

# Situation Overview: Unity State, South Sudan

July-August 2017

**REACH** Informing more effective humanitarian action

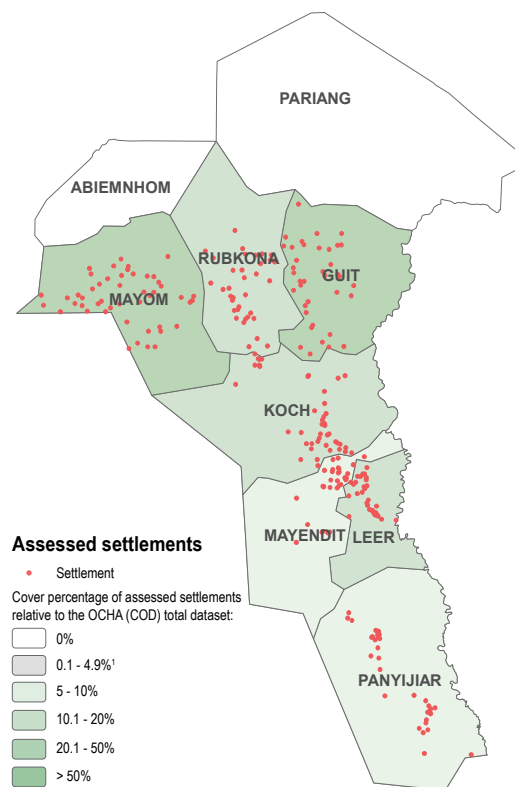
## Introduction

Displacement trends, population needs and humanitarian access have all been negatively affected by the insecurity resulting from the ongoing conflict in Unity State, which began in July 2016.

To inform humanitarian actors working outside formal settlement sites, REACH has conducted assessments of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since December 2015. The data is collected through interviews on a monthly basis from communities across the Greater Upper Nile region, Greater Equatoria region and Western Bahr el Ghazal.

Between 12 and 28 July and between 7 and 22 August 2017, REACH interviewed a total of 626 Key Informants (KIs) in Bentiu PoC and Nyal. The KIs were from 264 settlements situated in 7 of the 9 counties in Unity State. The findings were triangulated through four focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Bentiu PoC and Nyal, secondary data and previous REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas of Unity State.

Since 67% of the respondents interviewed had arrived at their formal displacement site within the last 30 days, they had up-to-date information about the village of former residence. This information, therefore, provides an accurate understanding of



**Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Unity State, August 2017**

the current displacement and population dynamics. The remaining 33% had recent information about certain villages through contact with someone (usually a relative) that is currently living there.

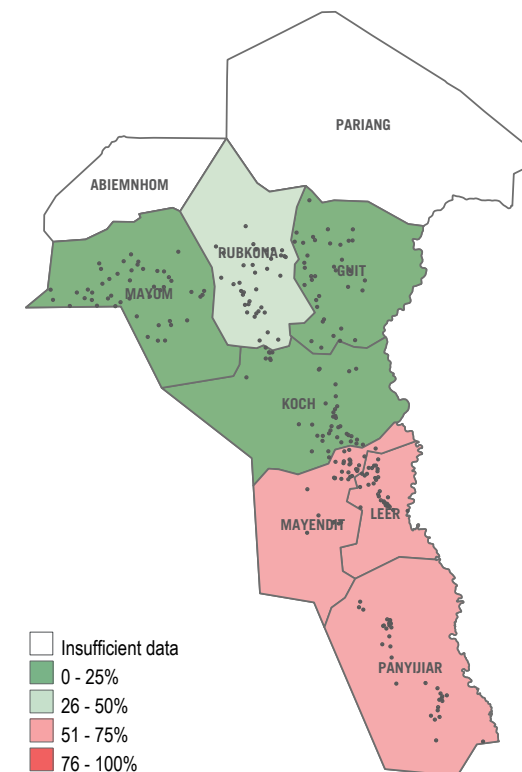
This Situation Overview focuses on changes in humanitarian needs observed since September 2016.<sup>1</sup> The first section analyses

displacement trends in July and August, and the second section evaluates the population dynamics in the assessed settlements, as well as access to food and basic services for both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local communities.

It should be noted that not enough settlements in Mayendit, Koch and Panyijar were assessed in July to be able to report substantively on these counties. Data collected on these counties was however used for state-wide analysis for July.

