

Increasing humanitarian needs in Unity State amid flooding and access constraints

May 2026 | South Sudan



Key messages

- **Recent health and nutrition data point to a severe and worsening public health crisis in Unity State.** Mortality data from February indicated emergency-level conditions in Panyijiar County, and a rise in cholera cases was reported across Unity State in May 2026. Malnutrition levels remain critical and continue to deteriorate, with Abiemnhom and Rubkona counties classified as AMN Phase 5 (Extremely Critical) for the April-June period.
- **Annual flooding remains a major risk in Unity State and is expected to have severe impacts in the second half of 2026, although not at the extreme levels seen in 2021.** Spatial analysis from 2025 estimated that 283,000 people across five counties were affected by flooding as of 30 September 2025. Overlay analysis further suggested that a substantial share of public infrastructure was impacted, including up to 72% of mapped facilities in Panyijiar. While below 2021 levels, annual flooding is expected to again be widespread in 2026, typically peaking between September and November, and to continue disrupting lives and essential services.
- **Ongoing insecurity, economic pressures and declining humanitarian support are compounding vulnerability and limiting access to essential services in Unity State.** Localised clashes in Rubkona and Guit have triggered displacement and heightened insecurity, placing additional strain on already fragile livelihoods and services. At the same time, food and commodity prices continue to rise across the country, with particularly sharp increases in parts of Unity State, while reduced funding and ongoing violence are further disrupting humanitarian service delivery.

Health and nutrition data point to severe humanitarian conditions in Unity State

Recent mortality data indicate emergency-level conditions in parts of Unity State.

A recent Integrated Public Health Rapid Assessment (IPHRA) conducted in Panyijiar County recorded a crude death rate (CDR) of 1.21 in Nyal payam and surrounding areas, exceeding the World Health Organization's emergency threshold of 1.0.

A rise in cholera cases was reported in Unity State in May 2026.

The ongoing cholera outbreak in South Sudan, [declared](#) on 28 October 2024, continues to escalate, particularly in Unity State. As of 13 May 2026, the national [case fatality rate](#) stood at 1.6%. In early May, Unity State recorded 122 new cases across six counties in a single week, representing a [93.7% increase](#) compared with the previous week. The surge was most pronounced in Panyijiar, Mayom and Rubkona, with internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Rubkona accounting for 55.7% of new cases.

Conditions in displacement sites are likely driving transmission and straining health services.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Bentiu Town [reported](#) a significant increase in suspected cholera cases, with the hospital's isolation unit reaching critical capacity. Notably, 92% of moderate to severe suspected cases were referred from Bentiu IDP camp, underscoring the role of overcrowding and inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) conditions in accelerating transmission. Although no confirmed cholera deaths were reported in May, one suspected case from the IDP camp was declared dead on arrival at Bentiu State Hospital on 9 May, raising concerns about undetected transmission.

Malnutrition levels across Unity State are critical and continue to deteriorate.

The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Malnutrition (AMN) [analysis](#), conducted in April, classified all counties in Unity State as Phase 4 (Critical) or higher for the April - June period. This implies that 15-29.9% of children are acutely malnourished, alongside elevated mortality and morbidity and compromised food

Using CDR and GAM to assess severity

The Crude Death Rate (CDR) and Global Acute Malnutrition rate (GAM) are two key indicators used to measure the severity of a humanitarian crisis. The CDR is assessed against the global World Health Organization (WHO) 'emergency threshold,' which is **one death per ten-thousand people per day**. The GAM emergency threshold is **15%**, indicating the proportion of children six to fifty-nine months who are acutely malnourished. The IPC provides an additional 'very critical' GAM threshold of **30%**, which is one of three criteria required to declare a famine.

consumption. Conditions are particularly severe in Abiemnhom and Rubkona, both classified as Phase 5 (Extremely Critical), indicating that at least 30% of children are acutely malnourished, with widespread morbidity and significant food consumption gaps.

Current trends build on a sustained pattern of extremely high malnutrition.

