



South Sudan Crossborder Population Movement Dynamics Brief

April 2019

Introduction

Since the beginning of conflict in 2013, millions of South Sudanese have been displaced, including to neighbouring countries.¹ As of April 2019, 2.3 million South Sudanese people were registered as refugees or seeking asylum outside of their country. South Sudanese have mainly settled in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR).² While the majority of those displaced remain in refugee camps, there is limited understanding of crossborder dynamics in South Sudan. Detailed information on the scale and nature of return patterns is lacking.

To support prioritization of humanitarian assistance and protection services to returnings households (HHs), REACH is collecting data on crossborder trends using its [Area of Knowledge \(AoK\)](#) methodology, which remotely monitors needs and access to basic services across South Sudan on a monthly basis through multi-sector interviews with Key Informants (KIs), and [Port and Road Monitoring \(PRM\)](#) methodology, which monitors several key crossborder transit points in South Sudan (Kapoeta, Renk and Akobo). PRM allows to provide up-to-date information on the demographics and vulnerabilities of HHs that are leaving and entering key transit locations and identify the scale of movement trends in a hard-to-reach settlement.³ Rapid assessments (RA) focusing on crossborder movements were also conducted in Mathiang and Torit. This brief provides an analysis of AoK and PRM data relating to crossborder movement collected between May 2018 and April 2019 and incorporates qualitative data collected over the same period, as well as a secondary data review.

Key Findings

- There has been an increase in the volume of crossborder movement toward South Sudan at some border points since September, but the vast majority of displaced South Sudanese HHs have yet to permanently return to South Sudan.⁴
- Crossborder movement trends varied greatly between the three points where REACH monitors ports and roads, seemingly depending on varying conditions in camps in neighbouring countries and variations in perception of safety of displaced HHs.
- In April AoK data, counties where highest proportion of assessed settlements reported that refugees had spontaneously returned were concentrated in the Greater Torit area, western bank and Southeastern Upper Nile, Northern Jonglei, and Southern Unity.
- Much of the areas where returnees are reported to have recently arrived also report low levels of access to basic services and some have been identified as severely food insecure.⁵
- Displacement continued in South Sudan over the second half of 2018 and first quarter of 2019, with large scale movement from Yei River toward Uganda and DRC and internal displacement within Lakes State, Western Bahr al Ghazal (WBEG) and Jonglei.
- HHs coming back to South Sudan via towns where REACH monitors ports and roads reported high levels of vulnerabilities, especially related to maternity (a pregnant or breastfeeding woman). A vast majority of inbound HHs reported being partial HHs, meaning that they were travelling without some HH members.

Table 1: Primary data collection (September 2018 to April 2019)

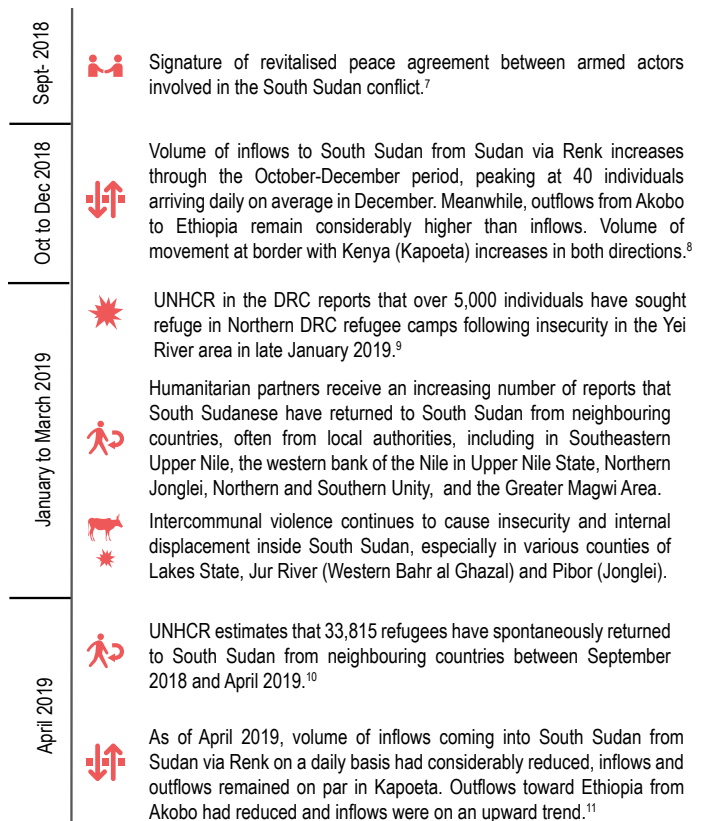
Location	Date	Kills	FGDs	HH surveys
Akobo (PRM)	Sept - Apr	10	4	3,100
Kapoeta (PRM)	Sept - Apr	10	-	3,463
Renk (PRM)	Sept - Apr	10	1	1,646
Mathiang (RA)	Mar - Apr	7	7	-
Torit (RA)	Dec	8	-	-
Wau (AoK)	March	-	2	-
Nationwide (AoK)	Sept - Apr	10,893	-	-
Total		10,938	14	8,209