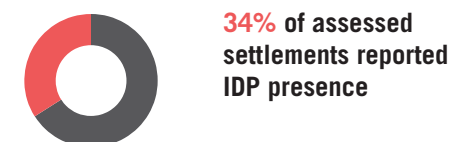
## Population Movement and Displacement

Displacement within Unity State has decreased over the recent months. In August, 34% of assessed settlements reported presence of IDPs (Figure 1), similar to 42% in July. However, none of the assessed settlements with IDP presence reported that IDPs arrived in July and August, suggesting that the security situation has improved. As illustrated by Map 2, the highest proportions of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence in August were located in central and southern Unity State. This suggests that IDPs that have settled in Mayendit, Leer and Panjiyar have not been able to return during July and August, likely due to insecurity.



**Map 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence, August 2017**

**Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence, August 2017**



<sup>1</sup> Settlement aggregation has been applied to dataset starting from September data. AoK data collected before September will therefore not be taken into consideration for comparative referencing.



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## METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas of Unity State, REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who have recently arrived, or receive regular information, from their pre-displacement location or “Area of Knowledge” (AoK).

Information for this report was collected from key informants in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Nyal in Unity State throughout June 2017.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map the relevant settlements in Unity State. In-depth interviews were then conducted with selected participants using a standardised survey tool comprising questions on displacement trends, population needs, and access to basic services.

After data collection was completed, all data was examined at the settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal response. When no consensus could be found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

It must be noted that this represents a **change in methodology as of December 2016**, as REACH previously analysed data at the community level. This means that **this report is not directly comparable with Situation Overviews from before December 2016**.

Similarly, movement monitoring data suggests a decrease in displacement in July and August; According to REACH port monitoring in Nyal, the recorded inflow notably decreased from 2,520 in March to 597 in July and 195 in August.<sup>2</sup> In Bentiu PoC IOM population count suggests a population decrease from 121,225 at the end of March<sup>3</sup> to 114,683 in July, with a consistently higher net-outflow.<sup>4</sup>

In August, the top three reasons reported by new arrivals for leaving their previous location were distance from family, lack of health services and insecurity (Figures 2 and 3). This represents a remarkable change compared to previous months, when insecurity and lack of food were the top two. This change in primary reported reasons for displacement confirms an improvement in security and improved access to food outside formal displacement sites.

**Figure 2: Top three reasons reported by new arrivals for leaving previous location, August 2017<sup>5</sup>**

1. Far from family	55%
2. Lack of health services	46%
3. Insecurity	41%



**Figure 3: Top three reasons reported by new arrivals for coming to their current location, August 2017<sup>5</sup>**

1. Joining family	60%
2. Access to healthcare	50%
3. Security	48%



## Situation in Assessed Settlements

### Demographic profile

#### Remaining population in assessed settlements

In line with displacement trends previously described, depopulation of assessed settlements decreased. In August, only 2% of assessed settlements reported that no member of the local community had remained in the settlement, similar to 1% in July and representing a decrease since April (13%). However, of the assessed settlements that reported that at least some of the local community remained in the settlement, half reported a population decrease of 50% or more, suggesting that overall depopulation remained pronounced in Unity State in August.

Still, 6% of assessed settlements reported that the majority of local community was hiding in the bush in August, similar to 5% in July. All of those settlements were located in Leer and Mayendit, suggesting that the security situation remained comparatively worse in those two counties.

#### IDP population in assessed settlements

The vast majority (91%) of assessed settlements with IDP presence reported that the majority of IDPs were living together with the host community, while 3% reported that the majority of IDPs were living in spontaneous settlements. However, consistent with trends observed for

local communities, 6% of assessed settlements with IDP presence reported that the majority of IDPs were living in the bush, all of which were located in Mayendit and Leer. One reason could be the lack of adequate shelter, which remained pronounced for IDPs in those two counties (see shelter section).

### Food security

Adequate access to food has been increasingly reported over the past months, from 39% of assessed settlements in February to 70% in July and 85% in August. As a likely result, lack of food and access to food were absent from the top three push and pull factors for displacement in August, for the first time since REACH started recording push and pull factors in February 2016.

