

Port and Road Monitoring: Analysis of Returns Movements, 2019 - 2021

South Sudan, Published July 2022

Background

The dynamic and multi-faceted nature of the South Sudanese displacement crisis has created significant challenges for humanitarian information management. Accessibility and security issues within South Sudan have impeded systematic data collection efforts, limiting the effectiveness of humanitarian planning and implementation. Meanwhile, displacement within and out of South Sudan remains highly dynamic, with 2 million South Sudanese internally displaced and 2.3 million seeking refuge in neighbouring countries as of March 2022.¹ Concurrently, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that as of January 2022, 1,924,368 South Sudanese had returned to their habitual residence, either from abroad or from internal displacement since 2016, adding complexity to the context of population movement in South Sudan.²

In order to promote more effective humanitarian response and inform humanitarian decision-making surrounding potential returns, REACH analyzed longitudinal data on returns movements collected by its Port and Road Monitoring (PRM) project between 2019-2021. This analysis of patterns of movement, demographics of those moving and push/pull factors aims to inform humanitarian actors in decision-making and planning.

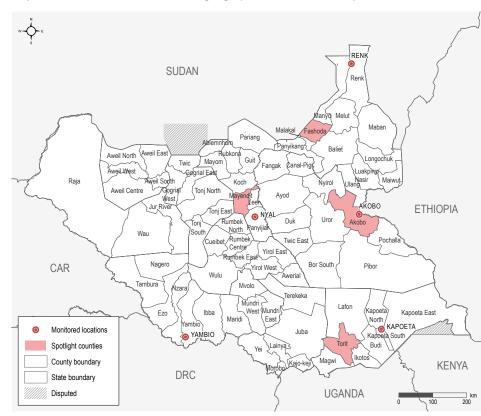
Methodology

Between 2019 and 2021, REACH'S PRM teams conducted direct face-to-face interviews with heads of households of purposively sampled travelers as they moved in or out of five key transit locations inside South Sudan: Akobo, Kapoeta, Nyal, Renk, and Yambio. These locations were selected as monitoring points due to their strategic location on transit routes to capture cross-border movement between South Sudan and neighboring countries and internal movement within South Sudan. Enumerators across the five locations used the same data collection tool, which gathered key information on the scale of movement, demographics of those moving, main movement routes, push and pull factors, and intentions for onward movement. Data collection occurred from the beginning of each month from Monday through Friday throughout the month in all locations, from 8am to 4:30pm.

This analysis seeks to understand the movement dynamics of returnee households, both from abroad and within South Sudan. Inclusion criteria for this analysis were: 1) The key informant (KI) identified themselves as an IDP or refugee, 2) The KI reported plans to return to either their area of origin or the area where they habitually resided prior to displacement during their current journey, 3) The KI reported the intention to stay in the destination for 6 months or permanently.³ For the purposes of this analysis, REACH defines a returnee as someone who was previously displaced from their habitual residence either within South Sudan or abroad but has now returned to their habitual residence or area of origin based on free decision. This does not include people who have returned to South Sudan but have not yet returned to their habitual residence.

This analysis is not able to provide comprehensive information on return movement trends throughout the country, as data collection did not occur at all possible transit points in South Sudan, nor during all possible days and times, and thus is only indicative. Additionally, fluctuations in data collection due to security conditions and other constraints mean that not all movement has

Map 1: Data collection locations and geographic distribution of reported returns



been captured within the locations that were monitored.

This analysis identified 2,548 potential returnee households which passed through REACH's five PRM points between 2019 and 2021. In the following pages, the analysis explores trends identified through this data. It also uses secondary data in order to triangulate the data provided by REACH's PRM.

Four counties (Akobo, Fashoda, Mayendit and Torit) were identified for further analysis. These were selected due to the relatively high numbers of returnees reportedly traveling to these counties, which together accounted for 21% of all return movement captured by this analysis, and due to the varying geographic locations and characteristics of the households reportedly planning to return to these locations.

