 22-29 August 2024.



8 Key informant interviews (KIIs) with aid workers, market traders, and local government officials, carried out 22-29 August 2024.



2 Mapping Focus Group Discussions (MFGDs), each with 6 community leaders and community experts, to roughly determine the location of facilities and infrastructure, held in May 2024.







Quantitative facilities assessment, using direct observation and 414 key informant interviews, to accurately map facilities in Malakal Town. These were held in May 2024.

¹ Craze, J. (2019). *Displaced & Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's civil war 2014–19*. Small Arms Survey. Pg.16. [Link](#). & Caragounis, V. (2022). *Voices on the Conflict in Malakal*. PAX Protection of Civilians. [Link](#).

² *Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites transition: Bentiu, Unity State, and Malakal, Upper Nile State - South Sudan*. (2021). Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility. [Link](#).

Key Findings

- Satellite imagery shows that Malakal Town experienced **significant destruction during the South Sudanese Civil War 2013-18**, while findings from primary data indicate a severe decline in living standards since the outbreak of violence in 2013.
- Due to a highly transient population, no recent research, and a lack of statistics on population figures below the county level in South Sudan, **the population of Malakal Town is currently unknown**. Though, data from the Danish Refugee Council Camp Management Team reveals there are reportedly at least 25,000 IDPs living in IDP sites across Malakal Town.³ Judging by these figures, as well as the size of Malakal Town, the research team estimates the overall population of Malakal Town to be between 60,000-150,000.
- The quantitative facilities assessment revealed that facility functionality is limited, with **large numbers of facilities non-functional**. There is no clear pattern to the distribution of non-functional latrines and waterpoints, though the non-functional schools and health facilities tend to be located further from the centre of Malakal Town.
- While before 2013 Malakal Town was often described as a mixed, bustling, cosmopolitan city, evidence from FGDs indicate **that relations between groups may be worsening**.
- According to community members in Malakal Town, **land disputes are reportedly** causing tension between groups, and resentment towards returnees. Returnees and IDPs are sometimes seen as receiving a disproportionate amount of aid, which may also drive resentment.
- Malakal Town suffers from criminals who create significant fear amongst the population, particularly at nighttime, according to community members. Government actors, primarily **the police, are reportedly responsible for managing the security situation**, though secondary sources describe how they may face challenges, such as limited funds.⁵

	Functional	Non-functional
 Schools	17	11
 Waterpoints	20	6
 Latrines	109	84
 Health facilities	7	4

- The disruption of key supply chains from Sudan, a decline in affordability of produce due to the 2023-24 economic crisis, and decreasing physical and financial access for communities, has resulted in **decreased market functionality in Malakal Town, as of October 2024**.⁴
- **Levels of food security are concerning**, with the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) estimating that 70% of the population in Malakal County would experience severe acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and above) between September and November 2024. Malakal is one of two counties where 5% of the population are expected to experience catastrophic food insecurity ("famine-like" conditions - IPC Phase 5) in this period.
- Satellite imagery and primary data reveals that **Malakal Town itself is not vulnerable to flooding**, though flooding in surrounding areas displaces communities who seek shelter on the higher grounds of Malakal Town, resulting in increased pressure on the already limited number of functional facilities.

³ Danish Refugee Council Camp Management Team. (2024, October 17). *Population estimates for IDP sites in Malakal Town* [Personal communication].

⁴ South Sudan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative Factsheet. (August 2023). REACH. [Link](#).

⁵ Idris, I. (2017). *Local Governance in South Sudan: Overview*. Department for International Development. [Link](#).

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Acronyms

CSRF – Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation

FEWS NET – Famine Early Warning System Network

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

GIS – Geographic Information System

GoSS – Government of South Sudan

HH – Household

IDP – Internally Displaced Person

IOM – International Organisation for Migration

IPC – Integrated Phrase Classification

JMMI – Joint Market Monitoring Initiative

JTF – Joint Task Force

KI – Key Informant

MFGD – Mapping Focus Group Discussion

MFS – Market Functionality Score

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

NUF – Necessary Unified Forces

OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

POC – Protection of Civilians

RARCSS – Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan

SPLM – Sudan People's Liberation Movement

SPLM-IO – Sudan People's Liberation Movement In Opposition

SSP – South Sudanese Pound

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

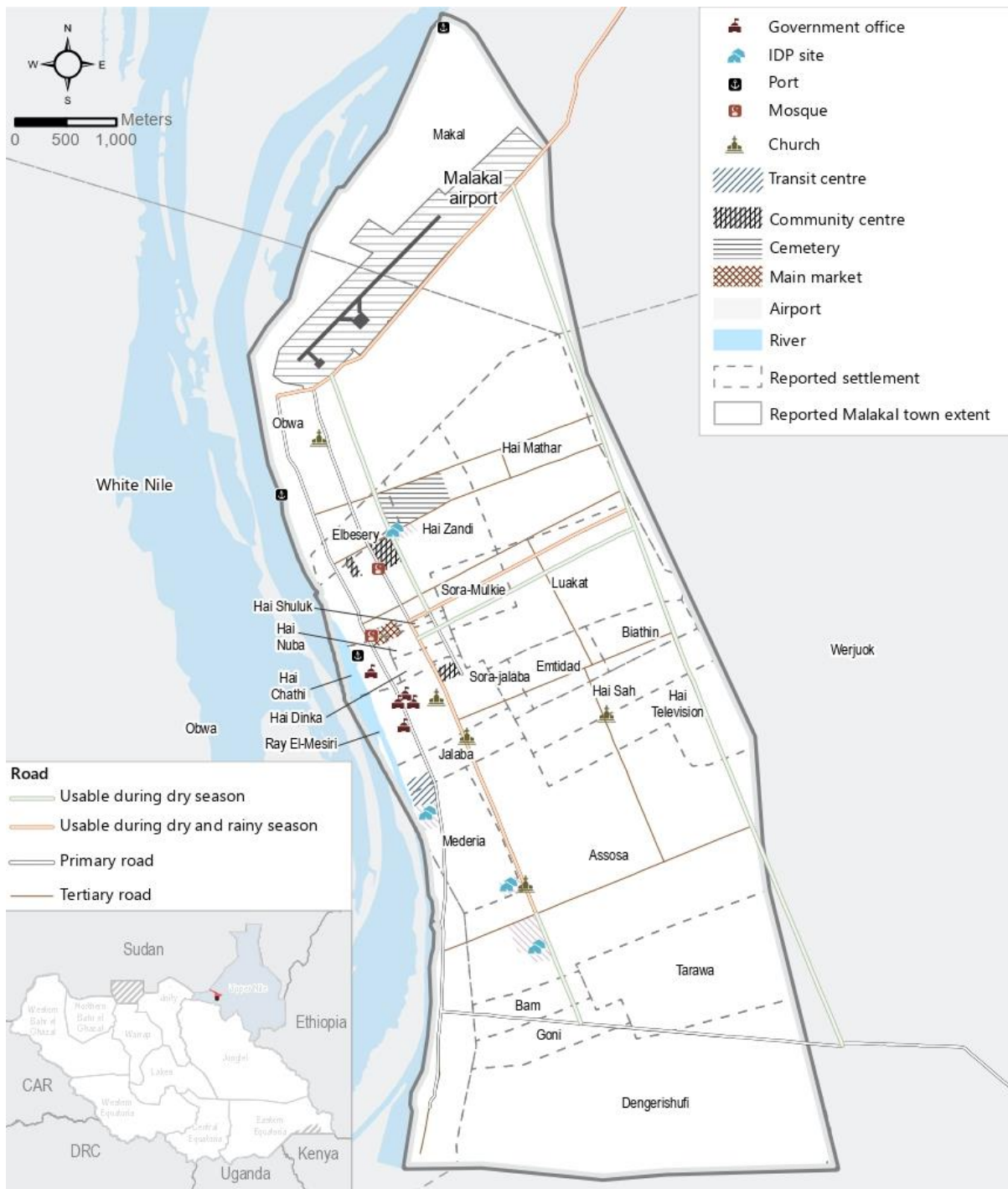
UNMISS – United Nations Mission in South Sudan

UNS - Upper Nile State

WFP – World Food Programme

1. Geographic Conditions

1.1 Town Layout



Map 1: Malakal Town Layout: Source: Primary data - Mapping Focus Group Discussions

According to MFGD findings, there are 24 neighbourhoods within Malakal Town, as displayed in Map 1. Most correspond to earlier findings in a 2018 IOM report, though this only indicates 19 neighbourhoods.⁶ Additional neighbourhoods found in the MFGDs were Hai Zandi, Obwa, Emtidad, Biathin, Tarawa, and Goni, while the 2018 IOM study also mapped a neighbourhood called Hai Sham, northwest of Assosa. Malakal Town is reportedly hosting a mixed population, both ethnically as well as by displacement status. According to a report by PAX, the predominant ethnic groups are

Shilluk, Dinka and Nuer.⁷ There are some internally displaced people (IDP) sites in Malakal Town, as seen in Map 1, though the majority of IDPs live in the Protection of Civilians (PoC) site that formed around a UN base, situated outside of Malakal Town itself.⁸ Returnees and refugees from Sudan are reportedly housed in Bulukat Transit Centre, which is located in the south-west of the city, between Madeira and Jalaba.

Secondary sources describe how neighbourhoods in South Sudan arise from complex interplays between kinship (often ethnicity or tribe), and

⁶ Malakal Combined Assessment February 2018. (2018). International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix. [Link](#).

⁷ Caragounis, V. (2022). *Voices on the Conflict in Malakal*. PAX. [Link](#).

⁸ Danish Refugee Council Camp Management Team. (2024, October 17). *Population estimates for IDP sites in Malakal Town* [Personal communication].

political agents who establish themselves as authorities within communities.⁹ Though, reports frequently describe how the population of Malakal Town pre-2013 was cosmopolitan and highly mixed.¹⁰

Indeed, findings from both MFGDs and FGDs suggest that the population in Malakal Town is still diverse.

1.2 Roads



Image 1: Maram road in Malakal a few hours after rain, taken by the research team



Image 2: Non-maram road in Malakal a few hours after rain, taken by the research team

As seen in Map 1, Malakal Town has primary roads and tertiary roads. Of the primary roads, there are those that are useable during both rainy and dry season, and those that are useable during only the dry season.

Primary roads are wider and more often used, while tertiary roads are smaller and often in worse condition. Roads that are useable during both rainy and dry season have been constructed using maram, a heavy red clay that withstands water.¹¹ This maram was, according to a key informant, brought in by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to ensure roads are accessible during the rainy season. As seen in Map 1, there are three roads that are covered in maram: the first runs parallel to the White Nile; the

second runs perpendicular to the first road, from the outskirts of the city to the city centre; and the third runs from the north of Malakal Town past the airport to the UNMISS base.

The difference between these roads can be seen clearly in Images 1 and 2. Where a road has been covered with maram, it dries rapidly after rainfall, often within 1-2 hours. Where a road has not been covered with maram, the mud stays sticky for often the entire day after rain. This renders these roads mostly impassable during the rainy season to even the most advanced 4x4s, let alone the tuktuks, motorbikes, and carts which were often observed by the research team as being stuck following downpours.

⁹ Kindersley, N. (2019). *Rule of whose law? The geography of authority in Juba, South Sudan*. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 57(1), 61–83. [Link](#).

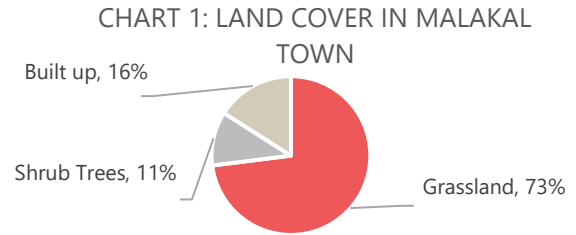
¹⁰ Caragounis, V. (2022). *Voices on the Malakal Conflict*. PAX. [Link](#).

¹¹ *South Sudan: Compounding Instability in Unity State* (179). (2011). International Crisis Group. [Link](#).

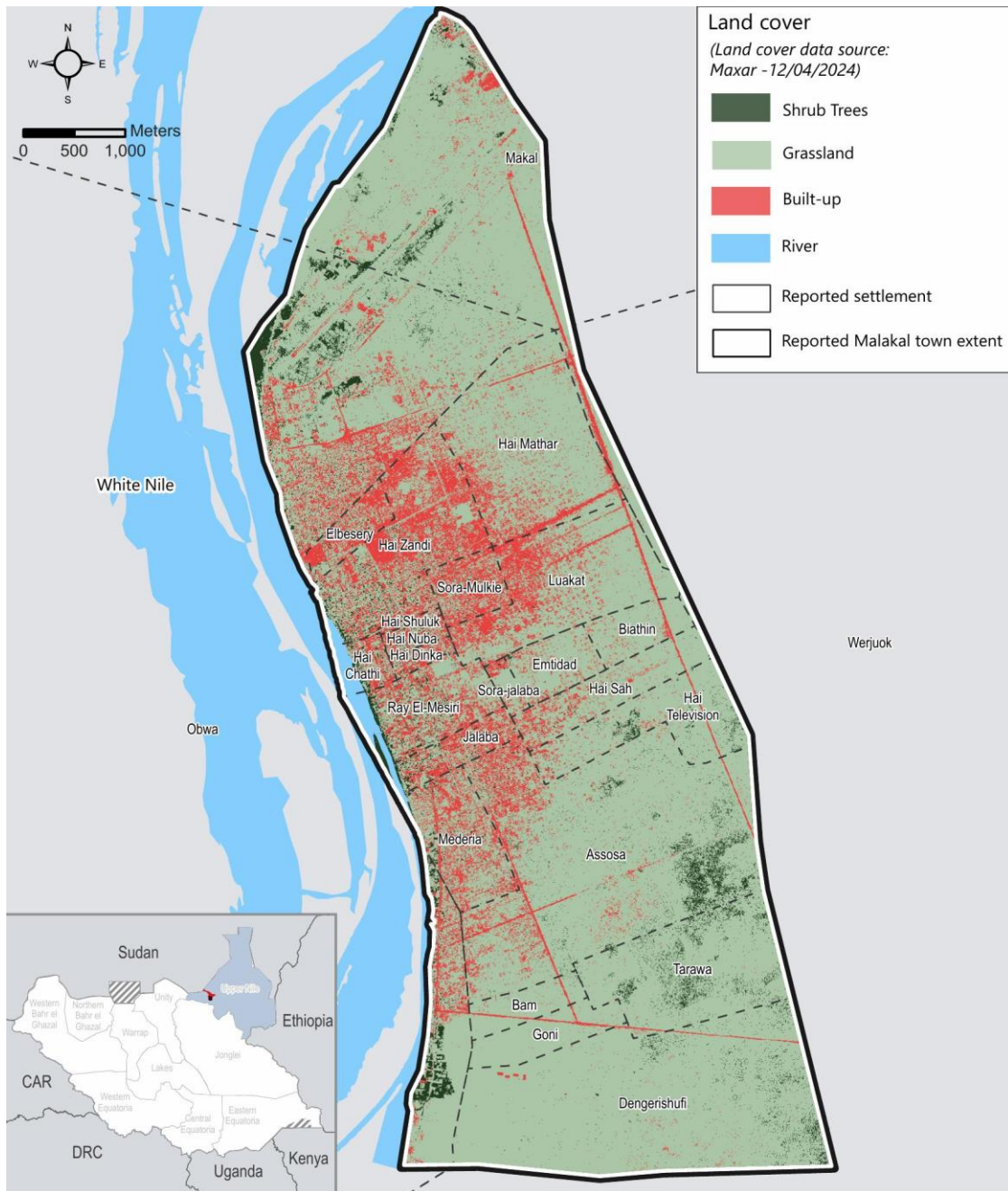
1.3 Land Use and Cover

As seen in Map 2, and corroborated by Images 3 and 4, buildings are concentrated in the centre of Malakal Town, while the outskirts have fewer buildings and more grassland. Chart 1 shows that the majority of land in Malakal Town is grassland (73%), while 16% is buildings, and 11% is shrub trees.

In October 2024, Eye Radio reported that the Upper Nile Council of Ministers had voted to evict occupants from buildings and land which belonged to the government, including government houses, public schools, and investment lands.¹² Unplanned expansions such as these were not found to pose environmental or climate risks.



Source: ESA WorldCover 2021/Contains modified Copernicus Sentinel data [2021] processed by ESA WorldCover consortium



¹² Lasuba, M. (2024, October 8). Upper Nile: Occupants of public buildings to face eviction. *Eye Radio*. [Link](#).



Image 3: View over outskirts of Malakal Town, looking South. Taken by the research team approaching Malakal airport.



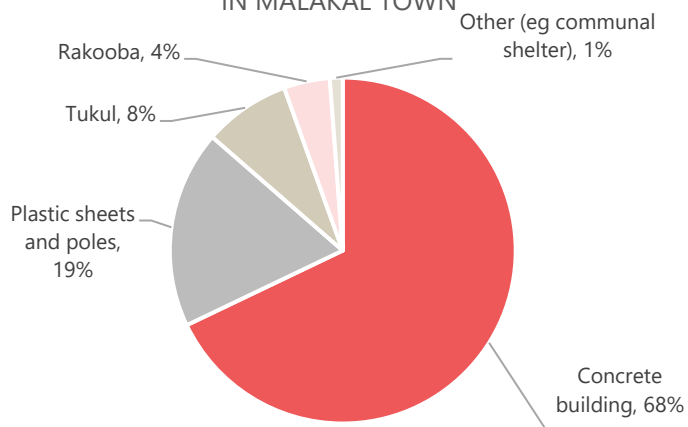
Image 4: View over centre of Malakal Town, looking South. Taken by the research team approaching Malakal airport.

1.4 Building Types

As seen in Map 3, the majority of buildings in Malakal Town are one-storey, though there is a considerable concentration of taller buildings in the city centre, with other taller buildings also seen running parallel to the Nile. Indeed, in Hai Nuba and Hai Zandi, some buildings appear to be above 6.5m tall, in line with the existence of some two-storey buildings in Malakal seen by the research team, albeit often abandoned, such as is evidenced in Image 6.

According to the urban component of the Inter-Sectoral Needs Assessment (ISNA) for Malakal County 2023, the data of which is displayed in Chart 2, the majority of households in Malakal Town (68%) live in a concrete building, however 19% live in a shelter made of plastic sheets.¹³ Heavy rainfall may therefore pose a significant challenge for a large minority of people in Malakal Town. An example of a shelter made of plastic sheets is shown in Image 5.

CHART 2: TYPE OF SHELTER REPORTED BY HHS IN MALAKAL TOWN



Source: Malakal County ISNA 2023.