Unity State has consistently recorded severe levels of acute malnutrition in recent years. In May 2024, Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) measured by weight-for-height (WHZ) reached 24.1% (95% CI: 19.3-29.6) in Guit County.¹ In November 2024, GAM prevalence in Rubkona County by WHZ was 26.0% (95% CI: 22.2-30.2).² Both figures far exceed the WHO threshold of 15% for 'Very High' levels of acute malnutrition.

These outcomes reflect a prolonged context of severe and widespread food insecurity. For at least the past six years, all counties in Unity State have consistently been [classified](#) in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) or worse in both current and projected periods. The latest IPC [analysis](#), conducted in April 2026, estimated that 841,523 people in Unity State (66% of the state's population)

are facing Crisis (Phase 3) or higher levels of food insecurity between April and June 2026. This indicates that households are either experiencing food consumption gaps associated with elevated malnutrition or are only meeting minimal food needs through unsustainable coping strategies and depletion of livelihood assets.

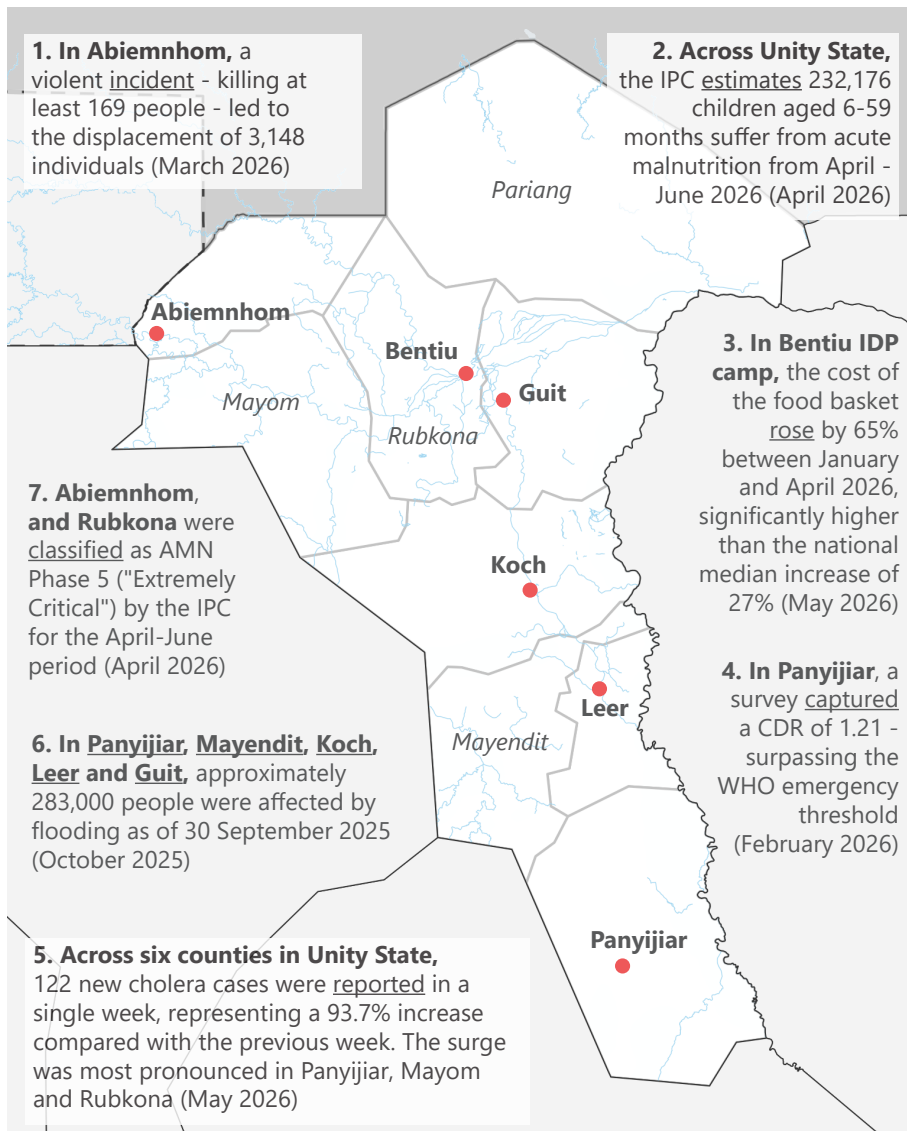
Flooding remains a major risk in Unity State and is likely to have severe impacts in 2026, despite not reaching the extreme levels seen in 2021