The increase in proportions of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food had been most notable in central Unity State (Leer, Mayendit and Koch) and northern Unity State (Mayom, Rubkona and Guit). While improvements in adequate access to food from February to July in northern Unity State and May to July in central Unity State are likely attributable to the upscale in humanitarian

**Figure 4: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food, August 2017**



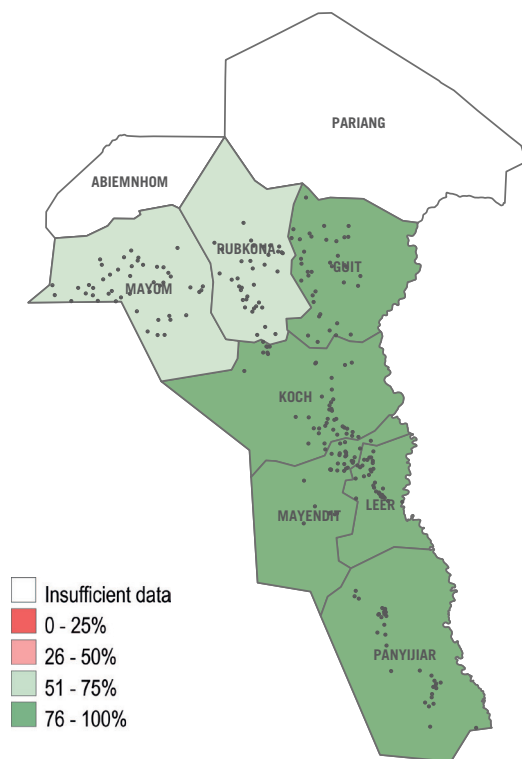
**15% of assessed settlements reported inadequate access to food**

2 REACH, Nyal Port monitoring Fact Sheet, July and August 2017. These are indicative trends; REACH does not record all arrivals and departures.

3 IOM, Bentiu PoC Site Profile, March 2017.

4 IOM, Bentiu PoC flow monitoring analysis, Jan-Aug 2017

5 Respondents could choose more than one option.



**Map 3: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, August 2017**

assistance, the further increase in August is likely related to first maize crop harvests, which likely complemented food distributions.<sup>6</sup>

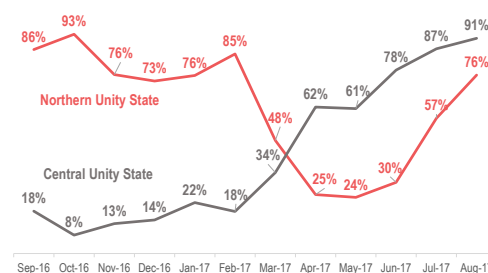
In August, the main reported reason for inadequate access to food was harvest losses due to natural disasters in 2016, cited by 43% of assessed settlements, all of which located in Mayom, Panyijar and, to a smaller extent, Guit. This was followed by conflict-related reasons such as destruction of crops during fighting and unsafe planting conditions, reported by 32%

and 8% of assessed settlements, respectively.

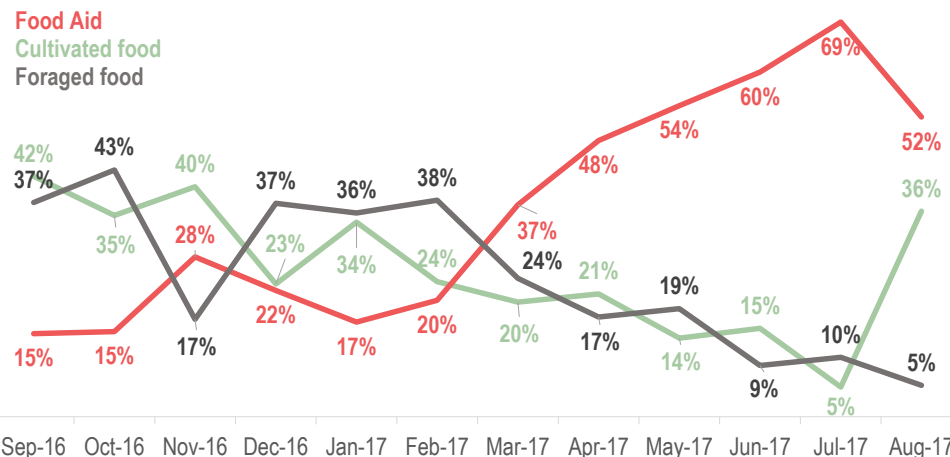
Food distribution remained the main source of food in more than half of the assessed settlements (52%) in August. However, REACH data suggests that reliance on food aid across Unity State slightly decreased between July and August, with the onset of the maize harvest season. As shown by Figure 6, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting food aid as primary source of food decreased from 69% in July to 52% in August, while cultivated food notably increased from 5% to 36%, respectively. As a result of increased food aid since February and first harvests in August, the proportion of assessed settlements relying on foraged food as primary food source decreased from 38% in February to 5% in August.