Overview of movement trends

Crossborder movement of refugee returnee households were reported in several areas of South Sudan between September 2018 and April 2019. Simultaneously, new displacement took place over the period.

While new displacement has been less frequent since September 2018 as compared to over the two years that preceded the peace agreement, various drivers continued to prompt internal displacement and displacement toward neighbouring countries over the period. Displacement has been driven by armed clashes and lack of access to resources. Intercommunal violence displaced populations in WBEG, Lakes and Jonglei States, especially over the first quarter of 2019. Moreover, continued armed clashes in the Yei River area displaced over 5,000 people toward DRC in January.⁶ Finally, water stress and lack of access to food has reportedly led to displacement, some of which following seasonal distress migration patterns, including in

Figure 1: Timeline of events driving population movement in South Sudan, September 2018 - April 2019



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Northern Bahr al Ghazal (NBEG) and northern Jonglei.^{12 13}

Based on REACH remote monitoring data, the proportion of settlements reporting an IDP presence in their area has largely remained stable over the past year or so. However, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting that IDPs made up less than half of the total population of the settlement increased from 51% to 63%, suggesting that IDP presence remains widespread geographically but that the relative size of the displaced population in some of these areas of displacement has been reducing. IDP returnee presence was also reported to be widespread in April among settlements assessed via AoK (54% of assessed settlements), more so than refugee returnee presence (34% of assessed settlements). With some notable exceptions such as the Greater Mundri area, IDP returnees also appear to return to the same areas as refugee returnees. Among the assessed settlements that reported refugee returnee presence in April, 69% reported that IDP returnees were also present.

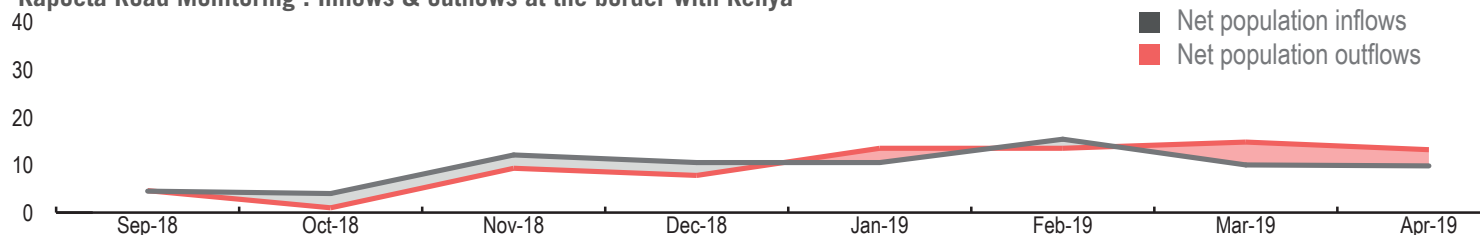
Perception of safety remain inhibited in many areas of South Sudan based on AoK data, however the dry season coupled with the re-opening of key roads and waterways as well as anticipation for the next cultivation cycle reportedly prompted HHs to cross into South Sudan from refugee settlements. Circular crossborder movement patterns observed by PRM teams at crossborder points suggests that HHs maintain ties in the refugee settlements and use these ties to access resources while scoping for opportunities in South Sudan.