Seasonal flooding has long had a profound and sustained impact on livelihoods in Unity State. Large parts of South Sudan, including Unity State, are affected by annual [flooding](#) (see map 1) which usually peaks from September to November, with particularly severe consequences in recent years. The exceptionally heavy floods of 2021, the [most severe](#) since 1960, rendered entire villages uninhabitable, submerged farmland, and triggered large-scale displacement to higher ground. Since then, extensive areas of Unity State have remained [submerged](#) throughout the year, fundamentally altering livelihoods and access to services.

Recent data show that annual flooding continues to affect a large proportion of the population and essential infrastructure. Spatial flood analysis conducted by REACH in 2025 indicates that approximately 283,000 people across five counties ([Panyijiar](#), [Mayendit](#), [Koch](#), [Leer](#) and [Guit](#)) were affected by flooding as of 30 September 2025. Overlay analysis further suggested that a substantial share of public infrastructure was impacted³, ranging from 40% of mapped facilities in Koch to 72% in Panyijiar.

Across the assessed counties, health and education facilities were among the most frequently affected. In Panyijiar, 87% of [health](#) facilities and 83% of [education](#) facilities were identified as flood-affected. Similarly high levels were observed in Mayendit and Guit, where around four in five mapped facilities in these sectors were impacted. Even in Koch, which recorded the lowest levels, approximately half of [health](#) and [education](#) facilities were affected by flooding.

Flooding in 2026 is expected to remain extensive and continue to disrupt lives and services. According to FEWS NET's 2026 flood monitoring and predictions⁴, flood extent is likely to significantly exceed



pre-2020 norms, although it is not expected to reach the levels observed in 2024 and 2025. Early indications already point to severe impacts: on 4 May, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) in Mayendit County [called](#) for increased humanitarian assistance in anticipation of flooding. Local authorities estimated that 25,000 people had already been displaced, more than double the 10,000 reported in the previous year.

Ongoing insecurity, economic pressures and declining humanitarian support are compounding vulnerability and limiting access to services

Continued insecurity is driving displacement and undermining stability across Unity State. In the first months of 2026, 64 violent incidents⁵ were reported across the state by a conflict monitoring organisation, resulting in an estimated 266 fatalities. A particularly severe [incident](#) occurred on 1 March in Abiemnhom County (Ruweng Administrative Area), where at least 169 people were killed, including 90 civilians. The attack triggered significant displacement: IOM’s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) reported that [3,148 individuals](#) were displaced within Abiemnhom between 1 and 9 March, with around 1,000 people seeking refuge at a nearby [UNMISS](#) base.

Localised clashes in Rubkona and Guit have prompted further displacement and heightened insecurity. Between 12 and 16 February, IOM DTM recorded over [2,000 newly displaced individuals](#) in Rubkona County, likely linked to armed clashes reported between 10 and 13 February in Rubkotne Payam. At the same time, approximately [1,500 individuals](#)

were displaced from Guit County following clashes in Nyathoar Payam, located just east of Bentiu. Although no further clashes were reported in Rubkona in subsequent months, a conflict monitoring organisation noted increased activity of an armed group in northern parts of the county in early May, suggesting continued instability.

Displacement and insecurity are further straining livelihoods and services in an already fragile context. These dynamics are taking place in a state that hosts the [largest number](#) of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in South Sudan, including Bentiu IDP camp. With over [109,000 residents](#), Bentiu IDP camp is the largest displacement site in the country.