¹³ Malakal County Inter Sectoral Needs Assessment: Urban Component Quantitative Assessment Report. (2023). IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. [Link](#).

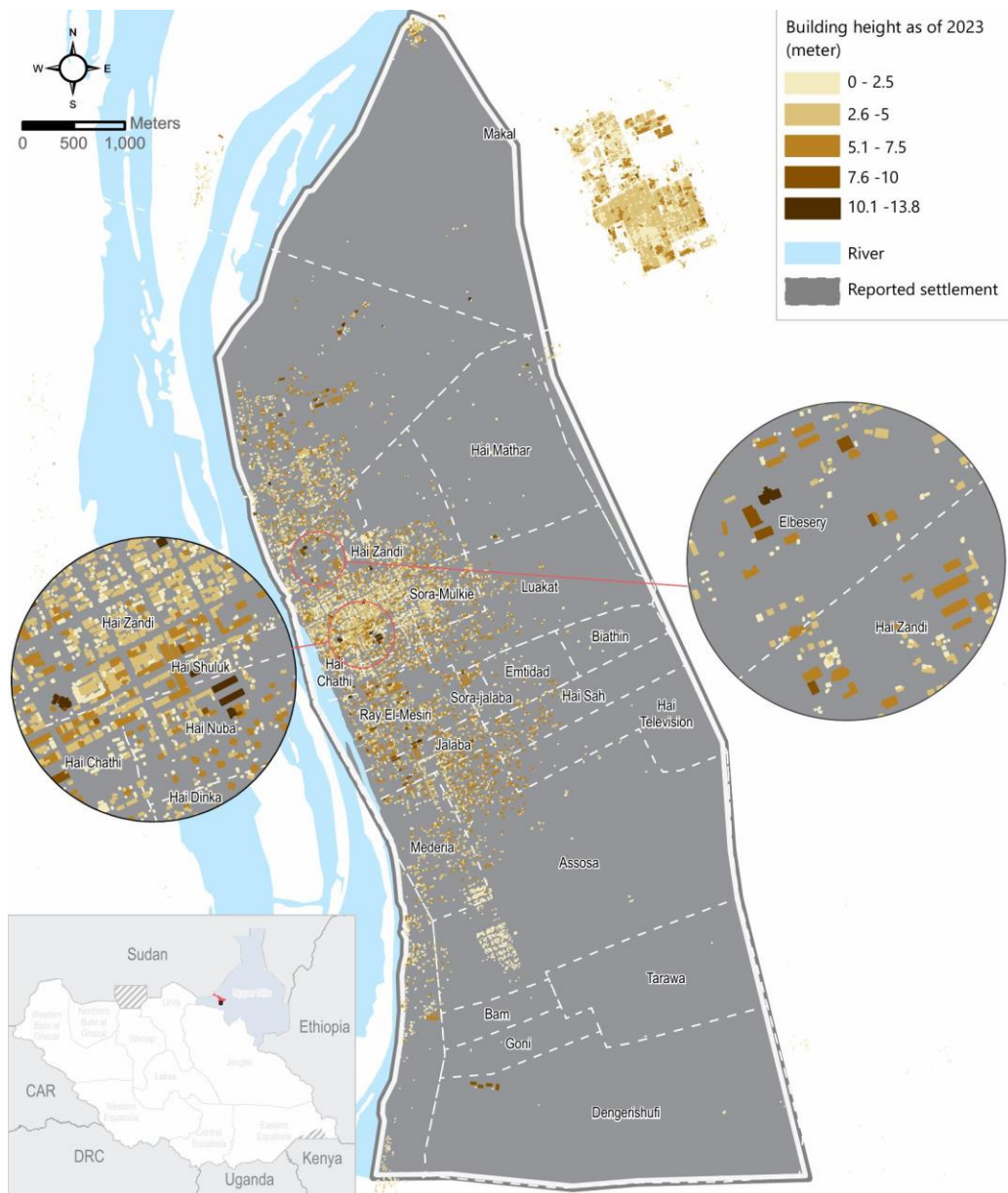


Image 5: Shelter made from plastic sheets in IDP camp in Hai Mathar, Malakal Town. Taken by the research team.

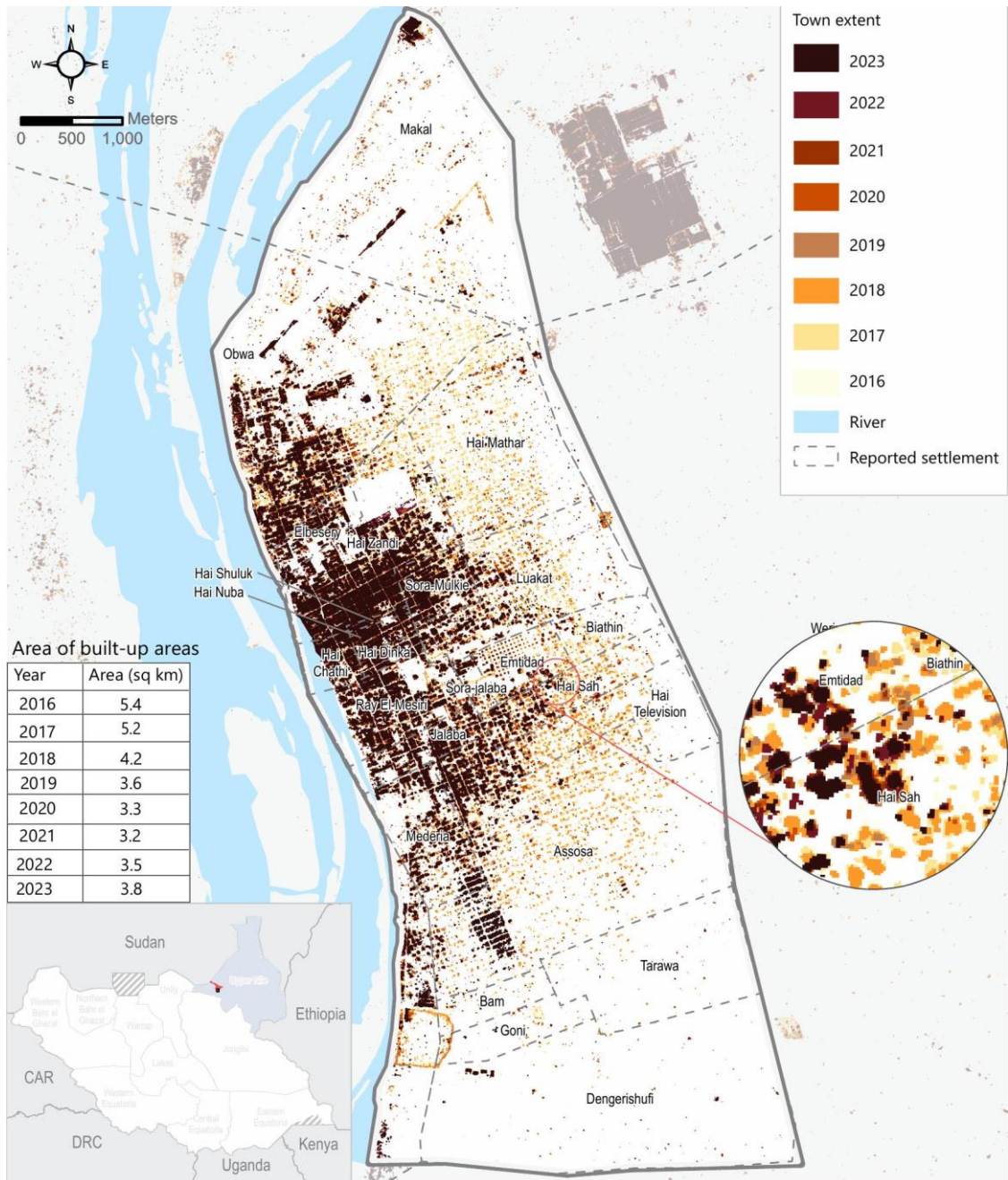


Image 6: Abandoned building in Malakal Town centre (Hai Nuba). Taken by the research team.

1.5 Settlement Destruction



Map 3: Building height of Malakal Town as of 2023. Source: Sirko et al. (2023). Google Research: High Resolution Building and Road Detection from Sentinel-2.



Map 2: Reduced building coverage in Malakal Town, shown by mapping the last year that a building was seen on satellite imagery. Source: Sirko et al. (2023). Google Research: High Resolution Building and Road Detection (Sentinel-2).

Findings from FGDs suggest that Malakal Town suffered severely from the South Sudanese Civil War 2013-18, with FGD participants reporting destruction of buildings and infrastructure.

Map 4 shows the last year a building was seen on satellite imagery. It therefore evidences the destruction of much of the outskirts of the city in 2016 and 2017, though central areas appear to have remained. This finding corresponds to secondary data reporting substantial destruction of Malakal city during the South Sudanese Civil War.¹⁴

Though, the built-up area of Malakal Town decreased from 4.2sq km in 2018, the year the Civil War finished, to 3.2sq km in 2021. This assessment found no secondary sources which explained this degradation. However, given one key informant reported that

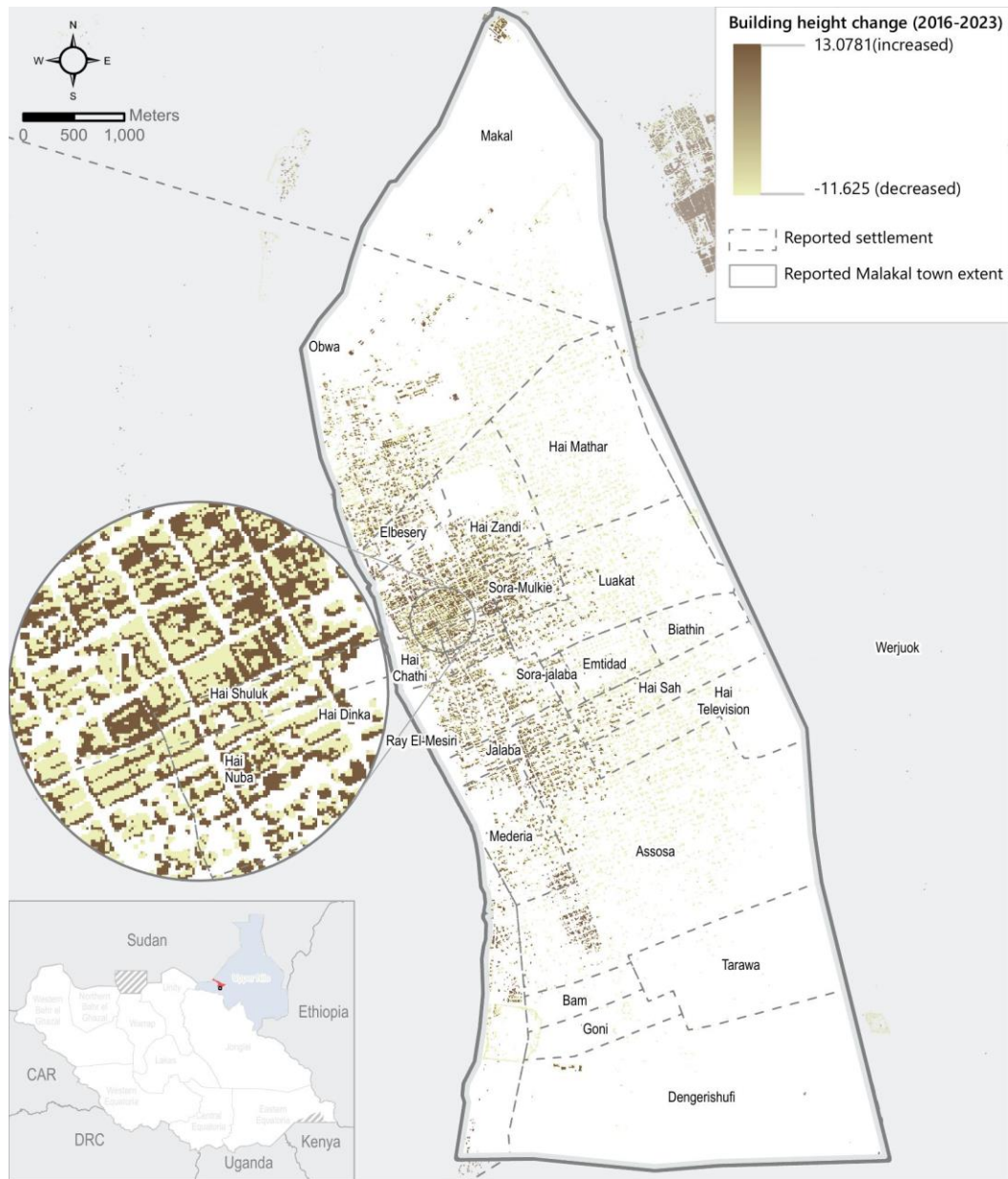
Malakal Town was 'abandoned' in 2018 after the war ended, this continued building destruction until 2021 could be a result of

building degradation due to abandonment. One key informant suggested that this destruction was the result of further conflict even after the war ended. Data from Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) indicates that there were indeed some instances of violence in 2019 and 2020, which may corroborate the key informant's account.¹⁵

From 2021, the built-up areas in Malakal Town began to increase, from 3.2sq km in 2021 to 3.8sq km in 2023, indicating increasing inhabitation of the town.

¹⁴ McCrone, F. (2021). *The War(s) in South Sudan: Local Dimensions of Conflict, Governance, and the Political Marketplace* (Conflict Research Programme). London School of Economics and Political Science. [Link](#).

¹⁵ *South Sudan – Conflict Events*. [dataset]. (2024, October). Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED). [Link](#).



Map 3: Building height change of Malakal Town 2016-2023. Source: Sirko et al. (2023). Google Research: High Resolution Building and Road Detection from Sentinel-2.

Map 5 evidences significant decrease in building height in parts of Malakal Town between 2016 and 2023, further highlighting the destruction of the city that occurred during these years. The outer edges of the city can be seen in map 5 to have decreased in height significantly. There has, however, been some evidence of new build-ups, particularly in the city centre, such as Hai Zandi, Sora Mulkie, and Hai Chathi.

Observations by the research team corroborate the widespread destruction of the city: they noted that a substantial number of buildings throughout Malakal Town, both in the centre as well as on the outskirts, had been destroyed or abandoned, such as in Images 6, 7, and 8.



Image 7: Abandoned buildings on the outskirts of Malakal Town. Taken by the research team.



Image 8: Abandoned bank in Malakal Town in Sora-Jalaba. Taken by the research team.

2. Population and Displacement

2.1 Population of Malakal Town

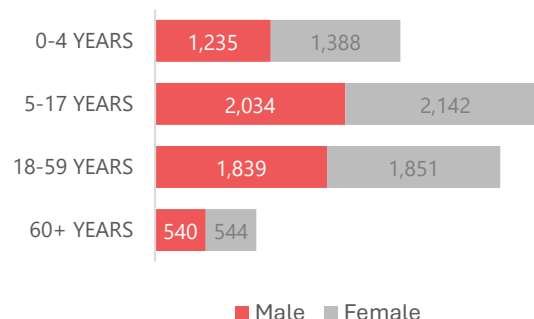
There are several estimates of the population of Malakal County, ranging from UN OCHA's 2022 estimate of 195,157¹⁶ to the National Bureau of Statistics' 2023 estimate of 76,231.¹⁷ There are, however, few figures for the population of Malakal Town. Due to challenges in estimating accurate population counts even at the county level within South Sudan, in addition to the transient population within Malakal Town, **this assessment is limited in its ability to provide a reliable figure for either the current population of Malakal Town, or the precise level of population growth in recent years.**

However, there are some figures which may prove helpful in providing rough estimates. The most recent population estimate for Malakal Town specifically was reported by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in 2018, in their finding that 11,573 people were living in Malakal Town.¹⁸ The breakdown of these ages is seen in Chart 3. However, Malakal Town was mostly abandoned during the conflict, meaning the population is likely to have been very low in 2018.¹⁹ Due to population return and movement following the end of the conflict (see Map 6), the current population is likely to be far higher. Indeed, data from the Kontur Population Dataset for population density shows that the **population of Malakal Town may have been around 133,000 in 2023.**²⁰

Demographic statistics provided by the Danish Refugee Council Camp Management indicate there are c. 25,000 IDPs within Malakal Town as of October 2024, as seen in Charts 4 and 5.²¹ According to one key informant, the population of Bulukat Transit Centre is usually 3-4,000.

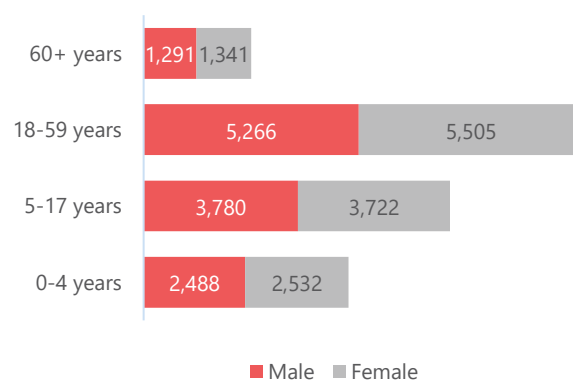
Using data collected in September-October 2022, the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM DTM) reported that 74% of households in Malakal Town identified as host community, 17% as IDPs, and 9% as returnees. This was before the war in Sudan began in April 2023, and 'returnees' may be a term used by both those who fled South Sudan and have returned, as well as IDPs who have returned home from IDP camps within the country.

CHART 3: POPULATION PYRAMID OF MALAKAL TOWN IN 2018



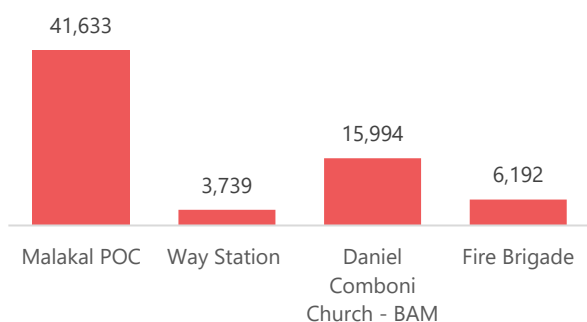
Source: Malakal Assessment. (2018). IOM DTM.