Crossborder dynamics

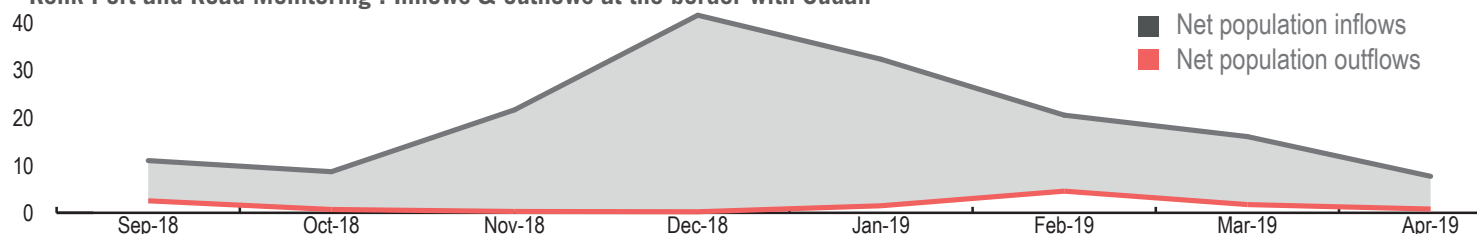
Crossborder movement at border points around South Sudan has been ongoing throughout the past years with many refugee HHs reporting to occasionally travel into South Sudan to access resources

Figure 2: Average daily number of individuals inbound to (grey) and outbound from (red) South Sudan with the intention to stay in their final destination for more than six months recorded from September 2018 to April 2019 at REACH Port and Road Monitoring points:

Kapoeta Road Monitoring : Inflows & outflows at the border with Kenya



Renk Port and Road Monitoring : Inflows & outflows at the border with Sudan



Akobo Port and Road Monitoring : Inflows & outflows at the border with Ethiopia

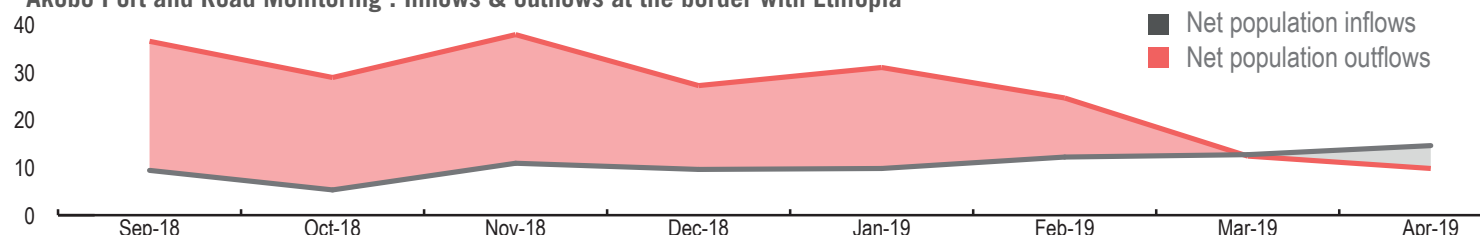


Figure 3: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence in their settlement (AoK, selected months)

	July 2018	October 2018	January 2019	April 2019
IDP presence	31%	56%	50%	52%
Refugee returnee presence	N/A ¹⁴	30%	24%	34%
IDP returnee presence	N/A	58%	46%	54%

Figure 4: Proportion of the total population of the settlement made up of IDPs, as reported by assessed settlements where IDP presence was reported (AoK, selected months)

	July 2018	October 2018	January 2019	April 2019
Less than half	51%	50%	55%	63%
Half	34%	39%	33%	31%
More than half	10%	7%	12%	6%

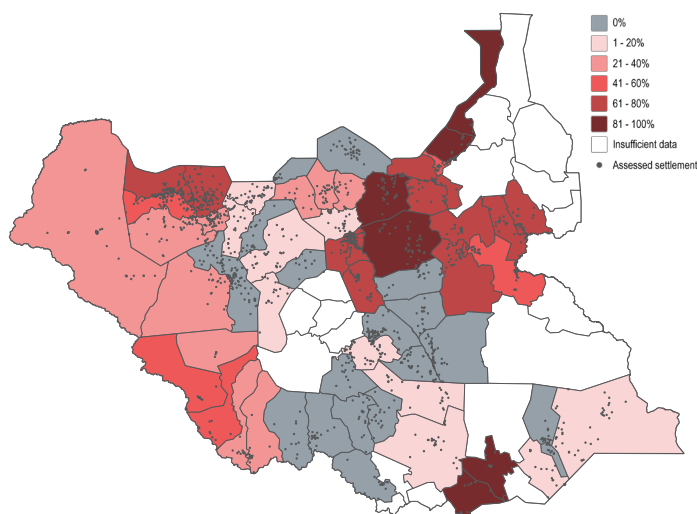
and verify conditions of their homestead in spite of continued perception of insecurity.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the period between September 2018 and April 2019 saw increasing mobility at some border points given that incidents of conflict became noticeably less frequent.¹⁶ Across all three PRM bases, both inbound and outbound HHs reported high levels of vulnerabilities throughout the period.