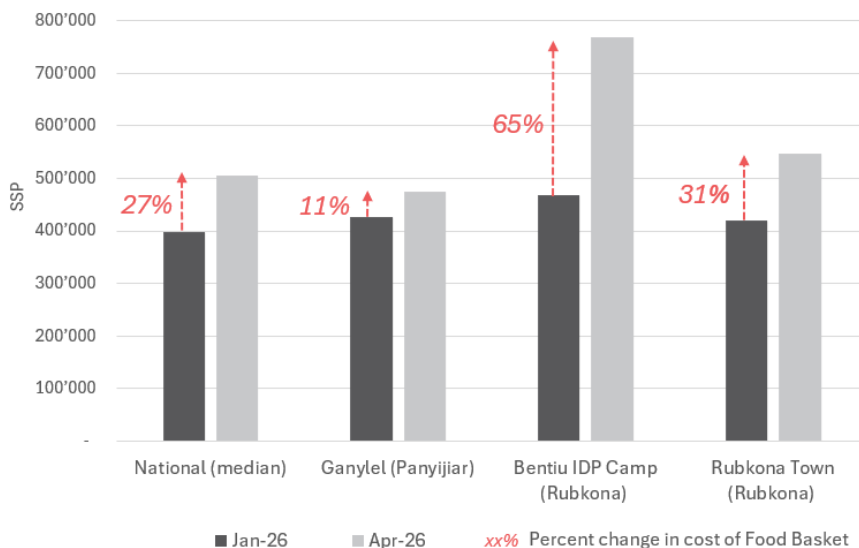
Food and commodity prices have continued to increase across South Sudan, with particularly sharp rises reported in parts of Unity State. In Bentiu IDP camp, the cost of the Multi-Sector Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket (MSSMEB) food basket⁶ rose by [65%](#) between January and April 2026, significantly higher than the national median increase of 27% (see figure 1). These increases further erode already [limited](#) household purchasing power, thereby reducing households’ ability to access food.

At the same time, violence and reduced humanitarian funding are affecting service delivery. In Rubkona County, one humanitarian partner [ceased](#) operations by the end of March, closing seven health facilities. Several additional facilities in the county (including in Tong, Kaljak, Norlamwel, Ngop and Tong Island) were reportedly destroyed in early 2026. In Abiemnhom, nutrition services were suspended in some locations due to looting and theft of supplies, while other facilities operated for extended periods without receiving medical consignments. These disruptions further limit access to critical health and nutrition care in Unity State, compounding already severe humanitarian needs.