CHART 4: POPULATION PYRAMID OF IDPS IN CAMPS IN MALAKAL TOWN - OCT 2024



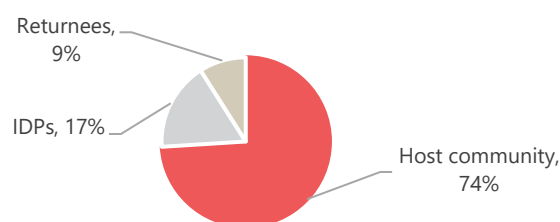
Source: DRC Camp Management Team

CHART 5: POPULATION OF IDPS IN MALAKAL TOWN AND MALAKAL POC - OCTOBER 2024



Source: DRC Camp Management Team

CHART 6: DEMOGRAPHICS OF HHS IN MALAKAL TOWN (SEP/OCT 2022)



Source: Malakal County ISNA 2023

¹⁶ South Sudan – Subnational Population Statistics. (2023). Humanitarian Data Exchange. [Link](#).

¹⁷ Ibid.

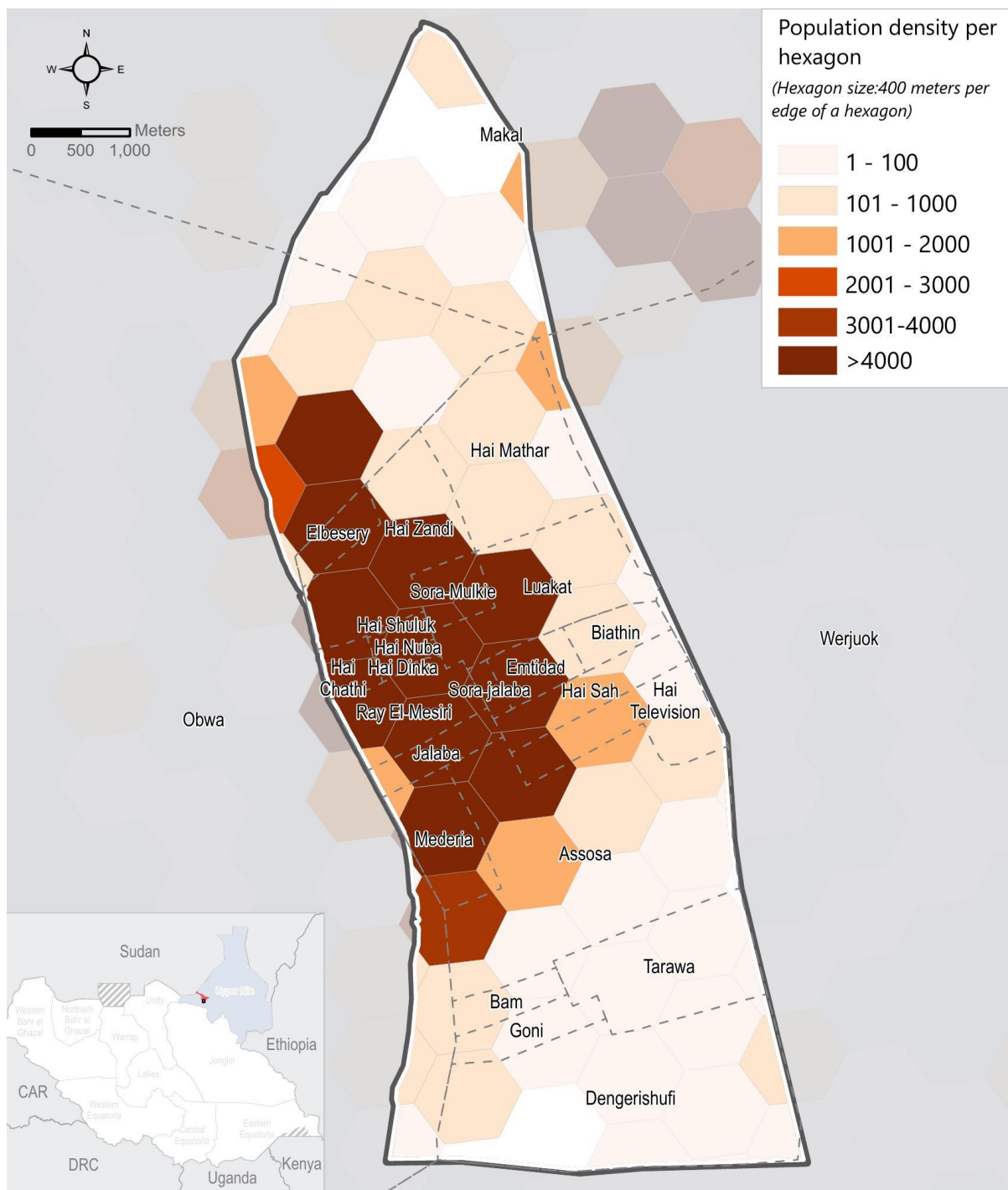
¹⁸ Malakal Combined Assessment February 2018. (2018). International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix. [Link](#).

¹⁹ Displaced and Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's civil war, 2014–19. (2019). Small Arms Survey. [Link](#)

²⁰ Kontur Population. (2023). South Sudan: Population Density for 400m H3 Hexagons [Dataset]. [Link](#).

²¹ Danish Refugee Council Camp Management Team. (2024, October 17). Population estimates for IDP sites in Malakal Town [Personal communication].

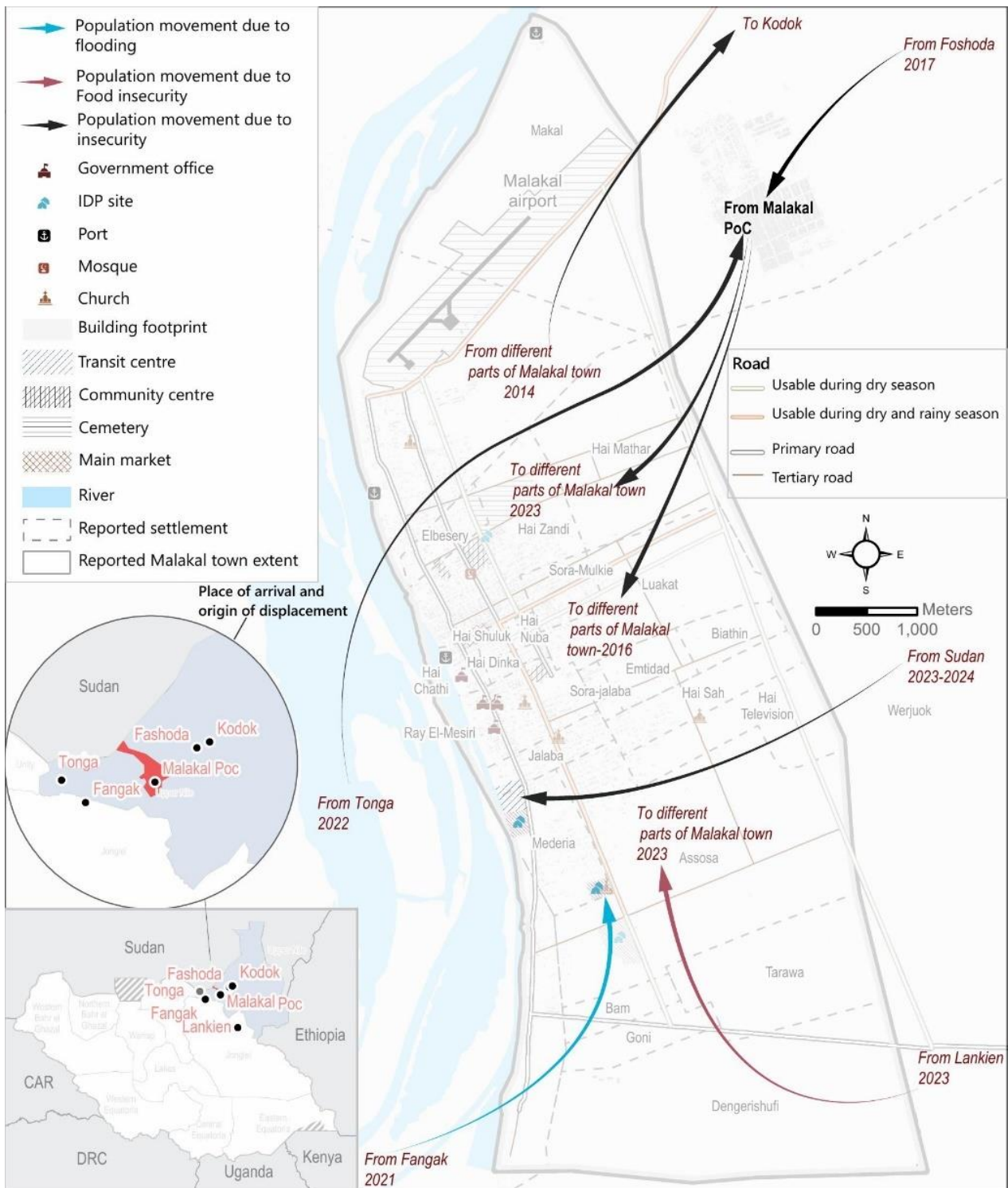
2.2 Population Density



As seen in Map 6, the majority of the population reside in the centre of Malakal Town, with greater population density also next to the White Nile. This map corresponds to Map 4 showing the extent of settlements in 2023.

The highest population density hexagon corresponds to the neighbourhoods of Sora-Mulkie and Hai Zandi. Here, population density reaches 5,811 people per km².

2.3 Population Movement



Map 7: Population movement in and out of Malakal Town. Source: Population Movement Baseline REACH 2024.

Malakal has experienced significant population movement in the last 10 years, including due to conflict, forced displacement, and flooding.

Though, the majority of significant population displacements in the last 10 years have been due to insecurity, as seen in map 7. In 2014, fighting in Malakal caused a mass movement from the eastern side of the Nile to the west, as well as pushing people to the northern and

Western directions of Kodok, South Kordofan, and White Nile.²² In August 2022, clashes in Tonga town resulted in 15,000 people being displaced, of whom 520 reportedly went to the Malakal PoC, and an unknown number to Malakal Town itself.²³ Additionally, there has been substantial movement between Malakal Town and Malakal PoC site. In particular, violence in 2016

²² Population Movement Baseline (2024) REACH. File on copy with REACH.

²³ Tonga clashes: Flash Update No. 2. (2022). UN OCHA. [Link](#).

and 2023 led to 4,500 people and 6,000 people,²⁴ respectively, moving from the Malakal PoC site to Malakal Town.

There are also reports of **significant insecurity driving population movement across Upper Nile State (UNS), including from Malakal Town, in 2017.**²⁵ Though there are no estimates of who or how many people fled from Malakal Town specifically during this time, and a variety of different groups were affected, some secondary sources report that many Malakal Town residents, and those across UNS, were displaced to Sudan.²⁶

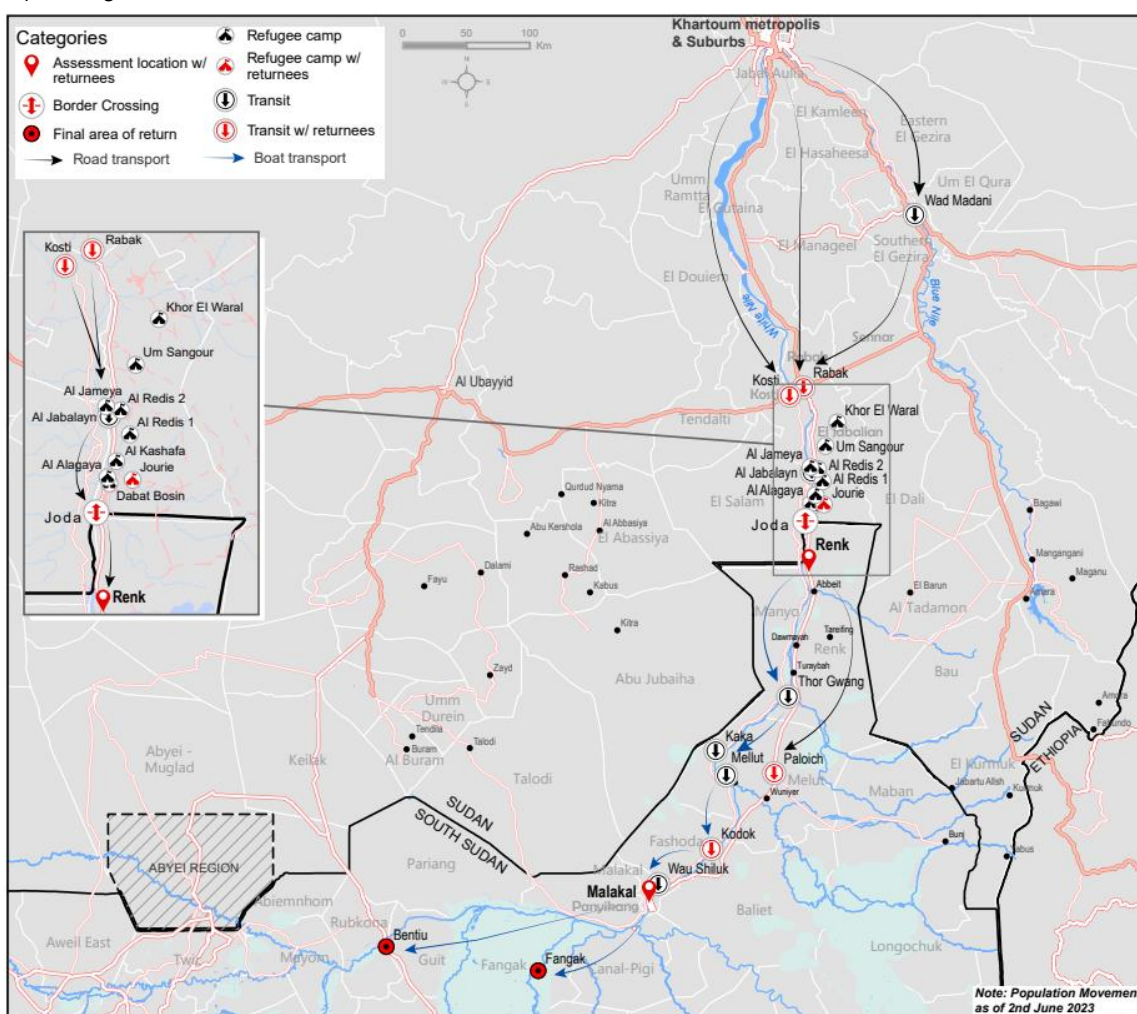
Flooding and food insecurity have also displaced communities in the region, with a key informant reporting that nearby communities often flee to Malakal Town because it is on higher ground relative to the Nile. In particular, substantial flooding in 2021 displaced at least 1,500 people from Fangak to Malakal Town,²⁷ as seen in Map 6. Moreover, IOM reported that in the period January-March 2023, 3,400 people were displaced from Lankien in Jonglei State to the counties of Baliet, Ulang, and Malakal in Unity State due to food insecurity.²⁸

While Map 7 captures significant events, it is non-exhaustive. Other

major events include the alleged relocation of up to 15,000 IDPs by the Government to Malakal County.²⁹ In FGDs, community members did not provide information on the economic 'pull' factors of Malakal Town, instead focusing on insecurity and flooding.

Since the Sudan crisis began in April 2023, UNHCR and IOM have recorded 872,563 individuals who have crossed into South Sudan from Sudan. 612,966 of these individuals (70%) arrived in South Sudan through the Joda border crossing in Upper Nile State.³⁰ Of these, 364,422 (42%) listed UPS as their final destination, and 33,612 (4%) listed Malakal County specifically. 508,151 (68%) people listed states other than UPS as their final destination, including 70,632 people (8%) who listed Central Equatoria, 53,754 (6%) who listed Unity, 46,994 (5%) listed Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, and 26,885 (3%) listed Western Bahr el-Ghazal.

For those continuing past UNS, Malakal Town's Bulukat Transit Centre serves as a crucial transit point as seen in Map 8, sourced from a REACH assessment in November 2023 on cross-border movements.³¹ It is likely, therefore, that out of the 508,151 people who listed states other than UPS as their destination, a majority passed through Malakal Town.



Map 8: Population movement from Khartoum to area of final return via Renk and Malakal (September 2023). Source: Cross-Border Assessment REACH 2024.

²⁴ MSF condemns attack in Malakal UN protection site. (2016, March). MSF. [Link](#).
 Ninrew, C. (2023, June 10). Deaths in Malakal camp violence rise to 20. *Eye Radio*. [Link](#).
 & Situation Report: Malakal Conflict Induced Displacement due to violent clashes in Malakal PoC (July 2023) - South Sudan. (2023). UN OCHA. [Link](#).
²⁵ Vannice, C et al. (2017). *Conflict Trends. Real-Time Analysis of African Political Violence, May 2017*. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. [Link](#).
²⁶ "It Was As If My Village Was Swept By A Flood": The Mass Displacement of the Shilluk Population From the West Bank of the White Nile, South Sudan. (2017). Amnesty International. [Link](#).
 & Displaced and Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's civil war, 2014–19. (2019). Small Arms Survey. [Link](#).

²⁷ Over 1,500 flood-displaced arrive in Malakal. (2021, August 4). *Radio Tamazuj*. [Link](#).
 & Chang, K. (2021, August 12). Flood displaces over 50,000 persons in Fangak County. *Eye Radio*. [Link](#).
²⁸ IOM. (2023). *Displacement Tracking Matrix [Dataset]*. [Link](#).
²⁹ *Indiscriminate Attacks Against Civilians in Southern Unity April-May 2018*. (2018). Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. [Link](#).
³⁰ *Population Movement from Sudan to South Sudan*. (2024) IOM and UNHCR. [Link](#).
³¹ *South Sudan cross-border displacement: Rapid food security assessment in areas of return—Malakal County*. (2023). REACH. [Link](#).

3. Socioeconomic Conditions

3.1 Livelihood Sources

Community members in Malakal Town rely on arduous and small-scale activities, with findings from FGDs suggesting that the majority of reported income sources fall into this category. At the time of data collection, most households reported that they relied on grass-cutting, firewood collecting, casual labour (often on farms), cultivation, cattle-rearing, fishing, charcoal production, and selling tea at the market. This corroborates data from a FAO/WFP report, which found farming was an important livelihood source in Malakal County,³² and a Famine Early Warning System (FEWS NET) report detailing the importance of many of the aforementioned livelihood sources, particularly cultivation and fishing, which are used both as a food and cash source.³³

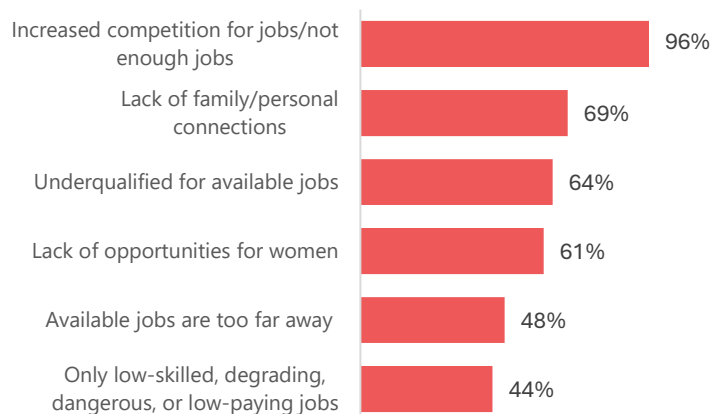
Yet, these livelihood sources were reported to come with significant challenges, primarily the economic crisis and insecurity, and challenges associated with seasonality.