Greater Upper Nile

The security situation has reportedly been relatively stable in Greater Upper Nile following the agreement between armed actors, leading to the first substantial lull in armed clashes in months. Conditions in

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Map 1: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting that refugee returnees were present in their settlement, April 2019



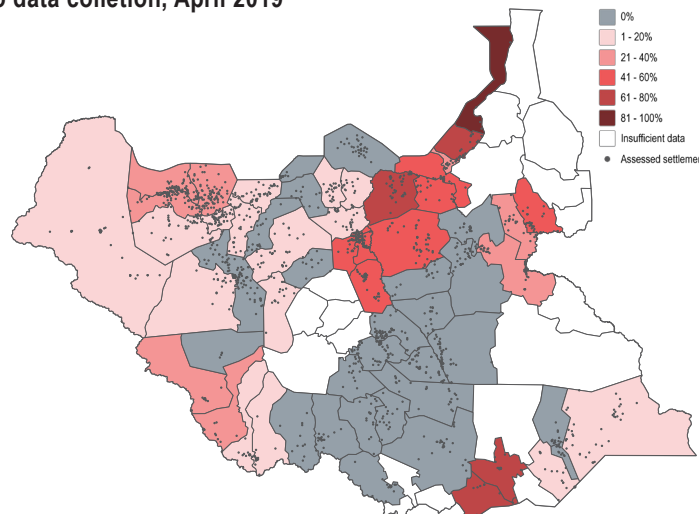
refugee camps in Sudan and Ethiopia as well as the deterioration of the security situation have reportedly prompted returns to Southeastern Upper Nile, the western bank of Upper Nile, Northern Jonglei and Southern Unity (Map 1). In **Renk**, where REACH monitors crossborder movements, inflows from Sudan soared around December and gradually declined in the period between January and April 2019. However, throughout the reporting period, approximately half of inbound HHs coming from Sudan and intending to stay for six months or more at their final destination reported that they were intending to head toward the Malakal Protection of Civilians (PoC) site as their final destination, suggesting that the site acts as a hub for returning HHs.¹⁷ The vast majority of inbound HHs were presenting vulnerabilities.

Meanwhile, in **Akobo**, the volume of HHs leaving toward Ethiopia gradually diminished between September 2018 and April 2019, whereas the volume of inflows remained low, with an upward trend toward the end of the period. In April, 86% of inbound HHs reported that at least one HH member was vulnerable, among whom 92% reported a pregnant or breastfeeding person.

Greater Equatoria

In Greater Equatoria, mobility along the border between Uganda and South Sudan and the border between Kenya and South Sudan has been dynamic over the period, as shown by IOM-DTM Flow Monitoring along the Ugandan border as well as REACH monitoring at a border point on the Kenya/South Sudan border.^{18,19} REACH AoK data suggests that the highest concentration of refugee returnees are located in the Greater Torit area of Eastern Equatoria (Torit and Magwi Counties) and in northwest Western Equatoria (Ezo and Tambura Counties). In Western Equatoria, insecurity along the border with CAR due to presence of armed cattle keepers and intercommunal violence around Obo, where most South Sudanese refugees are settled, reportedly prompted some South Sudanese to return to areas of Western Equatoria such as Tambura, Ezo, Nagero, as well as to areas in WBEG, before the border was closed in February 2019.²⁰ Returnees from DRC to Western Equatoria were also noted by humanitarian partners, especially in Yambio County (Bangasu and Gangura areas) and along the Ezo-Tambura-Nagero axis.²¹ IDPs

Map 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting that refugee returnees arrived in their settlement within the three months prior to data collection, April 2019



who had formerly been displaced from Nagero into Mabilia, Tambura County due to armed clashes in the summer of 2018, also reportedly returned to settlement in Nagero. In the midst of these reports of returning HHs, others were also displaced in the Greater Equatoria region. In February, as mentioned previously, UNHCR in DRC reported a large new influx of South Sudanese refugees into their camps, largely coming from the Yei River area, following clashes.