ABOUT REACH

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

Figure 1. Food Basket price change from January - April 2026



Endnotes

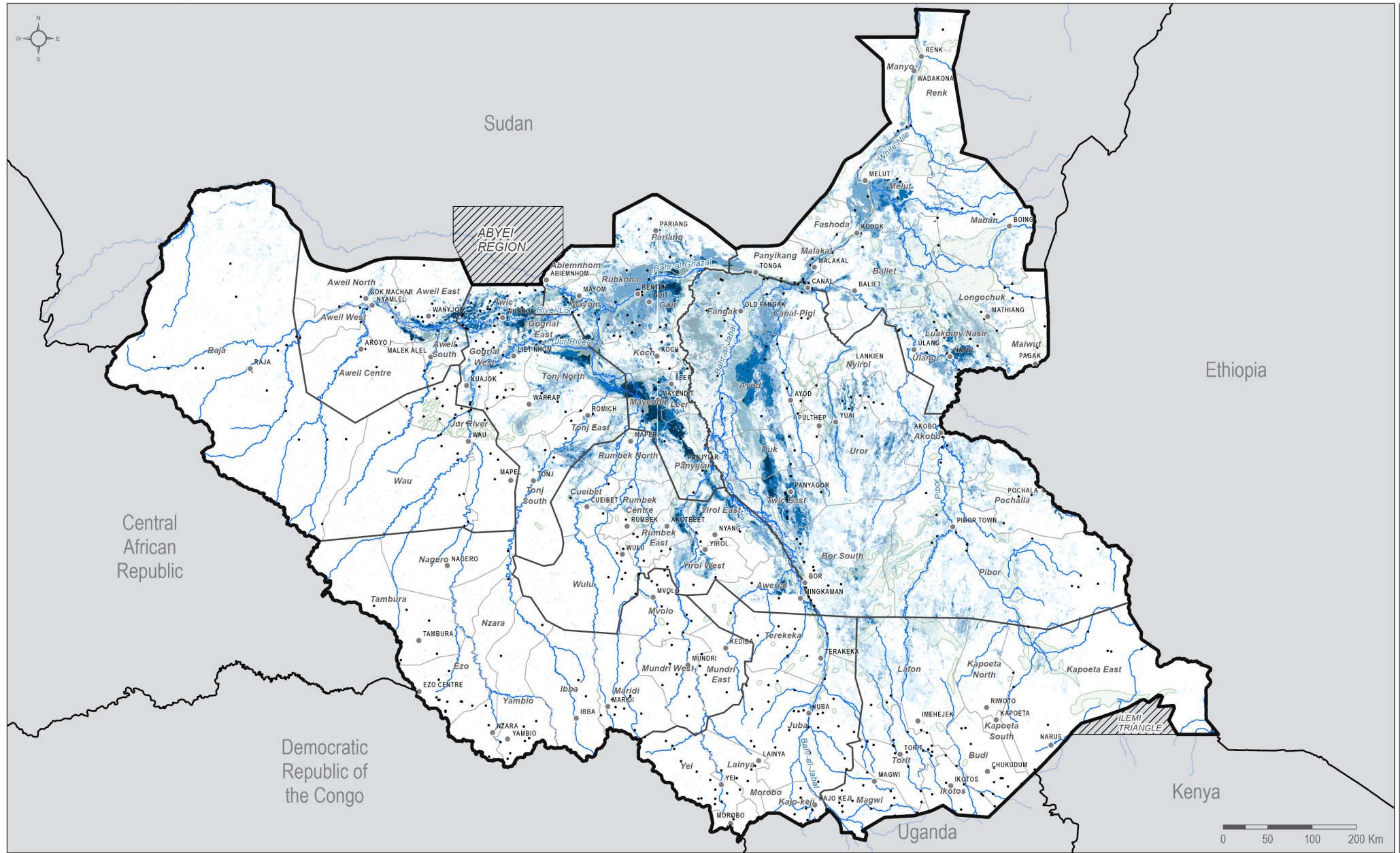
- 1 Concern Worldwide. (2024). *Nutrition and Mortality SMART Survey Report – Guit County, Unity State*. On file with REACH.
- 2 Welt Hunger Life. (2024). *Integrated Nutrition SMART Survey Report – Rubkona County, Unity State*. On file with REACH.
- 3 Facilities located within 100 meters of the detected flood perimeter were classified as flood-affected, accounting for potential uncertainty in the flood extent data to represent likely zones of physical or functional disruption.
- 4 FEWS NET. (2026, May 4). *South Sudan Flood Monitoring and Prediction – 2026 Season*. On file with REACH.
- 5 Armed attacks, armed clashes, or airstrikes.
- 6 The food basket is composed of the food items in the MSSMEB, which represents the minimum group of items required to support a six-person South Sudanese household for 1 month, defined by the Cash Working Group.



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Map 1: Flood extent frequency, 2019 - 2023

Source: [REACH, UNOSAT](#)



- Major Settlement
- County Capital
- River
- Lakes
- Wetland
- County boundary
- State boundary
- National boundary
- ▨ Contested
- Flood Frequency
- One year
- Two years
- Three years
- Four years
- Five years

Administrative boundaries: OCHA COD; HDX
 County Capital: OCHA COD; Open Street Map Contributors; HDX; GRID3
 Settlement Flood Events: Satellite Data, NOAA/VIIRS; analysis UNOSAT
 combined with OCHA COD, HDX.
 Coordinate System: GCS WGS 1984
 Contact: reach.mapping@impact-initiatives.org

Note: Settlement Flood Event dataset indicates number of years flooded in a particular settlement between 2019 and 2023 across South Sudan based on maximum flood extent detected in each year. Each annual dataset is an aggregation of all flood analyses undertaken by UNOSAT in that year in the settlement areas. These are developed based on satellite-detected water using NOAA/VIIRS in cloud-free areas. The lowest value of 1 indicates 1 flooding event in a settlement between 2019-2023, whilst a maximum value of 5 indicates 5 flooding events in a settlement during this period. 0 (None) indicate settlements with no flooding events.