While the findings of this analysis intend to inform the humanitarian community on trends in returns movement and key factors influencing decision-making from 2019-2021, they do not provide indications of future movement intentions.

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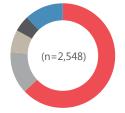
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1 UNHCR. South Sudan Overview of IDP Population Per County. April 2022. 2 IOM DTM. Mobility Tracking Round 12 Baseline Locations Dataset. 2022. 3 Due to REACH's data collection methodology, though the term "returnee" is used, this reflects the KI's stated intention to return, though REACH cannot determine that the KIs did in fact return to their locations of origin/habitual residence as planned.



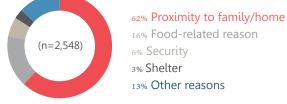
General trends in returns movement

Overall reported push factors*



63% Distance from family/home 13% Lack of food 7% Economic reasons 5% Lack of shelter 12% Other reasons

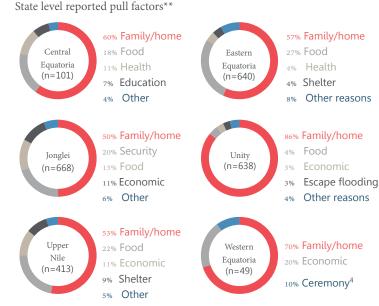
Overall reported pull factors



The landscape of returns is complex in South Sudan, with many dynamics which complicate an understanding of what "return" means. Lines between displacement and returns are often blurred in this context, with some populations experiencing multiple shocks which in turn lead to repeated cycles of displacement. A 2021 survey conducted across eight regions of South Sudan found that of respondents who reported being displaced during their lifetime, 45% had been displaced three or more times.⁵ Additionally, many refugee returnees reportedly face secondary displacement upon their return from abroad. According to the 2019 IDMC report, "Tired of Running" as many as two thirds of former refugees who had returned to South Sudan were living outside of their area of origin after coming back to the country.⁶ Additionally, the same report found that of surveyed refugees who were planning to go back to South Sudan, over 80% had been internally displaced before leaving South Sudan for abroad.7

The decision-making process for potential returnee households is similarly complex, with multiple factors influencing households' decisions and perceptions of where they are best able to meet their needs.⁸ Research shows that displaced people who are considering returning to their area of habitual residence likely take into account both the conditions in their area of displacement and the conditions in their area of habitual residence during the decision-making process.⁹ This analysis, however, highlights the main push and pull factors and some of the complexity of households' decision-making may not be clear in this analysis due to limitations of the PRM data collection tool.

Analysis of the main push and pull factors reported by households intending to return to their area of origin or habitual residence illuminates some trends. First, the main reported push and pull factors for potential returnee households across South Sudan were wanting to be reunited with family or a desire to return to the location they perceive as "home." This finding is triangulated by a 2019 Forced Migration Review article regarding perceptions of returns in South Sudan, which found that there was a "strong desire to return to South Sudan" among refugees interviewed, and that "refugees were generally convinced that if they were in their original



home environment, they could better meet at least the essential needs of their families."¹⁰ The same theme appears in IDMC's 2019 report regarding internally displaced persons: 80% of those surveyed wanted to return home, though not all felt that it would be possible in the near future.¹¹

Other frequently reported push and pull factors in the PRM data related to the perceived availability of food: people reported returning in order to plant crops, access local food or for food distributions. Sixteen percent of identified returnee households across South Sudan reported this as the main pull factor for their movement. The percentage of returning households citing a food-related reason as their primary push factor was highest in 2021, at 19%, which may correspond to increasing food insecurity in South Sudan and in Kenya in this year.^{12,13} One final frequently reported type of pull factor for returnee households was related to livelihoods: households reported returning for economic reasons or for access to markets. Overall, few returnee households reported access education or healthcare as a primary pull factor for their return.