In **Kapoeta**, the volume of inflows and outflows from/to Kenya increased starting October, with dry season onset, and fluctuated in subsequent months, with inflows and outflows remaining largely on par. In April 2019, KIs in Kapoeta reported that the lean season was prompting movement back toward refugee camps, with HHs travelling from Ikotos toward Kakuma refugee camp citing a lack of food as their main push factor. In April, 59% of inbound HHs and 61% of outbound HHs reported a vulnerability, whereby at least one pregnant or breastfeeding woman travelling with the HH.

Greater Bahr al Ghazal

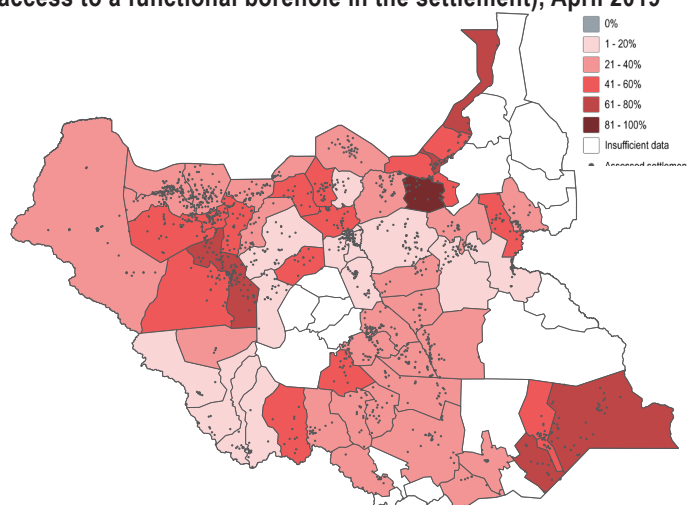
Over the period, there were reports that refugee returnees had reportedly arrived from refugee camps in Darfur toward NBEG, which is supported by REACH AoK data on presence of refugee returns

Figure 5: Proportion of assessed settlements in the three Greater Regions of South Sudan reporting adequate access to food, health services, education services and a functional borehole, April 2019²²

	Adequate access to food	Access to health services	Access to education services	Access to a functional borehole
Greater Equatoria	27%	74%	74%	77%
Greater Bahr al Ghazal	16%	82%	79%	62%
Greater Upper Nile	59%	89%	67%	69%

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Map 3: Composite indicator: Average proportion of assessed settlements reporting “no” to key indicators (adequate access to food, access to education and health services from the settlement, access to a functional borehole in the settlement), April 2019^{23 24}



(Map 1). Moreover, KIs in Aweil report that some returnees have self-settled in rural areas of Aweil. At the same time, UNHCR registered an influx of 5,000+ new arrivals to its refugee camps in East Darfur between January and March 2019, reportedly coming from Aweil.²⁴ Analysis of return patterns in NBEG is complex due to pre-existing patterns of crossborder seasonal migration between Sudan and South Sudan. Many South Sudanese from NBEG typically go to Sudan to access economic opportunities following seasonal patterns – some leave toward Sudan around October-November and tend to return around April-May. Refugee returnees have been reported in other parts of Greater Bahr al Ghazal. For example, refugee returnees reportedly arrived in Raja, WBEG, from Darfur according to IOM-DTM.²⁶

The security situation in WBEG remains fragile. The region has seen active displacement during the period, especially in the first quarter of 2019 and early in the second quarter, when thousands of people were displaced following intercommunal violence around Kuarijina, Jur River County, with some IDPs opting to move in nearby settlements and others heading to Wau town and into the Wau PoC Site.²⁷

Access to food, services and infrastructure

Based on REACH AoK data, there appeared to be an overlap between areas of return and areas where access to basic resources, services and infrastructure was the most severely limited as of April 2019 (Map 1, 2 and 3).