Insecurity was the most reported challenge by FGD participants, particularly in reference to grass-cutting, firewood collecting, cultivation, and charcoal production. Participants reported that criminals reportedly reside in the areas outside town, so if residents travel to their farms or to nearby wooded areas, there may be a risk of robberies or attacks.

Livelihood sources in Malakal County are highly seasonal, with land preparation for cultivation beginning in May, and harvest occurring mostly in November. Many households, therefore, rely on the income/food produced until around March, when the lean season begins. The rainy season (May-October) may thus represent a decline in income, which is supported by findings from FGDs. FGD participants reported that during the rainy season it is difficult to collect wood, cut grass, or burn charcoal, not only due to the rain but also because criminals can hide behind the high grass and rob those conducting these activities outside the town.

Moreover, as seen in Chart 7, 96% of households in Malakal Town in REACH’s 2024 Economic Hardships Assessment reported that the primary barrier to employment was increased competition for jobs, or not enough jobs.³⁴ Though, findings suggest many of these challenges preceded the current economic crisis. For example, many FGD participants cited the outbreak of conflict in 2013 as the most significant event that caused a decline in access to livelihood sources.

CHART 7: PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT OF HHS IN MALAKAL TOWN



Source: *Coping With Economic Hardships REACH 2024.*

'Before the crisis in 2013, the situation was good, we could farm in our villages and transport our goods to Malakal for sale... But currently we are restricted to live in this small area, livelihood is very difficult, we have lost many resources in the war' – FGD participant (male, returnee)

Findings suggest there are some small differences in the sources of income between groups. According to some FGD participants it is primarily residents in the PoC site who fish, with one Malakal town resident attributing this to the NGOs in the PoC site providing fishing equipment. Moreover, grass-cutting appears to be a livelihood that is accessible to returnees, particularly female returnees. This is supported by evidence from FEWSNET showing the challenges that returnees in South Sudan face, particularly due to their lack of land.³⁵

'Mostly for us from Sudan, we usually go to the bushes and cut grass... We bring it and then sell to people, and now we can afford to buy a bucket of flour' – FGD participant (female, returnee)

No FGD participants reported differing livelihoods for host community members.

Grass-cutting was reported by several FGD participants as an activity undertaken primarily by women, whereas charcoal production was described as primarily undertaken by men. In one FGD, participants reported that only women sell tea at the market. Firewood collection was reported by some FGD participants as undertaken only by women, and by others as only by men.

³² Special Report—FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to South Sudan. (2019). *World Food Programme & Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations*. [Link](#).

³³ *South Sudan Livelihood Zone Map*. (2018, November). FEWS NET. [Link](#).

³⁴ *Coping with Economic Hardships*. (2024). REACH. [Link](#) tbc.

³⁵ *Return to a Displaced Nation: The Sudan Crisis and South Sudan's Returnees*. (15 October 2024). Refugees International. [Link](#).

3.3 Seasonality of Food Security

		May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Seasons	Rainy season												
Crops	Sorghum												
	Maize												
	Sesame												
	Beans												
	Vegetables												
Livestock	Cattle sales peak												
	Goat sales peak												
	Lean season												

Table 1: Seasonality of food supply. Source: FEWS NET 2018

In Malakal, crop harvest usually occurs from August to January, the produce of which sustains communities throughout most of the dry season, as displayed in table 1.⁴¹ Indeed, FGD participants stated that more food is available at better prices in the dry season. They also reported that during the dry season, roads leaving Malakal are safer and more accessible, facilitating easier access to farms or villages.

Households, therefore, rely on their harvested food stores until around May, when they reportedly increasingly rely on market purchases. The 'lean season' coincides with this market dependency, spanning from May to July/August. Such market dependence puts households at greater vulnerability from economic shocks like inflation during this period.⁴²

3.4 Food Assistance

REACH's 2024 Economic Hardships Assessment indicated that 100% of households in Malakal Town need food assistance.⁴³ However, only FGD participants from IDP and returnee communities reported that they currently rely on aid to supplement their food supply. Findings therefore suggest that distribution of food aid may be uneven across Malakal Town, given that returnees in Bulukat Transit Centre may receive direct food assistance, while Malakal Town residents do not. Moreover, some FGD participants reported that IDPs in the PoC receive ration cards for food.

Several FGD participants expressed concern that humanitarian funding cuts will hinder their access to food assistance, and expressed fear about how they will cope:

'We are worried of the future, because the UN is saying they are going stop giving us our food rations. Also, the prices in the market keep on increasing on daily basis, our income is not meeting the prices' – FGD participant (female, returnee)

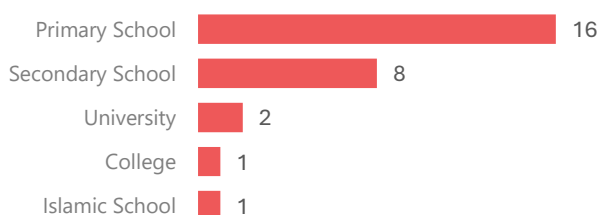
4. Infrastructure and Services

4.1 Education

The quantitative facilities assessment carried out in May 2024 identified a total of 28 education facilities were found and assessed in Malakal Town, shown in Map 9. Of these, 17 were functional, and 11 were non-functional due to damage during the South Sudanese Civil War (2013-18). The majority of the education facilities mapped were primary schools. Of functional schools where the number of

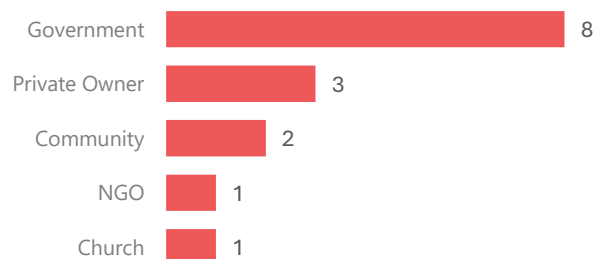
teachers were reported, the average was 16. Of functional schools where the number of pupils was reported, the average was 588, meaning the average number of pupils per teacher was 37.

CHART 12: TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES ASSESSED



Source: Primary data - quantitative facilities assessment.

CHART 13: REPORTED OWNERSHIP OF EDUCATION FACILITIES

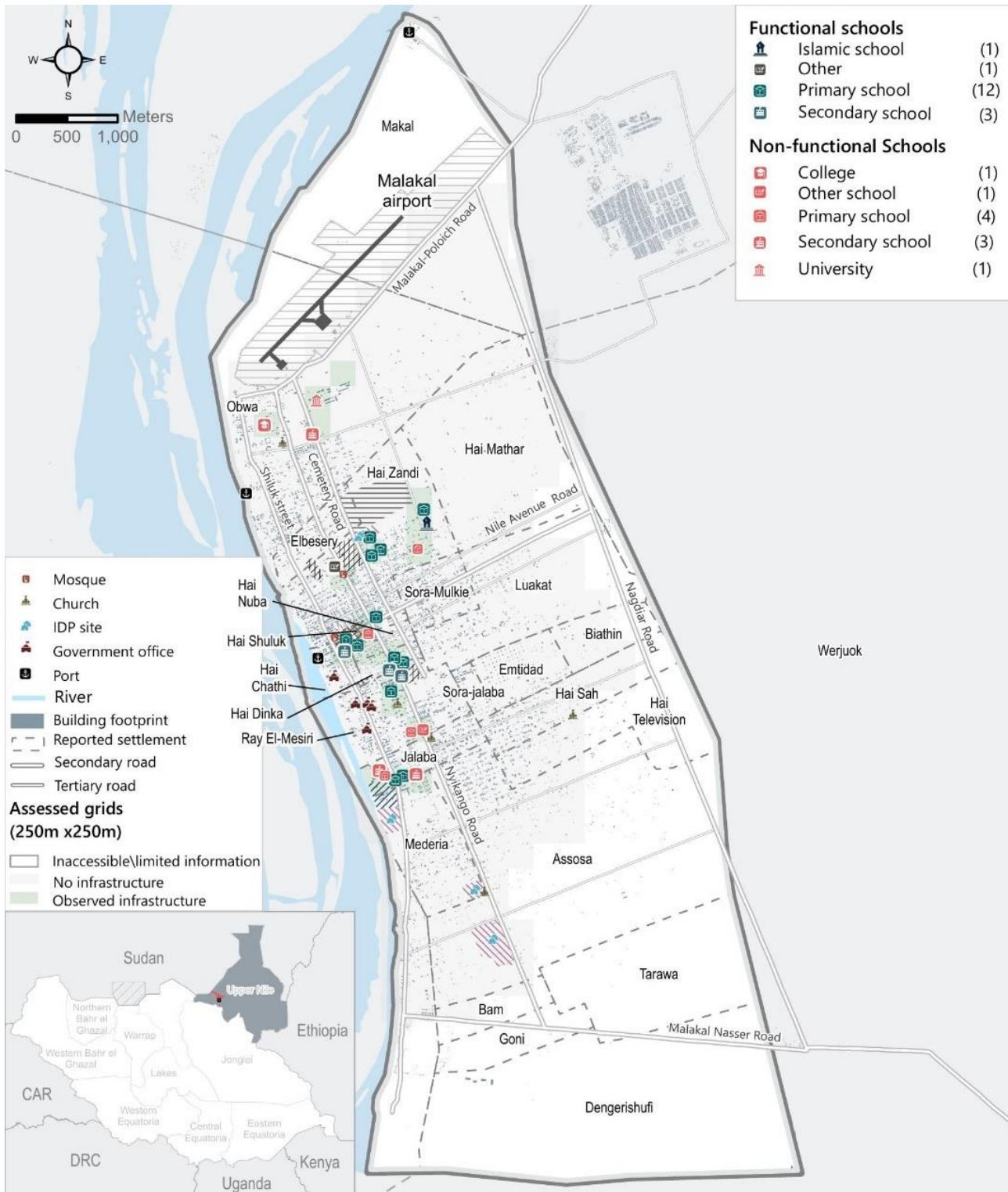


Source: Primary data - quantitative facilities assessment.

⁴¹ South Sudan Livelihood Zone Map. (2018, November). FEWS NET. [Link](#).

⁴² Tappis, H., Doocy, S., Paul, A., & Funna, S. (2013). Food security and development in South Sudan: A call to action. *Public Health Nutrition*, 16(9), 1631–1636. [Link](#).

⁴³ Coping with Economic Hardships. (2024). REACH. [Link](#) tbc.

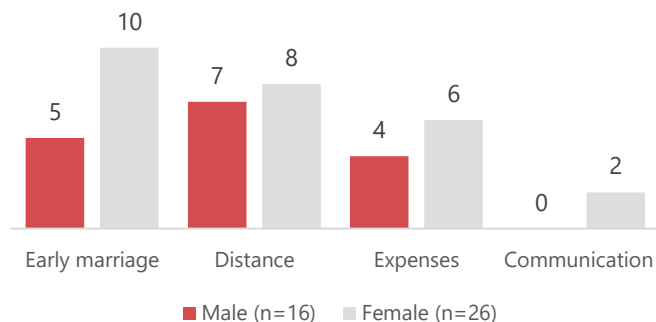


Map 9: Locations of education facilities in Malakal Town. Source: Primary data – quantitative facilities assessment

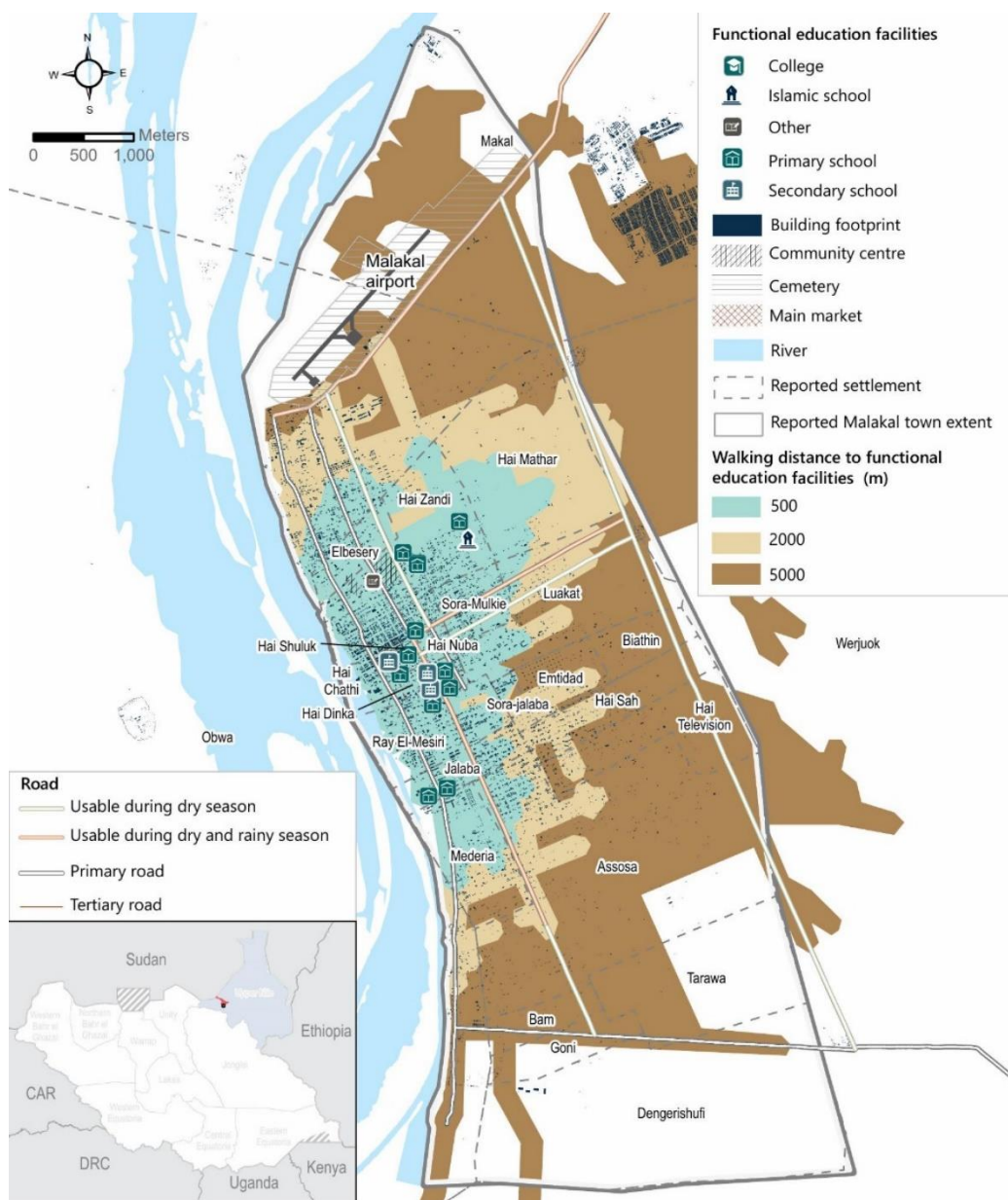
Dropouts were reportedly common, particularly for girls, with early marriage and distance to the school most frequently cited as reasons, as per Chart 14. This supports findings from the ISNA (2023) report on Malakal Town, which reported that 27% of HHs with children under 18 reported having children in their HH who had dropped out of school. However, the ISNA found that of this group, 60% of HHs reported unaffordable school fees were the reason for drop-out, while 17% cited early marriage as the cause.

As shown in Map 10, the majority of Malakal Town is located within 500 meters of a school, though there is a lack of coverage for communities living close to the airport, who would have to walk 2 km (roughly 20-30 minutes) to reach a school, and those in the southern neighbourhoods of Assosa and Bam, who would have to walk 5 km to reach a school (roughly 50-80 minutes). Several FGD participants described that children and teachers may struggle to reach school in the rainy season, due to muddy roads.

CHART 14: REASONS FOR SCHOOL DROPOUT

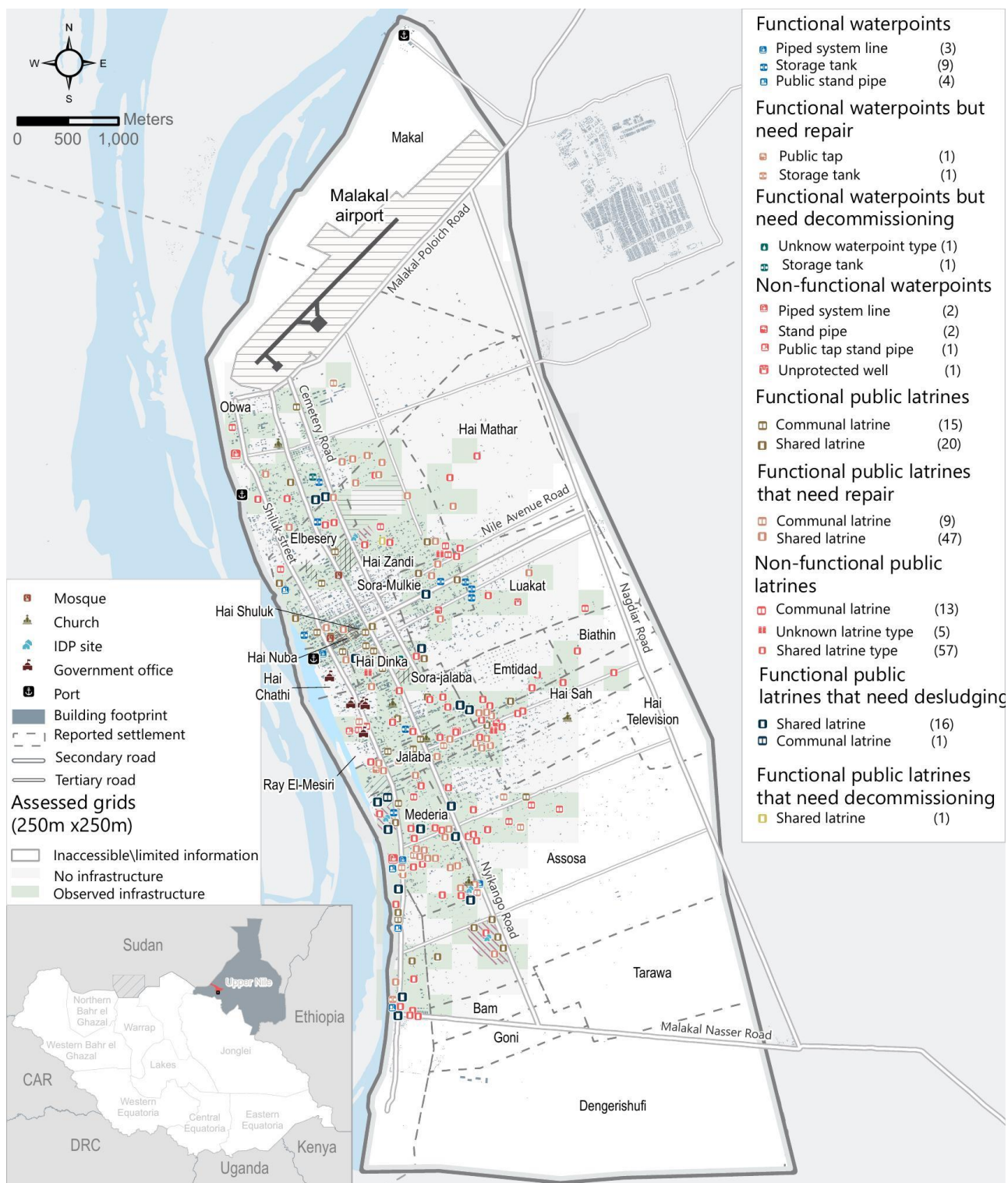


Source: Primary data - quantitative facilities assessment.