The positive effect of the cultivation season on access to food might, however, be hampered by reduced harvest amounts. According to FGDs, insecurity prevented people from cultivating bigger acreages in central Unity State. In comparatively more stable northern Unity

**Figure 5: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, north vs. central Unity State, Sep 2016-Aug 2017**



**Figure 6: Primary food source per proportion of assessed settlements, Sep 2016-Aug 2017**



State, FAO found in its recent crop watch report from July that prolonged dry spells negatively affected crop growth in Mayom, Koch, Guit and Rubkona.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, FGDs undertaken with new arrivals from Mayom, Guit and Rubkona at the end of August indicated that due to reduced crop growth, most of the maize had already been consumed. Low harvest and food stock levels will likely have a negative impact on the resilience of the population during the next lean season, increasing the probability of further reliance on food aid, assuming food distribution were to continue.

The assessed settlements that reported inadequate access to food (15% of the total assessed settlement, see Figure 4) also reported a number of severe coping strategies, such as reducing the number of meals eaten in a day (in 77%), limiting meal size (49%) and skipping all meals in a day entirely (21%), suggesting severe food consumption gaps.

## Livelihoods

Farming for sustenance was the most commonly reported livelihood activity in August, cited by 79% of assessed settlements (Figure 6) compared to 15% in March. This upward trend is likely attributable to the progression of the cultivation season as well as the increased access to land for cultivation likely due to improvements in security; Almost all (98%) of assessed settlements reported access to land for cultivation in August compared to 61% in December 2016.

As illustrated by Figure 7, the second most cited livelihood activity was livestock rearing, reported by 49% of assessed settlements, most of which located in Mayom and Panyijar. However, half of the assessed settlements that reported inadequate access to food in these

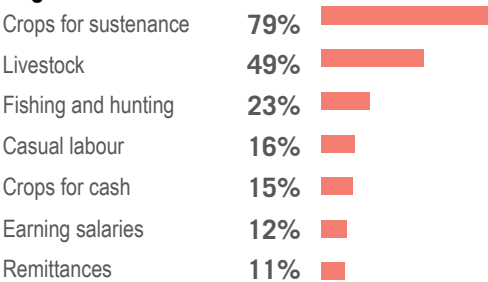
6 In central Unity State assistance had been up-scaled in response to localized famine which had been declared in central Unity State in February, see: IPC, Global Alert - South Sudan, February 2017. In northern Unity State FSL partners operating in Guit confirmed that new registrations took place in May; In Mayom food distributions took place at the end

of June, July and August (90 days delivery cycle).

7 FAO, South Sudan Crop Watch Updates to 3rd Dekad of July, July 2017.



**Figure 7: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting that at least some members of the community engage in livelihood activities, August 2017<sup>8</sup>**

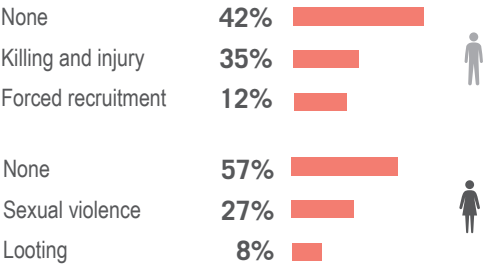


two counties also reported livestock selling as a resource-based coping strategy, reducing populations' access to livestock products such as milk and meat. The comparatively lower proportions of assessed settlements reporting livestock rearing as livelihood activity in the other assessed counties (Rubkona, Guit, Koch, Leer and Mayendit) are in line with the information collected during FGDs, which indicated that most livestock (mainly cattle) had been raided during the violent conflict after December 2013.