At the state level, some variation in these trends appears. In Jonglei, 20% of households planning to return stated that the main pull factor was security. In other states, less than 1% of returning households reported this pull factor. These households planning to return to Jonglei were largely traveling from Ethiopian refugee camps in 2019, which appears to correspond to a period of unrest among refugees and host communities in and near the Gambella camps.¹⁴

Additionally, households planning to return to Central Equatoria or Eastern Equatoria had higher proportions of key informants reporting that a food-related reason was the main pull factor for moving back to South Sudan. These households were mostly moving from Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp or Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, where issues of food insecurity have been documented in recent years.^{15,16} The decision for households to return from Kenya for food-related reasons despite the food insecurity in South Sudan may indicate a deterioration in conditions in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, or as discussed above, a perception that people will be more able to meet their basic needs in their place of origin.

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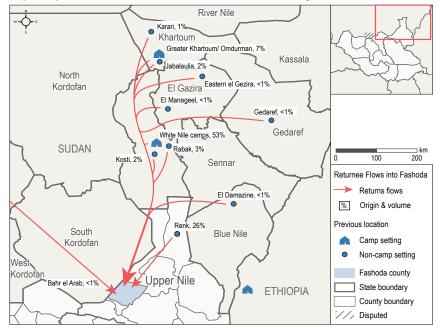
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*52% of respondents were traveling from 4 refugee camps in other countries: Gambella, Kakuma, White Nile and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, while 38% were traveling from Panyijiar, Renk and Akobo Counties within South Sudan. **In counties where at least 30 potential returnee households were identified 4. Ceremony in this analysis, refers to attending an event such as marriage, chruch activities among others. 5. Deng, Dawkins, Oringa, Posipil. National Survey on Perceptions of Peace in South Sudan.2022. 6 IDMC. Tired of Running: Repeated displacement and premature returns in South Sudan. November 2019 7 lbid. 8 REACH. Population Movement Baseline Report. 2020 9 Oxfam International, Nile Hope, Titi Foundation, Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council and CARE. No Simple Solutions: Women, Displacement and Durable Solutions in South Sudan. September 2019 10 Huser, Catherine; Cunningham, Andrew; Kamau, Christine; Obara, Mary, South Sudanese returns: perceptions and responses. 2019. 11 IDMC. 2019. 12 IPC. Kenya: Acute Food Insecurity Situation July-October 2021. 13 IPC. South Sudan. 2022. 14 Oxfam, et. al. 2019. 15 REACH. Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, Kalobeyei Settlement. October 2020 16 REACH. Comparative Analysis of Food Security Needs and Coping Strategies. April 2021



Spotlight: Fashoda County (n=125 households)*

Map 3: Reported routes of return movements to Fashoda County



Reported push and pull factors:

Reported pull factors for to Fashoda County	HHs to return				
Family	29%				
Want to be home	14%				
Plant crops	13%				
Access local food	11%				
	••••••				
Reported push factors for HHs to leave their previous location					
leave their previous loca	tion				
leave their previous loca Far from family	tion 34%				

The majority of households planning to return to Fashoda County between 2019 and 2020 were reportedly coming from refugee camps and other locations in Sudan (74%), while 26% were reportedly former IDPs returning from Renk County.¹⁷ The proportion of those coming from Sudan compared to Renk was higher in 2020, with more than three quarters of households reporting that they were traveling from Sudan in 2019, and only 67% reporting the same in 2020.

Data illustrates that more households planned to move back to Fashoda County in 2019 than in 2020, with PRM capturing 92 households planning to return in 2019 compared with 33 in 2020. This may be partially due to the political turmoil that occurred in Sudan in 2019, which may have been a push factor for return. Indeed, in a 2019 IDMC report, some people reported returning to South Sudan from Sudan because of political unrest, and others reported being forced to leave by security forces.¹⁸ A 2018 Oxfam report documenting interviews with returnees from Sudan in 2019 found that returnees cited conditions resulting from the political crisis in Sudan as the main factor in their decision to leave, with the signing of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) as a secondary consideration.¹⁹ PRM data shows that a larger amount of returning households reported lack of shelter as a push factor in 2019 (17%) compared to 2020 (6%), which may indicate that refugees felt unsafe in the places where they were staying in Sudan given the unrest in the country and the perceived decline in services provided to them.²⁰