Map 10: Distance to education facilities. Source: Primary Data Collection – Quantitative Facilities Assessment

4.2 Water and Sanitation



Map 11: Locations of sanitation facilities in Malakal Town. Source: Primary data – quantitative facilities assessment

Through the quantitative facilities assessment, the research team identified 26 waterpoints in Malakal Town, of which 20 were reportedly functional, (see Map 11). They also identified 193 latrines, of which only 109 were functional. Of the 84 non-functional latrines, 71% were reported to be non-functional due to damage from the conflict, compared to only 5% which were non-functional due to damage from normal use (see Chart 17). Out of the functioning latrines, 61% of latrines were either full or almost full, 63% did not have lockable doors, and only 44% of latrines were segregated.

While the quantitative assessment found that the majority of both waterpoints and latrines were reportedly owned by the community

as per Chart 15 and 16, some key informants in qualitative interviews identified NGOs as the actor primarily maintaining latrines.

'Flooding causes the latrines to break, and the NGOs come in and repair' – Key informant

Moreover, according to the ISNA report on Malakal Town (2023), 10% of HHs defecated in the open. Of those who reported they defecate in the open, the majority were women (60%). Furthermore,

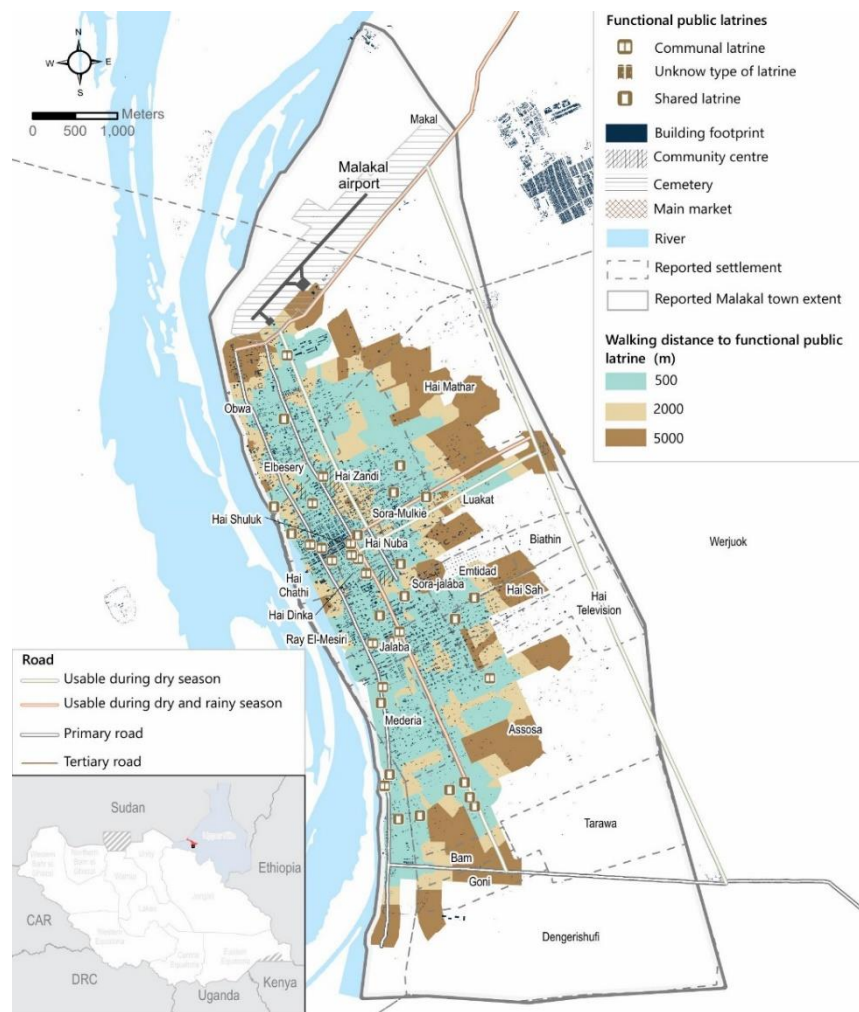
in almost 2/3 of households with children under 5, children were reported to defecate in the open.⁴⁴

As seen in maps 12 and 13, there is a concentration of latrines and waterpoints close to the city centre and alongside the river, supporting findings from FGDs which suggest that communities living on the outskirts of the city need to walk long distances to access these essential services. According to the ISNA report on Malakal Town (2023), 43% of households take 30 minutes to 1 hour to reach their main water source, 36% take less than 30 minutes, 16% require one hour to less than half a day.

CHART 15: REPORTED OWNERSHIP OF WATERPOINTS (N=20)

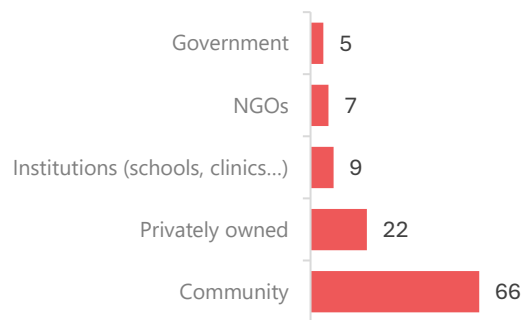


Source: Primary data - quantitative facilities assessment.



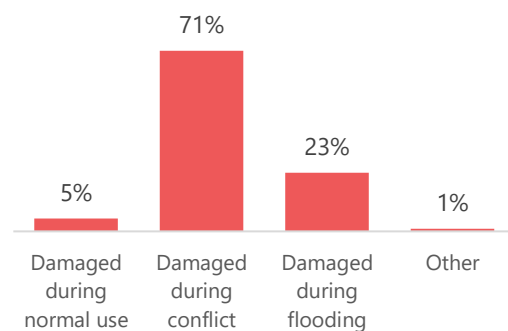
Map 12: Distance from latrines. Source: Quantitative facilities assessment

CHART 16: REPORTED OWNERSHIP OF LATRINES (N=109)



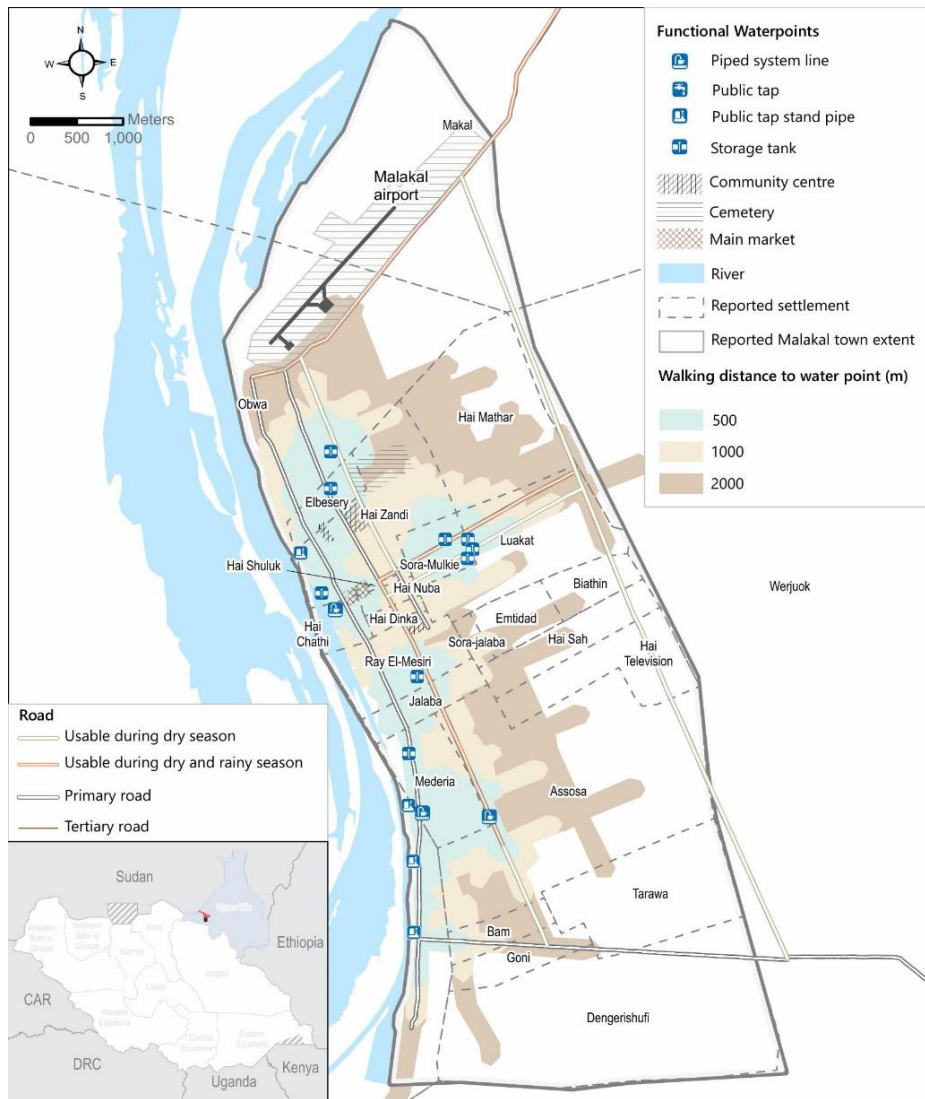
Source: Primary data - quantitative facilities assessment.

CHART 17: REPORTED REASONS FOR LATRINES NOT FUNCTIONING



Source: Primary data - quantitative facilities assessment.

⁴⁴ Malakal County Inter Sectoral Needs Assessment. (2023). IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. [Link](#). The data was exclusively collected from those within Malakal Town, thus is highly relevant to this assessment.



Map 13: Distance from waterpoints. Source: Quantitative facilities assessment

4.3 Health

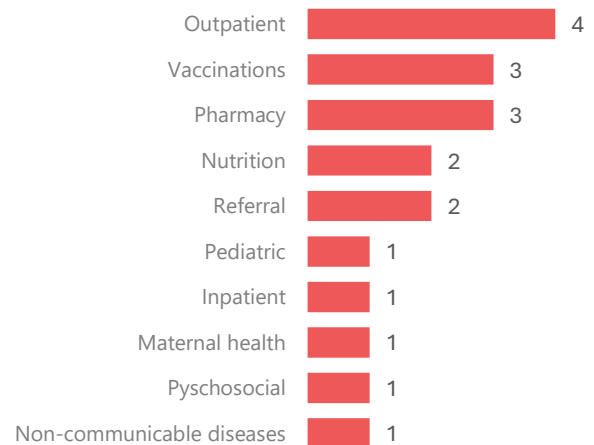
Map 14 shows the 11 health facilities that were identified by the research team, of which 4 were non-functional due to damage that reportedly occurred during the Civil War. The functional facilities were 2 health centres, 1 hospital, 3 mobile clinics, and 1 referral health centre. As shown in Map 12, these facilities are concentrated in the town centre, with 2 mobile clinics in the south, close to Bulukat Transit Centre.

The most common services offered at these facilities were outpatient, vaccinations, and pharmacy, as per Chart 18. Out of the 7 functional health facilities, 5 were public, and 2 were private.

When key informants for health facilities were asked about the challenges they faced, they reported financial and staff-related issues, such as lack of power, lack of water, and lack of medicines.

In the ISNA report on Malakal Town (2023), 66% of households had a household member of their household was unable to access healthcare when needed (of the household members that couldn't access healthcare, 78% were female members, and 22% were male members).⁴⁵ According to the Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRF), Malakal County has only 0.08 Primary Healthcare Units

CHART 18: REPORTED SERVICES BY NUMBER OF FACILITIES PROVIDING SERVICE



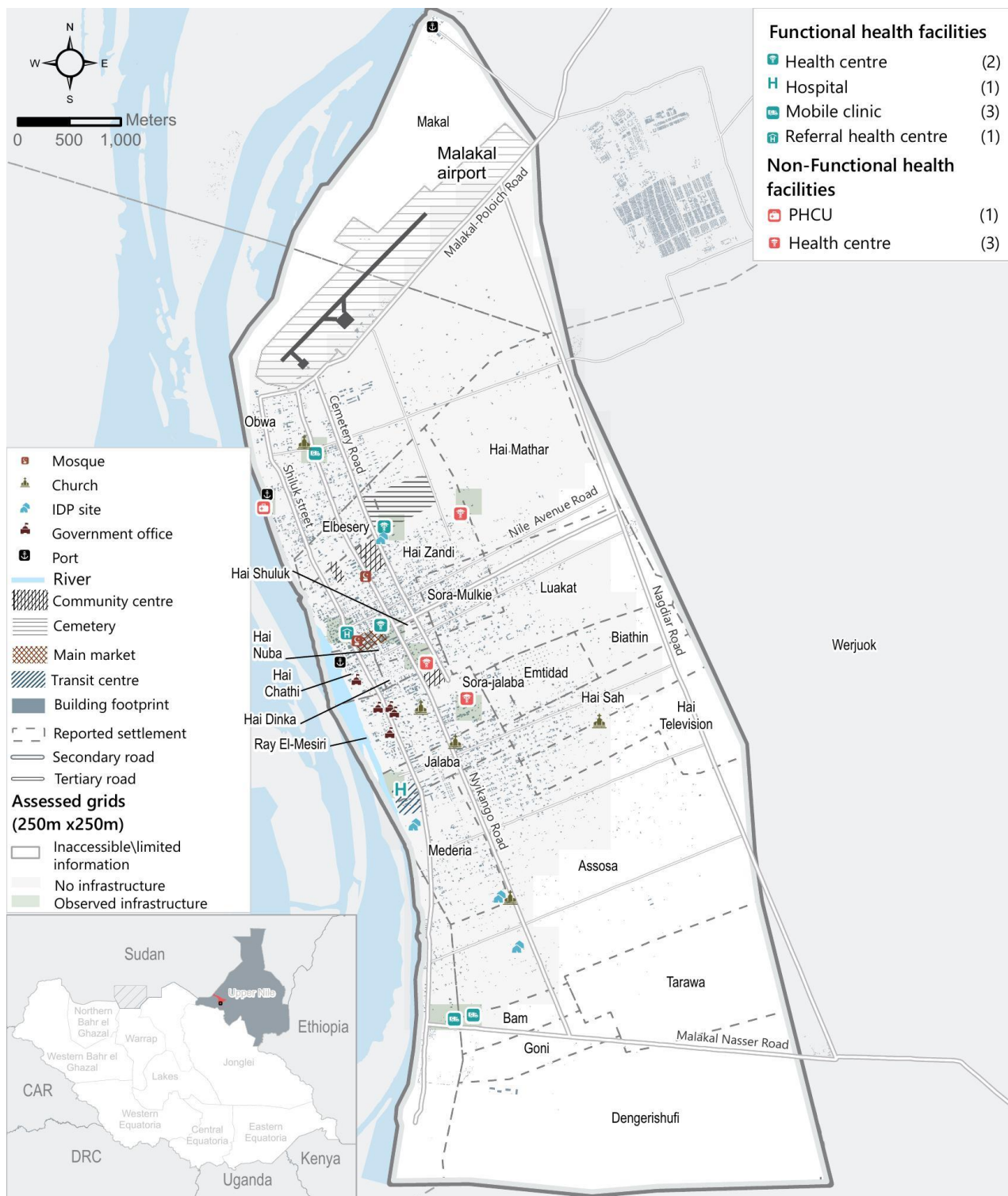
Source: Primary data - quantitative facilities assessment.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

(PHCUs) per 15,000 people, meaning it ranks as the lowest ratio of PHCUs per person in the country.⁴⁶

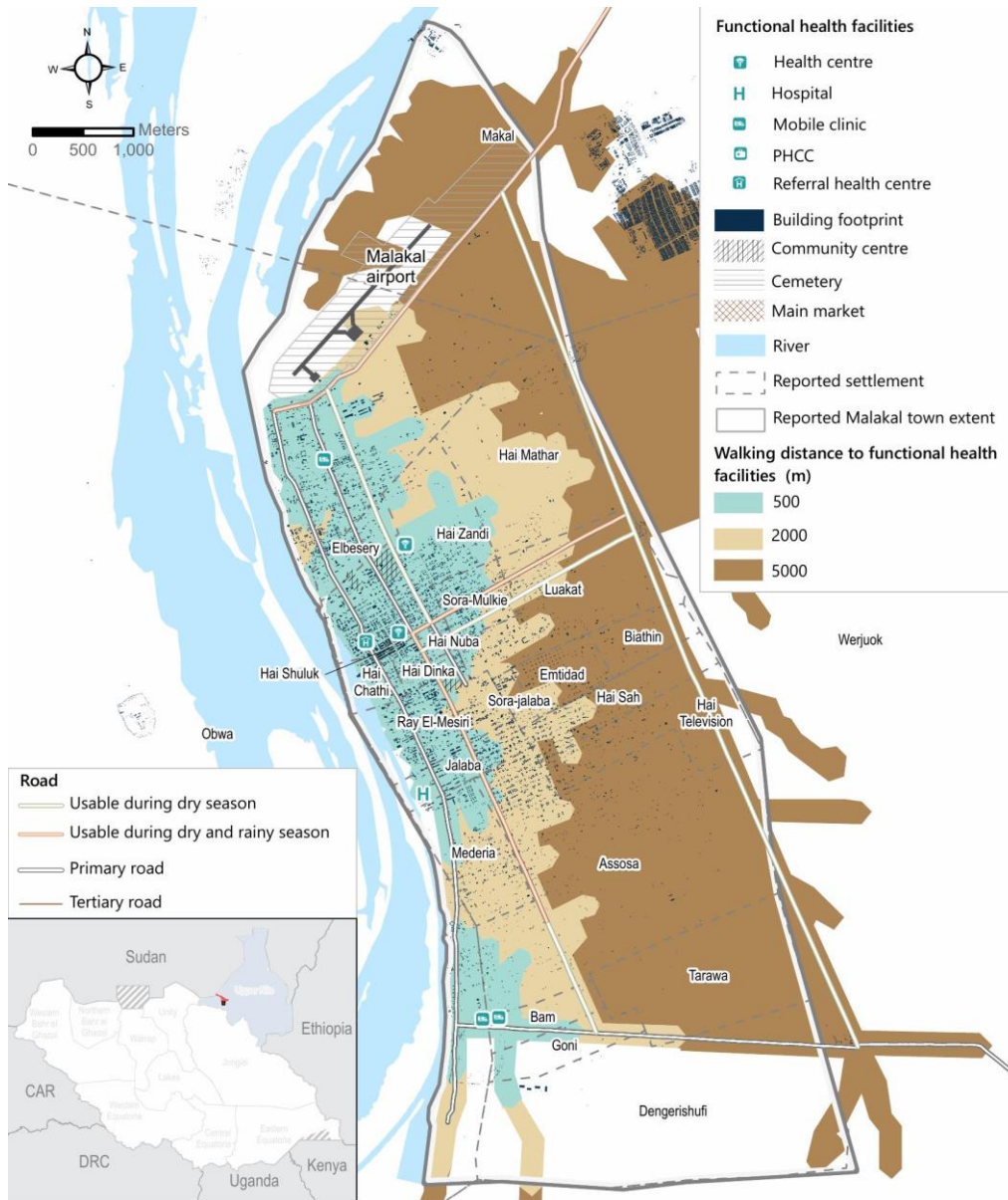
As seen in Map 15, the majority of buildings are within a 500m walk (roughly 5-8 minutes) to a health facility, though those who live on

the outskirts of the city face a longer walk of 2000m (roughly 20-30 minutes). This may pose a problem both for elderly and disabled people, in particular during heatwaves, where Malakal Town can reach temperatures in the mid-40s°C.