**Protection**

Although still very low, indicators regarding perceived physical protection in assessed settlements suggest a slight improvement in security since May. The proportion of assessed settlements reporting that men and women are perceived to be safe at all times increased over the recent months, from 13% in May to 45% in August for men and 41% to 63% for women, respectively. However, still very high proportions

**Figure 8: Most commonly cited protection concerns for men and women, August 2017**

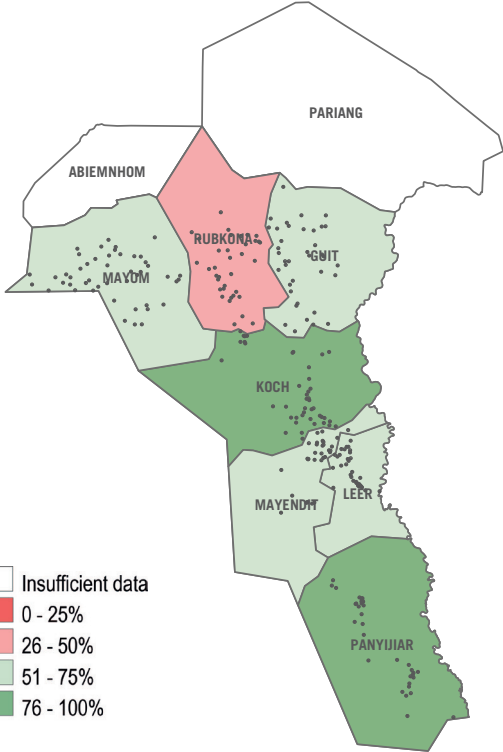


of assessed settlements reported a number of severe protection concerns, such as killing and injury as well as forced recruitment for men and sexual violence for women, as illustrated by Figure 8. This suggests that, despite slight improvements, the security situation in Unity State remained highly volatile in August.

**Water and Sanitation**

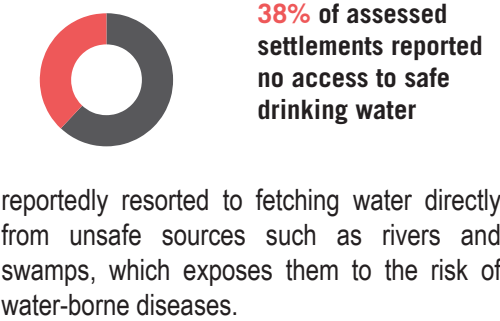
In August, only 62% of assessed settlements reported having access to safe drinking water, similar to previous months and still below the countrywide AoK average (73% in August). In the vast majority of the settlements with access to safe drinking water (97%), the habitants were reportedly able to walk to the water source (usually a borehole), fetch water and walk back in one hour or less.

Lack of maintenance of boreholes, destruction of boreholes by armed actors and complete absence of boreholes were described by FGD participants as the main reasons for the lack of access to safe drinking water. As a result, people without access to safe drinking water



**Map 4: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to safe water, August 2017**

**Figure 9: Access to safe drinking water, August 2017**

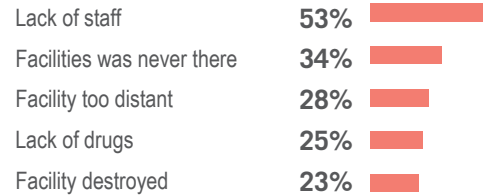


**Health**

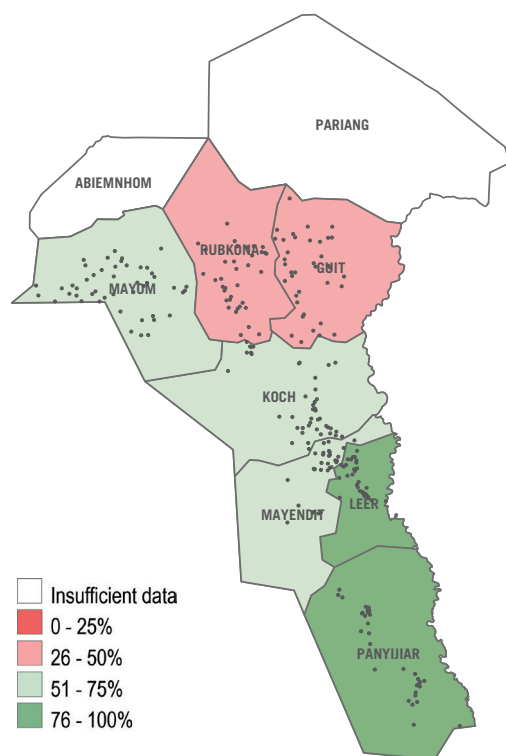
Reported access to health services gradually increased over the course of the year. While in September 2016 only 28% of assessed settlements reported access, this proportion increased to 63% in August, similar to 65% in July. This development is likely due to improvements in the security situation in parts of Unity State, allowing for easier movement of patients and healthcare providers. Of the assessed settlements reporting access to health services, 60% reported that the service could be reached by walking for one hour or less.