The average household size for those planning to return to Fashoda County was 3.7 people, which was relatively small compared to the average of 4.5 people across all returnee households identified through the five PRM points during the three years. Additionally, 13% of households planning to return to Fashoda County consisted of only adult men. In previous research by REACH in 2020, participants in focus group discussions (FGDs) in Fashoda County reported that households planning return to their communities sent men and elders ahead of the rest of the family in order to assess the security situation and prepare the home for the whole family's return.²¹ The small household size and relatively large portion of households reportedly including an older adult (15%) or only adult men (13%) may indicate that this strategy was in use by households returning to Fashoda County during this time.

The main reported pull factors for households to return to Fashoda County were proximity to family or home (43%) and reasons related to food security such as planting crops and local food (24%). However, food insecurity in Fashoda County remained high during the reporting period, with the county classified as Phase 4 (emergency) in the 2019 IPC analysis and Phase 3 (crisis) in the 2020 analysis.^{22,23} Additionally, Fashoda County was heavily affected by flooding in 2020, which negatively affected food supply and shelter conditions throughout the county and may have contributed to the lower number of returnee households identified by PRM in 2020 compared to 2019.²⁴

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*(n) refers to the number of households included in the analysis. 17 REACH's data collection in Renk was paused for ten months of the year in 2021, so data is limited for this time period. 18 IDMC. Tired of Running: Repeated displacement and premature returns in South Sudan. November 2019. 19 Oxfam, et al. No Simple Solutions. September 2019. 20 Ibid. 21 REACH. Population Movement Baseline Report. 2020. 22 IPC. South Sudan. 2019. 23 IPC. South Sudan. October-November 2020. 24 REACH. Situation Overview; Upper Nile State, October-December 2020. June 2021.



Households traveling with one or more older adults: 15% Households traveling with one or more persons with a disability: 7%

Returnee household

demographics:

size: 3.7 people

Average household



Households traveling with one or more pregnant persons: 10%



Households traveling with only adult men:

Displacement status of households:

Refugee: 76%

IDP: 24%

3

Spotlight: Mayendit County (n=144 households)

Map 4: Reported routes of return movements to Mayendit County

Returnee household

demographics:

size: 5.9 people

Households

17%

Average household

traveling with one or

Households traveling with one or more

more older adults:

persons with a

disability: 15%

Households

persons: 15%

Households

adult men: 10%

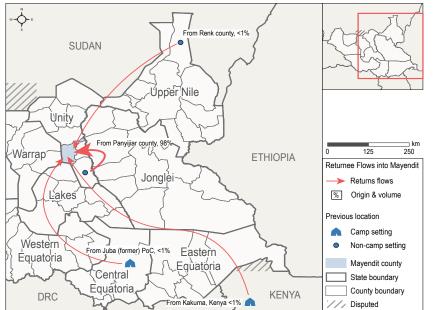
Displacement status of households:

traveling with one

or more pregnant

traveling with only

IDP: 75%



Reported push and pull factors:

Main reported pull factors for HHs to return to Mayendit County				
Family	47%			
Home	43%			
Market access	3%	•		
Security	2%	•		
Main reported leave their previ	push factors for 1 ous location	HHs to		
		HHs to		
leave their previ	ous location	HHs to		
leave their previ Far from family	ous location 48%	HHs to		
leave their previ Far from family Far from home	ous location 48% 41%	HHs to		

Between 2019-2021, households intending to return to Mayendit County were largely IDP returnees from within South Sudan, with less than 2% of households reportedly traveling from abroad at the time of the interview. The majority (98%) of the returnees reportedly returned from Panyijiar County.²⁵ This is triangulated by IOM data in 2020 which showed that returnees in Mayendit County had moved mostly from Rubkona County, with Panyijiar County as the second most frequent source county.^{26,27} Both sources of data indicate that most returnees to Mayendit County have returned from within South Sudan, rather than from abroad.