Map 14: Locations of health facilities. Source: Primary data - quantitative facilities assessment

⁴⁶ Malakal County, Upper Nile State. (2023). Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility. [Link](#).



Map 15: Distance from health facilities. Source: Primary Data - quantitative facilities assessment

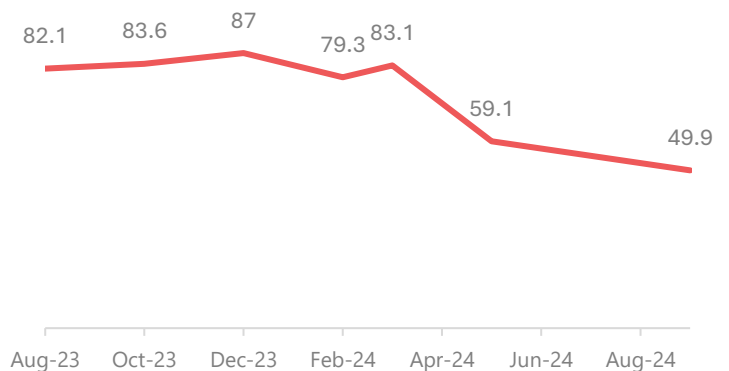
4.4 Markets

There is one main market in Malakal which is divided into three sections, two for food items, and one for non-food items. This main market then reportedly supplies smaller markets and stalls, though only 1 of these smaller markets was reported as functional.

As shown in Map 16, the main market is in Hai Shilluk, and the smaller market is to the east, between Sora-Mulkie and Luakat. For those in the centre of Malakal Town, the markets are only a short walk of 5-10 minutes. Though for those in the south and towards the outskirts, the walk to one of the two functioning markets is considerably longer. However, the research team observed small stalls throughout the town selling goods such as vegetables, fruit, and bread, which likely service these communities.

Findings from FGDs and KIIs suggest that the **markets are functional, though face a number of significant problems,**

CHART 21: JMMI MARKET FUNCTIONALITY SCORES FOR MALAKAL TOWN

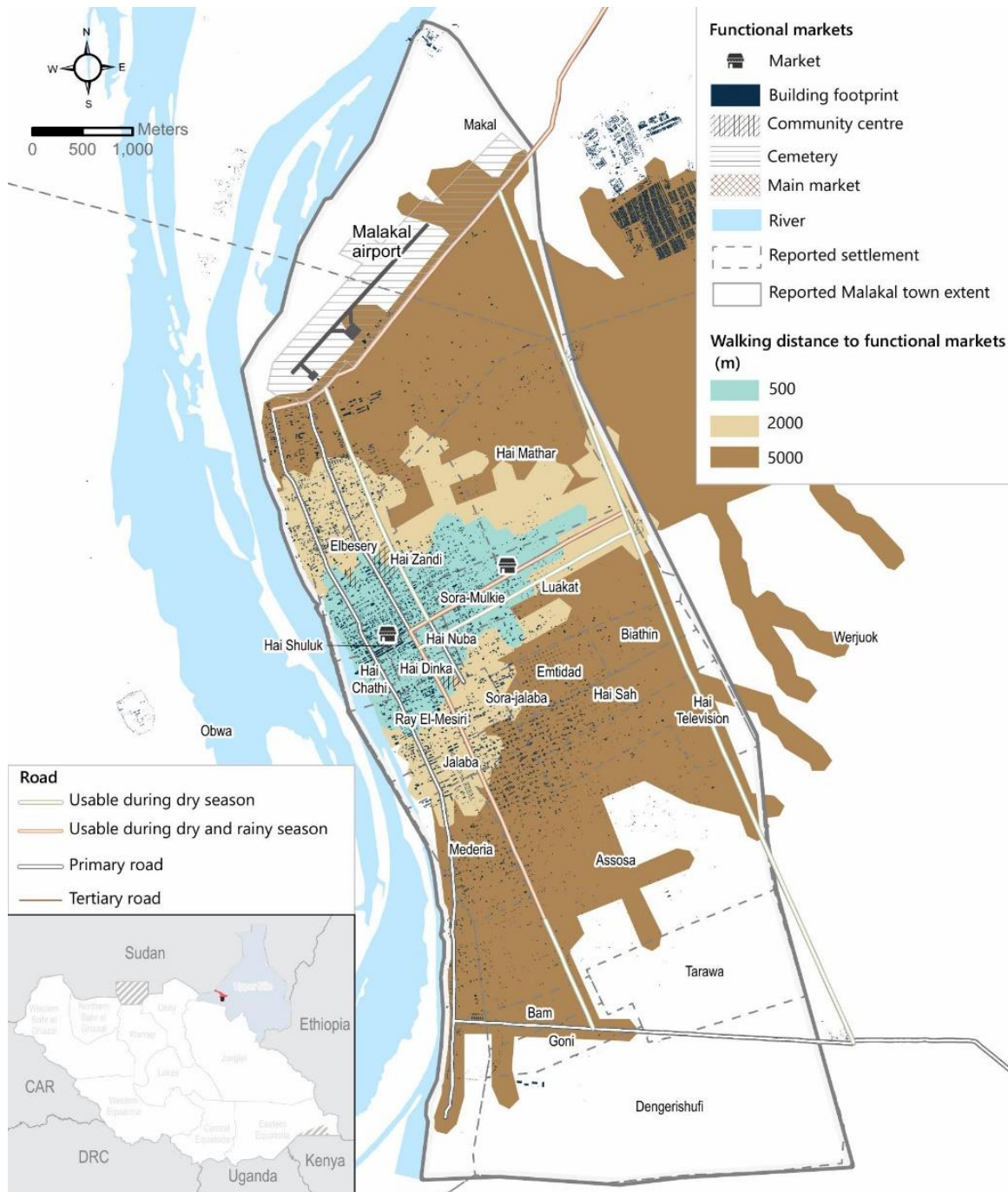


Source: South Sudan JMMI REACH & Cash Working Group 2024.

particularly in regards to the recent economic crisis. This assertion is supported by findings from the Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMML) Market Functionality Score (MFS), which captures data on different dimensions of market functionality. Its weighting is as follows: Accessibility (physical access, social access, safety/security) 25%; availability of core items 30%; affordability (financial access, price volatility) 15%; resilience (supply chains, variety of routes, vulnerability to disruption) 20%; and infrastructure (secure storage facilities) 10%. This metric shows that Malakal has decreased functionality from 82.1 in August 2023⁴⁷ to 50 in September 2024,⁴⁸ (see Chart 21). According to REACH, this drop is primarily due to a

70% reduction in its resilience score, 50% reduction in its accessibility score, and 30% decrease in its availability score. Affordability fell by 15%, while infrastructure remained the same.

Many participants reported that **markets face challenges functioning in rainy season**, primarily due to difficulties of transporting goods to Malakal. The market trader explained that the roads into, out of, and around Malakal are less accessible during rainy season due to rain and increased criminal activity, meaning there are fewer goods in Malakal. Second, significant inflation in South Sudan, in part due to the disruption of oil production since the start of the Sudan war in April 2023 has resulted in the cost of the



Map 16: Locations of, and distances to, markets. Source: Primary Data Collection – Quantitative Facilities Assessment

⁴⁷ South Sudan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative Factsheet. (August 2023). REACH. [Link](#).

⁴⁸ South Sudan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative Factsheet. (September 2024). REACH. [Link](#).

minimum-expenditure food basket rising from 126,800 SSP in August 2023 to 466,000 SSP in September 2024, an increase of 222% (see Chart 22).⁴⁹ Several participants reported that the economic crisis has prevented them from buying goods.

'If you go to the market intending to buy meat, you will be surprised by the tripling of the prices and you end up buying vegetables' – FGD participant (female, returnee)

Moreover, before the Sudan War began in 2023, Malakal Town was supplied both from Sudan as well as from southern South Sudan

(mostly Juba).⁵⁰ According to the market trader, since the outbreak of war, fewer products reach Malakal, and those that do have significantly higher prices as they are shipped from Juba. Indeed, a report by the Rift Valley Institute found that significant food supply chains supplying northern South Sudan had been abruptly cut off due to the Sudan War, with significant consequences for the region's food security,⁵¹ while FEWS NET found that sorghum imports in April 2024 were down 78% from a five-year average.⁵² Meanwhile REACH's 2024 Economic Hardships Assessment found that 79% of households in Malakal Town experienced less diversity in types of food products available at the market in July 2024 compared to January 2024.⁵³ Third, community members explained that the availability of non-food items at the market has decreased, in particular clothing.

'In the market, we are facing challenges of clothes. The clothing in the market is not good enough. New clothes can be 70,000 SSP and above. And second-hand clothes can be from 35,000 SSP. So, there's not enough clothing in the market' – FGD participant (male, IDP)

In general, several participants stated that markets' functionality had declined over time, particularly following the 2013 crisis, the Sudan War, and the 2023–24 economic crisis.

'10 years back, the markets were functioning well. The ferries from the north used to bring a lot of goods into Malakal market. But now, the

goods available in the market are few and very expensive' – FGD participant (female, Malakal Town resident)

According to FGD participants and market vendors, the market area is only dangerous at nighttime, which is supported by a number of accounts saying that criminals only operate at night. During the day, therefore, communities can reportedly visit the market without fear of attacks from criminals.

'The market is ok during the day. But when the sun sets you have to hurry and get home early, else your commodities will be robbed from you by a group of criminals' – FGD participant (male, IDP)

While most community members reported that the markets are only managed by the Government, the market trader provided more specific information:

'The Trader's Union sees that the market has good availability. Then the Union will come together and discuss what needs to be brought in. The City Council tries to keep law and order. They talk to the traders and try to maintain good law and order between them' – Key informant (Market trader)

CHART 22: COST IN SSP OF MINIMUM-EXPENDITURE FOOD BASKET IN MALAKAL TOWN



Source: REACH and Cash Working Group, JMMI Dashboard 2024.

4.5 Service Provision Through Aid

Charts 19 and 20, the data for which are taken from REACH's 2024 Coping with Economic Hardships assessment, show that out of nine possible types of assistance, **100% of households in Malakal Town listed food assistance as an expected need in the future**, while 98% of households listed that higher food expenses were the reason for increased assistance needs. However, the study found that 51% of households in Malakal Town did not understand application procedures for accessing assistance.⁵⁴

Findings from FGDs and KIs suggest that access to services may differ between groups in Malakal, mainly by displacement status. In FGDs with Malakal Town residents as well as with returnees, some community members reported that IDPs in the PoC camp and returnees/refugees in Bulukat Transit Centre are prioritised for aid distribution.

'There is unequal distribution of services because most of the infrastructure is being funded by NGOs... The better hospital where everyone is referred to in Malakal is managed by NGOs, and is found in the PoC... The NGOs mostly target those in the POC and in the transit site with services' – FGD participant (female, returnee)

CHART 19: REASONS FOR INCREASED ASSISTANCE NEEDS (% OF HHS IN MALAKAL TOWN)



Source: Coping With Economic Hardships REACH 2024.

⁴⁹ South Sudan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative Dashboard. (2024). [Link](#).

⁵⁰ Majok, J. (2024). War and the Borderland: Northern Bahr el-Ghazal during the Sudan Conflict. *Rift Valley Institute*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² South Sudan Food Security Outlook Update. (April 2024). FEWS NET. [Link](#).

⁵³ Coping with Economic Hardships. (2024). REACH. [Link](#) tbc.

⁵⁴ Coping with Economic Hardships. (2024). REACH. [Link](#) tbc.

This was supported by the statement of an aid worker, who noted that aid had been distributed unevenly, without taking into consideration the needs of different groups.

'Sometimes the humanitarian organisations look at the returnees and give them food and medicine, but this means the returnees are receiving hate. As when you look at the situation of citizens in Malakal town, the situation is very bad, people are living in hardship' – Aid worker

This appears to have led to tension between communities, with a key informant alleging that there have been incidents in which residents of Malakal Town have reportedly stolen from returnees/refugees from Sudan who reside in the Bulukat Transit Centre.

'The returnees from Khartoum came and found that the situation here is already bad. Therefore it worsened very much, because when they came to the market, they took all the produce and there wasn't enough left for us. There was competition for available sources such as waterpoints, the lines were very long' – FGD participant (male, Malakal Town resident)

The arrival of returnees therefore may have put a strain on accessibility and availability of goods and services, potentially resulting in increased social tensions. Indeed, the lack of food was described by one key informant as leading directly to conflict:

'The lack of food is a problem which is breeding conflict, because one group wants to steal from the other' – Key informant

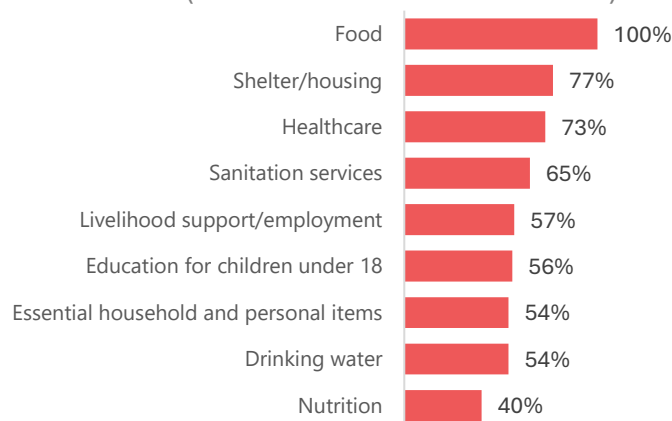
A key informant cited how the lack of conflict sensitivity in NGO programming had directly led to disputes between groups. Such findings support earlier research by the CSRF, which found that Malakal Town residents perceived that PoC residents had

disproportionate access to services, resulting in tensions between groups.⁵⁵

"In the PoC, the NGOs were not very conflict sensitive. Everyone was put in the same area with one waterpoint between them. But there was a fight... That conflict escalated to the block, and it also involved men. It became so chaotic and violent' – Key informant

Community members described how services were sometimes more difficult to access in the rainy season. For example, one FGD participant described how the muddy roads also hindered emergency cases from accessing hospitals, and also that food distribution suffers during the rainy season, as humanitarian actors struggle to get food supplies into Malakal.

CHART 20: TYPE OF ASSISTANCE NEEDED IN FUTURE (% OF HHS IN MALAKAL TOWN)



Source: Coping With Economic Hardships REACH 2024.

6. Governance and Security

6.1 Security Management

According to FGD participants and key informants, **the police were responsible for managing security**. However, secondary sources describe that local government actors face a variety of challenges, primarily financial challenges manifesting in a lack of funding, salaries, and equipment.⁵⁶

'Our only hope of safety is with the Government and police; they are responsible for protecting us all. But in our community, we protect ourselves alone. When thieves attack a home at night, everyone yells to attract the attention of the entire neighbourhood. We gather ourselves to fight off the attack' – FGD participant (male, IDP)

Moreover, the reported root cause of criminal activities was widespread unemployment,⁵⁷ which may be challenging for local government to address, particularly during an economic crisis.

In some places, other groups had formed to support security management. In Bulukat Transit Centre, for instance, one FGD

participant stated that they rely only on a 'camp management committee to protect them from criminal activities at night'.

Eyeradio reported in October 2024 that the Government appears to be taking measures to stabilize the security situation, with Upper Nile State Governor relocating his cabinet from Juba to Malakal in June.⁵⁸

Participants described three different ways that they believed that security policies could be improved. First, through improving access to livelihoods, thus providing criminals an alternative avenue to pursue. Second, through ensuring adequate representation in the police. Third, by empowering women and ensuring women's representation in leadership positions.

⁵⁵ Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: UNMISS PoC Sites Transition: Bentiu, Unity State and Malakal, Upper Nile State. (2021, March). Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility. [Link](#).

⁵⁶ See Sudans Post. (2024, September 5). South Sudan lawmaker proposes plan to clear 10-month salary arrears. *Sudans Post*. [Link](#). & Idris, I. (2017). *Local Governance in South Sudan: Overview*. Department for International Development. [Link](#).