As illustrated by Figure 10, the most commonly reported reasons for absence of health services were the lack of skilled medical staff and absence of facilities nearby the settlement (never there or too distant), as cited by 53% and 62% of the assessed settlements without access, respectively. According to FGDs, the habitants of these settlements without access to health services either travelled long distances for treatment, often carried on foot by family members or resorted to traditional medicines such as leaves and roots to cure common diseases.

**Figure 10: Five main reasons for healthcare unavailability , August 2017<sup>9</sup>**



8 Respondents could choose more than one answer.  
9 Rank two most cited reasons normalized.



**Map 5: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to health services, August 2017**

## Education

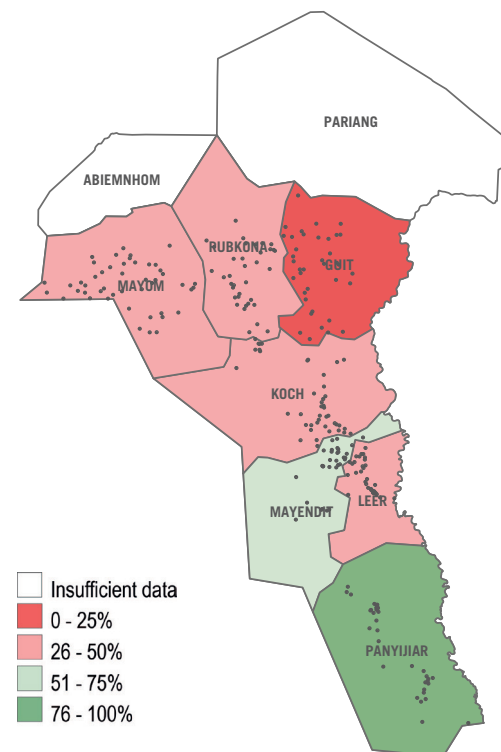
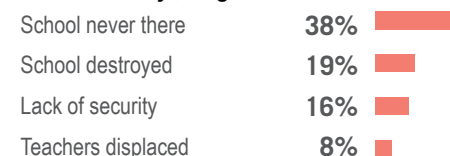
Following the upward trend observed since February, reported access to education in Unity State continued to improve. In August, almost half of assessed settlements (48%) reported that education services were accessible from the settlement, similar to July (52%) and representing an increase since June (39%). This improvement is likely due to scale up of efforts of NGOs to support education institutions throughout Unity State<sup>10</sup> coupled with improved security, which allows for easier movement of

students and teachers.

Most cited reason for lack of availability of formal and informal education services was that there were no (never there) education facilities nearby, as reported by 38% of the assessed settlements without access to education (Figure 11). This was followed by conflict-related reasons such as destruction of school facilities during fighting, insecurity and displacement of teachers, reported by 19%, 16% and 8% of assessed settlement without access to education, respectively.

Where education was available, the quality was generally low, as most of the teachers were volunteers with minimal qualifications. According to a joint education assessment conducted by organizations operating in northern Unity State, teachers in counties like Guit and Koch received incentives whereas those in other counties such as Rubkona did not, which negatively affected their commitment.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the assessment found that outside the Bentiu PoC the teacher-pupil ratio was 1 to 53. Although this ratio was better than inside the Bentiu PoC (1 to 98), it remained above the recommended standard in emergencies of approximately 1 to 40 (depending on context)<sup>12</sup>, which might have also negatively affected the

**Figure 11: Four main reasons for education inaccessibility, August 2017**



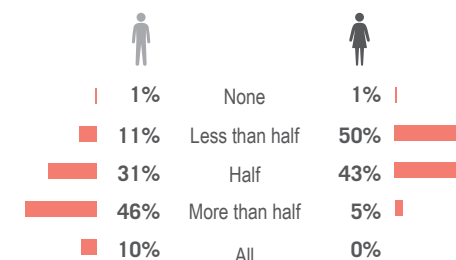
**Map 6: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to education services, August 2017**

quality of the education services.

