

An escalation of violence and severe flooding will heighten the risk of famine in Nasir and Ulang

June 2025 | South Sudan

In [March](#) and [April](#), REACH warned that a public health crisis was unfolding in Nasir and Ulang, where armed violence has [displaced](#) a fifth of the population and blocked lifesaving humanitarian assistance since February. A recent [IPC Update](#) – conducted in May and published in June – reveals that extreme conditions have emerged in both counties: a combined 22,000 people (5% of the population in each county) face catastrophic food insecurity, and the percentage of children who suffer from wasting has met the famine threshold. Given the severity of the situation, this brief summarises the [results](#) and presents key risks that actors should monitor between now and July.

Key Messages

- The latest [IPC Update](#) – published on June 12 – reports that 22,000 people face catastrophic food consumption gaps in Nasir and Ulang. Further, one in three children suffer from wasting – meaning they are dangerously thin and weak – which is a rate the IPC [classifies](#) as ‘extremely critical’.
- Poor nutrition and disease present an immediate threat to life. The cholera death rate in Nasir almost [doubled](#) between March (4.4%) and June (7.6%). In Ulang, a health partner was forced to [close](#) the only hospital and withdraw support from thirteen other facilities on June 10.
- Some analysts [warn](#) that the violence in Upper Nile will continue to escalate. In the week the IPC results were published, clashes resumed in Nasir. Meanwhile, the flood extent in Upper Nile in May was the [highest on record](#), signalling another major flood event in the second half of 2025.
- Under a plausible worst-case scenario, in which violence and flooding escalate and combine to block communities’ access to food and lifesaving humanitarian services, the IPC [warns](#) there is a risk of famine in Nasir and Ulang between now and July 2025.
- An immediate and sustained ceasefire in Nasir, Ulang and other affected areas is essential, as is unhindered access to partners to distribute critical lifesaving food, healthcare and nutrition services. A concerted response is needed urgently to reduce the risk of death from disease and malnutrition.

Overview

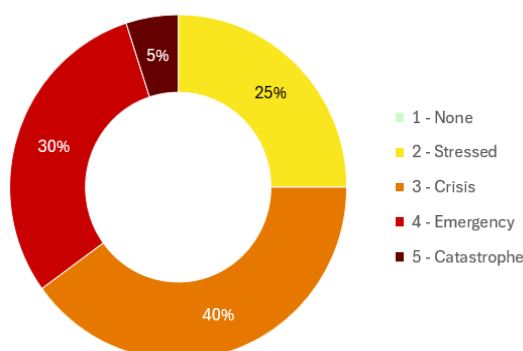
A new IPC Update – published on June 12, 2025 – reveals **extreme conditions** in Nasir and Ulang counties.

The IPC Acute Malnutrition (AMN) Analysis classified both counties in IPC AMN Phase-5 (Extremely Critical) between April and June 2025, meaning **the percentage of malnourished children (by Weight-for-Height scores) has reached the famine threshold (30%)**. This is the first time the IPC has reported ‘extremely critical’ conditions in Nasir and Ulang.

The IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) analysis estimated that 5% of the population in both counties (a combined 22,000 people) will experience catastrophic food insecurity (IPC AFI Phase-5) between April and July 2025. IPC Phase-5 is characterised by **‘extremely inadequate’ quantities of food, death and destitution**.

Under a plausible worst-case scenario, in which violent clashes escalate and combine with severe flooding – which available [modelling](#) suggest is possible – to restrict households’ access to food and lifesaving humanitarian assistance, the IPC declared **there is a risk that famine will emerge in Nasir and Ulang between now and July 2025**.

At least 75% of the combined population in Nasir and Ulang will face life-threatening acute food insecurity (IPC Phase-3+) between now and July



Conditions in several other counties, namely [Canal/ Pigi](#), [Fangak](#) and [Panyikang](#) – where significant violence has also displaced civilians – are immensely concerning. So too are those in Baliet and Rubkona – where acute malnutrition has met the famine threshold – and Malakal and Pibor, where 5% of the population is experiencing catastrophic food insecurity, according to the [IPC](#).

The IPC in South Sudan

The [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) (IPC) is a group of organisations that assess food crises in over thirty countries. The IPC conducts regular analyses in South Sudan – typically two per year.

The IPC has conducted two analyses that focus on the 2024/25 period in South Sudan. The [first](#) – conducted in October 2024 – was a “full” analysis workshop. The [second](#) – conducted in May 2025 – was an “update” analysis.

The October [analysis](#) used quantitative data – collected between June and July 2024 – to assess households’ access to food and project how this would evolve over two four-month periods (December 2024-March 2025 and April-July 2025).

The IPC [Update](#) – published on June 12 – used newly-available data to verify and revise the projections that the IPC made in October 2024. In turn, it updated the classifications that analysts made to reflect the latest data and prevailing conditions.

Households’ access to food in Nasir and Ulang deteriorated significantly and unexpectedly at the start of 2025

In October 2024, analysts assumed that the 2024 harvest would last for six months; that violence between December and March 2025 would be “sporadic” at worst; and that humanitarian food assistance (HFA) would sustain the poorest households between April and July 2025.