⁵⁷ The causal relationship between unemployment and gangs is well researched. See, for example, Hagan, J. (1993). The Social Embeddedness of Crime and Unemployment. *Criminology*, 31(4), 465–491. [Link](#). & Jackson, P. I. (1991). Crime, youth gangs, and urban transition: The social dislocations of postindustrial economic development. *Justice Quarterly*, 8(3), 379–397. [Link](#).

⁵⁸ Lasubaa, M. (2024, October 8). Upper Nile: Occupants of public buildings to face eviction. *Eye Radio*. [Link](#).

6.2 Infrastructure Maintenance

In Malakal Town, findings from quantitative data collection suggest that the most common bodies who carry out repairs to waterpoints and latrines are the government, NGOs, and the community. Indeed, a local government official in a qualitative interview described how the government works with NGOs to carry out repairs:

'The Government is partnering with UNDP to rehabilitate broken latrines, open drainage channels and provide shelter to IDPs. The biggest challenge the Government is finding is lack of capacity and funds to renovate most of the infrastructure destroyed during the war and provision of services to its citizens' – Key informant (Local government official)

6.3 Conflict Trends

'Insecurity is the most serious issue in Malakal' – FGD participant

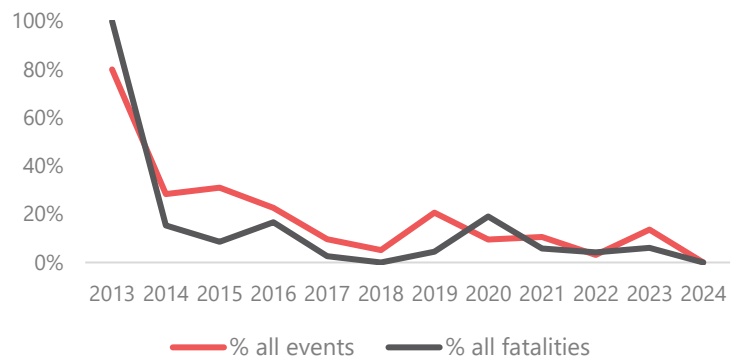
While groups in Malakal have a long history of peaceful coexistence and interdependence, there has been a significant deterioration of relationships dating back to displacement during the Second Sudanese Civil War 1983-2005.⁵⁹ **Violence in Malakal Town has reportedly often fallen along this divide.**⁶⁰

The South Sudanese Civil War 2013-2018 marked substantial violence in Malakal County. As seen in charts 24 and 25, violent events and fatalities peaked in Malakal County in 2014, though declined to a low in 2018, the year the war officially ended. Notably, as seen in chart 24, 100% of fatalities reported in Upper Nile State in 2013 took place in Malakal County, indicating it was a regional hotspot for violence at the beginning of the War. Indeed, Malakal County is often described as a key point of contention during the Civil War, with CSRF estimating that control of Malakal Town changed hands several times during this period, resulting in significant destruction of the city.⁶¹ While violent events and fatalities have declined since 2013-14, there was a small peak in 2019 and 2020, which may correspond to earlier findings regarding destruction of property that may have occurred during these years, as seen in Section 2 Geographic Conditions: Settlement Destruction.

Land disputes were often described by FGD participants and key informants as a source of conflict, with disputes over both specific plots of land or buildings, as well as larger regions of land. For example, the issue of ownership of Malakal Town is still reportedly disputed and can cause tensions even at the national level.⁶² In January 2022, an agreement was reportedly reached over the boundary dispute in Malakal Town, in which parties committed to respecting the communal boundaries that existed during British colonial rule in 1956.⁶³

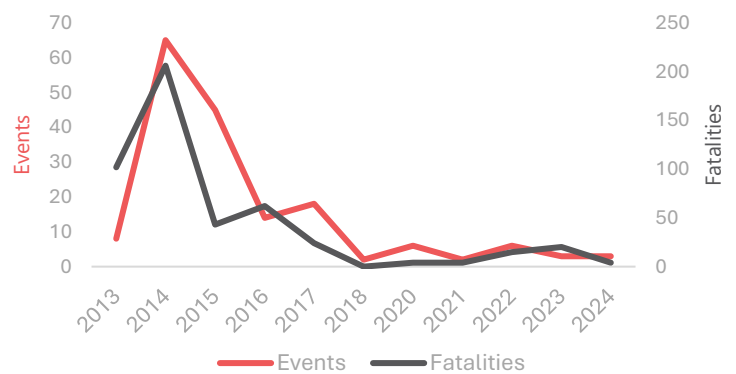
The PoC site was also frequently referenced as a significant source of tension by key informants and FGD participants.⁶⁴ Indeed, secondary sources describe several recent significant events at the PoC. These include February 2016, when the PoC site was

CHART 24: REPORTS OF VIOLENT EVENTS AND FATALITIES IN MALAKAL COUNTY (AS % OF UPPER NILE STATE)



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) 2024.

CHART 25: REPORTS OF VIOLENT EVENTS AND FATALITIES IN MALAKAL COUNTY



Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) 2024.

⁵⁹ Caragounis, V. (2022). *Voices on the Conflict in Malakal*. PAX Protection of Civilians. [Link](#)

⁶⁰ Caragounis, V. (2022). *Voices on the Conflict in Malakal*. PAX Protection of Civilians. Pg. 12. [Link](#). & Craze, J. (2019). *Displaced & Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's civil war 2014-19*. Small Arms Survey. Pg.16. [Link](#).

⁶¹ *Malakal County, Upper Nile State*. (2023). CSRF. [Link](#).

⁶² Collier, P. P. (2018). *The Struggle for South Sudan: Challenges of Security and State Formation* (D. L. B. D. Kuol & S. Logan, Eds.). I.B. Tauris. Pg .vii. [Link](#).

⁶³ *South Sudan's Splintered Opposition: Preventing More Conflict*. (2022). International Crisis Group. [Link](#).

⁶⁴ *Malakal County, Upper Nile State*. (2023). CSRF. [Link](#).

attacked⁶⁵ resulting in 35% of shelters being burned down,⁶⁶ and 2023, when fighting erupted again between communities.⁶⁷

According to an aid worker, as well as local news, both of these incidents resulted in large numbers of IDPs moving back to Malakal Town.⁶⁸ Most recently, another clash in the PoC site between communities led to the death of several people in May-June 2024.⁶⁹

Yet, several FGD participants and key informants stated that the situation in Malakal is currently 'stable' or 'calm' due to an absence of violence between groups. Indeed, one community member noted that insecurity due to criminals is now paramount.

6.4 Crime Trends

The issue of criminals in Malakal Town has increased in recent years. The criminals reportedly pose a particular threat to community members at nighttime within the town, though also target people leaving the town, such as to collect wood or tend to their farm:

'You don't move at night if you don't want to face them. They stage robberies in dark places and ask you 'between your life and your phone, choose one'' – FGD participant (male, returnee)

'There are criminals in the bush that rob and kill people, especially people working in burning charcoal. They also target pedestrians on their way to their villages. So the roads leading out of Malakal to other counties are not safe' – FGD participant (female, Malakal Town resident)

6.5 Gendered Patterns of Insecurity

Women appear to suffer disproportionately as a result of insecurity in Malakal. According to the ISNA report on Malakal Town (2023), of the households whose members restrict their movements due to insecurity, 76% were female members. Moreover, 13% of HHs in Malakal Town had a member of their HH affected by a safety/security incident in the last 30 days. Of these, 60% were female.⁷⁰ The disproportionate impact of insecurity on women may be partly caused by the gender differences in livelihoods. For example, several FGD participants stated that firewood-collecting is mostly done by women, an activity which involves leaving the safety of the town to the woods further out.

6.6 Land Management and Disputes

Control over land is a salient issue for groups in Malakal Town, with several groups claiming that the land upon which it sits is part of their ancestral homeland.⁷²

'The major outcry has been land disputes . . . These discussions are very controversial. Neither are willing to give up. Before 2013, everyone lived here peacefully, so everyone does have a claim to [the land]', highlighting the difficulty in resolving these issues' – Aid worker

⁶⁵ 'If We Leave We are Killed': Lessons Learned from South Sudan Protection of Civilian Sites 2013-16. (2016). International Organization for Migration. [Link](#).

⁶⁶ Conflict Sensitivity Analysis: UNMISS PoC Sites Transition: Bentiu, Unity State and Malakal, Upper Nile State. (2021, March). Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility. [Link](#). & South Sudan: MSF condemns outrageous attack in UN protection site in Malakal. (2016, February 3). Medecins Sans Frontieres. [Link](#).

⁶⁷ Sengupta, T. (2023, June 25). 20 Dead In Clashes At U.N. Displacement Camp In South Sudan. *The Organization for World Peace*. [Link](#).

⁶⁸ South Sudan: MSF condemns outrageous attack in UN protection site in Malakal. (2016, March 6). Medecins Sans Frontieres. [Link](#).

'5 years ago the situation was bad and there was too much killing. But now it's only the criminals who are terrorising you. It was war before, and now it's only criminal activity' – FGD participant (female, IDP)

However, FGD participants and key informants also stated that conflicts are easy to escalate.

'If a disagreement happens in Malakal, it can turn violent . . . very quickly' – Key informant

Many community members reported that the criminals are indiscriminate in their targeting.

'When you have available items they are interested to steal, they do that. They don't mind [about your ethnicity or displacement status], they don't care' – FGD participant (male, returnee)

One aid worker claimed that what unites the criminals is survival:

'What unites them is the operation of getting something for survival. I believe that the interest of finding livelihood through robbing has made them united so they can protect one another' – Key informant (Aid worker)

'The women don't go deep into the forest because there's a risk of meeting the criminals, so they only go to the closer areas' – FGD participant (male, IDP)

While charcoal-burning was reported as being practiced by both men and women, several FGD participants reported the risks of this activity for women, such as one who stated that if women go to burn charcoal, they may be sexually assaulted by criminals. Indeed, the ISNA report on Malakal Town (2023) found that out of households who restrict their movement due to insecurity, 6% said this was due to the risk of sexual violence, of whom 83% were female.⁷¹

These territorial struggles can be traced back to the late 20th century, with violent contestations over land in Upper Nile throughout the Second Sudanese Civil War 1983-2005.⁷³ The period following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 brought further disputes, with several distinct rounds of violence between

⁶⁹ Sudan Tribune. (2024, May 31). *Deadly clashes in Malakal raise concerns ahead of Political Rally*. Sudan Tribune. [Link](#).

⁷⁰ Malakal County Inter Sectoral Needs Assessment. (2023). IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. [Link](#).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Craze, J. (2019). *Displaced and Immiserated: The Shilluk of Upper Nile in South Sudan's civil war, 2014–19*. Small Arms Survey. Pg.24. [Link](#).

⁷³ Ibid. Pg.133.

groups since then.⁷⁴ FGD participants cited violence in 2013, 2016, and 2023 as particular exacerbations of disputes over land.

Land allocation is regulated by the Government of South Sudan's (GoSS) Land Act 2009, though the de facto situation at the local level appears to have slight variations, such as an elevated role for traditional authorities.⁷⁵ According to the Land Act 2009,⁷⁶ traditional authorities (i.e. Chiefs and Headmen) may allocate customary land rights for residential, agricultural, forestry, and grazing purposes. For land over 250 acres, the allocation should be approved by the relevant state-level Ministry. Indeed, FGD participants and key informants reported that the Chief and the Ministry of Land and Housing play important roles in land allocation and demarcation.

According to local government officials, the land within Malakal Town is divided into plots, the size, class, and number of which are

determined by the Ministry of Housing. Subsequently, the land can be leased by the City Council or the Ministry of Housing to individuals or businesses. In contrast, the land surrounding Malakal Town is reportedly administered by the community through the Chief, who has the power to authorize the distribution of land.

Community members often described the importance of having formal documentation to prove their occupancy arrangements to the Government. Yet, the ISNA 2023 found that 87% of households in Malakal Town did not have formal written documentation for their housing.⁷⁷ Moreover, 10% of households are facing an ownership dispute, meaning these community members may face significant challenges in proving land ownership, if this documentation is essential to do so.⁷⁸

6.7 Justice Delivery Mechanisms

A variety of actors appear to play a role in justice delivery for both land and non-land disputes in Malakal. According to community members, these may include **the police, Governor, Chiefs, Land Office, Courts, and the City Council**. Chiefs in particular appear to play a significant role, and may be the first point of call for community members when resolving disputes or attempting to procure justice. Secondary sources corroborate the prominent role of Chiefs within local governance in South Sudan.⁷⁹

One FGD participant noted an alternative process for those who do not have documentation, in that former or current neighbours can testify as witnesses to ownership.

'Disputes in the communities are usually reported to the Chiefs. They sit with their council, to settle the matter. When they fail to settle the matter, they are then referred to court' – FGD participant (female, IDP)

Another community member, referring specifically to the process for land disputes, reported that the City Council is approached first, and may then refer cases to the Ministry of Land and Housing. Supporting these findings, the ISNA report on Malakal Town (2023) found that the most common responses for how households resolve problems related to housing, land, and property (HLP) were traditional courts (71%), community Chiefs (38%), and formal courts (10%).⁸⁰ Some FGD participants reported that they could not take advantage of Malakal Town's justice system because they could not afford the required payment.

7. Social Cohesion

7.1 Cohesion Between Groups

Findings suggest that social dynamics in Malakal are tense.

Individual land disputes can easily escalate, leading either to violence or to further fear and divisions between groups. Key informants and community members often expressed the view that these tensions take place along communal lines.

There [are disagreement between groups] in Malakal which come as a result of struggles over land... Small disagreements can escalate into a bigger fight' – FGD participant (female, Malakal Town resident)

'The land disputes have created mistrust between [groups]' – FGD participant (male, returnee)

Several FGD participants and key informants reported that **relationships between groups pre-2013 were good**, stating that Malakal 'was a melting pot of communities', and a 'vibrant city full of opportunities'. Many held the perspective that this had changed significantly.

'The conflict of 2013 was the beginning of all the chaos you can witness in the city... The war changed Malakal from the good city known before to the ruined town you see these days' – Key informant

However, other sources have traced communal violence and social tensions in Malakal back further, before South Sudan's independence in 2011.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Southern Sudan: Abuses on Both Sides in Upper Nile Clashes. (2011, April 19). Human Rights Watch. [Link](#).

⁷⁵ Van Leeuwen, M., Van De Kerkhof, M., & Van Leyensele, Y. (2018). Transforming land governance and strengthening the state in South Sudan. *African Affairs*, 117(467), 286–309. [Link](#).

⁷⁶ Land Act, Laws of Southern Sudan (2009). [Link](#).

⁷⁷ Malakal County Inter Sectoral Needs Assessment. (2023). IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. [Link](#).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Leonardi, C. (2013). *Dealing with government in South Sudan: Histories of chiefship, community & state* (Vol. 16). Boydell & Brewer Ltd. [Link](#).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Craze, J. (2013). Dividing lines: Grazing and conflict along the Sudan–South Sudan border. *Small Arms Survey*. Pg.134. [Link](#).

Despite Malakal currently experiencing a period of calm during the time of data collection and reporting (September-December 2024), **the absence of violence is not necessarily synonymous with the absence of social tensions.**⁸² One community member noted that purportedly peaceful relations in fact mask deeper problems. Supporting this notion, in June 2024 UNMISS described the situation in Malakal as 'calm yet fragile'.⁸³

'There is good relationship between different communities in Malakal, you will see that people can meet together during functions like independence celebrations, but deep inside people's hearts, there is fear, hatred, tension between tribes' – FGD participant (female, Malakal Town resident)

7.2 Role of Facilities in Social Cohesion

Findings suggest that there are a number of places in which different communities interact in Malakal Town, though their efficacy in building deep relationships may be questionable.

The Church in the Bulukat Transit Centre was reported to be helpful in promoting relationships between groups, particularly through cultural events where people from different tribes come together, including to practice traditional dances. The football field was also cited as helping to build relationships between groups, with one community member saying it was the 'only' community centre that truly brings people together. However, the relationships built through these social spaces may in fact be 'superficial', with one FGD participant describing how a relationship between a market trader and their customers can be 'friendly, but not a deep relationship'. Moreover, one aid worker was sceptical that community centres could overcome the deep tension between groups.

'We need to look at the root causes of the conflict... We need to not only bring different groups together for an event, because it is shallow peace. Are we doing the right things or are we just doing these because of the rapid implementation cycle, where we need to show results?' – Key informant (Aid worker)

8. Climate

8.1 Seasonality

As shown in Chart 26, the average temperature stays consistent between 30-31°C throughout the year, with a slight drop at the peak of the rainy season in July and August. The average precipitation, meanwhile, ranges from almost nil rain in December, January and February, to 94mm in August, which is relatively low compared to averages across South Sudan.⁸⁶

Social tensions may also exist based on displacement status, particularly in regard to returnees. One key informant reported that returnees do not feel welcome in Malakal Town, due to the disputes that come from when they re-claim their land or property once they return to South Sudan. Additionally, an aid worker described how the perceived disproportionality of aid spent on returnees in Bulukat Transit Centre has caused resentment against returnees, which is supported by earlier research.⁸⁴ That being said, 92% of households in the ISNA report on Malakal Town (2023) described the relationship between Malakal Town residents and displaced groups as 'good', reporting that there are frequent social and economic interactions, and sharing of assistance and resources.⁸⁵

Intermarriages were also cited by FGD participants as 'bringing peace', with one returnee FGD participant reporting that this is a crucial way for them to integrate into the local community. Though, FGD participant also provided examples demonstrating how intermarriages had seemingly fuelled further conflict between groups.

One FGD participant cited an NGO activity that had been seen as successful, in which a drama activity aimed at young children had effectively fostered relationships between groups.

'There was also a drama activity that was brought in by an NGO that aimed at creating different relationship between different tribes. They wanted everyone to live in peace, and it was effective... it was effective among the children' – FGD participant (female, returnee)

Although the annual precipitation peaks in August throughout South Sudan, the water levels rise throughout the rainy season and peak in October.⁸⁷ Therefore, the end of the rainy season may produce greater levels of displacement due to flooding.

⁸² Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press. [Link](#).

⁸³ Lasuba, M. (2024, June 7). Upper Nile's Malakal is calm but fragile, says UNMISS. *Eye Radio*. [Link](#).