Long-term improvements in access to and quality of education are therefore highly dependent on the security and economic context. As long as security hampers education efforts and economic instability does not allow for adequate remuneration of teachers, it is unlikely that access to education will improve in the near future.

Reported attendance rates suggest that far

**Figure 12: Proportion of assessed settlements where 6-17 years old boys and girls reportedly attend school, August 2017**



more boys attended school than girls in August (Figure 12). While only 5% of the assessed settlements with access to education reported that more than half of the girls attend school, 56% reported the same for boys. The joint education assessment similarly found that in the assessed counties only one-third of the enrolled students were girls<sup>13</sup>, suggesting that girls in Unity State remain structurally disadvantaged in accessing education services.

## Shelter

### Local community shelter condition

Shelter conditions for local communities continued to improve across Unity State. In August, 73% of assessed settlements reported that the majority of the local community was living in permanent tukuls, as opposed to less permanent rakoobas or improvised shelters. This figure is slightly higher than the preceding month (68%) and represents a steady increase since November 2016 (15%), as shown by Figure 13. The worst shelter conditions for local communities appear to be in Leer and Mayendit (Map 7), which is likely a result of

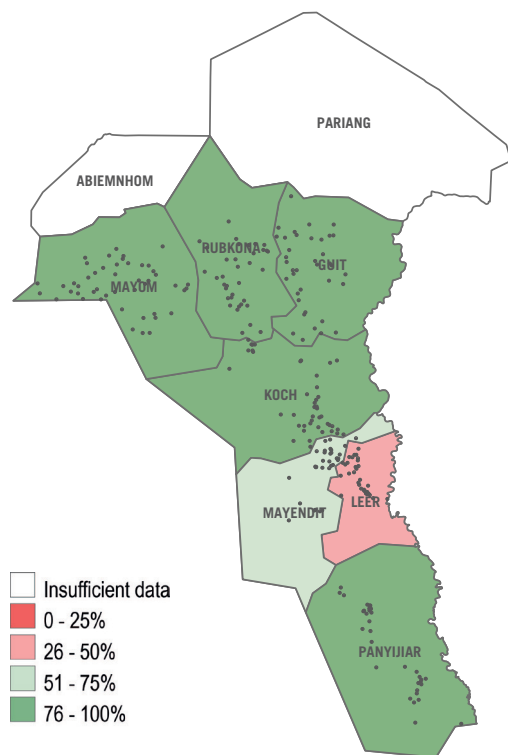
10 UNICEF, South Sudan Humanitarian Situation Report #110, June 2017.

11 State Education Cluster, Joint Education Assessment, Northern Liech State, July 2017.

12 Recommended standard varies between context taking into consideration

appropriateness and realismness. INEE, Minimum Standard for Education, Preparedness, Response, Recovery, 2012.

13 State Education Cluster, Joint Education Assessment, Northern Liech State, July 2017.

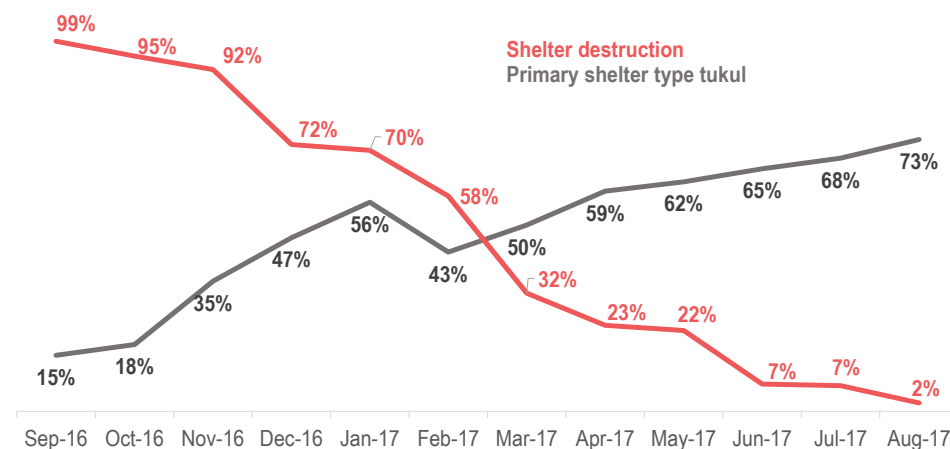


**Map 7: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting tukuls as the primary shelter type for the local community, August 2017**

insecurity in these two counties throughout recent months, during which many shelter have been destroyed and insecurity has hampered efforts to reconstruct.<sup>14</sup>