From 2019-2021, 89% of returnee households to Mayendit reported that the main push factor causing them to return was being far from their family or home. This was higher than the average across the entire dataset of returnees, where 63% reported being far from family or home as the primary push factor for leaving their previous location. The average household size for returnees to Mayendit County was 5.9 people, indicating that people were often traveling with many members of their household. This may indicate the intention of these households to stay in their destination longer-term.

This analysis identified 144 total households intending to return to Mayendit County from 2019 to 2021, with the highest percentage of households moving through the Nyal PRM point in 2020 (46% in 2020 compared with 18% and 35% in 2019 and 2021 respectively). Findings from FGDs conducted in Mayendit and Panyijiar Counties by REACH in 2019 indicated that insecurity in Mayendit from 2015 until the time of data collection had caused people to displace southwards into Panyijiar County, especially to Nyal and nearby islands.²⁸ Reportedly, those who left Mayendit intended to return home once they perceived that the insecurity had subsided. Additionally, Panyijiar County was heavily affected by flooding in 2020, which may have impacted the ability of IDPs in the county to meet their basic needs, and encouraged returns to Mayendit.²⁹ Though this was not reported as a main push factor by PRM respondents, it is possible that KIs reported a push factor that is an outcome of flooding, such as lack of food, as the tool limits reporting to one main push factor. New displacement also occurred in Mayendit in 2020 due to flooding, which may have led to higher numbers of people returning in late 2020 and 2021, after a short displacement in Panyijiar until flooding subsided.³⁰

Other sources and research indicate that the ability of returnee households in Mayendit County to meet basic needs may be limited. The IPC analyses in 2019 and 2020 classified food security in Mayendit County as Phase 4 (emergency).^{31,32} Additionally, a REACH assessment in 2021 found that community-level coping mechanisms in Mayendit County had been eroded by compounding shocks, including recent flooding which limited access to land in the county and caused displacement.³³ The same assessment also found that the arrival of returnees in 2019 had put pressure on already scarce food sources in the county.³⁴ In this context, returnees to Mayendit County, with potentially fewer ties to social networks than non-displaced community members, may experience difficulties accessing food and other resources.

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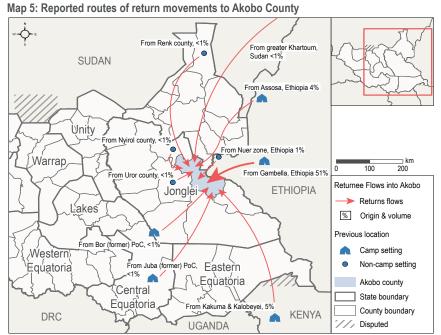
25 Data was collected in Nyal, Panyijiar County, so movements to and from southern Unity had a greater chance of being captured. 26 IOM. Biometric Registration Mayendit, Unity. 29 April 2020. 27 As returnees from Rubkona would not pass through Panyijiar County, these returnees were likely not captured by REACH's data collection. 28 REACH. Focus Group Discussions in Mayendit and Panyijiar Counties. August 2019. 29 REACH. Situation Overview: Unity State. April-September 2020. 30 REACH. Compounding shocks and consequeces for food security, coping capacity, and social stratification in Leer and Mayendit Counties. June 2021. 31 IPC. South Sudan. August 2019. 32 IPC. South Sudan. October-November 2020. 33 REACH. Compounding shocks. June 2021. 34 Ibid.



Refugee: 25%

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Spotlight: Akobo County (n=322 households)



Reported push and pull factors:

••••••		
Reported pull factors return to Akobo Cou		to
Family	30%	
Security	24%	
Want to be home	14%	
Employment	11%	
Reported push factors their previous location		to leave
1 A		to leave
their previous locatio	on	to leave
their previous location Far from family	on 29%	to leave
their previous locatic Far from family Frictions/tensions	on 29% 18%	to leave

*Additionally, 34% of returnees to Akobo County were reportedly returning from other parts of Akobo County.