While access to basic services appears to have improved following the lull in active clashes between armed actors in parts of the country since September 2018, the January 2019 IPC update projected that emergency levels of food insecurity would persist for 57% of the South Sudan population.²⁸ A clear overlap was noted between areas reported to be hosting returnees and areas shown to be hosting population in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe) as of April, which was particularly the case in areas near Sudan such as Northern Jonglei (Canal-Pigi) and the western bank in Upper Nile, such as Panyikang. This may be due to high pre-existing needs among returning HHs inadequate access to resources and services in areas of return.²⁹ REACH AoK data also shows that the proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food was low (Figure 5).

Conclusion

While the vast majority of South Sudanese refugees have not permanently moved back to South Sudan as of April 2019, influxes of returning HHs have been reported. Mobility increased at border points in Renk and Kapoeta in October 2018 while the ratio of outflows against inflows reversed in Akobo between October 2018 and April 2019. Some of the areas where returnees have settled were among the most food insecure in South Sudan, and had the lowest levels of access to services according to REACH AoK data. While returnee HHs are increasingly attempting to settle more permanently in some areas, the picture remains mixed depending on the location based on factors such as conditions in the country of asylum and perceived safety in areas of return. With the rainy season onset, political uncertainty and lack of access to food in South Sudan, it is unlikely that the majority of refugees settled in neighbouring countries will return permanently to South Sudan and severe ties in refugee settlements in the upcoming months. Nevertheless, given the lack of access to resources and basic services in South Sudan, the scale of humanitarian needs is likely to increase as some of the displaced HHs gradually return.

Endnotes

1. UNHCR. Refugees and asylum-seekers from South Sudan. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/southsudan>. Data as of April 30th, 2019.
2. Ibid.
3. REACH publishes regular information products under the Area of Knowledge and Port and Road Monitoring research cycles, including quarterly Situation Overviews for different areas of South Sudan (Lakes, Unity, Jonglei and Upper Nile States, Greater Bahr al Ghazal and Greater Equatoria regions) as well as monthly countrywide information factsheets (Camp Management, Protection, Food Security and Livelihoods, Shelter and WASH) and monthly Port and Road Monitoring Factsheets for Kapoeta, Renk, Akobo, Nyal and Yambio. All information products are available on the [REACH Resource Centre](#).
4. OCHA, REACH, IOM-DTM, UNHCR, PC. Returnee Scenario Planning Report, January 2019.
5. IPC. South Sudan. January 2019 update.
6. UNHCR. Thousands fleeing new violence in South Sudan's Central Equatoria State. 12 February 2019.
7. Reuters. South Sudan's president, rebel leader sign peace deal. September 2018.
8. REACH. Port and Road Monitoring. October-December 2018.
9. UNHCR. Thousands fleeing new violence in South Sudan's Central Equatoria State. 12 February 2019.
10. UNHCR. Overview of Spontaneous Refugee Returns to South Sudan. April 2019.
11. REACH. Port and Road Monitoring. October-December 2018. April 2019.
12. REACH. Situation Overview : Greater Bahr al Ghazal. January-March 2019.
13. REACH. Kurwai Assessment. April 2019.
14. Prior to October 2018, data on returns was collected regardless of whether the returnees were former refugees or IDPs.
15. REACH. Regional Displacement of South Sudanese. March 2018.
16. REACH. Renk Road Monitoring Factsheet. April 2019.
17. Ibid.
18. IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Dashboard. Uganda - South Sudan. 25 April 2019.
19. REACH. Kapoeta Road Monitoring Factsheet. April 2019.
20. Invisible Children. LRA Tracker. Intercommunal violence around Obo. February 2019.
21. WHO. South Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report, Issue 12. March 2019.
22. The indicators of access to health and education services measure accessibility FROM the settlement, regardless of walking distance. Access to a functional borehole measures accessibility to a borehole IN the settlement.
23. Ibid.
24. For each indicator, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting “no” per county was calculated, and an average of the proportion for all 4 indicators was then calculated.
25. UNHCR. East Darfur Update. Sudan: Population & Operational Update: South Sudanese Refugee Response (1 – 28 February 2019)
26. IOM-DTM. Event Tracking Report. Dulu, Raja County. 9 April 2019.
27. Wau ICWG. Meeting Minutes.
28. IPC. South Sudan. January 2019 update.
29. OCHA, REACH, IOM-DTM, UNHCR, Protection Cluster. Returnee Scenario Planning Report, January 2019.