Reflective of improvements in security, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting shelter destruction due to fighting has dropped sharply throughout the last 12 months. In September 2016, 99% of assessed settlements reported conflict-related shelter destruction, compared to only 2% in August (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting tukul as primary shelter type vs. reported shelter destruction**



This suggests that relative improvements in security in many parts of Unity State might have encouraged local communities to reconstruct permanent tukuls.

#### IDP shelter condition

Shelter conditions for IDPs have remained comparable throughout preceding months, with the majority of assessed settlements (71%) reporting rakooba to be the primary shelter type for IDP communities, followed by tukul (30%) and improvised shelter (9%) (Figure 14). In line with comparatively worse shelter conditions in Leer and Mayendit for local communities, all settlements reporting improvised shelter as primary shelter type for IDPs were located in these two counties (except one settlement in Koch). Such high proportions of assessed settlements (33% in Mayendit and 12% in Leer) reporting improvised shelter as primary shelter

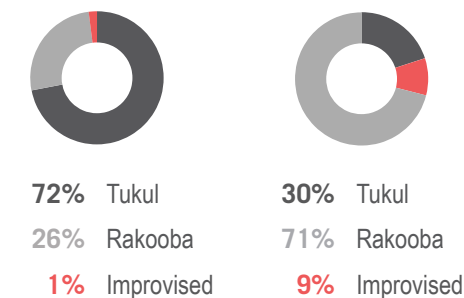
type (often just a plastic sheet tied to a tree or to pieces of wood) suggest that local community's capacity to absorb IDP influx and adequately meet their shelter needs is exhausted.

These findings indicate that shelter needs of local and IDP communities, especially in Mayendit and Leer, remain a priority concern.

## Conclusion

Displacement trends, population needs and access to services in Unity State appeared to have improved over the course of the year across all indicators. This was likely due to a relative improvement in the security situation in parts of the state after March and an upscale in humanitarian assistance to locations outside formal displacement sites since then. Nevertheless, overall access to services in Unity State was still low in August.

**Figure 14: Main shelter type for local community (left) vs. IDP community (right), August 2017**



Reported access to food has gradually improved, due to massive upscale in food aid in central Unity State after February and first crop harvests, which became an additional source of food in August. Although the increase in reported access to food at the beginning of the cultivation season marks a promising development, it must be noted that dry spells in northern Unity State and reduced cultivation in central Unity State (due to insecurity) might decrease harvest outputs. Low harvest levels will therefore possibly increase the likelihood of further reliance on food aid, if distributions were to continue.

Access to safe drinking water and access to health services remained a key concern in July and August. Reported access to health services has gradually improved over the past months, from 28% of assessed settlements in September 2016 to 63% in August 2017. In contrast, reported access to safe drinking water has commuted around an average of 57% of assessed settlements reporting access

over the course of the year. This proportion has constantly been below the country-wide average of 75% of assessed settlements for the same period. As a result, people reportedly resorted to drinking water from unsafe water sources (such as river or swamp), which, especially in absence of health services, can cause water-borne diseases.

Shelter conditions have notably improved over the recent months, likely due to improved security (reportedly less shelter destruction and more permanent shelter construction). However, especially in central Unity State, shelter needs continued to be pronounced in July and August. Poor shelter conditions have consistently been among the three main push factors forcing people from Leer and Mayendit to leave their previous location, as recorded by REACH port monitoring in Nyal.<sup>15</sup>

To reverse and stem the negative impact on the humanitarian situation caused by conflict and economic crisis over recent years, a sustained, large-scale humanitarian effort would be required. However, this can only be possible if reliable, unrestricted access is ensured to humanitarian actors in both the immediate and longer term.

#### About REACH Initiative

REACH 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. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms.

For more information, you can write to our in-country office: [southsudan@reach-initiative.org](mailto:southsudan@reach-initiative.org) or to our global office: [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org).

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<sup>15</sup> REACH, Nyal Port Monitoring, July and August 2017.