The IPC Update in June 2025 reviewed those core assumptions in its analysis and found that all three failed to materialise:

First – instead of lasting for six months, CFSAM data on crop yields showed that the 2024 harvest in Nasir and Ulang likely exhausted in January 2025, a mere three months later. Indeed, a marked and unforeseen food shortage [displaced](#) 21,000 people in Nasir in January.

Second – far from sporadic, the population in Nasir and Ulang suffered [lethal](#) and [recurrent](#) violence at the beginning of 2025. In both counties, the number of armed clashes – violence between government and opposition forces – and armed

attacks – artillery shelling – recorded by one conflict monitor between January and April exceeded the total number of violent incidents in the previous two years combined.

Third – the violence has suspended humanitarian food distributions, which were set to reach half the population in both counties between April and August 2025. So far, distributions were missed in April and May. Notably, the government [airdropped](#) hundreds of metric tonnes of food in Nasir and Ulang at the end of May.

The violence has also shaken critical supply chains. Health partners have [run out](#) of basic medicines and nutrition supplies, including therapeutic food for malnourished children. This is all the more concerning amid a seemingly intractable cholera outbreak in Nasir and Ulang, which accounts for [two-thirds](#) of all cholera deaths in South Sudan since a nationwide outbreak on September 28, 2024.

In the worst-case scenario, there is a plausible risk that famine will unfold in Nasir and Ulang between now and July 2025

Between now and July, the IPC Update considered two scenarios: a *most-likely* scenario and a *worst-case* scenario that has a reasonable chance of occurring. The analysis concluded that, in the worst-case scenario, there is a risk that famine will unfold in Nasir and Ulang.

A lapse from the *most-likely* into the *worst-case* scenario – from an extreme situation to a heightened risk of famine – hinges on two factors: the intensity of violence that communities are exposed to, and the severity of seasonal flooding, which will persist until October at least.

If violence and severe flooding were to escalate and combine, there is a risk that households’ access to food and lifesaving humanitarian services will collapse, possibly causing food consumption gaps, acute malnutrition and mortality to meet or exceed the famine thresholds.

What will happen between now and July?

In the most-likely scenario – in which *there is not* a risk of famine – **violence in both counties is expected to be less frequent and intense than that in March and April**. However, sporadic violence and the constant threat of further clashes will prevent most of the displaced from returning to their homes.

In the week that the IPC Update was published (June 12), **reported clashes around Burebiey** – a border town in Nasir – displaced humanitarian agencies and thousands of people to a settlement in Ethiopia, where one partner [claimed](#) that a public health catastrophe is “imminent”.

Meanwhile, **heavy rains and seasonal flooding will likely restrict some people’s movement** in search of food, farm and grazing land, and income sources (for instance, wooded areas where households can source firewood).

In June, partners [warned](#) that **another major flood event is likely to occur** in South Sudan in the second half of 2025. An [above-average](#) *Kiremt* – seasonal rains between June and September – in western Ethiopia could trigger severe flooding in Nasir and Ulang.

It is assumed that **supply chains will be choked** by checkpoints and sporadic violence, meaning trade flows into both counties will be limited, and the functionality of markets will be poor. In result, food prices will likely exceed most households’ purchasing power.

Furthermore, it is expected that **some households will not be able to access livestock products** (especially milk) – a staple food source in both counties at this time of year – because of flood water, a scarcity of grazing land, and the growing threat of diseased animals.

These challenges will likely deepen the population’s reliance on **humanitarian food assistance, which might not reach displaced and isolated communities between now and July**, despite recent [airdrops](#) in both counties.

In turn, **the displaced population is expected to depend** – even more so than usual at this time of year – **on fish and wild food**. However, flood water, a broad scarcity of fishing equipment and considerable demand will likely erode the availability of both foods.

This is all the more concerning, given that **sporadic violence will likely continue to disrupt lifesaving medical assistance**. The health system will struggle to recover, let alone stem a rising tide of cholera infections and treat a large caseload of malnourished children.

Though significant violence has declined in Ulang – largely since the government [retook](#) the main town in April – **an episode of violent looting** in April forced the main health provider to [close](#) the only hospital and withdraw support from thirteen primary health facilities on June 10.

What risk factors should be monitored?

There remains a lot of uncertainty regarding the current – and future – situation in Nasir and Ulang. Between now and July at the very least, humanitarian actors should monitor the following:

- The frequency and intensity of armed violence, particularly along the Sobat River in close proximity to displacement sites, and the impact on households’ access to food and lifesaving humanitarian services.
- Rainfall and the scale of seasonal flooding – set to peak between September and October – and the impact on displaced persons’ ability to move in search of food and safety.
- Humanitarian access to distribute food and deliver critical lifesaving health and nutrition services.
- Disease rates, in particular of cholera, diarrhoea and malaria, as well as households’ ability to access appropriate healthcare, including medicine and treatment.
- Households’ access to adequate supplies of safe water and latrines, and the impact of seasonal rainfall on sanitation, especially in displacement sites.
- Households’ access to basic income and livelihood sources, including farm land, livestock and wooded areas.
- Households’ access to staple food sources, namely fish and wild food, as well as functional markets (including any volatility in food prices).