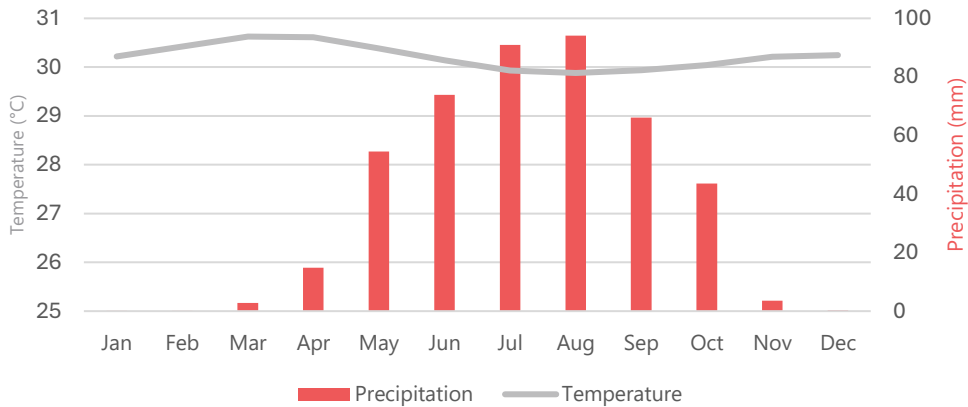
⁸⁴ *Influx of Returnees, Escalating Violence Thwarting Progress in Implementing South Sudan's Peace Accord, Special Representative Tells Security Council*. (2023, June 20). United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. [Link](#).

⁸⁵ *Malakal County Inter Sectoral Needs Assessment*. (2023). IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix. [Link](#).

⁸⁶ *South Sudan: Monthly Climate and Weather*. (2024). Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). [Link](#).

⁸⁷ *Floods in South Sudan*. (2022). International Crisis Group. [Link](#).

CHART 26: AVERAGE MONTHLY TEMPERATURE AND PRECIPITATION IN MALAKAL TOWN 2004-2024



Source: CHIRPS: Rainfall estimates [Dataset]. (2023). Climate Hazards Center. & ERA5-Land Daily Aggregated Climate Reanalysis [Dataset]. (2023). Earth Engine Data Catalogue.

8.2 Flooding

FGD participants and key informants reported that Malakal Town itself does not flood significantly during the rainy season, but that surrounding areas do, displacing communities who seek shelter in Malakal Town, which sits on high ground.

'Most communities that receive displacement to Malakal due to flooding are Dinka from Canal/Pigi and Fangak, and Nuer Canal/Pigi and Fangak. We also have Shilluk affected from other areas of Malakal' – Key informant (Aid worker)

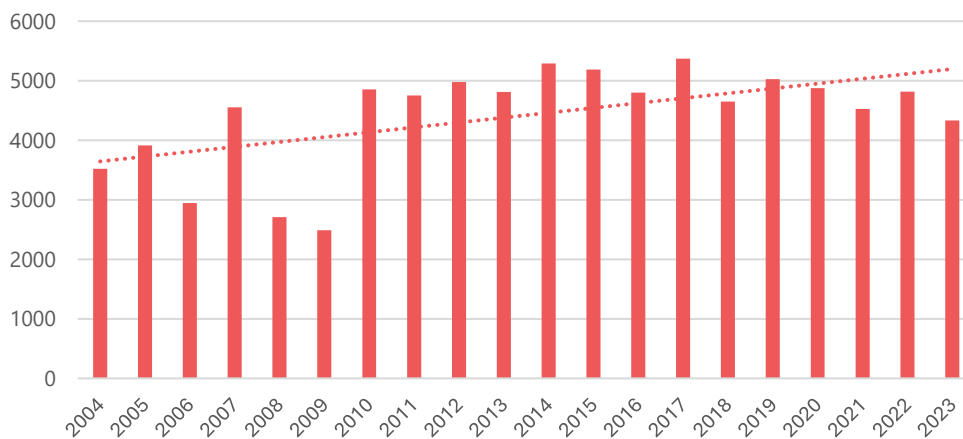
This finding is corroborated by data in Map 17, which shows that the areas surrounding Malakal Town along the White Nile flood frequently. Map 18, meanwhile, demonstrates the potential flood depth of a major flood with a 1% chance of occurring each year. In this, the majority of Malakal Town is likely to escape severe flooding, though areas along the White Nile, such as Canal-Pigi, are likely to be affected. Only one key informant reported flash floods in Malakal

Town, in April and May 2023, though stated they did not cause serious impact to the community. As seen in Chart 27, the average yearly precipitation has increased slightly in the last 20 years.

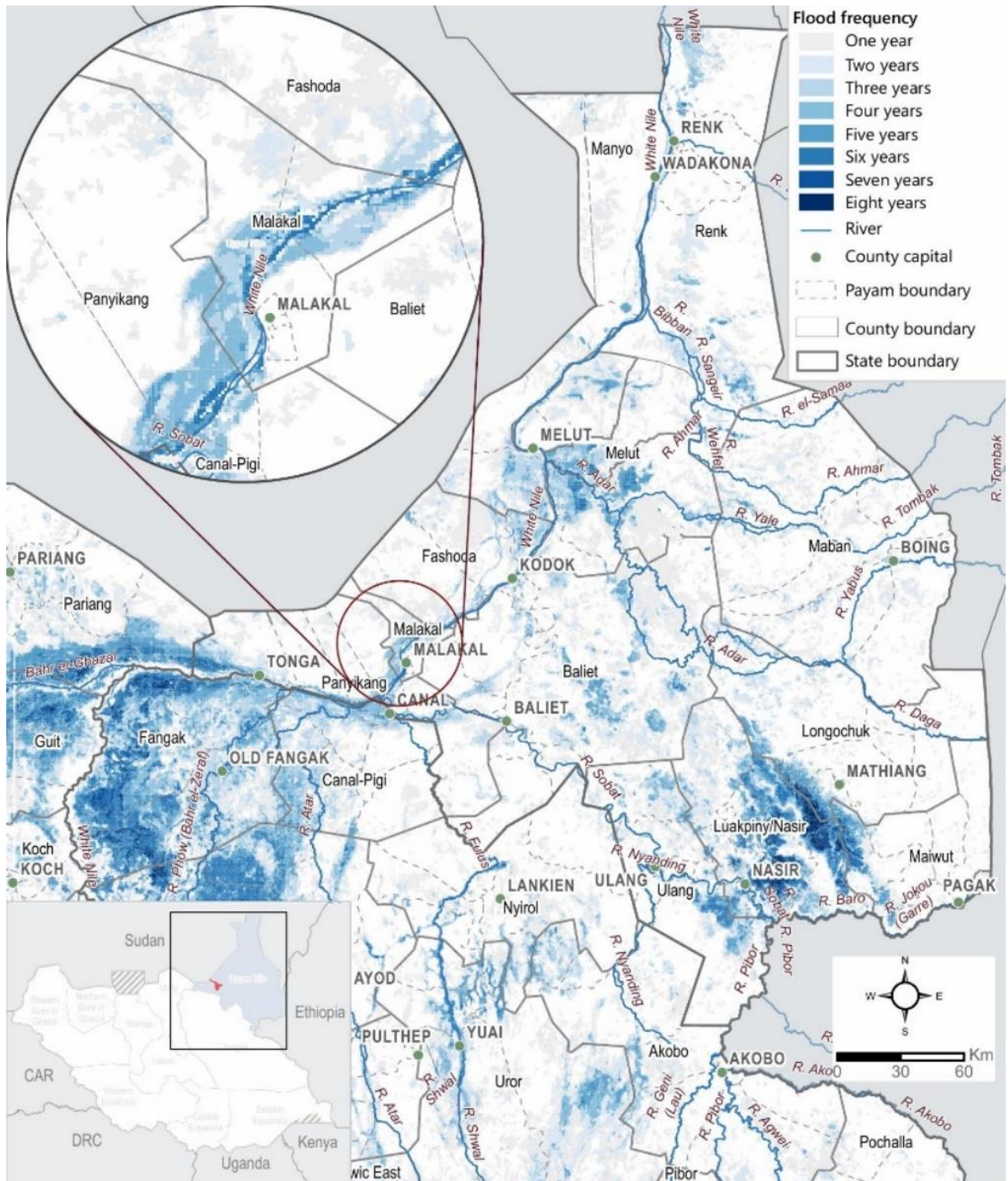
The rainy season can also prevent the community from accessing their livelihoods (farms, as well as collecting firewood, burning charcoal), as well as causing limited food supplies as a result of the roads becoming inaccessible. Given that one key informant noted that some of the roads in Malakal Town used to be tarmacked before the outbreak of conflict in 2013, the situation has deteriorated significantly.

While a key informant described how money had been used to try to improve the drainage system in Malakal, several other key informants reported that the drainage system was ineffective, meaning during the rainy season it's often too muddy to use the roads.

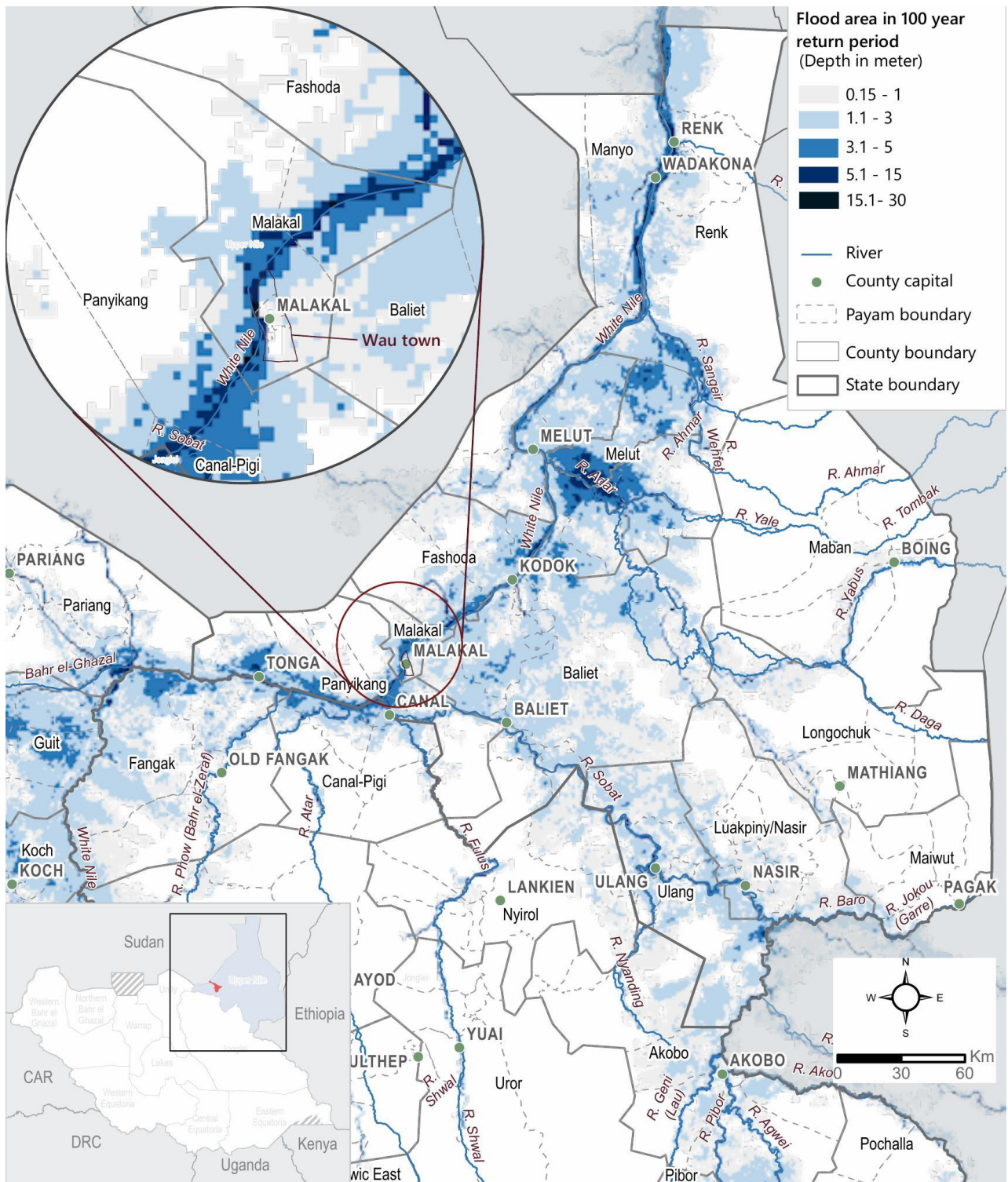
CHART 27: YEARLY PRECIPITATION (MM) IN MALAKAL TOWN (2004-2023)



Source: CHIRPS: Rainfall estimates [Dataset]. (2023). Climate Hazards Center.

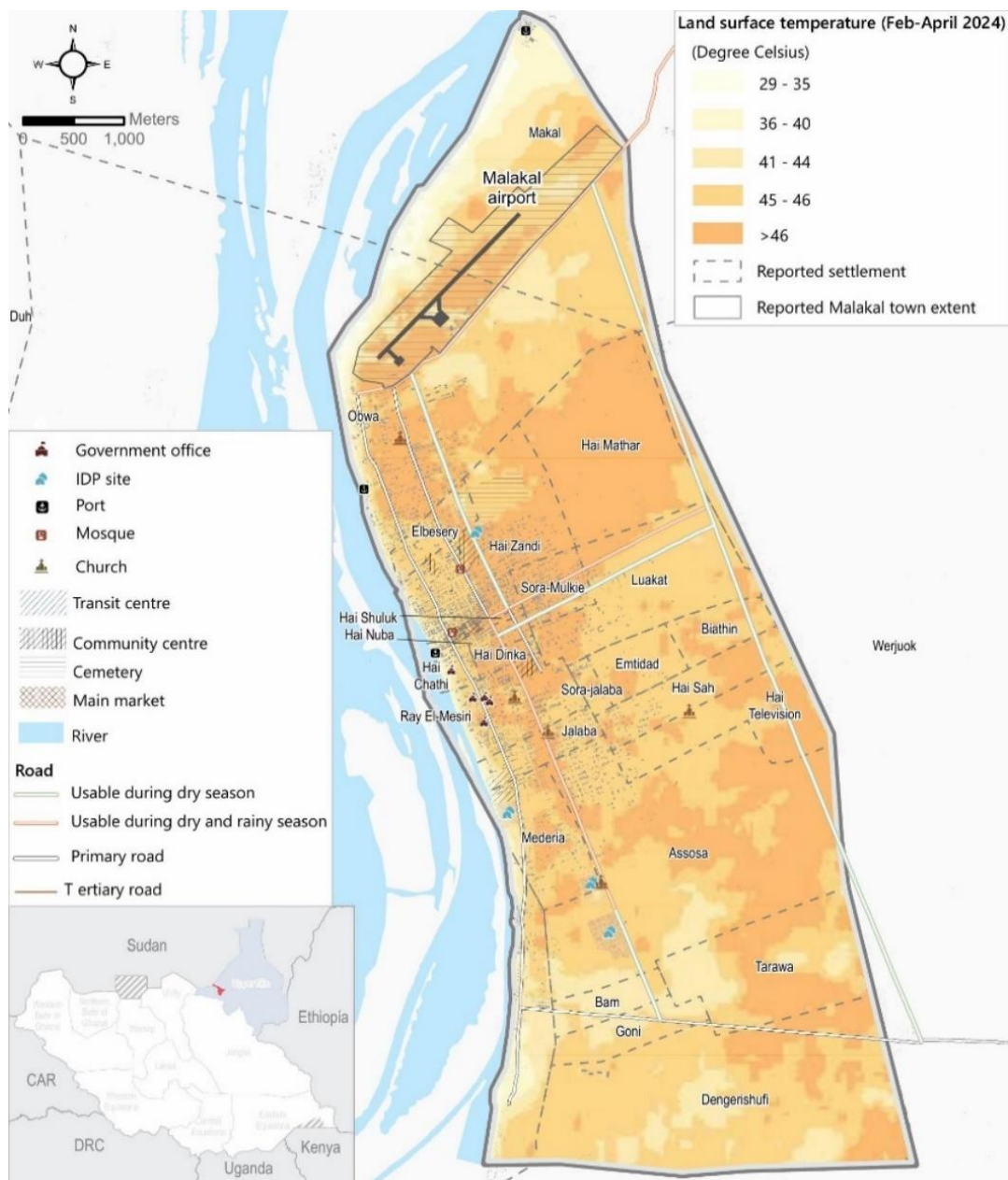


Map 17: Flood frequency across Upper Nile State. Source: Bough et al. (2024). *Global River Flood Hazard Maps*. European Commission, Joint Research Centre.



Map 18: Flood area in 100 year return period. Source: Bough et al. (2024). Global River Flood Hazard Maps. European Commission, Joint Research Centre.

8.3 Heatwaves and Drought

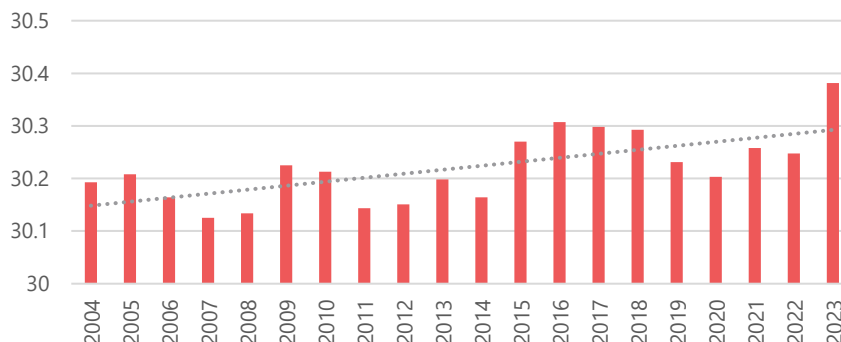


Map 19: Malakal town heatwave map. Source: Earth Resources Observation and Science Center (2020). Landsat 8 Thermal Infrared Sensor Level-2. [dataset] U.S. Geological Survey.

As seen in Map 19, Malakal Town has experienced severe heatwaves, with temperatures reaching above 46°C in parts of the town between Feb-April 2024, which includes the national heatwave of 2024. Notably, some parts of the town remain cooler, partially in the south and north ends of the town. As seen in Chart 28, the average yearly temperature has risen slightly over the last 20 years, from 30.2°C in 2004 to 30.4°C in 2024.

Several key informants reported that the dry season does not bring issues of droughts, at least in the last five years. This is likely because Malakal Town is situated next to the White Nile, which provides a vital source of water throughout the year for a variety of purposes.

CHART 28: AVERAGE YEARLY TEMPERATURE (°C) IN MALAKAL TOWN (2004-2023)



Source: ERA5-Land Daily Aggregated Climate Reanalysis. [Dataset]. (2023). Earth Engine Data Dialogue

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