Returnee household demographics: Average household size: 5.4 people



Households traveling with one or more older adults: 13%



Households traveling with one or more persons with a disability: 12%



Households traveling with one or more pregnant persons: 31%



Households traveling with only adult men:

Displacement status of households: Refugee: 98% IDP: 2% Households planning to return to Akobo County between 2019-2021 reportedly came from diverse areas of displacement. About half (51%) traveled from the Gambella Refugee Camps in Ethiopia, with 5% leaving from other parts of Ethiopia. Another large portion (34%) of returnee households to Akobo County came from other locations within Akobo County.

For households planning to return to Akobo County, trends changed over time between 2019 and 2021. In 2019, the majority (60%) of these households were traveling from the Gambella region of Ethiopia, whereas by 2021, 58% of households planning returns to Akobo County were traveling from other parts of Akobo County. This may be related to multiple factors, including widespread flooding in Jonglei State in 2020 and 2021, which led to considerable displacement.^{34,35} Some of the return movement captured by PRM from other areas of Akobo County in 2020 and 2021 may be households who were displaced during these instances of flooding, and were subsequently returning to their habitual residence.

Findings on pull factors also vary by year for this county. In 2020 and 2021, most households (about 70% for both years) planning to return to Akobo County reported proximity to family or a return to "home" to be the primary pull factor for their movement. However, in 2019, these reasons accounted for only 33% of the reported pull factors for households returning to Akobo County. Notably, 28% of households returning in 2019 reported that the primary pull factor was "security," which may indicate conditions of insecurity in the location of displacement at this time. Similar findings are observed in a 2019 report led by Oxfam International, which found that returnees in Akobo cited difficult conditions in displacement areas, including conflict in camp locations between the host community and refugees and between refugees, as the driving factor in their return movement.³⁶

Akobo County was an area of high needs during the reporting period, with it classified during the 2019 and 2020 IPC analyses as having Phase 4 (emergency) levels of food insecurity.^{37,38} Analysis by REACH in 2021 showed that respondents from 95% of assessed settlements in Akobo reported that humanitarian food assistance (HFA) was the main food source for most people in the settlement.³⁹ Additionally, many returnees to Akobo in 2019 reportedly relied on neighbors and relatives to meet their basic needs, especially in the absence of services they expected in their area of origin.⁴⁰ Sharing of resources by the host community with returnee households may lead to fewer resources available, impacting overall vulnerability.

Although all returnees in this analysis of PRM data indicated the intention to stay longterm in Akobo County, other research has shown that for communities living in the border area between South Sudan and Ethiopia's Gambella region, a shared ethnic identity enables people to use cross-border movement frequently as a coping mechanism as situations change in either country.⁴¹ Previous REACH research has also noted that returnees to border areas aim to maintain the option of movement back to refugee camps in other countries as a contingency plan in case of a deterioration of conditions in their area of return.⁴²

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34 IOM South Sudan - Jonglei State Event Tracking: Akobo County. October 2020. 35 IRNA. Akobo West Flood Vulnerability Needs Assessment. September 2021. 36 Oxfam et al. No Simple Solutions. September 2019. 37 IPC South Sudan. August 2019. 38 IPC. South Sudan. February 2020. 39 REACH. Situation Overview: Jonglei State. 2021. 40 Oxfam et al. 2019. 41 Rift Valley Institute. No One Can Stay Without Someone. Transnational networks amongst the Nuer-speaking peoples of Gambella and South Sudan. 42 REACH. Population Movement Baseline Report. 2020.



Spotlight: Torit County (n=252 households)

Map 6: Reported routes of return movements to Torit County

Returnee household

demographics:

size: 3.9 people

Average household

Households traveling

Households traveling

Households traveling

Households traveling

with only adult men:

IDP: 0%

Displacement status of households:

6%

with one or more pregnant persons:

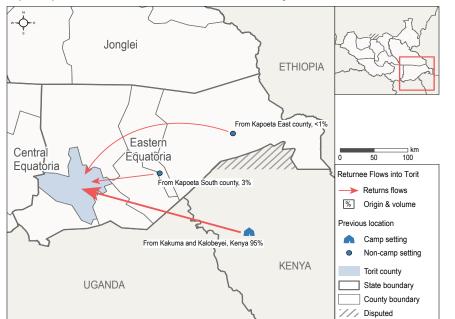
with one or more

with one or more

persons with a

disability: 3%

older adults: 4%



Reported push and pull factors:

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •				
Primary reported pull factors for HHs to return to Torit County				
Family	35%			
Want to be home	28%			
Local food	12%			
Education	7%			
••••••••••••••••	•••••	•••••		
Primary reported push factors for HHs to leave their previous location				
Far from family	35%			
Far from home	28%			
Lack of food	20%	-		
Lack of education	7%			

Households planning to return to Torit County were reportedly largely moving from the Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement in Kenya (95%), with less than 4% returning from the Greater Kapoeta area. These returnee households were identified as they crossed through the PRM point in Kapoeta Town, Kapoeta South County.⁴⁴

The average household size for returnees to Torit County was 3.9 people, and the percentage of households containing only adult men was highest in 2019, when 8% of returning households contained no women or children compared to 4% in 2020 and 2021. This may indicate that potential returnees to Torit employed a strategy where male household members were sent back to their area of origin in order to assess the conditions in the area, prepare land for cultivation or resolve land disputes prior to bringing the rest of the family.⁴⁵

In 2020 and 2021, households planning to return to Torit County mostly came from Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement (59% in 2020 and 57% in 2021), in contrast to 2019, when 74% of returnees to Torit County came from Kakuma Refugee Camp. This may indicate shifting situations in these displacement areas. Reportedly, food insecurity was an increasing issue of concern in Kalobeyei Settlements in 2020 and 2021, with two thirds of respondents indicating that food assistance had decreased in the six months prior to a REACH survey in October 2020.⁴⁶ Concurrently, the region faced a drought since 2020, which reportedly limited refugees' ability to farm for supplemental food.⁴⁷ Additionally, the ability to receive cash assistance for food is dependent upon being registered in the camp, and registration processes were reportedly delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁸ These factors may explain why PRM data shows a larger percentage of returnees leaving Kalobeyei in these years.

The main reported push factors for people to return to Torit County were being far from family and home (63%). However, 27% of returnees to this county also reported moving back to South Sudan because of a lack of resources in the displacement location, namely a reported lack of food and lack of educational opportunities. These trends varied somewhat by year. Push factors in 2020 were mostly (80%) related to a desire to return home or be reunited with family, with 6% of households reporting lack of food as a primary push factor. However, in 2019 and 2021, a higher percentage of returning households (27% and 22% respectively) reported lack of food in the area of displacement as their primary push factor.

Other research indicates challenging conditions for some returnees in Torit County. An Initial Rapid Needs Assessment (IRNA) in Greater Torit in March 2021 found that returnees in Torit County experienced difficulties accessing food, health services and shelter.⁴⁹ Some returnees reportedly were hosted by family members in their homes, but others reportedly slept under trees or in the open due to damage to their former homes and loss of NFI items during their return journey.⁵⁰

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43 Refugee status of households is based on self-reported not on where the KIs were coming from 44 Other reports on returns indicated that returnees to Torit County also came from Uganda, but REACH's road monitoring does not include any border crossing points with Uganda. 45 REACH. Population Movement Baseline Report. September 2020. 46 REACH. Multi-Sector Needs Assessment, Kalobeyei Settleemnt. October 2020. 47 WFP. How refugees from Burundi in Kenya are empowered to farm. 2022. 48 REACH. MSNA Kalobeyei. 2020. 49 Humanitarian Partners and RRC. IRNA Report on Returnees in Ikwoto, Lafon, Magwi and Torit Counties. April 2021. 50 Ibid.



Refugee: 100%43

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